EURIPIDEAN TRAGEDY AND QUOTATION CULTURE:
THE CASE OF *STHENEBOEA* F661

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Abstract: This article examines how a tragic quotation (Euripides, *Stheneboea* F661) is deployed by those who quote it, and it uses this example as a test case to address broader questions about quotation culture and reading habits in antiquity. F661 can be read both in and out of context: it is argued that the utterance is formulated in such a way that it lends itself to this dual function. It is further argued that the positioning of the quotation at the start of the play constitutes a framing device analogous to the use of paratextual epigraphs in other types of texts.

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οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ.

No man exists who is fortunate in every respect (*Stheneboea* F661.1).

What is a quotation, and what are we doing when we quote texts? The answers to these questions are not as obvious as they may seem.[1] Not only do they require careful consideration of issues of authorship, authority and voice (for it can be unclear whose words or thoughts are embodied in a quotation); but they also require that we pay attention to context (for the same words can turn out to have different functions or meanings depending on the situation in which they appear). A quotation can be used seriously, ironically or parodically, and it may assume many different guises (such as illustration, example, reference, source, proof, decoration, authority, marker of cultural knowledge, or joke).[2] Any study of quotation culture in the ancient world must also bear in mind the possibility that the habit of quotation may have altered or evolved significantly over time.

This article explores just one aspect of a potentially huge topic, *viz.* the way in which tragic drama was quoted and used by various writers within antiquity. More specifically, it takes as its focus a single Euripidean quotation (*Stheneboea* F661),[3] and looks closely at the ways in which it is deployed by the authors who quote it. I use this example as a case study in order to make some broader observations about ancient reading practices, the function of quotations within various types of literary texts, and the reception of tragedy within antiquity. I begin by examining the uses of this quotation in the work of other authors, before going on to analyse the quotation as an utterance in its own right, characterized by a quality called "quotationality"; I conclude by relocating the quotation in its original setting in the prologue of *Stheneboea* and examining its effect

and function there. More specifically, in the latter part of this article I suggest that the positioning of the quotation as the opening lines of the tragedy constitutes a framing device analogous to the use of paratextual epigraphs in other types of text.

What this discussion demonstrates is that F661 can be read both in and out of context: that is, it functions *both* as part of a text *and* as an independent short text in its own right.[4] As we shall see, this inherent quality of doubleness is a highly significant feature of the quotation (and of quotations in general). Indeed, I argue that the quotation is formulated from the start in such a way that it naturally lends itself to this dual function.

I. THE AFTERLIFE OF A QUOTATION

The lost tragedy *Stheneboea* is among its author's most quoted plays within antiquity. Apart from the lines with which we are concerned, there exist ten other fragments, several of which are cited more than once.[5]

It is worth emphasizing that F661 is both a "quotation" and a "fragment". These two terms are often practically synonymous, since the majority of tragic fragments are book-fragments rather than papyrus remains. On a theoretical level the act of excerption from a complete text could be seen as an act of deliberate fragmentation: the person who selects a portion of the text and makes it into a quotation is, in a sense, transforming or rewriting that text. And yet for a modern scholar the experience of dealing with the "fragments" of a lost work is not quite the same sort of activity as studying "quotations" from a surviving text.[6]

What we now refer to as "F661" was quoted, in several slightly different forms, by numerous writers throughout antiquity. The full text of F661 as printed by Kannicht runs to thirty-one lines, which were preserved by the Byzantine scholar Ioannes Logothetes in his commentary on Hermogenes. This passage as a whole, despite a few gaps here and there, represents nearly all of Bellerophon's monologue with which

Stheneboea opened, and a papyrus *Hypothesis* to the play confirms that these were the opening lines.[7] But no other source quotes the speech in full. The quotation as it appears elsewhere – in the work of several Greek comedians, as well as Aristotle and Plutarch – is limited to the first three lines of text, or even just the first line on its own. This fact raises some important questions about textual knowledge and memory. How many people in the comedians' audiences would have recognized the source of the quotation? How many of them knew it as part of a complete text, and how much did they know, or need to know, about the play *Stheneboea* in order to get the point? To what extent does Aristotle or Plutarch's use of the quotation depend on knowledge of its source? How many of these writers, or their readers, knew it only as a quotation? When we try to reconstruct the mental processes of these people, should we be thinking in terms of their memory of tragic performances or their knowledge of books, including books of quotations? Is it possible to distinguish between oral and literate culture in this sort of context?

Not all of these questions can be definitively answered, though (as we shall see) some plausible explanations suggest themselves. The main points I want to emphasize here are that this quotation, even as early as the fifth century, obviously became famous *as a quotation* in its own right; and that the quotation was used in a variety of ways, most of which had nothing to do with the tragedy *Stheneboea* itself. One can tentatively trace a process by which the quotation rapidly became, in effect, an autonomous literary work, acquiring a life and currency independent of its original author and context.

The earliest known quotation is found in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1215-19). In this scene the character "Euripides" is reciting portions of his own prologues, in an attempt to prove their superiority to Aeschylean opening scenes, but "Aeschylus" repeatedly interrupts.

> ΕΥ. ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἔσται πρᾶγμα· πρὸς γὰρ τουτονί
> τὸν πρόλογον οὐχ ἕξει προσάψαι ληκύθον·
> **Οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ.**

ἢ γὰρ πεφυκὼς ἐσθλὸς οὐκ ἔχει βίον,

ἢ δυσγενὴς ὢν—

AI. ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν.

Euripides: Oh, it won't bother me. He won't be able to attach an oil-flask to *this* prologue: "**No man exists who is fortunate in every respect. Either someone has noble birth but no livelihood, or he is of lowly origin but…**"

Aeschylus: …loses his oil-flask.

