

A LITERARY STUDY OF EURIPIDES' *PHOINISSAI*

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Introduction

Aims

Euripides' *Phoinissai* exemplifies Athenian drama at its most mature and sophisticated. Produced towards the close of the 'Golden Age' of Classical tragedy, the play is intensely rich and diverse in its mythical and thematic representation. Euripides is here at the height of his literary and dramaturgical powers in a drama marked by an unusual innovativeness in its sustained exploitation of its several dramatic and poetic influences. The play follows in the footsteps of Sophocles and Aeschylus in drawing upon the familiar Oedipus theme but is unique in extant tragedy in combining the Labdacid myth with that of Theban pre-history and the city's autochthonic origins. This unusual variety and complexity of the play's mythical fabric is appropriate to the drama's position in the late Euripidean corpus, which reveals a tendency towards the 'open' style of composition – that is, the plays tend to demonstrate less interest in establishing a sense of the plot as self-contained, with a firm beginning and ending, but incline instead to encompass more wide-ranging topics and themes. *Phoinissai* presents a more loosely-connected, almost episodic, combination of themes than the 'closed' form¹ - admired by Aristotle - which has a more simple structure and a tighter unity of subject and action: thus, for instance, the *Oedipus Tyrannos* of Sophocles, which was produced approximately two decades before *Phoinissai*.² Late fifth-century tragedy, especially late Euripides, generally contains a broader cast of characters and a greater tendency towards 'narrativity' which permits a more extensive and developed account of events. This creates a more panoramic dramatic focus which adds to the impression of the play as verging on the epic in its theatrical scope.³ The maturity and sophistication of tragedy in general increase with time. *Phoinissai* exemplifies this in its extensive, almost episodic structure of separate yet inter-connected dramatic events and particularly in its sustained revisitation in the Choral odes of Theban history and the impact of the past on the present. These features in turn lend additional room for the exploration – or exploitation – of the dramatic form itself; on this point, a peculiarly elusive study in a genre which generally resists overt self-reference, *Phoinissai* is intriguingly experimental. The play bears in addition a distinctive contemporary flavour, staged as it was at a time of constitutional instability at Athens: in its sustained exploration

¹ On the differences between the 'open' and 'closed' forms in drama see Pfister (1988) 239-45.

² On the dating of *Phoinissai*, see below under 'Production'.

³ On this feature as characteristic of late Eur. with a particular focus on *IA* see Michelini in Cropp, Lee, and Sansone (1999/2000) 41-57.

of contemporary political and intellectual cultures, the drama engages closely with late fifth-century ‘real-life’ experience and thus bears a particular historical interest for the modern critic.

It is therefore surprising that there exists no full-scale literary study of the play. Scholars of the twentieth century continued the earlier tradition of lemmatic commentaries (Pearson, 1909; Powell, 1911) in focusing largely on the play’s text. The late twentieth century saw the appearance of two editions with commentaries: the massive linguistic commentary of Mastronarde (1994), and the shorter edition of Craik (1988). Still more recently there has appeared the full-scale exegetic French-language commentary of Amiech (2004). Even so, *Phoinissai* is still comparatively neglected in scholarship when one considers the plethora of publications on other more familiar Euripidean dramas, such as *Medea* or *Hippolytus*. The play has in the last half-century inspired a number of articles and smaller-scale works, but its particular thematic interest merits a more in-depth and extensive analysis. Recent years have seen the emergence of a trend in monographic studies on Euripidean dramas in particular: Zacharia on *Ion* (2003), Allan on *Andromache* (2000), Croally on *Trojan Women* (1994). In 2010 there appeared Lamari’s study of *Phoinissai*, which focuses on the play’s myths and intertexts from a narratological perspective. Lamari’s particular interest is in the artistic design and coherence of the play. This study concerns itself more with the complexity of theme and character. Of course, all these studies differ in structure (thematic vs. linear) and emphasis; but all share a concentrated focus on the individual work. Our analysis of the play aims broadly to situate itself within the thematic approach. It is presented as a literary study rather than as a commentary. The themes discussed are not exhaustive; those chosen are of foremost relevance in the play and generally occupy a prominent position in modern Euripidean and tragic scholarship. Each chapter begins with an introduction to the relevant theme – gender, for instance, or politics – as presented in tragedy as a genre with a brief analysis of modern scholarship on the subject. The main bulk of the chapter examines the theme as presented in *Phoinissai*. The intention throughout is to explore and elucidate aspects of the play which have of necessity been beyond the scope of the lemmatic commentator. The study aims in addition to situate the play in its contemporary context by examining its themes in relation to late fifth-century life. In this way it may also help to provide an interpretation of the main problems and concerns of tragedy as a genre. Though our interest is in the issues explored by the play and its relationship with its larger environment (both literary and socio-political), no discussion of a play can ignore questions of staging

and performance; particular features of dramaturgy – such as the innovative staging of the early *teichoskopia* scene on the palace roof – are addressed where necessary. It is to be hoped that this analysis of *Phoinissai* will offer a deeper understanding of the play and in the process stimulate further study.

Myth

The Oedipus myth of *Phoinissai* was by the late fifth century already a highly popular theme in tragedy and earlier genres. Homer's *Odyssey* mentions the incestuous marriage of Oedipus and his mother Jocasta and the latter's subsequent suicide, and the *Iliad* alludes to the siege of Thebes by Polynices.⁴ Hesiod refers to the assault on Thebes by the Sphinx and to the fraternal discord over Oedipus' inheritance.⁵ The fragmentary epics *Oidipodeia* and *Thebaid* clearly dealt with the family 'curse', as did the lyric *Thebaid* attributed to Stesichorus, the extant fragments of which reveal the conflict between the two sons of Oedipus and Jocasta, Eteocles and Polynices. There are in addition allusions to the myth in fifth-century lyric.⁶ Of the tragedians Aeschylus produced a trilogy which treated the family's unhappy history: the fragmentary *Laius* and *Oidipous* are generally accepted to have included the illicit conception of Oedipus in contravention of Apollo's oracle and the subsequent realisation of the god's prediction that Laius would die at the hands of any son he fathered. These plays are also likely to have contained the pronouncement by Oedipus of a curse on his sons and (possibly) the breakdown of the fraternal relationship.⁷ The sole surviving drama in the trilogy, *Seven against Thebes*, which was staged in 467, presents the fraternal battle over the city's leadership and the Argive assault on Thebes, events which were to be dramatised in *Phoinissai* over half a century later. Sophocles staged his *Antigone* (c.442/1) and *Oedipus Tyrannos* (c.429), and would in later years revisit the myth in the posthumously produced *Oedipus at Colonus* (401). Euripides had himself written an *Antigone* and an *Oedipus*, of which only a few fragments remain; and given the prominence of the Oedipus theme in the extant tragic corpus, one can only suppose that a number of the vast quantity of plays lost to us contained variations on the same subject.⁸

⁴ Cf. *Od.* 11. 271-80; *Il.* 4.378, 6. 222-3, 10. 285-6.

