CLEARING UP SOME CONFUSION IN CALLIAS' *ALPHABET TRAGEDY:* HOW TO READ SOPHOCLES *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS* 332–33 ET AL.

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Even "I's" never mean that you're sure to "C"
XTC, "Chalkhills and Children"

THEODORUS THE CYNIC (a.k.a. Cynulcus), a symposiast in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae,* makes the following incidental statement to Ulpian of Tyre, his fellow diner and connoisseur of word riddles and puzzles (7.276a):[1]

ταῦτ' εἶπεν ὁ Κλέαρχος. εἰ δ' ἀπιστεῖς, ὦ ἑταῖρε, καὶ τὸ βιβλίον κεκτημένος οὐ φθονήσω σοι· ἀφ' οὗ πολλὰ ἐκμαθὼν εὐπορήσεις προβλημάτων· καὶ γὰρ Καλλίαν ἱστορεῖ τὸν Ἀθηναῖον γραμματικὴν συνθεῖναι τραγωιδίαν, ἀφ' ἧς ποιῆσαι τὰ μέλη καὶ τὴν διάθεσιν Εὐριπίδην ἐν Μηδείαι καὶ Σοφοκλέα τὸν Οἰδίπουν.

3 γραμματικὴν K-A, Kaibel, Edmonds, Gulick: ὃν AC (Epitome: τὸν Ἀθηναῖον γραμματικὸν Καλλίαν marginal lemma in A: Καλλίου γραμματικοῦ ἀθηναίου γραμματικὴ τραγωιδία)

Clearchus [of Soli] said these things. Friend, if you don't believe me, I actually have his book [περὶ γρίφων (*On Riddles*)] and I'll share it with you. You'll learn many things from it and get a full supply of problems; for instance, he reports that Callias the Athenian composed his *Alphabet Tragedy,*[2] from which Euripides made his songs and delivery in *Medea* and Sophocles made his *Oedipus.*

Two major articles on Callias' *Alphabet Tragedy,* one of them appearing in the pages of this journal, are recent additions in what has proven to be a generation-long push toward the proper incorporation of the fragments of this fascinating fifth- (or perhaps fourth-) century comedy into the framework of Classical Greek drama and, just as significantly, into the social dynamics of literacy and the promulgation of written literature at Athens.[3] While these two studies differ markedly in critical assumption and approach, both wrestle earnestly with the seemingly intractable and confused testimony preserved in the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus, whose familiarity with this work of Callias apparently derives entirely from a book about riddles by the fourth-century Aristotelian philosopher Clearchus of Soli. What can be known of *Alphabet Tragedy,* then, comes packaged as a bundle of puzzles.[4] Scholarship on the comedy, up to and including these two studies of the piece, has tended to despair of finding adequate solutions to many of these puzzles.[5] In offering a solution to one of the more tantalizing of *Alphabet Tragedy*'s problems—the relationship of this comedy to Sophocles' *Oedipus*—I hope to demonstrate that other problematic issues regarding the play (e.g., when the play might have been produced, whether the Callias who composed this comedy is someone different from the known playwright of Old Comedies, what the nature and purpose of its skits might have been, and what literary expectations the comedian had of his audience) tend nearer to resolution in consequence of this reading.

Furthermore, the explication advanced here offers insight into the nature of the "reading" of dramatic texts not only in late-fifth-century Athens, but in Athenaeus' own day, six centuries later. Athenaeus has been maligned in the scholarship of the past century on the grounds that he has only a poor or partial understanding of the material for which he serves as conduit, and that blame for our own poor understanding of Clearchus and the precious gems buried in his book should be ascribed to corruption introduced by the

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entitled *Grammatike Tragedy*"), certifies the obscurity of the work or its esoteric source of derivation, but not necessarily the authenticity of the title.

However that may be, a regularized nomenclature in translation has not resulted from the last 125 years of scholarship: the play has been treated under the titles *ABC-Tragedy* or *Alphabet Tragedy* (Hense 1876, Arnott 1960, Pöhlmann 1971, Slater 2002), *Alphabetic Tragedy* (Gulick 1929, 3:241), *Grammarian's Tragedy* (Gulick 1930, 4:531), *Alphabet Revue* (Gulick 1930, 4:555, Dover 1996), *Grammatical Play* or *Grammatical Tragedy* (Edmonds 1957), *ABC Show* (Svenbro 1990; Wise 1998), *Letter Tragedy* (Körte 1919 and 1932, Rosen 1999), and *Letter Show* (Rosen 1999, Ruijgh 2001). Athenaeus' quotations and testimony make three things clear about the play that motivate my own choice in rendering the title: (1) the prologue and parodos of the play incorporate and treat not simply *letters,* but all of the letters of *the alphabet:* see 10.453d–e, pp. 315–16 below; (2) the comedy's skits—Larensius gives us quick glimpses into perhaps as many as six—betray a playwright eager to parody scenes from tragedies à la *Frogs* or *Thesmophoriazusae* (as opposed to the parody of a newfangled system of rhetorical education à la *Clouds*); and (3), as will be demonstrated here, the comedy to be generated from these paratragic fragments has far more to do with how the alphabet sounded and less to do with how it appeared than has sometimes been imagined.

3. Rosen 1999; and Ruijgh 2001. Contemporary discussion on *Alphabet Tragedy* begins from Pöhlmann 1971. Other important discussions include Svenbro 1993, 183–86 = 1990, 381–84; Wise 1998, 15–18; and now Slater 2002.

4. Rosen 1999, 150–51, on Athenaeus' lack of direct access to Callias' text.

5. Hense (1876, 582–83) catalogues perplexed nineteenth-century explicators; Rosen (1999, p. 147 n. 1) quotes the despair of Wilamowitz 1971, 398 = 1906, 632.

interfering medium.[6] That such aspersions have been unjustly cast in this particular case I hope becomes clear in what follows.

A. THE *GRIPHOS* POSED

Athenaeus dangles the substance of Clearchus' book before his reader as a dinner enticement. Yet it is not until the tables have been cleared away and the serious drinking has begun that Athenaeus has his symposiasts return to the topic of *problemata* suitable for the symposium and to the prized material contained within *On Riddles* (10.448b–459c). Implying that Clearchus has achieved something of a circulating readership among his symposiasts, Athenaeus has the character Aemilianus demonstrate his own familiarity with that book by broaching the topic of riddles and Callias' use of them (10.448b), while Larensius, host of the symposium, assumes the task of working through the material of Clearchus' text.[7] With the exception of one riddle (10.448e) that he purposefully poses to Ulpian without immediate solution, Larensius quite scrupulously supplies the answers to all the riddles he proffers.[8] This helpful inclination to reveal and explicate solutions may provide some measure of Athenaeus' expectation of his readers' lack of familiarity with the riddles posed from the rare text of Clearchus. Paradoxically, once one sees that the relationship between Callias' comedy and Sophocles' tragedy has not, after all, been left as a problem without solution, it is also possible to gauge Athenaeus' equal expectation of his readers' ability to recreate from the bare text the lively performances scripted into the mouths of his symposiasts.