This comedy was produced in 405 B.C.E., within living memory of the original production of *Stheneboea*, which means that some of Aristophanes' audience members, at least, may have remembered that tragedy and its striking opening speech. But it would have made little difference whether or not they did, for no detailed knowledge is necessary in order to appreciate the joke. The whole scene is concerned with Euripides and his prologues, as would have been obvious even to someone who had never heard of Euripides, and no very complicated point is being made. On a literary level, the point of the criticism being directed at Euripides is not entirely clear, but it does not seem to depend on any specific aspect of the content or meaning of *Stheneboea* itself. Aristophanes quotes three other Euripidean prologues as well (*Antigone, Hypsipyle* and *Archelaus*), and is probably using all these examples to make a broad, general point – that is, implying that Euripides' prologues are all uninterestingly formulaic or metrically monotonous.[8]

Stheneboea is not named as the source: perhaps this was because it seemed inconvenient or irrelevant to the joke, but it may imply, more significantly, that the quotation had already assumed some degree of detachability from its source text. It also means that there will have been an extra level of appreciation involved for those audience members who enjoyed quotation-spotting for its own sake. This extra level will not have been much more than the pleasure of recognition or self-congratulation, such as one might get from answering a quiz question correctly, but still Aristophanes can be seen as subtly differentiating between the effects of his play on different types of audience member – the bookish and the not-so-bookish.[9] (Note that none of the other

Euripidean prologues in *Frogs* is identified either.) In the same vein, the manner in which the quotation is presented also suggests that Aristophanes is mobilizing the audience's literary knowledge: by supplying this quotation in truncated form, he is implicitly inviting them not just to identify it but also to *complete* it. The character "Aeschylus" comes up with his own ludicrous (or perhaps obscene?) ending to the quotation,[10] but the more erudite spectators will no doubt have been mentally filling in the real missing words for themselves.[11] The difficulty of this sort of parlour game would have depended on the length of time that had elapsed since the première of *Stheneboea* and the spectators' power of recall. This tragedy was produced at least eighteen years before *Frogs,* and perhaps considerably earlier.[12] In that case it seems unlikely that the majority of Aristophanes' spectators would have remembered the play in detail – unless they had read the script in the form of a book. (One cannot rule out the possibility of reperformance shortly before 405 B.C.E., but there is no evidence for it.)

In Aristophanes' hands, then, our quotation has not yet become completely autonomous. Even if not universally familiar, it is still being treated as part of a longer Euripidean work. However, the situation changes when we move forward a few decades to look at the quotation's afterlife in fourth-century comedy. The next occurrence comes in a lost play by Philippides (F18 K-A, a fragment-within-a-fragment quoted by the anthologist John of Stobi).

> ὅταν ἀτυχεῖν σοι συμπέσηι τι, δέσποτα,
> Εὐριπίδου μνήσθητι, καὶ ῥάιων ἔσηι·
> **Οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ,**
> εἶναι δ' ὑπόλαβε καὶ σε τῶν πολλῶν ἕνα.
>
> Whenever you find yourself in an unfortunate situation, sir, just remember Euripides, and you'll feel better. "**No man exists who is fortunate in every respect**"—so understand that you are one among many.

The first thing to note is that “the quotation” has shrunk down to a single, easily memorable verse. In fact, after the fifth century no one ever quotes more than this one line from the opening to Bellerophon’s speech, despite the fact that the complete text of *Stheneboea* continued to be available to a reading public. Both Philippides and his character seem to be making use of the quotation specifically for its gnomic and consolatory properties: it is being treated purely as a moralizing maxim or piece of general advice for life. This was a very common way of reading extracts from tragedy throughout antiquity, and it is notable that the majority of the tragic quotations/fragments that we possess are gnomic in nature. Tragedy was commonly used, not just by comedians but by serious writers of all sorts, as a source of moral wisdom or ethical advice, to be dipped into at will whenever help or encouragement was desired.[13]

The fact that the speaker explicitly attributes the line to Euripides shows that its authorship and genre remain important factors when judging its function: the quotation has not yet become simply proverbial or free-floating. Nevertheless, there is no mention of *Stheneboea*. Perhaps Philippides is playing another “quotation-spotting” game with his audience, as in Aristophanes, or perhaps the quotation has become decontextualized to such a degree that it no longer matters whether we recognize its exact source. Note also that the quoter leaves it ambiguous exactly what he means when he says “Remember Euripides, and you’ll feel better.” The concept that tragedy can have some sort of beneficial or therapeutic effect on its audience is seen in other fourth-century sources, including other comedies as well as Aristotle’s *Poetics*.[14] But in Philippides it is left significantly unclear whether the alleged benefit derives from the tragedy as a whole or specifically from the maxim. Exactly *what* are we supposed to “remember”, and what is the exact nature of the beneficial effect? Perhaps we are supposed to assume that quotable maxims can have an efficacious or quasi-magical power (almost as one might repeat a mantra); or perhaps we are to imagine that this maxim somehow encapsulates the meaning or message of the play; or perhaps we are supposed to reflect on the figure of Euripides himself (in his capacity as a wise man or moral counsellor); or perhaps the

verse that is quoted is merely meant as an *aide-mémoire*, calculated to prompt more detailed recollection of the play *Stheneboea*. This last option might seem the least likely when we recall the unhappy plot of that tragedy[15] – for reflecting on what actually happened to Bellerophon, Stheneboea and Proetus could scarcely make anyone feel much *better* – but this is a comedy, after all, and no doubt Philippides is trying to be funny.

However we might interpret the specifics of the joke, it is clear that Philippides is explicitly drawing our attention to the habit of selective quotation of excerpts as a topic of interest in its own right. The scene above depends on the premise that this was already a widespread use of tragic quotation during the fourth century.[16] Another comic fragment which contains the *Stheneboea* quotation (Nicostratus F29 K-A) is based on the same premise:

> **Οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ·**
> νὴ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν συντόμως γε, φίλτατε
> Εὐριπίδη, τὸν βίον ἔθηκας εἰς στίχον.
> "**No man exists who is fortunate in every respect**"…yes, by Athena, that's right! My dear Euripides, how very neatly you have managed to put the whole of life into one line!