⁵ See *Th.* 326; *WD* 161-3.

⁶ Cf. Pindar, *O.* 2.38-45; *O.* 6.15-6; *N.* 9.16-27.

⁷ On the lost plays of the Aeschylean Theban trilogy, see Sommerstein (1996) 121-8; and Hutchinson (1985) intro. part I.

⁸ The number of plays produced at the Dionysia in the fifth century can be calculated as approximately 900; at least, twelve plays a year from the years 480 to 410 gives 852 performances.

The established position of the Labdacid legend within the mythical tradition necessitated a degree of literary reinvention and innovation among the Greek poets. The inclusion in *Phoinissai* of Cadmean myth marks the poet's consciousness of a need to establish originality in relation to his literary forebears as well as a particular interest, characteristic of Euripides' later years, in the city of Thebes and Theban history: the late *Bacchae* (406) explores a different branch of the city's autochthonic legend while examining the relationship of Thebes with Dionysiac cult. Within the Oedipus myth, *Phoinissai* diverges on several important points from earlier tragic representations of the legend: the survival of Jocasta beyond the discovery of the incest, for instance, is unique in extant tragedy;⁹ so too is the direct confrontation in the city between Eteocles and Polynices prior to battle. That Oedipus should live on after the deaths of his sons, and depart into exile with his daughter Antigone, is another unprecedented feature, as is the characterisation of Polynices, who only in *Phoinissai* – and the later *Oedipus at Colonus* – is given a voice in the surviving plays. The Antigone of Euripides is in the main very different from her bold and passionate Sophoclean predecessor, just as Creon is not the Creon of, for instance, *Oedipus Tyrannos*. It is also true that no other extant play on the Oedipus theme is as concerned as *Phoinissai* with more general historical problems such as the constitutional future of Athens.¹⁰ The flexibility of myth meant that Euripides, like Sophocles and Aeschylus before him, could establish dramatic individuality in the presentation of events, character, and contemporary 'external' concerns.

Text

The literary focus of this study naturally means that there is less space for textual analysis. However, as the play poses substantial textual problems and interpolation in parts has long been suspected, some attention to these questions is necessary. The second half of the twentieth century has seen a particular interest in the textual difficulties of *Phoinissai*. These are principally concentrated in three parts of the play: the Exodos (1582ff), major portions of which have long been viewed as suspect; the early *teichoskopia* scene on the palace roof (88-201); and the description of the Argive attackers' shields in the second

⁹ In Soph. *OT* Jocasta commits suicide on discovery of the incestuous marriage with her son; cf. *Ant.* 53-4. The lack of direct reference to Jocasta's actions following the discovery in *OC* and Aesch.'s *Septem* suggests that she was probably dead by this point.

¹⁰ The only antecedent in extant tragedy for a play's awareness of the fault-lines in contemporary Athens is Aesch.'s *Eumenides*. Then subsequent to *Phoinissai* is the late *Orestes* (408) of Eur., which reveals a sustained engagement with political matters.

messenger speech at 1104-40. Gilbert Murray's OCT of 1913 retained the *teichoskopia* and 1104-40 with only minor internal deletions; only one line (1634) in the Exodos was bracketed. Half a century later, however, Eduard Fraenkel's 1963 monograph broke new ground in tackling the textual difficulties in detail, expanding upon the work in a lengthy 1939 article of W.H. Friedrich. Fraenkel's highly influential book set the scene for a resurgence of interest in the text of *Phoinissai* in subsequent decades. In 1985 Mueller-Goldingen produced a comprehensive overview of previous discussions of the textual problems as well as focusing in linear fashion on points of dramatic interest. The same decade brought the argument of Dihle (1981) against the authenticity of the *teichoskopia*, which he viewed as a later independent composition interpolated into the text of *Phoinissai*. His thesis was authoritatively refuted in a 1987 article by Burgess. Over the past three decades the debate has been refined by Mastronarde, who developed the analysis undertaken in his doctoral thesis of 1974 - a linear exegesis of the play - into a collaborative study (with Bremer) on the textual tradition of *Phoinissai* (1982) and then the Teubner edition of 1988. This analysis was consolidated in Mastronarde's lemmatic commentary of 1994, which stands independently as a definitive guide to the play's language, metre, and dramatic structure. Mastronarde offers an essentially conservative view of the overall textual integrity of *Phoinissai* - although on matters of more localised detail he is quick to propose emendation or excision - retaining in large part the Exodos and the *teichoskopia*. He had also defied scholarly tradition in offering a defence - albeit a cautious one - of the messenger description of the Argive shields at 1104-40 in an earlier article (1978). The 1994 OCT of Diggle, on the other hand, reveals a more radical approach to the text of the play. Although Diggle retains the bulk of the *teichoskopia*, 1104-40 and a large proportion of the Exodos are deleted. Throughout the main body of the play - which contains a not insignificant proportion of problematic lines and passages - he tends to excise rather than to emend. Craik's edition does not, due to restrictions of form and space, give a great deal of detailed textual commentary, although it has a useful critical apparatus which is based on the work of Mastronarde and Bremer, and is on many points indebted to the extensive work of Diggle. The recent commentary of Amiech somewhat eccentrically appears uninterested in modern textual analysis and ignores alike the disconcerting evidence of the papyri¹¹ and the textual discussions of the second half of the twentieth century. Amiech instead bases her findings on the medieval manuscript

¹¹ See esp. Haslam (1976).

tradition and thus neglects many important developments on the play's text in recent years.

This study tends to a broadly (though not uncritically) conservative view of the play's textual problems, agreeing generally with the analysis of Mastronarde, though differing from him on smaller points of internal detail. A summary and analysis of the problems of the Exodos, which admittedly contains a significant degree of corruption and interpolation, is found in the first appendix. Here we examine the relevance of key themes of the Exodos – in particular, the burial of Polynices and the exile of Oedipus with Antigone – and argue for the retention of the main bulk of the text. This involves a detailed study of apparent inconsistencies in theme (e.g. the impossibility of Antigone accomplishing the burial and accompanying her father into exile), and scenes viewed as generally suspect (such as the confrontation between Antigone and Creon over Polynices' burial, which is excised in its entirety by Fraenkel). There are in the Exodos some particular passages of difficulty, namely the speech of Oedipus (1595-1624) and the play's final thirty or so lines - including the Choral coda - which in the view of the present writer are certainly spurious as they currently stand. The appendix offers a more appropriate conclusion to the play based on evidence from the (textually sound) endings of other extant late Euripidean plays. In the case of Oedipus' speech, we find that the main part can be retained and that partial excision offers a satisfactory solution to internal inconsistencies. There are in addition other more localised textual obscurities in the Exodos which can be remedied through emendation or excision.