Indeed, when Larensius describes or recites several passages from Callias' comedy (10.453c–454a), the testimony baffles and frustrates insofar as it, unlike what precedes and follows in Larensius' discourse, appears to be a set of *problemata* without explanatory solutions.[9] Here is the opening passage in full:

[453c] ὁ δὲ Ἀθηναῖος Καλλίας (ἐζητοῦμεν γὰρ ἔτι πρότερον περὶ αὐτοῦ) μικρὸν ἔμ-προσθεν γενόμενος τοῖς χρόνοις Στράττιδος ἐποίησε τὴν καλουμένην γραμματικὴν θεω-ρίαν οὕτω διατάξας. πρόλογος μὲν αὐτῆς ἐστιν ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων, ὃν χρὴ λέγειν ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων διαιροῦντας κατὰ τὰς πάσας γραφὰς καὶ τὴν τελευτὴν καταστροφικῶς ποιου-μένους εἰς τάλφα· [453d]

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6. Rosen (1999, 151) is willing to countenance the possibility that Athenaeus is carelessly passing on corruption already introduced by Clearchus. Ruijgh (2001, 271–72) deflects the blame to Athenaeus' successive *epitomator* and *breviator*.

7. Cynulcus, in posing a problem to Ulpian and then demonstrating its solution from Clearchus' book (which he has memorized), gains the admiration of the banqueters (7.275b–276a) for his display of familiarity with the esoteric treatise. See section C below for evidence of general familiarity among the banqueters with Clearchus, at least as far as Callias is concerned. See Rosen 1999, 159–66, for the hierarchical arrangement of puzzle types in Clearchus that organizes Larensius' presentation.

8. Larensius challenges Ulpian to name the sympotic drink traditionally administered as punishment to those unable to solve a riddle. The solution (revealed at 10.458f, with Clearchus cited as authority, 457c), briny *halme,* closes the night of drinking. For the particular Socratic resonance of posing such a riddle to Ulpian (whose failure to acquit himself of the problem will result in his having to drink down the very potion), see Davidson 2000, 293–95.

9. Rosen (1999, 160) notices the odd lack of explanation of how the fragments of the comedy relate to the rest of "Athenaeus' typically discursive presentation of the various riddle types. . . ."

⟨τὸ ἄλφα⟩, βῆτα, γάμμα, δέλτα, θεοῦ γὰρ εἶ,
ζῆτ', ἦτα, θῆτ', ἰῶτα, κάππα, λάβδα, μῦ,
νῦ, ξεῖ, τὸ οὖ, πεῖ, ῥῶ, τὸ σίγμα, ταῦ, ⟨τὸ⟩ ὖ,
παρὸν ⟨τὸ⟩ φεῖ, ⟨τὸ⟩ χεῖ τε τῶι ψεῖ εἰς τὸ ὤ.

ὁ χορὸς δὲ γυναικῶν ἐκ τῶν σύνδυο πεποιημένος αὐτῶι ἐστιν ἔμμετρος ἅμα καὶ μεμε-
λοπεποιημένος τόνδε τὸν τρόπον· βῆτα ἄλφα βα, βῆτα εἶ βε, βῆτα ἦτα βη, βῆτα ἰῶτα βι,
βῆτα οὖ βο, βῆτα ὖ βυ, βῆτα ὢ βω, καὶ πάλιν ἐν ἀντιστρόφωι τοῦ μέλους καὶ τοῦ μέτρου
γάμμα ἄλφα, γάμμα εἶ, [453e] γάμμα ἦτα, γάμμα ἰῶτα, γάμμα οὖ, γάμμα ὖ, γάμμα ὢ,
καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν λοιπῶν συλλαβῶν ὁμοίως ἑκάστων τό τε μέτρον καὶ τὸ μέλος ἐν ἀντιστρό-
φοις ἔχουσι πᾶσαι ταὐτόν, ὥστε τὸν Εὐριπίδην μὴ μόνον ὑπονοεῖσθαι τὴν Μήδειαν ἐν-
τεῦθεν πεποιηκέναι πᾶσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ μέλος αὐτὸ μετενηνοχότα φανερὸν εἶναι. τὸν δὲ
Σοφοκλέα διελεῖν φασιν ἀποτολμῆσαι τὸ ποίημα τῶι μέτρωι τοῦτ' ἀκούσαντα καὶ ποιῆσαι
ἐν τῶι Οἰδίποδι οὕτως·

ἐγὼ οὔτ' ἐμαυτὸν οὔτε σ' ἀλγυνῶ. ⟨τί⟩ ταῦτ'
⟨ἄλλως⟩ ἐλέγχεις· [OT 332–33]

[453f] διόπερ οἱ λοιποὶ τὰς ἀντιστρόφους ἀπὸ τούτου παρεδέχοντο πάντες, ὡς ἔοικεν,
εἰς τὰς τραγωιδίας.

2–3 γραμματικὴν θεωρίαν AC: γραμματικὴν τραγωιδίαν K-A 3 ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων A: omit K-A,
Edmonds, Gulick διαιροῦντας Schweighäuser: διαιροῦντα A 4 κατὰ τὰς πάσας γραφὰς A:
κατὰ τὰς παραγραφὰς K-A, Gulick

Callias the Athenian (we were making inquiry about him a bit earlier), who was a little
before the time of Strattis, composed his so-called *Alphabet Show* and arranged it in
this way: its prologue consists of letter names (*stoicheia*) which must be read dividing
out the letter names through the whole group of letters (*graphae*), making word divi-
sion (*teleute*)[10] in broken-down fashion at *alpha:*

alpha, bêta, gamma, delta, now god's *eî,*
zêt', êta, thêt', iôta, kappa, labda, mû,
nû, xeî, oû, peî, rhô, sigma, taû, û,
pheî being next, and *cheî,* to *pseî,* ending at *ô.*

And the chorus of women has been composed by Callias out of pairs [of *stoicheia*], in
meter and set to music in this way: *bêta alpha "ba," bêta eî "be," bêta êta "bê," bêta
iôta "bi," bêta oû "bo," bêta û "bu," bêta ô "bô,"* and again in antistrophe of music and
rhythm, *gamma alpha ["ga"], gamma eî ["ge"], gamma êta ["gê"], gamma iôta
["gi"], gamma oû ["go"], gamma û ["gu'], gamma ô ["gô"],* and in the case of each
of the remaining syllables, all have the same meter and melody in antistrophic substitu-
tions in the same way. As a result, not only does one suspect that Euripides fashioned
all his *Medea* from this scheme, but it is obvious that he took over the melody itself.
And they say Sophocles, when he heard this, dared to split up his poem by meter and
composed in his *Oedipus* this way:

Egô out' emauton oute s'algunô. Ti taût'
allôs elencheis? [OT 332–33]

And thus all poets thereafter admitted antistrophic substitutions from Callias, as it
seems, into their tragedies.