Once again, the quotation is treated as a decontextualized soundbite or maxim containing general advice for life; and once again, there is no obvious sense in which *Stheneboea* is being specifically evoked. (Nicostratus could, admittedly, have mentioned the play in the lines that are lost, but the mode of citation and the punchline here suggest that he did not.) Here, however, the comedian seems to go further than Philippides, not only drawing our attention to the practice of excerption but actually making fun of it.[17] The speaker's ironically fulsome or disingenuous tone is clearly intended to challenge the idea that the meaning of a whole play can really be boiled down to a series of pithy one-liners.

A similar tone is adopted by the character Daos in Menander's *Shield* (407-8), who once again quotes the line οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ, before immediately adding the words πάλιν εὖ διαφόρως ("Oh yes, jolly well done again!"). We can read this utterance as a self-congratulatory comment on his own apposite choice of quotation, or as a sign of admiration for the playwright who conveniently supplies the *mot juste* for every occasion.[18] Daos is accused of "spouting maxims" (γνωμολογεῖς, τρισάθλιε; 414), but in fact the function of the quotation is not the same as in the other passages above. Here the Euripidean verse is being quoted not for its gnomic qualities but simply because it sounds tragic. At this point in the plot of *Shield,* the characters are trying to create a "tragic" situation: Chaerestratos is pretending to be mortally ill in order to bamboozle Smikrines, and Daos is using tragic mannerisms as window-dressing in order to create an exaggerated impression of gloom and despair. Daos enters the stage and bursts into a paratragic lament, into which he inserts a series of unconnected (and seemingly random) lines from various tragedians. Some of these lines are gnomic, others are not; some are attributed to specific authors, others are not. According to the most recent commentator on the play, the quotations represent "popular tags", but even if some were more popular or familiar than others, the point is that they will all have been instantaneously recognizable as generic examples of tragic lines.[19] The overall effect is of a broadly paratragic collage or pastiche. At any rate, the meaning, content, authorship and source of the *Stheneboea* quotation all seem to be irrelevant, since they are are ignored by Menander.

But it is also interesting to note who is doing the quoting: Daos, the speaker, is a slave. The same situation is seen in the extract from Philippides above. In both these comedies it seems significant that the sort of characters who are well versed in tragedy, and who can apply this knowledge effectively to other situations, should be of low social status. It is hard to judge how far this state of affairs is representative of real life, but this comic evidence may have consequences for our knowledge of fourth-century literacy and the extent to which quotation culture permeated different levels of society.[20]

In this respect, it is important to consider these comic texts from the perpective of the audience or reader. Comedians are conventionally seen as purveyors of mass entertainment, aiming their work at the broadest possible audience; but in the passages above it is obvious that the humorous effect of the quotation will have varied slightly depending on whether or not the audience member(s) could identify the source. The fact that Greek comedy of all periods is full of quotations and literary allusions may imply a high level of literary culture and general knowledge in the average audience member; or it may imply that some of the precise details would have been picked up only by a smaller sub-group of educated people who were capable of appreciating the "literariness" of comedy in full. There is simply not enough evidence about literacy or popular culture in classical Athens to allow us to decide.[21] But our approach to the problem will depend on whether we tend to privilege the act of going to the theatre or the act of reading books in the formation of literary knowledge. Certainly the sphere of quotation culture encompasses both types of activity, as well as word-of-mouth or the oral tradition more generally. The social contexts for quotation in classical Greece cannot be reconstructed with absolute certainty, but they would no doubt have included schoolrooms, the theatre, festivals, symposia, and daily life and conversation as well as the private reading of books for a privileged minority.[22] (Much of what I have to say here is couched in the terminology of texts and readers, but it applies equally well to a world of orality and performance culture.)

Menander's approximate contemporary, Aristotle, is normally seen as writing for a very different sort of audience. His *Rhetoric* is aimed not at the general public but at the educated elite and, in particular, the aspiring politician or rhetor. Nevertheless, at the point at which he quotes *Sthenebeoa* F661 he is talking about the use of maxims as a rhetorical device, which means that he must have the needs of a general audience in mind, at least in the sense that he is considering how to exert a persuasive effect on the public in the lawcourt or assembly.[23] Aristotle goes on to add that maxims are effective in speeches because of the uncultivated mind of the audience. Most people, he says, enjoy hearing the sort of wisdom that they already agree with, which means that even

clichés are permitted. Certainly there is nothing about Aristotle's own use of the Euripidean quotation that is any more sophisticated or complex than what we have seen in comedy.

> καὶ τὸ **Οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ·**
> καὶ τὸ Οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνδρῶν ὅστις ἔστ' ἐλεύθερος…
> γνώμη, πρὸς δὲ τῶι ἐχομένωι ἐνθύμημα·
> …ἢ χρημάτων γὰρ δοῦλός ἐστιν ἢ τύχης.
> Another example [of a maxim] is: "**No man exists who is fortunate in every respect**." Also, take "There is no one among men who is free…"—which is a maxim, but when taken together with the line that follows ("…because he is in thrall to either money or fortune" [= Eur. *Hecuba* 864-5]) is an enthymeme.