The second appendix examines the *teichoskopia*, which has generally been accepted as genuine in modern scholarship and thus requires comparatively brief discussion. Here we analyse the problems of the scene – mainly internal repetition and some unusual points of detail which have led critics such as Dihle to propose, again too hastily, complete excision of the whole episode. This study examines the objections made by Dihle and, with reference to the counter-arguments of Burgess and Mastronarde, offers a case for the retention of the scene as an important part of the original play. The final appendix focuses on the shield descriptions at 1104-40. Here we find more concentrated linguistic and stylistic difficulties which require not insubstantial alteration or deletion. This study tentatively accepts Euripidean authorship of the bulk of the passage, although specific lines within it are rejected; if this is correct, it adds a valuable dimension to the play's intertextual relationship with Aeschylus which is so important elsewhere in the

drama.¹² However, it would be overly bold to assume Euripidean authorship as a certainty in view of the undeniable difficulties of the passage. Various smaller-scale questions of textual integrity relating to the bulk of the play are flagged throughout the main study; the reader may be referred in addition to the bibliography, which lists the most useful modern analyses of the text. The text referred to throughout is that printed in Mastronarde's 1994 commentary, which is largely that of the Teubner edition with minor emendations, since it is his work on the play's text which has borne the greatest influence on the present writer's discussion in the appendices.

Production

Phoinissai is a late play, generally placed between the years 411-409. Although many dramatic features of the play point to late authorship¹³ and certain thematic detail – such as the play's political interest – may offer some indication as to the play's date,¹⁴ the general consensus among modern critics is that the most decisive factor is the proportion and type of resolutions, by which any of the first five of the six naturally long syllables in the iambic trimeter of spoken dialogue is resolved into two short syllables. The seminal work on resolutions in Euripides is the 1925 study of Zielinski; more recently Cropp and Fick (1985) produced an analysis usefully focusing on the fragmentary Euripidean dramas while situating their findings within the corpus at large. In the number and form of its resolutions *Phoinissai* is most like *Helen* (412) and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (approx. 413).¹⁵ The scholion on Aristophanes' *Frogs* 53, where Dionysus mentions having recently read *Andromeda*, questions why the reference is not to plays, including *Phoinissai*, performed more recently than *Andromeda*, which was staged with *Helen* in 412, eight years prior to the production of *Frogs* in 405: τὴν Ἀνδρομέδαν] διὰ τί δὲ μὴ ἄλλο τι τῶν πρὸ ὀλίγου (sc. ante 405) διδαχθέντων καὶ καλῶν, Ὑψιπύλης, Θοινισσῶν, Ἀντιόπης; ἡ δὲ Ἀνδρομέδα ὀγδόῳ ἔτει προ<ει>σῆλθεν.¹⁶ Our play is thus clearly placed in the years following 412 but no later than 409, taking into consideration the question of resolutions, which suggests

¹² See below under 'Themes'.

¹³ For instance, the frequency of spoken (as opposed to sung) parts; the use of trochaic tetrameters; the featuring of two messenger episodes, and the length of the messenger speeches.

¹⁴ The oligarchic revolution at Athens in 411 has been viewed as an approximate guide to the play's date when placed against the dramatic context of the brothers' battle for political ascendancy and the examination of different power forms in the central *agōn*.

¹⁵ Cf. Cropp & Fick (1985) 60-1.

¹⁶ See *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* DID C 15 (c) (vol.1; ed. Snell (1971)).

a date prior to plays such as *Orestes* (408),¹⁷ where the resolution rate is higher and the type more varied.¹⁸ This pattern of increase in both number and range, from early plays such as *Alcestis* (438) to late ones such as *Bacchae* (406), is generally consistent in extant Euripides and is thus a reliable guide to dating. *Phoinissai* may therefore be dated to 410, although 409 cannot be dismissed as a possibility; in light of the scholion on *Frogs* 53, 411 is probably less likely.

The identity of the other plays staged in a trilogy with *Phoinissai* has long been open to debate. Two groupings have been suggested: *Oenomaus*, *Chrysippus*, and *Phoinissai*;¹⁹ or *Hypsipyle* and our play followed by *Antiope*.²⁰ The first grouping is based on a corrupt hypothesis of Aristophanes of Byzantium which refers to the three plays together: <Euripidis Phoenissae ἐδιδάχθησαν> ἐπὶ Ναυσικράτους ἄρχοντος ** δεύτερος Εὐριπίδης ** καθῆκε διδασκαλίαν περὶ τούτου καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα ** ὁ Οἰνόμαος καὶ Χρύσιππος καὶ ** σῶζεται²¹ - although we cannot be certain that the reference is to the plays specifically as performed in a trilogy, i.e. in the same year; it may simply imply the thematic connections between the dramas. The second grouping hinges on the scholion to *Frogs* 53 to which we have already referred; the writer includes *Antiope* and *Hypsipyle* along with *Phoinissai* as suitable candidates (in place of the actual reference to *Andromeda*) for Dionysus' comment at that point in the comic drama. Yet although this reference is more textually sound than the Aristophanic hypothesis, again it does not point definitively to these three plays as having been staged at the same festival. Either or both references may be alluding to the plays as similar in quality or theme; not necessarily as formal trilogies. We must therefore turn to the internal evidence for and against each grouping.

The staging of *Phoinissai* with *Oenomaus* and *Chrysippus* is a difficult case to argue. There are no resolutions in the extant fragments of the latter two plays.²² But this is

¹⁷ The contention that *Orestes* was the final and prosatyrlic play in a tetralogy consisting of *Antiope*, *Hypsipyle*, and *Phoinissai* (on this grouping see below) – accepted as a possibility by Craik, 40 – has been refuted by Mastronarde (1994; 13-14 and 14 nn.1-2) on account of the improbability of a drama as long as *Orestes* being staged subsequent to plays similarly lengthy, as found in *Hypsipyle* and *Antiope*.

¹⁸ Cf. Cropp & Fick *ibid*.

¹⁹ As accepted by e.g. Zielinski (1924); and Kambitsis (1972).

²⁰ This grouping was accepted by, for instance, Webster (1967) 205-19, although he preferred to change the order to *Antiope*, *Hypsipyle*, then *Phoinissai*. This order was seen as the natural one by Webster, who viewed *Phoinissai* as not only the logical sequel to *Hypsipyle*, which foreshadows the Argive expedition, but also as linking back to *Antiope* through references to Amphion, Dirce, and Dionysus. For the present argument, however, the established order of *Hypsipyle*, *Phoinissai*, and *Antiope* will be maintained.

²¹ Cf. DID C 16 (a) in *TrGF* (vol.1).