10. LSJ, s.v. τελευτή II.2.

While Callias' alphabetical prologue has achieved anthology status, fre-
quently inserted into the appendices of introductory Greek textbooks to
welcome the uninitiated into the singsong world of basic Greek literacy, the
remainder of the passage has barred even the most experienced Hellenists
from a satisfactory reading experience.[11] The passage has proven vexatious,
to say the least. Larensius' allegation of the dependence of Euripides'
Medea and Sophocles' *Oedipus* upon this comedy is, prima facie, prepos-
terous enough. The apparent lack of support provided by the lines quoted
from *Oedipus* to bolster the claim of dependence renders the proposition still
more dubious. And finally, that such dependence is at odds with the first
thing reported by Larensius about Callias' play (453c)—that the author (and
presumably the comedy) came along a little before Strattis (the comedian of
Middle Comedy, active 409–c. 357 B.C.E.)—would give the editor ample
reason to assess the testimony cautiously.[12]

B. MAKING PROBLEMS WHERE NONE EXIST

Two general approaches toward the interpretation of the passage have
emerged in the scholarship and are neatly typified in the work of Ralph
Rosen and Cornelis Ruijgh. The first, dominant from the time of Gottfried
Hermann and lately reasserted at considerable length by Ruijgh, accepts as
unassailable the ascription of the play to Callias, the comic playwright of
the generation before Aristophanes,[13] as well as the assertion that Callias'
work influenced (and necessarily predates) *Medea* (produced 431 B.C.E.) and
Oedipus.[14] By implication, the production date of *Oedipus* would fall near
to both *Alphabet Tragedy* and *Medea* (and fit its traditionally assigned stag-
ing date after the outbreak of the plague, c. 429).

The second approach, found in Rosen's assessment of the problem, accepts
the detail of the dating of "Callias the Athenian" to the time just prior to
Strattis' floruit (i.e., after 409 B.C.E.) as foundationally important to the in-
terpretation of the fragments. Rosen, following the trail cleared by Egert
Pöhlmann some thirty years before, understands the assertion of this Cal-
lias' influence over Sophocles, Euripides, and all tragic poets thereafter
(453e–f, above) as the outlandish and impossible boast of the poet within
Alphabet Tragedy and claims that Athenaeus (or perhaps Clearchus before
him) has misconstrued joke for fact.[15] In so accepting the "late" production
date for the comedy, one gains the ability to interpret the work in the

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11. See n. 5 above. See Pöhlmann 1971, p. 234, n. 20, and Rosen 1999, pp. 147–48, nn. 1–2, for bibli-
ography of significant frustrated explicators of the text.
    12. Kaibel [1895] 1966, 3:595, indexes the fragments as decidedly not the work of the known Callias.
On the problem of dating the Old Comic poet by the career of Strattis, a Middle Comic: Körte 1932, 336;
Rosen 1999, 148; Ruijgh 2001, 275. Edmonds (1957, 1:176–81) publishes the comedy at the end of the
Callias material as doubtfully ascribed; Sidwell (2000, 144) appears to be dropping the testimony alto-
gether from his handlist of passages from fifth-century comedy cited in Athenaeus.
    13. A rival of Cratinus (who was active roughly from the death of Cimon up to the Peace of Nicias),
Callias was an active competitor by 446 B.C.E. (based on an epigraphic restoration); Körte 1919, 1627. On
the problem of the *terminus ante quem* for the end of Callias' career, see n. 18 below.
    14. Hense 1876, 582. More recently: Arnott 1960, 179; Webster 1969, 180; Ruijgh 2001, 273.
    15. Pöhlmann 1971, 238–40; Rosen 1999, 153–55, and see n. 43 below.

contextual light of the decree of Archinus, enacted by the Athenian assembly in the eponymous year of Euclides (403/2 B.C.E.), which officially sanctioned changes to the Attic alphabet (viz., the addition of eta, psi, xi, and omega to the script of public writing),[16] and of attendant assumptions not only of greater rates of letter recognition and phonetic reading among the *demos* but also of the general promulgation of literary texts through Attica at the end of the fifth century.[17] This postulation of a late production date fits all the testimony in *Deipnosophistae* into a cogent scheme, but would sacrifice the ascription of the work to the known Old Comedian Callias and necessitate postulating some later comic playwright, "Callias the Athenian, author of *Alphabet Tragedy,* who came a little before the time of Strattis."[18]

As far as letter recognition and phonetic reading are concerned, it is Ruijgh who has proceeded from an understanding that the fragments of Callias' play left to us in Athenaeus need some special editing: the enterprise of reconstituting the autograph of Callias' text (or, more correctly, the condition of the written text in Clearchus' puzzle book) involves recreating a symbolic feature reported by Larensius (453c)—the *stoicheia,* or letter initials—that the *graphae* puzzlingly represent.[19] Which is to say that Athenaeus is having Larensius describe a text that he has seen (presumably in its state as an unsolved puzzle) and then perform the operation of "catastrophic" stoichiastic division (453c) through the simple act of oral performance of the text. The result, when the puzzle is solved, is a set of comic trimeters and parodic lyrics that Larensius' internal audience of symposiasts "hears" and that the external audience, the reader, "sees" (with word divisions, elisions, etc., already having been editorially inserted) as a rendition of Callias' script in its shape as it was meant to be performed. What we find in Athenaeus, then, should be thought of as a dictation or mimetic representation in letters of the sounds that have resulted from a "reader" (i.e., Larensius) orally representing letter names that he has seen as *graphae* written in a book. That indeed is puzzling.

The act of reading an ancient text was always, first and foremost, a phonetic enterprise of breaking strings of letters down into groupings of consonants and vowels according to simple practices of syllabification.[20] Callias' text, as it might have been printed in Clearchus' book, if one takes the trouble

16. Pöhlmann 1971, 233; Rosen 1999, 149; Ruijgh 2001, 273–74.

17. Thomas 1992, 91–93, on phonetic reading as a functional literacy.

18. Attempts have been made to run the career of the known Callias past (and in conjunction with the events of) the eponymous year of Euclides (403/2); see Körte 1919, 1627, and Gulick 1937, 117 (on Ath. 13.577b), for assessments. Rosen (1999, 148–49) understands the difficulties of assigning the play to the known Callias when arguing for the lateness of the comedy itself, yet argues (154–55) that the outlandishness of the claims made in the comedy makes ascription to a known, established comedian more likely. Slater 2002, 117, assumes Rosen's case to be proven.

19. Ruijgh (2001, 266–67 and 290–95) demonstrates the compression of the *scripta plena* of the MSS, but seems to be taking *graphe* and *stoicheion* synonymously (291–92). That Athenaeus used the word *stoicheion* in different sense from *gramma* or *graphe* is seen when he has Plutarch (11.466e–f) quote from Achaeus' satyr play *Omphale,* where a satyr reads out, letter by letter, the inscription upon a wine cup, ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟ, "Dionysus' [cup]." In glossing the morphology, Plutarch observes that the ancients wrote –ο for the sound of –ου. So while the cup itself lacks the final *gramma* or *graphe* ("letter"), Υ, Plutarch says that Achaeus' verses lack the final *stoicheion* ("letter name"), τὸ ῦ.