In this passage Aristotle includes the *Stheneboea* quotation as an example of a generally applicable maxim, such as a rhetor might use in any situation at all. It seems that by this time the verse has become an autonomous text in its own right. Perhaps Aristotle is not even treating it primarily as a verse from tragedy, but as a disembodied *gnome.* Indeed, we might even consider the *gnome* to be an independent literary genre (or sub-genre) in terms of its function.[24]

Probably Aristotle is aware that this is a Euripidean line – his next example is also taken from a Euripidean tragedy – but he gives no indication of its provenance. It even seems possible that he is unaware of its precise source. Note that Aristotle is discussing two distinct types of generalization, the *gnome* (maxim) and the *enthymeme* (consisting of maxim plus *epilogos* or "supplement"). The manner in which Aristotle quotes *Stheneboea* F661, as distinct from *Hecuba* 864-5, shows that he wants his readers to think of it as the first type: he treats it specifically as a free-standing single verse, complete in itself. But in fact the full version of the *Stheneboea* quotation does have an *epilogos*: it includes a continuation of the maxim using precisely the same form of words (ἢ γὰρ...) as the *Hecuba* example. All this seems to suggest that by the fourth century οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ had developed a life of its own as a one-line maxim

– with the result that even such a highly educated man as Aristotle did not associate the line with a particular literary context.

Of course, we need to be careful to distinguish between an author's *use* of quotations (which is observable) and his *knowledge* of quotations (which is unverifiable). But it is worth considering how Aristotle might have known the quotation, if not from his reading or recollection of the play *Stheneboea*. It may be that the verse had attained a quasi-proverbial status in everyday discourse, or it may even be that Aristotle was already relying on rhetorical handbooks or collections of maxims. The anthology or florilegium is often seen as a relatively late literary development, but such collections seem to have come into being, in some form, as early as the fifth century, to judge by references such as the following (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.6.14):

> καὶ τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῶν πάλαι σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν, οὓς ἐκεῖνοι κατέλιπον ἐν βιβλίοις γράψαντες, ἀνελίττων κοινῆι σὺν τοῖς φίλοις διέρχομαι· καὶ ἄν τι ὁρῶμεν ἀγαθὸν ἐκλεγόμεθα.
>
> And as for the the treasure-trove of the wise men of old, which they wrote down in their books and left behind as a legacy, I unfold it and go through it with my friends; and if we see anything good there, we excerpt it.

In fact there is quite a large amount of evidence pointing (directly or indirectly) to the use of anthologies at an early date.[25] The tendency of many authors throughout antiquity to quote the same lines over and over again has also been taken as implying the widespread use of anthologies as a source of illustrative, paradigmatic or thematic material.

Anthologies would certainly have been familiar to Plutarch, who quotes *Stheneboea* F661 some centuries later in his *Letter of Consolation to Apollonius*.[26] Plutarch treats the quotation in much the same way as the authors whom we have already examined: as a moral generalization and a source of wisdom and consolation. He is writing here about the capacity of sensible men to bear up with fortitude and adopt a becoming attitude towards adversity. Life is uncertain; but one needs must persevere.

> οὗτοι τῆς φρονήσεως καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν εἰσι κανόνες, οἷς πρὸς ἀμφότερα χρηστέον. **Οὐκ ἔστιν** γὰρ **ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ.**
> These are the principles of thought and of all the other virtues, which for better or for worse must be followed: "**no man exists**", after all, "**who is fortunate in every respect**."

It is clear that the quotation was still well known to Plutarch and his readers, some four hundred years after the first production of Euripides' play. But how did they know the quotation, and in what form had they encountered it? Perhaps the quotation had trickled down over the centuries through the oral tradition, as a proverb or motto; but by this date it is more likely than ever that we have to think in terms of a world of books, readers, textual citation, and anthologies of famous quotations.[27]

It is not impossible that Plutarch or some of his readers might have known *Stheneboea* as a complete play, but there is no sign that this was the case, or that it makes any difference to one's understanding of the quotation's function here. The fact that Plutarch even breaks into the quotation with an unmetrical word of his own (γάρ) shows that he is not even treating it primarily as a line of poetry, and implies that he values it more for its content than its form. Like Aristotle, Plutarch quotes the line without mentioning its author or source. This is perfectly in line with his normal methods of citation elsewhere, which are fairly unsystematic,[28] but the point to be emphasized here is that, from the viewpoint of Plutarch's own readers, no knowledge of the original context is required to make sense of the quotation. The play *Stheneboea* has long ago become irrelevant, whereas the quotation has assumed a status and significance that is apparently timeless and universal.

In the passages above we have seen that the quotation is deployed and manipulated in a variety of ways; but it is clear that it developed a life of its own *as a quotation* from a very early stage in its existence. It is remarkable that the play *Stheneboea* is not cited by name in a single one of these texts, and that Euripides is mentioned only in half of them. Nor does any of these authors indicate who was the original speaker of

the words, or whose point of view is represented. It may be that some of them are treating the verse as if it reflected Euripides' own view of the world, but more often the quotation is treated as a disembodied voice of wisdom, a general truism, or even a cliché. Nowadays we tend to be scrupulous about treating lines from a play as the utterances of a particular character within a particular context. Indeed, recent scholarship on tragic maxims has been concerned with precisely the sort of effects that arise from the contrast (or ironic dissonance) between content and context, or between the characters' sentiments and their identity or status – a quality of maxims that has been called "polysemy".[29] But this sort of distinction does not seem to have played much part in ancient reading habits or quotation culture. It certainly does not appear that any of those who quote F661 knew or cared that these words originally appeared in the mouth of Bellerophon. Whatever special meaning or nuance the quotation may have had in its original dramatic setting seems to have been almost immediately forgotten, if it was ever acknowledged at all.

II. QUOTATIONALITY, NON-LINEAR READING, AND PARATEXTUALITY

It would be easy, perhaps, to feel dismay at the sort of treatment to which Euripides' work has been subjected – whether we are talking about banal over-simplification, selective misinterpretation, the reduction of his plays to a collection of decontextualized excerpts, or the literal fragmentation and loss that eventually befell most of his oeuvre. However, it could be argued that certain texts actually encourage their readers to treat them in this way. In this section I suggest that the play *Stheneboea* actively participates in quotation culture, in the sense that it is deliberately designed to be susceptible to quotation and excerption.