²² See Cropp & Fick on *Chrysippus* 77-8; and on *Oenomaus* 86.

not in itself decisive evidence for dating, since there are so few remaining fragments²³ that an assumption regarding the resolution rate in *Oenomaus* and *Chrysippus* in their entirety cannot safely be made. It is thus difficult to establish a date on this basis; unwise also to assume that the overall resolution rates of the two fragmentary plays would necessarily have been far removed from that of *Phoinissai*.²⁴ In terms of theme, *Oenomaus* and *Chrysippus* have been viewed as parts of a trilogy connected by the family ‘curse’ on the Labdacid family; *Phoinissai* continues and completes this theme in presenting the fraternal feud. There is little to be gained from seeking potential connections between the subject of *Oenomaus* with Sophocles’ fragmentary play of the same name or indeed, in turn, with *Phoinissai*. *Chrysippus* at least has been viewed as representing events surrounding the rape of the title-character by Oedipus’ father Laius. It is likely to have included the suicide of Chrysippus following the rape and the invocation by his father Pelops of a curse on Laius.²⁵ This would form the background to the illicit conception of Oedipus and the subsequent patricide and incestuous marriage between Oedipus and his mother Jocasta; and so, in the next generation, to the events of *Phoinissai*. The thematic connection of the ‘curse’ on the house of Laius²⁶ has seemed an attractive argument to critics such as Zielinski;²⁷ but this is not especially convincing given that Euripidean dramas which were thematically unconnected were staged together: after the poet’s death, *Alcmaeon in Corinth*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and *Bacchae* were in 406 put on by his son.²⁸ On the other hand, this lack of thematic interrelations also has implications for Mastronarde’s argument against the staging of *Phoinissai* with (i.e. immediately following on from) *Chrysippus* on the grounds that our play holds no allusion to or explicit link with that drama.²⁹ It is also true that while *Phoinissai* makes no reference to the events of *Laius* and *Chrysippus*, our play’s panoramic view of Theban history – not exclusively focusing on the Oedipus theme – suggests that the drama is not easily placed within any particular mythical or thematic

²³ Of *Oenomaus* seven fragments totalling 24 lines remain; of *Chrysippus*, there are six totalling 25 lines (cf. pp. 593-5 and 880-4 in *TrGF* vol. 5.2 (ed. Kannicht 2004)).

²⁴ Webster 101-2 incautiously places *Oenomaus* and *Chrysippus* as early plays on account of the lack of resolutions in the frr. but there is no reason to assume that the frr. do not offer a biased representation of metrical characteristic; a later date for one or both plays is not unfeasible.

²⁵ Cf. Mastronarde (1994) 31-2.

²⁶ On the curse see the essay of West in Griffin (1999) 31-45.

²⁷ Zielinski however attaches too much significance to *Ph.* 1611, where Oedipus mentions having acquired curses, *arai*, from his father Laius which he then passed on to his sons. There is no real evidence that this is a specific allusion to the curse imposed by Pelops on Laius as a result of the latter’s rape of Chrysippus; the *ara* may denote a more general cyclical and inherited pattern of misfortune which in our play at least appears to begin with the illicit conception of Oedipus. For further discussion of causation in the Labdacid myth, see below ch. 3.4.

²⁸ As recorded in the scholion to Arist. *Frogs* 67.

²⁹ See Mastronarde 37.

schema. Of course, it is true that Euripides did submit plays on the same mythic cycle at a single festival; the ‘Trojan’ trilogy, consisting of the lost *Alexandros* and *Palamedes* and, as third play, the extant *Trojan Women*, may constitute a gesture towards the trilogies of the early to mid-fifth century. The debate about thematic links between those plays which we know to have been submitted together makes the reconstructions of trilogies on the basis of a priori assumptions about thematic links hazardous. It is also important that the subjectivity of thematic considerations means that these are a less reliable guide than the fixed and objective questions of metrical form. This last we do not have in the extant material; thus there is no way of establishing that this grouping of plays is the correct one.

The staging of *Phoinissai* with *Hypsipyle* and *Antiope*, based on the surviving evidence, appears to be more likely; there remain substantially more of both the latter plays in the extant fragments to work with, although again absolute certainty either way is impossible. The resolution rate in *Hypsipyle* corresponds closely to that of *Phoinissai*.³⁰ In *Antiope*, the rate is somewhat lower.³¹ This is naturally problematic for the question of staging. Statistical analysis has revealed that the types of resolutions in the extant fragments – in addition to the quantity – do not establish *Antiope* as a late production. This is in contrast with the metrical evidence from the surviving text of *Hypsipyle*, which is quite clearly a late play. The analysis has further revealed that it is unlikely that the extant fragments of *Antiope* offer a biased representation of metrical characteristic.³² This is mainly on account of the fact that the resolution rate in the *deus ex machina* speech (spoken here by Hermes) towards the end of the play is generally consistent with that of the drama *in toto*.³³ There are 37 extant lines from Hermes’ speech in adequately reasonable condition, showing that the resolution rate is low. On this basis, *Antiope* is more likely to belong to the ‘semi-severe’ grouping of tragedies staged between the years of, approximately, 425-415.

This does not, however, wholly negate the case for the production of *Antiope* in a trilogy with *Phoinissai*. Two possibilities have been put forward: that the former play was staged after some delay following its composition,³⁴ which would explain the inconsistency in resolution rate; or that the apparent reference in the scholion to *Frogs* 53 to *Antiope* is actually a corruption of (Euripides’) *Antigone*, where metrical analysis of the

³⁰ On *Hypsipyle* cf. again Cropp & Fick 80-1.

³¹ See Cropp & Fick 74.

³² See Cropp & Fick 74-6.

³³ Cf. the tabular analysis of Cropp & Fick 17.

³⁴ Cf. Zielinski (1925) 219-221.

extant fragments places the play quite confidently as a late one, i.e. after 415.³⁵ Corruption of the scholion is of course not impossible, but the choice and order of the plays in the scholion if the theory of corruption is accepted – *Hypsipyle*, *Phoinissai*, *Antigone* – is highly improbable, since the *Antigone* of *Phoinissai* refuses to marry Creon's son Haimon, preferring to accompany her father into exile (1673ff). Yet in Euripides' *Antigone*, of which only approximately fifty lines remain, there is good reason to believe that the plot included the marriage of *Antigone* to Haimon and the actual burial of *Antigone*'s brother Polynices,³⁶ which again is clearly eliminated as a future possibility for the *Antigone* of *Phoinissai*.³⁷ Indeed, the combination of *Antigone* in a trilogy with *Phoinissai* would be incongruous whatever the ordering of the plays. Of course, we must again bear in mind that the scholion may refer to three plays staged in successive years rather than as a trilogy, in which case the corruption theory may stand; but it is also possible that confusion is the problem here rather than corruption, since the scholion may be misrepresenting its source. But a delay in the production of *Antiope* may explain the problem, though a delay – while always a possibility – remains a remote hypothesis; and even in the event of a delay *Antiope* may not necessarily have been produced in the same year as *Phoinissai* and *Hypsipyle*. Evidence for the staging of Euripidean plays reveals that there is no established rule for the production of the dramas, and that Euripides appeared to be not averse to staging plays which were very different from each other; indeed, the staging of unrelated plays appears to have been the norm at this period. Equally, one cannot dismiss the possibility that plays which *were* thematically connected were put on as trilogies; and thus that the earlier *Antiope* was placed with *Phoinissai* and *Hypsipyle* as a suitable third play. But there is no guarantee in the absence of hard evidence. We therefore proceed in the belief that this grouping is an attractive and appropriate one but not on the basis that perceived thematic links and allusions point irrefutably to this combination. And although one can see obvious mythic affinities and the potential for thematic links between these plays, the arguments for the latter have been overstated by their proponents.³⁸ The

³⁵ Cf. again Cropp & Fick 74-6.