20. See Svenbro 1993, 109–16, on the engagement of the reader in script solution.

to reconstitute it with letter names represented as *graphae* written *"en écri-ture continue"* (as Ruijgh has done), would have looked something like this:[21]

(1) TOABΓΔΘEOYΓAPE
ZHΘIKΛM
NΞTOOΠPTOΣTTOY
ΠAPONTOΦTOXTETΩIΨEIΣTOΩ

Three syllables into the first line (το- αβ- γδθε-) and the perplexed reader must understand there is something problematic—and unreadable—about these lines. Yet if guided by the special instructions *not* to syllabify, but rather to divide "all letters" as letter initials, suddenly the game becomes clear. To get these letters to fill out the meter of comic trimeter, one has to read in the following manner:

(2) TO A̲ B̲ Γ̲ Δ̲ ΘEOY ΓAP E̲
Z̲ H̲ Θ̲ I̲ K̲ Λ̲ M̲
N̲ Ξ̲ TO O̲ Π̲ P TO Σ̲ T TO Y̲
ΠAPON TO Φ̲ TO X̲ TE TΩI Ψ̲ EIΣ TO Ω̲

The addition of the simple aid of underlining certain letters demonstrates where the reader is to treat the *graphae* as *stoicheia:*[22] some *graphae* need to be read aloud in one symbolic system (letters representing phonemes) while the other *graphae* need to be read according to another system (letters representing letters' names). Larensius' instructions to divide the text at "all *graphae*" does not hold completely true;[23] stranger still, to get the poetry to work in meter, some of these *stoicheia* need to be elided (e.g., ζῆτ', θῆτ'), while others apparently allow hiatus (τὸ ἄλφα, τὸ οὖ, etc.). So the "puzzle" that Larensius is doing his audience the favor of solving—simply by per-forming with select *graphae* correctly broken into *stoicheia* and pronounced as demanded by meter—is the process by which a line of ostensible alpha-betic nonsense becomes the performable script of a comic prologue. Callias certainly never intended his performance text to be a puzzle for a reader. Regardless of whether Callias composed his play by writing it down or by other means, his intention for the delivery of his poetry to his audience was through theatrical performance. Likely it was Clearchus (or a sophist pre-ceding him), working from the textual relic of Callias' composition, who saw a sophisticated way to problematize that text so as to make it unread-able (and unperformable).[24]

When one hears Callias' script performed aloud, of course, none of this puzzling complexity is apparent. What is apparent is that Callias has humorously incorporated letter names into dramatic meter. He does not intend his audience to see the letters; he intends his audience to hear them. And it simply has not been sufficiently apparent to those puzzling over the fragments of *Alphabet Tragedy* that Larensius is not posing reading problems to his audience as he has found them in Clearchus' book. On the contrary, he is solving Clearchus' puzzles by reading them (i.e., performing the texts aloud) for his guests who are hearing everything as Callias' script in its "solved," performance-ready state. From our vantage (as Athenaeus' readers who see only the "transcript" of what Larensius said to his audience), the real problem is one of reconstructing the original riddle before Larensius provides the oral/aural solution. As problems go, this is a relatively easy thing to do.

Immediately after his quotation from Sophocles' *Oedipus,* Larensius repeats his warning about the nature of the puzzle he is about to solve (453f):

καὶ μετὰ τὸν χορὸν εἰσάγει πάλιν ἐκ τῶν φωνηέντων ῥῆσιν οὕτως (ἣν δεῖ κατὰ τὰς πάσας γραφὰς ὁμοίως τοῖς πρόσθεν λέγοντα διαιρεῖν, ἵν' ἡ τοῦ ποιήσαντος ὑπόκρισις σωίζηται κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν)·

1–2 κατὰ τὰς παραγραφὰς MSS[25]

And after the chorus, [Callias] again introduces a speech from the vowels (which the performer has to divide at the whole body of *graphae* in the same way as the previous text so that the intention of the one who composed it is restored to its meaning)[26] like this: . . .

Larensius then performs a passage of comic trimeters, the first six lines of which run as follows (453f):

ἄλφα μόνον, ὦ γυναῖκες, εἴ τε δεύτερον
λέγειν μόνον χρὴ καὶ τρίτον μόνον γ' ἐρεῖς
ἦτ' ἄρα φήσω. τό τε τέταρτον αὖ μόνον

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book of Neoptolemos of Parium (Ath. 10.454f = 85 A8 DK; Gulick 1930, 4:562–63). When seen as a printed text in Athenaeus, the epigram poses no puzzle at all (and no apparent display of sophistic acumen): τοὔνομα θῆτα ῥῶ ἄλφα σὰν ὗ μῦ ἄλφα χεῖ οὗ σάν. / πατρὶς Χαλκηδών· ἡ δὲ τέχνη σοφίη. ("My name is *thêta rhô alpha san û mû alpha cheî oû san.* / My fatherland is Chalcedon; and my craft is wisdom.") When heard, however, the (solved) puzzle challenges the auditor to picture what might have been inscribed on Thrasymachus' hypothetical *mnema* (which Neoptolemos, Larensius testifies, saw with his own eyes). That text would have looked like this: ΤΟΟΝΟΜΑΘΡΑΣΥΜΑΧΟΣΠΑΤΡΙΣΧΑΛΚΗΔΩΝΗΔΕΤΕΧΝΗΣΟΦΙΗ.

As with Clearchus' treatment of Callias' script, the puzzle is only apparent when the reader recognizes the challenge to form a proper elegiac couplet by the conversion of *graphae* to *stoicheia,* thus: τοὔνομα Θ Ρ Α Σ Υ Μ Α Χ Ο Σ / πατρὶς Χαλκηδών· ἡ δὲ τέχνη σοφίη. While this stoichiastic division involves no elisions of letter names, the reader/puzzle solver must perform crasis in one place, allow for hiatus in three other places, and know that Σ has the (non-Attic) letter name *san.* The *mnema,* as Thrasymachus intends it, can only be "read" by not reading what one sees: that is sophistic craft.

25. In light of the reading solution offered here, κατὰ τὰς παραγραφὰς (traditionally used to emend the text at 453c [pp. 315–16 above] from what now appears to be the correct text) can no longer be seen as providing a satisfactory meaning, and I have used the reading at 453c to emend 453f. See n. 23 above on my rendering of the phrase as "the whole body of *graphae.*"

26. For δύναμις as "word meaning" or even as "phonetic sound," see LSJ, s.v. δύναμις III.1.a–b.

ἰῶτα, πέμπτον οὖ, τὸ θ' ἕκτον ὖ μόνον
λέγε. λοίσθιον ⟨λέγειν⟩ δὲ φωνῶ σοι τὸ ὦ
τῶν ἑπτὰ φωνῶν, ἑπτὰ δ' ἐν μέτροις μόνον.[27]

Such, presumably, represents the performance script as performed by Callias' players in the theater at the time of their original production. Yet what Larensius claims to be "reading" for his symposiasts from Clearchus' riddle book would have looked liked this (for which I supply place markers under the *graphae* to be read as *stoicheia*):

(3) ΑΜΟΝΟΝΩΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣΕΤΕΔΕΥΤΕΡΟΝ
     ΛΕΓΕΙΝΜΟΝΟΝΧΡΗΚΑΙΤΡΙΤΟΝΜΟΝΟΝΓΕΡΕΙΣ
     ΗΑΡΑΦΗΣΩΤΟΤΕΤΕΤΑΡΤΟΝΑΥΜΟΝΟΝ
     ΙΠΕΜΠΤΟΝΟΤΟΘΕΚΤΟΝΥΜΟΝΟΝ
     ΛΕΓΕΛΟΙΣΘΙΟΝΛΕΓΕΙΝΔΕΦΩΝΩΣΟΙΤΟΩ
     ΤΩΝΕΠΤΑΦΩΝΩΝΕΠΤΑΔΕΝΜΕΤΡΟΙΣΜΟΝΟΝ

Again, this problem is not completely solved and ready to be read out simply because one knows where the *stoicheia* are lurking. To make the iambics scan, the reader must elide the eta (ἦτ' ἆρα, line 3) yet allow for hiatus before the omega (line 5). Which is to say that Clearchus' version of the text is a hypothetical construct that can exist only in written form: the puzzle is solved (and the proof of solution is demonstrated) only when it can be spoken (and heard) as Callias' trimeters.

Larensius again warns that the process of getting from (3) to the solution involves the breaking down of all *graphae* to see which of them need to be converted to *stoicheia*. What is actually involved is dividing the letters syllabically until one reaches a complex of consonants and vowels that do not render a sensible Greek word, or fail to scan into the meter. Then, the game is to determine which letters are causing the problem. A curious by-product of this reading method is that various forms of indeterminacy arise as the letters are syllabically paired. The omega of the first line of (3), for instance, looks at first to be a *stoicheion* until one has read to the next word (or perhaps has the complete grammatical sense after the enjambment) and understands that the *stoicheion* is actually a vocative interjection, ὦ.

C. SOUNDING OUT THE SOLUTION

So then, when Larensius recites the following lines from *Oedipus* this way (as printed in modern editions of Athenaeus), we must understand that our job is to reconstruct the riddle as Clearchus' book would pose it:

ἐγὼ οὔτ' ἐμαυτὸν οὔτε σ' ἀλγυνῶ· τί ταῦτ'
ἄλλως ἐλέγχεις; ⟨οὐ γὰρ ἂν πύθοιό μου.⟩[28]

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27. Kassel-Austin (1983, 40) and Gulick (1930, 558–59) follow Meineke in distributing the lines into a choral dialogue.

28. The text is Lloyd-Jones 1994. Athenaeus' chief MS (A) has Larensius (mis)quoting the line: ἐγὼ οὔτ' ἐμαυτὸν οὔτε σ' ἀλγυνῶ. ταῦτα ἐλεγχθείς. Though metrically implausible and contrary to the desired meaning in Sophocles, the misquotation reveals enough of the comic business to make its point and could represent what Athenaeus intended for Larensius' performance.

To restore the text to its "pre-read" condition, we must remove the divisions that the process of "reading" supplies to the text:

(4) ΕΓΩΟΥΤΕΜΑΥΤΟΝΟΥΤΕΣΑΛΓΥΝΩΤΙΤΑΥΤ
     ΑΛΛΩΣΕΛΕΓΧΕΙΣΟΥΓΑΡΑΝΠΥΘΟΙΟΜΟΥ

Now, dividing the letters according to basic rules of syllabification, and reading out again, the lines break down like this:

(5) Ε ΓΩ-ΟΥ[29] ΤΕ ΜΑΥ Ι ΤΟ ΝΟΥ ΤΕ ΣΑΛ Ι ΓΥ ΝΩ ΤΙ ΤΑΥ ΙΙ
     ΤΑΛ ΛΩ ΣΕ ΛΕΓ Ι ΧΕΙ ΣΟΥ ΓΑ ΡΑΝ Ι ΠΥ ΘΟΙ Ο ΜΟΥ

Listening to the syllables read out like this, one can plainly hear the same effect as in the preceding passages from Callias: there are "letters" lurking within the lines of Sophocles. One clearly hears omicron, tau, and chi. If we apply the same double system of *graphae* and *stoicheia* that Larensius warns are to be found in the book whence he derives his Callias, we can reconstruct the riddle this way:

(6) ΕΓΩΟΤΕΜΑΥΤΟΝΟΥΤΕΣΑΛΓΥΝΩΤΙΤΤ
     ΑΛΛΩΣΕΛΕΓΧΣΟΥΓΑΡΑΝΠΥΘΟΙΟΜΟΥ

Here, at last, we approach the problem (likely without the helpful underscores) as it might have been recorded in Clearchus' book of riddles.

All this establishes how these two lines of text from *Oedipus* form part of a set of problems worthy of a riddle book. It must be remembered that the solution of Clearchus' puzzle merely restores the text to Callias' script as he intended his actors to perform it. Yet it is not until a reader sees (6) that Callias' comic intentions for the tragic lines become clear. The comedian is obviously interested in showing how letters of the alphabet are part of the serious works of Athenian theater and have, in fact, long been indwelling and participating in tragedy. As with Callias' own alphabet prologue, Sophocles' *Oedipus* is a veritable minefield of *stoicheia* waiting to be exposed.[30]

Exposure happens in performance. Callias' audience never *saw* these *stoicheia* as a spectacle; rather they *heard* the actors giving special emphasis to the letter names as they "appear" in the text. The proper dramatic "reading" of these lines (whether by Callias' actors or by Larensius recreating the jokes from the flat text) would have ignored the original sense of Sophocles' verses for the sake of sounding out letter names. The more intrusive the *stoicheia* upon the lines, the funnier the skit. Given a comic license for mayhem to justify such liberties, I would argue that, with slightly more exaggeration on the part of the performer rendering these lines from *Oedipus,* there are several more letters to be brought out from hiding. Mispronunciation could easily tease out an εἶ (E–), a μῦ (–MAU–), a νῦ (–NOU–), a πεῖ

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29. However the synizesis of ἐγὼ οὖτ' would have actually been pronounced in tragic performance, I represent the elements as a double diphthong for comic purposes. See West 1982, 13.

30. It is difficult to gain a sense of whether Callias is exposing the letters hidden in the tragic scripts to reflect positively or negatively upon the tragic poets. Callias could easily have it both ways: the skits might involve his self-promotion in demonstrating that the likes of Sophocles and Euripides were daring to follow his model, but equally mock the tragedians in portraying them as poetic buffoons. See n. 46 below for the potential conservative ambivalence Old Comedy may have adopted toward a newfangled alphabetic system.

(–PU–), a second οὗ (–O–), and a second μῦ (–MOU). Thus, it may be that Callias' intended rendition for these lines could be printed:

(7)   Ε̲ γω Ο̲ τε Μ̲ το Ν̲ τε σαλ γυ νω τι Τ̲
      ταλ λω σε λεγ Χ̲ σου γαρ αν Π̲ θοι Ο̲ Μ³¹

Again, the text of (7) is not to be thought of as a Clearchan riddle that could have been solved on paper (though this is exactly the game Clearchus would have us play with Sophocles or Callias). Rather, it is a symbolic method of hypothesizing how to mispronounce lines from a tragedy to derive maximum comic effect in the theater. The proof of this hypothesis is in the performance: can a reading of these lines simultaneously convey to an auditor the intrusive *stoicheia* as well as the underlying original sense from Sophocles? This is what the skit in Callias would have demanded.