It is not just later authors – or critics, anthologists or other sorts of quoter – who make certain portions of a text into "quotations". The original author can also formulate or frame parts of his work as "quotations" right from the start. This is precisely what we

see in the case of *Stheneboea* F661. It did not simply *become* a quotation in its complex afterlife. Even within its original setting in the play, it was *already* a quotation. The utterance is formulated in such a way that it stands out from its context and is inherently detachable.

The useful term *quotationality* has been coined by Gary Morson to denote the special qualities that certain types of utterance possess (in varying degrees). Quotationality, according to Morson, "confers on phrases a degree of otherness"; it is said to create an "aura" or a vague feeling that something is being quoted, even when nothing is literally being quoted as such. Not every utterance that is quoted possesses quotationality (Morson distinguishes between "quotations" and "citations" in this respect). But a phrase with this quality will typically be "short", "memorizable", "interesting", "complete in itself", "shared", and "potentially autonomous" (of speaker, author or context); it will also possess an inherent "doubleness" or ambiguity, either because it can function in or out of context, or because it has an implied "shadowy second speaker, who is not identical to the speaker of the source".[30]

It could be said that *all* tragic maxims conform to this definition of quotationality. They are short and memorable; they have a high degree of iterability; they tend to stand out from the surrounding text because of the use of framing devices (e.g. their positioning at the start or end of speeches, or the fact that they normally fill complete lines of verse, facilitating maximum detachability); they have an inherent doubleness about them, allowing them to function both contextually and independently; they are often intertextual in a broad sense, in that they are adapted from earlier texts or the tradition of Greek popular wisdom more generally; they seem to blur the narratological category of voice; they also blur the boundaries between past and present, or between the world of the play and the real world of the audience.[31]

By typically including a large number of maxims in their plays, the tragedians are showing that they are to be taken seriously as poets and custodians of traditional wisdom (along with their epic and lyric predecessors); but more importantly, they are also conferring a high level of quotability on their own work. We can see this not as an

incidental outcome but a central feature of the way in which they aimed to communicate with their audience. The tragedians knew perfectly well that their readers would have mined their work for quotations, and so they are playing along with this tendency. The fact that Euripides' plays contain so many more quotable maxims than other tragedies seems to indicate that he was *especially* interested in making sure that he would be quoted in the future.[32]

I have already mentioned the crucial fact that "quotations" and "fragments" of ancient texts are often synonymous, to all practical intents and purposes. But it is also important to acknowledge that fragmentary texts possess distinctive aesthetic or intellectual qualities of their own. It is not just that the fragment can be a valid modern literary form for original writing (especially philosophical *pensées*). Even ancient fragmentary texts can exert a curious appeal on certain types of reader: one can appreciate that the modern reception of some ancient authors (Sappho and Alcaeus, for instance) has been determined largely by the fact that they are fragmentary and evanescent.[33] But more importantly, the whole post-Aristotelian tradition that has fetishized unity as a criterion for evaluating classical poetry (especially tragic poetry) represents only one possible approach to the material.[34] It would be equally possible to privilege other criteria such as variety, polyphony and open-endedness.

It is not at all certain that Euripides or other tragedians were aiming to achieve unity (in the sense understood by Aristotle or later critics) when composing their plays. Given the fact that ancient readers of all periods tended to dip into texts and focus on selected extracts, it is quite likely that the poets themselves planned their works to accommodate this sort of non-unitary reading. It seems even more likely if we bear in mind the form and polyphonic texture of drama, consisting of a dialogue between multiple voices with the notable absence of any explicit authorial voice to impose coherence. At any rate, we might usefully make a distinction between the "linear" (complete, consecutive, unitary) and "non-linear" (disconnected, fragmentary, selective) reading of texts.[35] These two modes of reading are probably best seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. But Roland Barthes has argued, more provocatively, that

the act of reading a text is *always* inherently fragmentary. Whenever we "read" a text, even a complete text which can be shown to possess unity, our interpretation of its meaning is inevitably provisional and incomplete, and we only ever read it, or understand it, or recall it, selectively. No one ever accords exactly equal weight to every single utterance within the text; and even if you and I are both reading the same text, we are bound to interpret it differently, or describe it differently, or remember and quote different portions (i.e. "fragments"). Perhaps we are not even reading "the same" text at all.[36]

It may well be, then, that certain tragedies were conceived of at the time of their origin as, in a sense, collections of fragments (quotations), susceptible of being read (or performed, or quoted) either consecutively or in excerpts. The broader consequences of this sort of approach to tragedy call out for further study;[37] but for the moment we are concerned with F661 in particular.

I want to examine a further way in which this utterance seems to "stand out" from its context. It not only possesses "quotationality" and an inbuilt excerptability; it also belongs to a distinct (and rather small) category of gnomic lines that are prominently placed right at the beginning of a play.[38] This sort of opening device has been seen as loosely analogous to the *priamel* technique much favoured by lyric poets, whereby a discursive argument, a purposely obscure assertion, a list of items, or a gnomic generalization is used to provide an arresting opening, especially as a contrast or foil to a main idea that follows.[39] The device has also been discussed in light of the conventions of tragic prologues, and especially Euripides' penchant for "detached" narrative prologues (in contrast with the more integrated or organic openings seen in Aeschylus and Sophocles): Euripidean prologue-speeches often seem to embody "a microcosm of major themes" or "resonances" which will be developed later in the play.[40]

Here I suggest that the opening of *Stheneboea* can be seen as directly analogous to the use of *epigraphs* in other types of literary work. In this respect the formal qualities of the *Stheneboea* prologue can be illuminated by Genette's theory of paratextuality, as outlined in his book *Paratexts* (originally *Seuils*, i.e. 'Thresholds'). "Paratexts" in

Genette's sense include all those parts of a modern printed book which affect our reading but are not considered part of the text proper, such as the cover design, the dustwrapper blurb, the table of contents, the foreword, the footnotes, the index, and so on.