³⁶ See fr. 157-78 In *TrGrF* vol. 5.1 (ed. Kannicht) (pp. 261-73).

³⁷ This is evident in her gradual retreat over the question of burial at 1667-71. See further below Appendix A.

³⁸ Common themes include: two brothers in conflict, strong mother figure, problems of identity and belonging – but these are also common to other late Euripidean plays, esp. *Ion*; and the themes of recognition and cult are equally important in *IT* and *Bacchae*. Zeitlin (1993) argues for the trilogy on the basis of the strong Dionysiac influence perceived in the trilogy; but Dionysus is not at all prominent in *Phoinissai* (save for the second Stasimon), so cannot be used as firm evidence for the question of staging. Zeitlin's further discussion of the plays' geographical locations is hindered by the varying degrees of

grouping conjectured on the basis of the scholion remains an attractive and appropriate one; but an assumption either way would be overly hasty. Each drama is best studied on its own merits.

Themes

One of the outstanding features of *Phoinissai* is its consistent and profound engagement with representations of Theban myth in other literary forms – epic, for instance, or lyric – as well as, most importantly, with the works of the other poets in the tragic corpus. The intrinsically competitive nature of tragic performance, which saw many hundreds of plays staged at the Theatre of Dionysus for the greater part of the fifth century, meant that, as noted earlier, each poet was working both within and against mythical tradition in his establishment of artistic innovativeness and originality. The production of *Phoinissai* towards the end of the fifth century required of Euripides a particular need to distinguish himself from previous tragic versions of the Oedipus myth – especially that of the final generation Labdacids, the warring sons of Oedipus. This had, of course, most famously been represented in Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*. This play is the single greatest influence on *Phoinissai*, in terms of theme, characterisation, and form. In the first chapter of this study we examine the nature of Greek literary interrelations and competition, a phenomenon which reaches as far back as Homer and Hesiod. We focus particularly on tragic ‘intertextuality,’ or the adaptation by later authors of earlier literary themes, as well as examining the performative innovativeness of *Phoinissai* – how Euripides diverged from Aeschylus, in particular, in questions of dramatic structure and staging. We aim to show that the literary relationship between the two dramatists is finely poised between tradition and innovation, and that in several important aspects of the play – such as the characterisation of Eteocles, for instance – Euripides updates and modernises his Aeschylean precedent in order to bring *Phoinissai* into line with the socio-political concerns of the day. We also focus on the influences of other tragic dramas, in particular the *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone* of Sophocles, which like *Seven against Thebes* were established classics by the time of *Phoinissai*’s production. The Sophoclean dramas are

political interest in the three plays and esp. her persistently negative view of Thebes as tragic locale, following on from her earlier (1990) article. In *Antiope*, set at Eleutherae on the Attic borders, the loss of a substantial amount of the text precludes an evidence-based reading of the play’s Theban-Athenian dynamic; the identity of the Chorus (either Attic or Boeotian) is also uncertain. We return to Zeitlin’s treatment of Thebes in ch.3.5 below.

particularly important for the question of Euripidean characterisation: thus his Antigone tries and fails to assume the mantle of her fearless and spirited predecessor; Oedipus, kept alive and incarcerated in the royal palace, is brought onstage at the play's close and recalls for the audience the helpless ruined king at the end of the *Tyrannos*. Other less prominent characters, such as Creon and Teiresias, are also an illuminating study when balanced against their namesakes in Sophocles. It is also interesting to note the distinction between Euripides' more overt play with Aeschylus and the less explicit but still persistent engagement with Sophocles. Euripides' position in indirect competition with some of the great classics of Athenian theatre results in a highly sophisticated use of his dramatic precedents, as he acknowledges his debt to yet simultaneously distances himself from other authors in the canon. The same is true, though without the same element of literary (and dramatic) rivalry, of the poet's engagement with Stesichorus' *Thebaid*, the extant fragments of which present the sons of Oedipus in battle over the leadership of Thebes. Here the mother-figure's attempted mediation between the brothers is an important precursor of events in the *agōn* of *Phoinissai*. The associated questions of fate, curse, and responsibility as explored in the lyric are also an important study in Euripides. Finally, we come back to Homer, whose Iliadic *teichoskopia* scene between Helen and Priam, looking out at the warriors on the battlefield, is an important precedent for the similar scene in *Phoinissai* between Antigone and the Paidagogus on the palace roof. We examine the modifications made by Euripides in order to situate the scene in the play's thematic context – the role here of Antigone, for example, in contrast with the Helen of the *Iliad*. It is also important that the epic scene affords the dramatist the opportunity for an innovative use of dramatic 'space', which in turn marks a distinction from Aeschylus, again, as well as from Sophocles.

In chapter two the theme is politics. Initially we aim to establish the nature of political interest in a genre such as tragedy, simultaneously universal in its scope and a product of its day. Scholarly opinion tends to be divided between two camps: tragedy's function is solely as an art form whose chief appeal is its aesthetic or emotional impact; or that as a firmly-rooted civic institution it seeks to instruct and to educate the Athenian audience. Our argument is situated broadly between these two theses, which are not mutually exclusive, and aims to elucidate the nature of tragic education and the extent to which – as well as the manner in which – the genre can be said to reflect contemporary political concerns. This is central to a play such as *Phoinissai*, which staged its Theban myths against the background of an Athens whose political stability had been shaken to its

foundations and which revealed ever more starkly historical perception of the tenuousness of political allegiance during war. We examine the manner in which the confrontation of Eteocles and Polynices in the central *agōn* reflects historical concern with shifting loyalties in the *polis* and the infiltration into Athenian public life of the various positions and teachings of the sophists. The themes of rhetoric and ambition are especially important here: we examine the nature and functions of speech as employed by the main protagonists, situating our argument within the historical context of political events at Athens as recorded in Thucydidean narrative. The chapter aims to show how contemporary experience infiltrates the myths without inclining to a view of tragedy as in any way allegorical or didactic in a straightforward sense. On the model adopted, the genre seeks to educate by stimulating its audience to consider the real-life concerns reflected in the dramatic events. For an Athenian audience, the play would have inspired serious reflection on the nature of power in the late fifth-century *polis* with its shifting political regime. Eteocles' and Polynices' sophistic arguments in defence of their actions reflect also contemporary concerns relating to the abuse of power and the culture of mistrust which pervaded the wartime *polis*. The chapter aims to show the historical relevance of these questions without compromising the dramatic integrity of events in the myths. It also seeks to elucidate the fact that tragic politics are not exclusively Athenian politics, but can also reflect the socio-political concerns and problems of any (Greek) city.