That such tricks of mispronunciations are the very essence of Callian humor in *Alphabet Tragedy* can be deduced from Aemilianus' first remarks in *Deipnosophistae* (10.448b) that introduce both the topic of riddles and Callias' *Alphabet Tragedy*: "It's time for us to seek something (ὥρα ἡμῖν ζητεῖν τι) about riddles so that we may take a rest, just for a bit, from our cups (ποτηρίων), not in the fashion of Callias the Athenian's play entitled *Alphabet Tragedy*. But let us seek first (ἡμεῖς ζητήσωμεν πρότερον) what is the definition (τίς ὁ ὅρος) of the riddle." Athenaeus is having Aemilianus pun, Callias-style, on a complex of syllable sounds:

(8)   ὥρα ἡμῖν . . . ζητεῖν τι . . . ποτηρίων
      ἡμεῖς ζητήσωμεν πρότερον τίς . . . ὁ ὅρος

The express denial that he wishes to employ Callian humor is of course the sure sign that he is using it.³² Leaving aside the heavy-handed use of the verb, "to seek," which causes zetas (i.e., the stoichiastic letter name) to spring from Aemilianus' mouth, it is just as striking that Aemilianus wants to pain the ears of his audience with the emphatically chiastic play upon ω/ο (ὥρα / ὅρος) and, even worse, with the cluster of η/ῑ/ει/ε sounds (e.g., ποτηρ- / προτερ-).³³ The jingle of ἡμῖν . . . ζητεῖν / ἡμεῖς ζητήσ- . . . is akin to the strange choral permutation of consonants and vowels later demonstrated in Callias' parodos by Larensius (10.453d, p. 316 above, p. 325 below). Regardless of whether these puns and the play upon zeta derive directly from *Alphabet Tragedy* or whether Aemilianus is ad-libbing new material in the vein of Callias, these jokes reveal a contract between Athenaeus and his

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31. If the misquotation of *OT* 332–33 in A (see n. 28 above) actually represents Larensius' intended performance, a studied mispronunciation along the lines of (7) would still include the following letter jokes: Ε̲ γω Ο̲ τε Μ̲ το Ν̲ τε σαλ γυ νω Τ̲ τα Ε̲ λεγ χθεις.

32. Aemilianus is humorously manipulating a formula for searching out textual support from ancient authorities used by Athenaeus' symposiasts, e.g., Plutarch's expression (3.83b): ὥστε ὥρα σοι, φίλε Μυρτίλε, ἄλλον ζητεῖν μάρτυρα ("So it's time for you to seek out another authority, dear Myrtilus"); 8.447c, ὥρα σοι ζητεῖν, καλὲ Οὐλπιανέ, καὶ διδάσκειν ἡμᾶς ("Dear Ulpian, it's time for you to seek and inform us . . ."); 14.653d, ὥρα οὖν ὑμῖν ζητεῖν ("So it is time for you to seek . . ."), etc. Ath. 1.2b establishes Larensius' banqueting hall as a locus where appetite for philosophical *zetesis* takes precedent over culinary appetite (as is Ulpian's rule of conduct at table, 1.1e).

33. Puns drawing upon ambiguities between omega and omicron, eta and epsilon, would have been particularly apt for a comedy staged at the time of the decree of Archinus; see n. 16 above.

external (reading) audience of a tacit, mutual understanding of what that humor was. It is this external audience, after all, that will supply a voice to Aemilianus or Larensius when the text is performed in reading.

It seems a natural choice for Callias to have subjected *Oedipus* to this silly process of misreading. The story, after all, involves a family that traces its troubles back to one *Labda*-cus, and among its dominant themes, in Sophocles' treatment at least, is the *zet(a)esis* to find a murderer.[34] But, given that Larensius claims that Sophocles was motivated to redivide his *Oedipus* once exposed to Callias' method of alphabetization—that is, to have subjected something more than the line and a half that Larensius has tossed off as a meager sample of the process—it remains to be shown that other passages in the play might have sustained the skit. One need look no farther than the play's famous first line:

(9)   Ω τεκ να καδ M του πα λαι νε α τρο Φ

I offer one more particularly rich passage and simply claim that suitable material can be gleaned everywhere from the play:

KP. Εἰ μὲν λέγει τάδ'. αὐτὸς οἶσθ'· ἐγὼ δὲ σοῦ
     μαθεῖν δικαιῶ ταῦθ' ἅπερ κἀμοῦ σὺ νῦν.
OI. 'Εκμάνθαν'· οὐ γὰρ δὴ φονεὺς ἁλώσομαι.
KP. Τί δῆτ'; ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐμὴν γήμας ἔχεις; (*OT* 575–78)

When subjected to re-syllabification, the lines could be performed thus (reading underscores as *stoicheia*):

(10) E μεν λε γH δαυ το σοι σθε γω δε σου
      μα θειν δι κα I Y θα περ κα M συ N(ν)
      εκ μαν θα N γαρ δη φο νευ σα λω σο μαι
      τι δH δA(ν) τη νε μην Γ σε X(ς)

Oedipus Tyrannus 576 = (10) line 2 could also be divided μα θειν δι και Ω T περ κα M συ N(ν). Either way the point remains: this is a game of teasing the sounds of *stoicheia* out of a script that ostensibly has nothing to do with the alphabet.

This game does not spring from a peculiar or particular quality of Sophocles' compositional method either in *Oedipus* or generally.[35] Euripides' *Medea* could supply abundant samples of stoichiastic play as well.[36] And as with Sophocles and Euripides, so with all other tragedians, just as Larensius boasts on Callias' behalf (10.453e–f, above). The antistrophic substitution

34. Labdacus is named at *OT* 224, 267, 489, 495, 1226; for the *zetesis* theme: *OT* 110–11, 265–66, 278–79, 349–52, 362, 658–59, 1111–12.

35. It has sometimes been suspected (Ruijgh 2001, 320) that Larensius, Clearchus, Callias, or some compound of the three was attracted to *OT* 332–33 by its hypermetrical elision—the *eidos Sophocleion,* as ancient critics called it. While this peculiarity of composition may have made the lines familiar to Callias, his repartitioning of the sounds in the lines gives indication of his thinking of Sophocles' script in oral and not written terms.

36. I offer a single example, again asserting that every page of Euripides' text (Diggle 1984) provides some amusing possibilities of stoichiastic sound play: φθόνον πρὸς ἀστῶν ἀλφάνουσι δυσμενῆ (*Med.* 297) could be rendered φθο νον προ σα στω νA N σι δυσ με νη.

that "all remaining tragedians" received into their tragedies is the humorous incorporation of the alphabet into all drama.