> More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*…it is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text." Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public…[41]

Of course one must avoid anachronism, and it is important to remember that tragedies were performances as well as texts; but nonetheless it seems that much of what Genette says about paratexts can be applied, *mutatis mutandis,* to Euripides. The quotation with which *Stheneboea* begins can be seen as quite literally on the edge or fringe of the text; it is a "zone of transition and transaction" in terms of the way in which the text communicates with its audience. This is equally true whether we are thinking in terms of a book, in which the quotation might be the first words unrolled by the reader, or of a stage production in the theatre of Dionysus.

Our quotation can be called paratextual in terms of its form and pragmatic function; but what Genette has to say about epigraphs in particular is also highly suggestive in terms of its content. It is suggested that such utterances stand *in dialogue* with the other portions of the text but are seen as auxiliary or "heteronomous".[42] The function of epigraphs is to provide food for thought; to challenge or puzzle us; to be, at times, deliberately evasive; to place us, as readers, in a position in which we have to make connections and do a lot of interpretative work for ourselves.

> The semantic relevance of epigraphs is often, as it were, random; and without the least ill will, one can suspect some authors of positioning some epigraphs hit-and-miss, of believing—rightly—that *every* joining creates meaning and that the absence of meaning is an impression of meaning, often the most stimulating or most rewarding; to think without knowing what you are thinking—is that not one of the purest pleasures of the mind?[43]

Genette's focus is mainly on the epigraph in the modern French novel, but (once again) his remarks seem to describe the content and function of Bellerophon's opening lines extraordinarily well.

This will become clearer from a closer examination of the beginning of *Stheneboea,* in a slightly more extended version consisting of the first six lines (including "the quotation" *and* its continuation). Viewed as an act of communication between author and reader, or as a statement possessing "semantic relevance", it is ambiguous in several ways.

> οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ' ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ.
> ἢ γὰρ πεφυκὼς ἐσθλὸς οὐκ ἔχει βίον,
> ἢ δυσγενὴς ὢν πλουσίαν ἀροῖ πλάκα.
> πολλοὺς δὲ πλούτωι καὶ γένει γαυρουμένους
> γυνὴ κατήισχυν' ἐν δόμοισι νηπία.
> τοιᾶιδε Προῖτος <γῆς> ἄναξ νόσωι νοσεῖ...
> No man exists who is fortunate in every respect. Either someone has noble birth but no livelihood, or he is of lowly origin but ploughs rich farmland; and many who pride themselves on wealth and birth are disgraced by a foolish wife in their house. Such is the affliction which afflicts Proetus, the ruler of this land...

Let us begin by imagining the effect of these lines on a spectator in the theatre. As is well known, the Greek theatre had no curtain, which means that we always have to think carefully about the exact point at which any play can be said to begin, and about

the different ways in which a boundary is established between the real world and the mimetic world of the drama. The speaker of the first lines is simultaneously a character in the play and an actor alerting the spectators to the fact that the play has now begun and encouraging them to settle down and be quiet. The opening words function as a "raising of the curtain", but are they truly part of the play proper? Did everyone in the theatre audience even hear them? Perhaps not.

Even if we can make out the lines clearly enough, we will be unaware who is speaking them. It is not till much later in the prologue that Bellerophon reveals his identity. Until that time, he is simply a voice – an anonymous and mysterious figure, who could represent anyone at all. Is he fully in the guise of a character? Does he represent some sort of transcendent presence, such as an impersonal "voice of wisdom" or "implied second speaker" (to use Morson's term), or might he be some sort of divine, quasi-authorial figure (such as would become so central to the prologues of New Comedy)? Note that most Euripidean prologue-speeches are delivered by a minor character or a god, rather than a principal participant in the action, which means that we will be unlikely to guess Bellerophon's identity at any rate. These feelings of uncertainty would probably have been common to spectators or readers alike. Modern playscripts give reader-friendly orientation in the form of cast lists, speaker attributions and stage directions, but it seems unlikely that a fifth-century bookroll would have contained any of these aids to understanding.[44] The speaker's identity eventually becomes known, but for the moment, crucially, we are left dangling on the play's threshold.

A further source of ambiguity presents itself: where does "the quotation" end? We have seen that in the hands of other authors it was soon reduced to a single verse, but the full version of the maxim might be perceived as occupying the first three, or even five, lines of the play. It seems that there is a deliberate blurring of the "cut-off" point between the opening maxim and the narrative that follows. (Note also that the narrative proper seems to begin at line 6, but even there the transition is brought about by the pronoun τοιᾶιδε, which initially might seem to refer back to γυνή on line 5.) Not only that, but the expansion of the maxim in lines 2-3 and 4-5 is unnecessary: indeed, the

development of the idea is slightly odd and inconsequential, and it seems to weaken the overall effect. One could dismiss it as faulty writing, perhaps, but actually this blurring of the general and the specific seems completely in tune with the communicative strategy of the opening scene as a whole. It is deliberately ambiguous, "an undefined zone between the inside and the outside" (to quote Genette again).