The third chapter focuses on Thebes. The city's wealth of myth meant that it offered the Athenian dramatists substantial scope for an unusually complex representation of Thebes and its history. We examine the physical portrayal of Thebes and Euripides' evocation of dramatic 'space' both inside and outside the *polis*. Thebes' long and troubled history, as revealed in *Phoinissai*'s choral odes, is focused on the city's complex and ambivalent relationship with the gods. We examine this relationship in the context of the play's myths, especially the autochthonic origins of Thebes and the death of the last autochthon, Menoeceus. This myth reveals the danger and threat inherent in the very Theban earth, *gē*, which demands the death of its own progeny. The chapter examines the various presentations of the Theban land across the play – as *gē*, as *patris*, fatherland, for the exiled Polynices, who returns to claim his share of the city; as *polis* for both brothers, battling for political authority. In the context of the Oedipus myth in particular, the questions of fate, free will, and responsibility are an important study as we examine the mechanisms of the family 'curse'. The exploration in Thebes in particular of these problems has, as noted earlier, given rise to a view of the city as an 'anti-Athens', to which

all the worst of human experience is displaced in order to maintain the (self-) image of the home city. The chapter aims to show that while this is to some extent true, it is not the case that Thebes is portrayed consistently negatively in tragedy, or that its problems are necessarily and exclusively Theban – that is, rooted solely in the city’s own mythical complexities. This involves discussion of other plays concerned with the city, especially *Oedipus at Colonus* and the *Suppliants* of Euripides. We show that Thebes *is* different, both from Athens and from other non-Athenian tragic locales – that it does bear an especially complex set of experiences and problems – but that those problems may also be those of any other city, Athens included. Above all, the chapter aims to demonstrate the mutability of Thebes and the flexibility of its myths, so that the city is never perceived as a monolith, but as an ever-changing, and ever-enduring, dramatic entity.

Finally, we come to gender. The importance of this topic in tragic scholarship and its centrality in *Phoinissai* requires extensive discussion of the play’s gender dynamic and in particular the female role, which is especially prominent here. Again, the aim is to show the fluidity of male-female roles both within *Phoinissai* and in tragedy in general. We look at women within tragic ‘space’, since *Phoinissai* frequently presents women entering into the public life of the *polis* from which they were usually excluded; and women and speech, especially speech in the public domain. Women’s actions in the public sphere naturally invite reflection on the behaviour within it of the males, traditionally at the helm of civic life. The chapter examines male and female action against the background of home and family, revealing in particular the conflict between public and private interests. The play ultimately reveals the disempowerment and victimisation of women during war-time, when normal social structures and rituals – such as religion – are destabilised, and women are forced to sacrifice their proper roles. We examine the play’s female characters – Jocasta, Antigone, the Phoenician Chorus – in the context of all these themes. We also return to the Menoeceus episode and the complex ‘gendering’ of his character in relation to his role within the *polis*. In addition, the ambivalent role of the Theban earth in the autochthony myth again opens up discussion of the multi-faceted presentation of Thebes as physical entity – as the dangerous female *gē* which demands the death of its own offspring; as *patris* for the Labdacid brothers, now bound up in the ‘male’ concerns of power and inheritance. All this is placed within the play’s political context, which demonstrates the destruction by (male) ambition and greed of the female claim within the domestic sphere. *Phoinissai* starkly demonstrates the catastrophic reverberations of war, which makes no distinction between the guilty and the innocent.

1. Euripides and the Theban Tradition

The Theban myth of *Phoinissai* draws on a rich literary tradition which can be traced back through the tragedies of Euripides' predecessors, Sophocles and Aeschylus, to the age of Greek lyric and beyond to the prominent position occupied in the epic cycle by the Labdacid legend. Literary influence inevitably involves a degree of competition with as well as genuflection to pre-existing works. Both elements are applicable to all forms of Greek literary composition; the continual reworking of myth from epic through to fifth-century Attic tragedy involves a degree of inter-dependence just as it simultaneously commands an assertion of originality. The Homeric epics display a distinct interest in poetry and poetry-performance, a feature especially characteristic of the *Odyssey*, in which the use and effects of language, as well as the figure of the bard, are central to the artistic integrity of the whole.³⁹ This engagement with the conditions and effects of song composition as a defining feature of the oral tradition extends to a consciousness of other works within that tradition and heralds the development of the agonistic context within which Greek literary composition flourished. Engagement with an earlier literary tradition is a part of a poetic self-awareness visible in Homer, who is likely to have drawn on different strands of a pre-existing and longstanding literary tradition, and to have relied on his audience's knowledge of other works.⁴⁰

In the didactic sub-genre of early Greek hexameter poetry literary competition and interrelations are more firmly and overtly established. In Hesiod the aim to assert poetic originality and authority is closely associated with the poet's commitment to the truth and reliability of his work as an instructive or educative medium. Hesiod's famous distinction between truth-telling and plausible falsehood, *ψεύδεα...ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα*,⁴¹ implies a deliberate attempt to distance his own work from other poetic forms in which speech and language may be implicitly or explicitly associated with guile and deceit. It is hardly unreasonable to believe that underlying these lines is a tacit rivalry between the poet and heroic epic, which importantly does not vouchsafe for the entire truth of its narrative, and which tends to place in the mouths of its characters speeches whose veracity may be called

³⁹ On bards in Homer, cf. e.g. Scodel (1998). In the *Iliad*, Helen's prediction of Trojan events as subject for future song (6.357-8) pre-figures the later poem's consciousness of its own role in the preservation of the 'glorious deeds of men', *κλέα ἄνδρῶν* (cf. *Il.* 9.186-9).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, the way in which Homer draws on the wider 'return', *nostos*, tradition in the *Odyssey*. Cf. also Willcock (1997) for a summary of neoanalytical arguments for more precise engagement by Homer with the existing epic tradition.

⁴¹ *Th.* 27-8.

into question.⁴² In this way Hesiod establishes a claim of superiority to other works in which truth as integral to the poet's moral tone is not a literary priority.⁴³ Explicit self-reference in *Theogony*⁴⁴ in association with Hesiod's concern with literary authority and truth also marks the poet's independence in redefining cosmogenic myth. This corrective element in the representation of myth is made more explicit elsewhere in early Greek poetry and foregrounds a similar motif in later lyric.⁴⁵ In *Works and Days* the poet's commitment to truth and his literary self-consciousness are more pronounced than in *Theogony* in their centrality to the later work's didactic function. The poet's recollection of his victory in a literary competition and reiteration of his allegiance with the Muses⁴⁶ emphasise his privileged and elevated status while importantly placing poetic composition within a formally agonistic context. Both of these features herald the development of literary competition as a social construct which was to be influential to varying degrees on later genres.