One could object on the grounds that the difference between this process of resyllabification of Sophocles' text and those samples of Callias' own play excised by Clearchus into his riddle book is that Clearchus' rendering of Callias' text simply transposes symbolic *graphae* (the *stoicheia*) for the more usual, syllabic method of writing out letter names, while, on the other hand, such a treatment in Sophocles' text generates letter names at the cost of destroying the meaning of the lines. That Callias had a keen interest in just such nonsense is best demonstrated in Larensius' performance of some lyrics of *Alphabet Tragedy,* the famous permutation of the consonants with the seven vowels (453d, quoted above). Here is a single line of the antistrophic song in its state as a riddle from Clearchus' book:

(11) ΒΑΒΑΒΕΒΕΒΗΒΗΒΙΒΙΒΟΒΟΒΥΒΥΒΩΒΩ

which Larensius unpacks for his readers as the following solution:

(12) B̲ A̲ βα B̲ E̲ βε B̲ H̲ βη B̲ I̲ βι B̲ O̲ βο B̲ Y̲ βυ B̲ Ω̲ βω

Larensius' prefatory comments upon these lines are explicit (453d): these are choral lyrics—ὁ χορὸς δὲ γυναικῶν ἐκ τῶν σύνδυο πεποιημένος αὐτῶι ἐστιν ἔμμετρος ἅμα καὶ μεμελοπεποιημένος τόνδε τὸν τρόπον ("the chorus of women has been composed by him out of pairs [of *stoicheia*], simultaneously set to meter and music in this fashion . . . ").[37] This curiously superfluous statement about choral lyric, worthy of comment only if Callias' lines were *not* set to meter and music, gives reason to suspect two things about Larensius' intentions in making the observation. First, it seems likely that, even as he is describing the doublets of *stoicheia* and resulting syllables, Larensius' alliterative doublings of sounds in his commentary, πεποιη-μένος . . . μεμελοπεποιημένος and πεποιημένος . . . ἔμμετρος ἅμα καὶ μεμε-λοπεποιημένος, represent further exploitation of Callian humor.[38] Second, it

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37. Taking the phrase ἐκ τῶν σύνδυο ("from the(se) pairs") as referring to pairs of *stoicheia* (as most translators seem to have taken it, e.g., Gulick 1930, 4:557, "with the collocation of letters in pairs"), and given that Larensius' interest in these *stoicheia,* "letter names," is rooted in his solution to a reading problem, it now seems clear that Larensius' reading instructions shed no light on the physical character or composition of the choral women for whom Callias scripted his lyrics. Insofar as Larensius' recreation of the play offers no visual component, Athenaeus' testimony gives no compelling reason to assume that the chorus of *Alphabet Tragedy* was the twenty-four-letter Ionic alphabet (i.e., male actors dressed as female letters), though this reading has become a commonplace assumption: Svenbro 1990, 382 = 1993, 184; Wise 1998, 15; Ruijgh 2001, 262; Slater 2002, 126. Larensius' bold claim for the playwright of *Letter Tragedy* is that he was first to offer a rude description of a letter (i.e., its physical appearance) through spoken verse (454a = Edmonds 31D). This is an odd claim if Callias has taken the much bolder step of making his chorus the very embodiment of the alphabet. The passage in question, a paratragic revelation of a shamed pregnant woman to her girlfriends (presumably the chorus in a Euripidean-style role of sympathetic confidantes), would lose its dramatic purpose and humor if we are to imagine that it is a periphrastic description of letter shapes spoken to the very letters it is describing.

38. Larensius offers two variants of the phrase immediately after his demonstration of the lyrics, saying that all the combinations of consonant and vowel sounds are the same with respect to song and meter, τοῦ μέλους καὶ τοῦ μέτρου (453d), meter and song, τό τε μέτρον καὶ τὸ μέλος (453e). The only other place in *Deipnosophistae* where an analogous phrasing appears is in association with the definition of an *amystis,* a sympotic drink taken as punishment for failure at a riddle or equal challenge, drunk "with a melody set to meter for quickness of tempo" (μετὰ μέλους μεμετρημένου πρὸς ὠκύτητα χρόνου, 11.783e).

makes it quite likely that Larensius sings the lyrics for his fellow symposi-asts and, as with the rest of the material from Clearchus, Athenaeus expects his external reading audience to be able to follow Larensius' lead and sup-ply the missing melody to the partially reconstructed lyrics.

Unlike their counterparts in trimeters, these lyric *stoicheia* are not given definite articles, show no elisions, and are rife with hiatus; despite La-rensius' claim for them, these lines reveal no discernible metric mode that could accommodate, in successive antistrophes, the diverse combinations of *stoicheia* and syllables of different prosodic weights.[39] As with the very melody to which the lyrics are to be sung, the meter may be irrecoverable. But what can be assumed with more certainty is that these lyrics parody and overwrite Euripides' lyrics in *Medea*.[40] Just as Sophocles had dared to re-divide lines from his *Oedipus,* so claims Larensius, Euripides may be sus-pected of having imported the very song of Callias into his own tragedy. Sophocles' form of "borrowing" from Callias reflects directly on that of Euripides.

This finally renders sensible what Larensius means when he describes Euripides and Sophocles as having heard the type of poetry found in Cal-lias' comedy and responding to it by changing their own poetry: "they say Sophocles dared to divide his poem by meter" (453e, above). Given the ob-session we discover there with the careful enunciation of vowel sounds "in meters," the speaker(s) of the vowel speech (453f above = Edmonds 31C v. 6) may well be the "they" in question who make the assertion of Sophocles and his work upon his verses "in meter." Whether Sophocles and Euripides make personal appearances, *Frogs*-style, in *Alphabet Tragedy* to do this daring craftwork, or whether Callias' actors offer demonstrative proofs on behalf of the tragedians, the skits of the comedy depend upon a humorous redrafting (i.e., redivision) of preexisting tragic poetry.

D. REWARDS FOR THE SOLUTION

Plainly, *Alphabet Tragedy* postdates *Oedipus* and *Medea*. It need not per-plex us too deeply to discover that, despite the claims made for Callias' pro-found and comprehensive influence on the composition of tragedy, it turns out that this influence is nothing more than a witty trick upon the ear con-ceived for the purpose of some rather silly comic business. If Callias' letter jokes disappoint for their lack of critical insight into the true method of com-position employed by Sophocles or Euripides, then they should also satisfy and reassure us for the commensurate insight they offer into the simple manner of the reintroduction of tragic "texts" in the Theater of Dionysus

39. Ruijgh (2001, 264–66) attempts a fanciful reconstruction of the complete permutation of 119 differ-ent vowel and consonant combinations, from beta-alpha to psi-omega. The emendation produces lyrics in iambic dimeter and, where necessary, choliambics.

40. No block of lyrics in *Medea* stands out as prime candidate for Callian treatment. It is, rather, a non-lyric line, the infamous sigmatic hissing of Medea—E ΣΩ ΣΑ ΣΩ ΣΙ ΣΑ ΣΙ ΝΕΛ ΛΗ ΝΩ ΝΟ ΣΟΙ (*Med.* 476)—which seems to provide the sort of raw material that could play into Callias' choral nonsense. Yet Larensius does assert (453e) that all of *Medea*, not simply the choral sections, was influenced by Callias' music and compositional method. See Mastronarde 2002, ad v. 476, on the notoriety achieved by this verse in the lampoons of the comedians.

perhaps more than a generation removed from the original production date of those plays.