We could also detect ambiguity in terms of the authorship of the maxim, which, in terms of its content, might well be called a "quotation" in an additional sense. Can Euripides really be considered the author of a sentiment that is so banal and so commonly encountered elsewhere in Greek literature and thought?[45] The tragedian has packaged an old cliché in an attractive, memorable format, but he was presumably not regarded as the unique originator of the idea. Here, perhaps, we have a partial explanation why so many of those who later quote the line do not treat it specifically as a Euripidean quotation. Indeed, it is not even clear whether the play is to be read as endorsing the sentiment or offering it up as a topic for debate – an embodiment of traditional wisdom which the audience is being invited to reflect upon, or question, or modify in some way. We might compare the way in which Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* begins by quoting a similar maxim, but explicitly distances herself from the maxim by referring to it as "a well-known old saying" (λόγος μὲν ἔστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανείς) which her own experience makes her inclined to doubt.[46]

To sum up: the quotation in its original context is presented and framed from the very beginning *as a quotation.* Considered either as a maxim or as a paratextual epigraph, it is characterized by ambiguity and doubleness. It is inherently detachable or semi-detached from the main text of the prologue. It both is and is not properly part of the scene that follows. It is an undeniably arresting opening device, but it raises unanswerable questions about authorship, voice, function and meaning. The experience of listening to the opening words in a live theater performance or reading them in a book will have been significantly different, of course, but it seems obvious that more or less the same types of ambiguity, and the same sense of hovering uncertainly on the threshold of the text, will have arisen in either case.

This article has taken a single small quotation as a starting-point for posing some much bigger questions about tragedy and ancient reading practices. Whether or not the reader is convinced by my suggestion that tragedy can be treated as a collage of quotations or a dialogue composed of multiple "fragments", I hope I have made a case, at least, for regarding "quotationality" as an important formal aspect of tragedy, and for reading dramatic quotations simultaneously both in and out of context. Furthermore, it will be obvious that quasi-epigraphic verses such as *Stheneboea* F661 constitute the mere tip of the iceberg: there are many other categories of quotable/quoted verses from tragedy that would bear further investigation along similar lines.[47]

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[1] I deal with these questions at length in a forthcoming book. On theoretical aspects of quotation culture in the modern world see Compagnon 1979, Garber 2003, Morson 2011, Sternberg 1982.

[2] This list (based on Orr 2003, 130-1) does not exhaust all the possibilities.

[3] Note that all tragic fragments (F) and testimonia (T) are cited from *TrGF;* all translations are my own.

[4] Cf. Morson 2011, 92: "a line interpreted as an independent work differs fundamentally from the same line interpreted as part of some larger work".

[5] F662-671 *TrGF*: see Kannicht *ad loc.* for full details of the sources.

[6] See Dover 2000 for a suggestive study of "Frogments" (i.e. book fragments of Aristophanes' *Frogs* preserved in the indirect tradition).

[7] *P. Oxy.* 2455 (Kannicht T iia). Stobaeus 4.22b.46 also quotes lines 4-5 as a separate fragment with no indication of context.

[8] Cf. Goldhill 1991, 216; Sommerstein 1996 *ad loc.*

[9] See Wright 2012, 143-62 on "quotation-spotting" as a source of humor in old comedy and a means of differentiating between levels of audience response.

[10] See Dover 1993 and Sommerstein 1996 *ad loc.*

[11] Cf. *Stheneboea* F663, which became so famous as a quotation that it is hardly ever quoted in full: all that is given in most cases is a half-line or a paraphrase (see esp. Ar. *Wasps* 1074, Pl. *Symp.* 196e, Aristid. *Or.* 26.3). This type of literary pastime might be said to anticipate the *Ergänzungsspiel* ('completion game'), seen in Hellenistic poetry and later epigram, whereby readers are required to use their literary knowledge to supply information not found in the text. See Bing 1995.

[12] Two passages from *Stheneboea* (F663, F665) are parodied by Ar. *Wasps* of 422 B.C.E., i.e. 423 is the earliest possible date for its first production. Collard 1995, 83 and Webster 1967, 31 estimate a date of *ca.* 431-425 on the basis of thematic similarities with *Med.* and *Hipp.*, though Collard also tentatively suggests that Eupolis' *Prospaltians* of 429 B.C.E.

(F259 K-A) alludes to *Stheneboea*, indicating a date of 430 or earlier. The metrical evidence for fragmentary plays is unreliable, but suggests a date earlier than 420: see Cropp and Fick 1985, 22; 70.

[13] See Gill 2005, Konstan 2011, Perlman 1964, Wilson 2006 on different aspects of gnomic quotation from tragedy or excerption as a reading practice.

[14] A notable parallel is provided by Timocles, *Dionysiazousai* F6 K-A; see (most recently) Rosen 2013 and Wright 2013, 613-15 for detailed discussion of this source and its possible connection to the Aristotelian theory of *katharsis*.

[15] See Collard 1995, 79-97 for details (as far as they can be reconstructed).

[16] In fact, several scenes in fifth-century comedy depend on the same idea: e.g. Ar. *Frogs* 1050-88; *Thesm.* 177-8, 193-201, 383-456.

[17] A similar attitude is implied also by Diphilus, *Synoris* F74 K-A; cf. Menander, *Epitrep.* 1123-6.

[18] Note, however, that the lines immediately before 407 are badly mutilated or missing, making it impossible to tell exactly what preceded the quotation: see Gomme and Sandbach 1973 *ad loc.*

[19] The other lines quoted include Chaeremon, *Achilles Thersitoktonos* F2; Aeschylus, *Niobe* F154. 15-16; Carcinus II F5a; Euripides, *Orestes* 1-2; Chaeremon F42 (or Euripides F944a). See Ireland 2010, 101; cf. Cusset 2003, 144-58.

[20] Evidence for the social spread of literacy in classical Greece is poor, but a few literary sources mention literate slaves, e.g. Pl. *Theaet.* 143b-c (a reference to slaves working in the Athenian public archives); cf. [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 47.5, Dem. 29.11, 33.17, 45.72. Theophilus F1 K-A, dating from a similar period to Menander, assumes that literate slaves were exceptional. See Thomas 1992, 143-4; cf. Harris 1989, 251-8 (mostly with reference to the Roman imperial period).