One of these genres was lyric, in which competitive self-positioning – even where competition is informal – is firmly established. In the first Olympian Pindar establishes his Hesiodic commitment to the truth in the representation of myth as a defining motif of his oeuvre. His repudiation of distortion in myth-telling⁴⁷ is central to the moral teaching for which his account of Tantalus' punishment for insolence, *hubris*, is vehicle. This establishment of his moral as well as poetic authority in the implicit admonition offered to the poet's addressee Hieron underpins his standing in Greek literary culture and validates the praise he offers. This is closely tied to the reciprocal relationship established between patron and poet, and to the immortalisation in verse of the one's sporting victory and the other's literary achievement.⁴⁸ The ode's closing claim that the poet's wisdom, *sophia*, will assume pan-Hellenic fame is paired with an implicit awareness of potential

⁴² Note, for instance, the latent irony in Alcinous' conviction in *Od.* 11 that Odysseus' appearance is not suggestive of a deceitful nature (363ff.). The effect is heightened by the manner in which the hero's linguistic cunning is instrumental to his successes in the second half of the poem. The Homeric poems arguably present themselves as 'truth', but do not guarantee that the narrated speeches (such as Odysseus' description of his adventures in books 9-12), which are intrinsic to the poems' fabric, are 'true'.

⁴³ It may thus be misguided to comment as West (1966) does on *Th.* 27-8 that Hesiod's assertion here does not imply any distinction between epic and didactic poetry. The strong echo of *Od.* 19.203 at *Th.* 27-8 may, on the contrary, imply that Homer was uppermost on Hesiod's mind at this early point in the narrative, and that Hesiod sought consciously to distance himself from epic.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Th.* 22.

⁴⁵ Cf. e.g. the fragmentary *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (fr.A 2-7 in West (2003)), which seeks to provide a new definitive account of the god's origins in place of previous 'lying' versions.

⁴⁶ Cf. *WD* 654-9.

⁴⁷ Cf. *O.* 1.28-9. On myth correction in *O.* 1, see Howie (1984); and the comm. of Gerber (1982). For the truth motif in Pindar, see also e.g. *O.* 13.52 or *N.* 1.18.

⁴⁸ See in general on Pindar and the Homeric themes of *philia* and reciprocity Kurke (1991), esp. part II.

competitors.⁴⁹ This is evident in Pindar's consciousness of his literary heritage, in which the foremost figure is naturally Homer, by whom he is so heavily influenced and yet from whom he also – not unlike Hesiod before him – seeks to distance himself as individual poet within a different genre.⁵⁰

Against this background the localisation of Attic drama within an agonistic context opens up new ground for developed intertextuality, rivalry, and even a certain degree of literary polemic. Both depend to a large extent on previous performances; Aristophanic comedy, for instance, is marked by a pervasive self-reflexivity in the exploitation of thematic connections between the plays⁵¹ as well as by reference to other genres, including tragedy. Aristophanic self-reflexivity in the form of internal and external literary allusion is closely associated with the poet's establishment of an individual identity and authority which distinguishes him from his rivals within both the comic and tragic genres.⁵² Of course, comedy seeks comparison with tragedy's status as 'teacher' within the city, *polis* – its improvement and instruction of the people, *nouthesia*,⁵³ but it also exploits a certain slippage between *nouthesia* and *dexiotēs*, or the technical aspects of comic composition. *Dexiotēs* allows comedy to claim distinction from, and in addition superiority to, tragedy, in encompassing the construction of the play as dramatic creation. This points to comedy's overt engagement with its theatrical or dramatic context,⁵⁴ a characteristic almost entirely absent in tragedy.

Tragedy on the whole sought conscientiously to avoid the type of self-reflexivity now commonly known as metatheatre, or reference to the conditions of performance and composition.⁵⁵ Its systematic maintenance of the 'dramatic illusion'⁵⁶ is closely bound with the seriousness of its subject matter, the intellectual and emotional impact of which

⁴⁹ At 103-5 Pindar expresses a similar conviction of his own suitability to the task in hand as far surpassing that of other poets of the genre.

⁵⁰ Cf. esp. fr.52h in Race (1997), which refers to the 'pathway' of Homer as *τυπτόν*, 'well-worn' or 'trodden'. In N.7 Pindar returns to his preoccupation with literary manipulation in reference to the *Odyssey* and its exploitation of story-telling, again suggesting a conscious desire to establish firmly his reputation independently of his epic influences.

⁵¹ On internal intertextuality in Aristophanes with a special focus on the *parabasis*, cf. Hubbard (1991).

⁵² See further Bakola (2008).

⁵³ The poet as teacher is a pervasive concern of e.g. *Acharnians*; on the teaching of tragedy, cf. the arguments of the Aristophanic Aeschylus in *Frogs*; and Plato, *Republic* 376e-398b, *Laws* 817a-d, *Gorgias* 501d-502d.

⁵⁴ On comic self-reflexivity cf. e.g. Muecke (1977); and Bain (1977) 208ff.

⁵⁵ The term 'metatheatre', originating in Abel (1963), is posited specifically in relation to authorial consciousness of the conditions of the theatre and performance; and is not to be understood as an umbrella term for all types of authorial self-reflexivity (which has been the tendency of some recent scholarship on comedy, e.g. Slater (2002)).

⁵⁶ On dramatic illusion in tragedy see Bain (1987). Easterling however expresses reservations concerning the use of this term; see her discussion in Easterling (1997) 165-73.

would be compromised were attention conspicuously drawn to the fictiveness of events.⁵⁷ Although there are some areas of overlap between the genres,⁵⁸ generally the demarcation between them remains rigidly and carefully maintained.⁵⁹ The tragedian cannot emerge from his plot as explicitly as does the comic poet. Yet although the tragic poet, unlike his comic counterpart, composes within a fairly narrow mythical repertoire, tragedy's relationship with the mythic past offers an alternative path to an engagement with the process of composition. This is concentrated on a more literary or textual interrelationship(s) without wholly denying the potential for *theatrical* (self)-awareness. The reworking of myth also creates greater potential for intra-generic competition and self-reflexivity. Tragedy inevitably from early on in its development involves an intertextual and interperformative relationship with earlier plays. This competitive element is likely to have increased over the course of the fifth century as the collective repertoire grew and with it the existence of classic versions against which to compete. Sophocles competed against Aeschylus; and although Euripides' career post-dates Aeschylus, rivalry with the 'father of tragedy' was stimulated by the re-production of Aeschylean tragedies in the second half of the fifth century.⁶⁰ The tragedians thus competed horizontally with their (near-) contemporaries and vertically with other poets in the tradition.