The nature of the abuse to which Callias subjects Athens' most revered tragedies does not require us to imagine an acquaintance on the part of Callias' original audience with any of the details of the plots of either *Medea* or *Oedipus*, or to suppose that this audience needed familiarity with any specific passages chosen for parody by Callias in order to find what he was doing funny.[41] The comedian simply expected an audience with both an appetite for the disrespectful send-up of tragedy's unassailable masterpieces and an ear to hear the funny vocal distortions that can be pronounced upon their "scripts." There is certainly no need to hypothesize that *Alphabet Tragedy* had to be staged in close chronological proximity to *Medea* or *Oedipus* (or these to each other);[42] to the contrary, the parody would have been funnier when performed on works that had achieved canonical status over time.[43] And thus the hypothesis of a late production date for *Alphabet Tragedy* linked to the decree of Archinus and the political sanctioning of a twenty-four-letter alphabet seems all the more likely. If Sophocles and Euripides were dead at the time of the production of *Alphabet Tragedy*, so much the funnier; Aristophanes' *Frogs*, produced three years before Archinus' decree, demonstrates that even dead poets can reproduce the scripts of their tragedies.[44] But this late production date moves the play to the limits of a reasonable career span for Callias, the son of Lysimachus, the known playwright of Old Comedies, and necessitates the attribution of *Alphabet Tragedy* to some later Callias. Athenaeus' unique distinguishing epithets for the Callias who authored *Alphabet Tragedy* make this identification almost a certainty.[45]

Yet, while there may be certain interpretive advantages to associating *Alphabet Tragedy* with the official promulgation of a new alphabet in Athens, the reading solution offered here does not cast interpretive light upon a new literacy in the city. Callias' treatment of Sophocles' text is hardly textual and we have no better grounds for assuming that written versions of *Oedipus* or *Medea* were in circulation among the general populace whenever his

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41. Cf. our own general ignorance, beyond what help the comedian himself gives us, of the substance of Aristophanes' parody of Agathon's metrics and music at *Thesm.* 41–62 and 101–29: our lack of intertexts from Agathon's work does not stop these parodies—even the earnest choral ode—from being devastatingly funny when performed by a comic actor playing Agathon.

42. So Webster (1969, 180–81) countered by Pöhlmann (1971, 237–38).

43. Rosen 1999, 155: "It is not, therefore, difficult to imagine that Callias might have made patently false and humorously arrogant claims of his influence on tragedy in the *Letter Tragedy*, even if the chronological impossibility of such claims would have seemed obvious to the audience."

44. Among the play titles collected under Callias' name is a (dubiously ascribed) *Frogs* (Körte 1919, 1627; Kassel-Austin 1983, 38 test. 1 = *Suda* κ 213 Καλλίας).

45. For the problem of Callias' career reaching to 403 B.C.E., see n. 13 above. Athenaeus' casual methods of signifying the known Callias include naming him in conjunction with other well-known poets of Old Comedy (with Cratinus, 1.22c; with [but of greater antiquity than] Aristophanes, 2.57a), or with familiar play titles of Old Comedy (*Cyclopes* 4.140e, 11.487a, 12.524f, and 15.667d; *Pedetai* 4.177a and 8.344e). Only in conjunction with *Alphabet Tragedy* does Athenaeus move to explicit modifiers, "the Athenian" (276a, 10.448b, 10.453c), "the *grammatikos*" (276a), "who was a little before the times of Strattis" (10.453c). *Suda* does not catalogue *Alphabet Tragedy* with the known titles of Callias, son of Lysimachus (Kassel-Austin 1983, s.v. Callias, test. 1).

comedy was performed. *Alphabet Tragedy* anticipates an audience with no functional literacy beyond knowing the names of the letters of the alphabet (which Callias helpfully reviews with his audience anyway). Callias' fragments as we have them place no demand on an audience for visual recognition of letters. As the modern-day struggle to unpack Clearchus' textualization of Callias' script itself testifies, thinking of dramatic texts only in their visual, printed form actually impedes getting the jokes. This might give those who look to *Alphabet Tragedy* as demonstrative proof of a new, changing relationship between ancient readers and their texts, now startlingly reified and visual, some reason to pause and reevaluate.[46]

So also does this explication of Callias' humorous treatment of some tragic plays make clear that *Alphabet Tragedy* was not composed as a set of riddles to baffle a theater audience. Whatever uses Clearchus had for Callias' script to confound his own "audience" of readers, we must be sure to distinguish between how Callias' comedy played in the theater and how it later played in a riddle book. To imagine *Alphabet Tragedy* as some sort of efficient catalogue of riddle types is to condemn it as a dramatic failure.[47] And for that matter, this comedy seems to have offered Clearchus the material of only one riddle type, a type that could only be generated by the special problematization of the performance script as a reading text. This particular riddle type was, paradoxically, ill suited to the sort of *griphoi* normally posed as challenges for oral response at symposia. Exception needs to be made, of course, for Athenaeus' bookish banqueters whose pleasure in hearing the solution to this class of riddle would have depended on their visualizing the reading problem (which they take pride in having seen/ read for themselves). For ourselves, there is cautionary need to make triple distinction among Callias' (nontextual/parodic) treatment of his tragic sources, Clearchus' (textualizing/encoding) treatment of Callias, and Athenaeus' (detextualizing/decoding) treatment of Clearchus.

If one accepts the interpretation put forward here of Athenaeus' reading of Clearchus' reading of Callias' reading of Sophocles and Euripides, it is no longer a tenable position to suppose ignorance on the part of Athenaeus, purportedly transmitting the parodic stuff of comedy only dimly understood by the transmitter. However indirectly Athenaeus obtained the material from *Alphabet Tragedy,* it now seems clear that he is passing on riddles— and perhaps generating new jokes—that he is capable of putting into the mouths of Larensius and his guests as solved problems. The traditions of reading performance that were necessarily extratextual (such as the delivery of comic and tragic odes in melic meter if not with full melody) were shared between Athenaeus and his audience of readers just as they were shared

46. E.g., the readings of the play to be found in Wise 1998 and Slater 2002. Slater (1996, 105–12) tracks the perceptible shift among the practitioners of Old Comedy at the end of the fifth century from their traditional conceptualization of their poetry as oral material toward composition created and preserved through writing. If *Alphabet Tragedy* plays into or comments upon this very shift, it challenges us to think of a comedy about the core component of the technology of writing that resists being successfully captured by that technology.

47. Rosen 1999, 164: "It is easy to see, therefore, that Callias' *Letter Tragedy* was cited by Clearchus, and later by Athenaeus' Larensius, precisely because it helped them catalogue riddles so efficiently."

between Larensius and his audience of symposiasts (among whom Athenaeus situates himself).[48] And this is to say that our own experience with Callias' joke upon Sophocles and Euripides in *Alphabet Tragedy,* though we encounter it deeply embedded in Athenaeus' bookish symposium, depends upon our restoring it to its essential oral/aural (i.e., unreadable) nature.[49]

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