[21] For very different views about the "competence" (i.e. literary knowledge) of classical theater audiences and fuller discussion of the issues see Biles 2010, Mastromarco 2006, Revermann 2006, Wright 2012.

[22] Nervegna 2013 is an excellent attempt to pin down what can be known about the contexts for the reception of dramatic texts within antiquity (with reference to Menander).

[23] Arist. *Rhet.* 2.21.2-4, 1394b-1395a; cf. 2.21.11-15, 1395b. See also Arist. fr. 13 Rose for the view that maxims and proverbs are the property of ordinary people.

[24] Several scholars treat *gnomai* or proverbs as a genre in a formal sense, drawing attention to their function in social, performative or literary contexts: see e.g. Russo 1997, Martin 2011. The *quotation* is also seen as a distinct genre by Morson 2011.

[25] Ar. *Wasps* 1259-60 (cf. 725-6); Pl. *Laws* 7.811a-b, *Phaedr.* 278d-e; Arist. *Rhet.* 2.21.2-4, 1394b-1395a; Isocr. *Ad Nic.* 42-4, *Ad Demon.* 51-2; Aesch. *In Ctes.* 135; cf. Suda Φ 441 (referring to Philochorus' fourth-century collection of Attic epigrams). Sider 2007 argues for fifth-century collections of epigrams; cf. Carey 2011 for hypothetical reconstruction of a fifth-century Alcman anthology; Bowie 2012 treats the *Theognidea* as a collection of excerpts; Canevaro 2015 and Hunter 2014 treat the Hesiodic poems in a similar light. On the early history of anthologies more generally see Wachsmuth 1882, Barns 1950, and now Konstan 2011 (who sees Stobaeus as the culmination of a very long tradition of excerption stretching back to the very beginnings of Greek literary culture).

[26] Plut. *Mor.* 103a-b.

[27] See Hunter and Russell 2011, 11-16.

[28] On Plutarch's use of quotation see Helmbold and O'Neil 1959; Russell 1972, 26-47; de Romilly 1988; cf. Hunter and Russell 2011 *passim*.

[29] Lardinois 2006 (with specific reference to Soph. *Ajax*). Cf. Slater 2001 (on the importance of context when interpreting *gnomai*) and Dover 1974, 14-17 (on the dangers of treating moral sentiments in tragedy as authorial – though he stresses that most ancient readers did precisely this).

[30] Morson 2011, esp. 37-8, 81-5, 96-7. For broadly similar definitions cf. Garber 2003, 16 (on the "ventriloquism" of quotations); Empson 1930, 51 (on "lines that stand out...like quotations on a tombstone" as a source of productive ambiguity).

[31] Some of these characteristics of tragic *gnomai* are explored by Friis Johansen 1959 , Lardinois 2006, Martin 2011, Russo 1997.

[32] Most 2003 discusses the extraordinarily high concentration of *gnomai* in Euripides. But it may be that the work of other tragedians (including Agathon and Chaeremon) was even more marked by *gnomai* and quotationality: see [ ].

[33] On the Romantic fascination with fragments and ruins, see Woodward 2001; cf. Kassel 1991 on tragic fragments and their collectors.

[34] See Heath 1989 for the background to classical conceptions of unity.

[35] This distinction has been made in two very suggestive recent works on Hesiod and his ancient readers: both Hunter 2014 and Canevaro 2015 make a case for reading Hesiod's works (esp. the *Hypothekai of Cheiron* [F283-5 M-W] and parts of *Works and Days* [e.g. 695-764]) in "piecemeal" or "excerpted" fashion. Cf. Konstan 2011, 21-2 on the variety of ancient reading practices.

[36] See esp. Barthes 1973 *passim* and 1975, 92-5; cf. Bayard 2007 for an even more radical variation on this position (in which the possibility of "reading" any text at all, in a meaningful sense, is denied).

[37] See [forthcoming], where I develop this interplay and contrast between "linear" and "non-linear" reading in relation to complete tragedies.

[38] The only other known examples of such a technique are Eur. *Hcld.* 1-6, *Or.* 1-3, *Aeolus* F13a, *Phoenix* F803a and Soph. *Trach.* 1-5. Any of these passages could be interpreted in much the same way that I am interpreting *Stheneboea* F661 here; but see Davies 1991 and Willink 1986 *ad locc.* for more traditional forms of analysis and comment.

[39] Race 1992, 17-18, comparing Sappho F16; Alcaeus F42; Pind. *Ol.* 1.1-7, 11.1-15, *Pyth.* 5.1-4, *Isth.* 3.1-3; Bacchyl. 14.1-20. See also Davies 1999 on the *priamel* as dramatic opening device (distorted for humorous purposes) in Eur. *Cyc.* 1-10.

[40] Segal 1992, 92-3, with ref. to Schadewaldt 1926, II.105-6. Cf. Erbse 1984 on formal and conventional aspects of Euripidean prologues.

[41] Genette 1997, 1-2.

[42] Genette 1997, 269.

[43] Genette 1997, 158.

[44] It is hard to reconstruct the experience of a fifth- or fourth-century reader, but see Kenyon 1951, 1-37 and Casson 2001, 17-30 on the evidence for ancient Greek books.

[45] Stobaeus (Book 4, 'On the Instability of Human Fortune') records dozens of nearly-synonymous *gnomai*; cf. Collard 1995 ad loc. for other passages from fifth-century literature (incl. Hdt. 1.32.4-5 (who attributes the sentiment to Solon); Soph. *Trach.* 1-4, *OT* 1528-30, *Tyndareus* F646; Eur. *Suppl.* 170, *Alexandros* F45, *Auge* F273 etc.).

[46] Soph. *Trach.* 1-5; see Martin 2011 for discussion of the distancing effect there.

[47] See [forthcoming].