Tragic self-reflexivity is presented in many different forms. Intertextuality as a strictly literary phenomenon – that is, existing independently of tragedy's performative context, and concerning itself exclusively with the reworking of myth – is pervasive within the genre and encompasses the ludic, the parodic, the tribute, and very often a combination of these. This is a peculiarly prominent feature of late Euripides – as plays such as *Orestes* and *Helen* testify.⁶¹ Equally, we find a pronounced interest in the conditions of theatre and performance in, for instance, *Bacchae*,⁶² although here the potential for an intertextual relationship and rivalry with Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia* is also a

⁵⁷ Of course, tragedy's use of myth, in which comedy of course did not share, may presuppose a certain degree of 'unreality'; but from the perspective of the ancient Greeks myth was in some sense historical, and the re-shaping of mythical events – the Trojan War, for instance – in tragedy is rooted in a certain historical basis. On the Greek perception of myth, see in general Dowden (1992) and Buxton (1994).

⁵⁸ Critics have long discussed in particular the comic streak and more overt theatrical self-consciousness of late Euripidean drama. On modernism, cf. for refs. Zeitlin (1980) 72 n.2.

⁵⁹ Cf. esp. Taplin (1986).

⁶⁰ Cf. e.g. Arist. *Frogs* 868-70; and *Ach.* 10. Hutchinson, however, remains sceptical on the question of re-performance, suggesting that the familiarity with Aeschylean drama among subsequent generations is due to written transmission of the text(s). See xl-xlv.

⁶¹ See on *Orestes* Zeitlin (1980); on the position of *Helen* in the mythical tradition, see Allan (2008) 10-28.

⁶² Cf. the central discussions of Foley (1985) 205-58, and Segal (1982) 215-71.

significant consideration.⁶³ If we focus on intra-generic literary competition as prelude to discussing *Phoinissai*, on which by far the greatest influence was Aeschylus' *Septem*, we find that intertextuality and metatheatricality often co-exist as interdependent methods in the poets' establishment of individuality and rivalry with earlier plays in the genre. This is aptly testified in the *Electra* of Euripides – a predictable exemplum, yet in this instance probably the most appropriate. The poet engages in a sustained and sophisticated exploitation of his Aeschylean precedent in both characterisation and dramaturgy. There appears to be a wholesale rejection of the Oresteian treatment in the play's setting, the relatively unsympathetic treatment of Electra and Orestes, the sympathy accorded to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, the black humour characteristic of late Euripides, and in the realism for which he is widely criticised. Yet at the same time the very fibre of the play is imbued with the influence of Aeschylus, from the basic alignment in plot to the continual reworking of Aeschylean motifs into the Euripidean fabric.⁶⁴ Shades of Aeschylean characterisation and motivation present themselves in Euripides' figures.⁶⁵ The later play's treatment of the matricide is not so much fundamentally dissimilar from its precedent as differing in nuance and emphasis – as in the shift of focus from the theological background of Aeschylus to the anthropocentrism of Euripides and the diminished emphasis on the home or *oikos*. The relentless pattern of 'the doer shall suffer', *drasanta pathein*, and its broader ethical implications constitute the driving force in both dramas. The later poet invites his audience, for whom in all likelihood a recently re-performed *Oresteia* would have been a fresh memory, to compare both the play's similarities to Aeschylus and to contrast the differences from him in *Electra*'s representation of an intricate balance between tradition and innovation.

In the notorious 'token scene',⁶⁶ the implied intertextuality assumes a more specific and overt representation in its association with explicitly theatrical considerations. Electra's sophistic dismissal of the tokens almost certainly presupposes the audience's familiarity with *Choephoroi*. The strong humour of the episode and the final accomplishment of the recognition not through the Aeschylean clues but through the

⁶³ See the introduction to *Bacchae* of Dodds (1960) xxviii-xxxiii.

⁶⁴ There is unfortunately no space for discussion here: see for refs. in play the ed. of Cropp (1988) Index s.v. 'Aeschylus'.

⁶⁵ On Electra's physical hardships, cf. Aesch. *Ch.* 124-51, 444-50; on her vindictiveness towards her mother, cf. e.g. *Ch.* 394-9, 418-22. For the Euripidean Orestes' sense of moral obligation to Agamemnon and Apollo, as well as his concern with his patrimony, cf. *Ch.* 246ff. and esp. 297-305.

⁶⁶ This study views the passage as authentic, following Lloyd-Jones (1961) and Bond (1974). Objections to the whole are found in Bain (1977) and Fraenkel (1950); for partial deletion, cf. West (1980).

Odyssean token of a scar have been widely read as a parody of the earlier dramatist.⁶⁷ Yet the language of parody may not be the most useful in this instance or in the analysis of Euripides' relationship with Aeschylus in general; or if parody is present, an equation of parody with mockery is inadequate. It need not be that Euripides aims merely to ridicule and make a farce of his dramatic predecessor while supplanting Aeschylus' methods with new and improved versions. That is not to deny any element of criticism. Euripides may offer a critique of the earlier poet's work without wholly dismissing it. The rejection may also constitute a deliberate invitation to the audience to compare his methods with those of the earlier poet, and thus to elevate the status of Euripides himself through that critical comparison. The later poet requires a classic work in order to do this, since comparison or contrast with a play of lower standing would ultimately threaten to diminish the status of his own. The treatment of Aeschylus is unfair on many counts; but Euripides was under no obligation to provide a fair treatment of his predecessor. Rather, he uses him in order to display his own dramaturgical individuality in incorporating an element of criticism which flavours the scene with a satirical humour as cover for the ultimate seriousness of the later poet's claim for recognition *vis-à-vis* his great forebear.⁶⁸ We will see that similar techniques are employed in *Phoinissai*'s pervasive interplay of dramatic as well as other texts. Yet let us begin first with that omnipresent influence which shaped the entirety of Greek literary culture: the Homeric epic.

1.1 *The Iliad*

An early acquaintance with the literariness of *Phoinissai* is found in the *teichoskopia* scene.⁶⁹ Euripides' sensitive reworking of the Iliadic scene between Priam and Helen in the third book of the epic is finely balanced between debt to and distancing from the Homeric precedent. Both scenes form the prelude to a duel; in *Phoinissai*, the relief of tension created by Jocasta's anxious foreboding in the Prologue is matched by the Iliadic scene's diminution of narrative pace and the anticipation established by the exchanges between Hector and Paris. The glimpses offered by both poets of the warriors on the far-off battlefield externalise the martial scenes and thus create distance, yet also sustain a

⁶⁷ This is the main thrust of the argument of e.g. Hammond (1984).

⁶⁸ For a balanced and sensitive appreciation of metatheatrical/dramatic considerations in *Electra*, see Raeburn (2000). For a detailed study of Eur.'s relationship with Aesch., see Aelion (1983).

⁶⁹ Following what is now the general consensus, this study accepts the episode as authentic. See for discussion below Appendix B.

sense of the encroachment of that world on the present action. Tension is thus maintained throughout the respective scenes through inviting the audience to anticipate the forthcoming return to the battlefields and to the wider consequences of war. The Homeric shift of focus from the immediate action on the battlefield to the *polis* and the non-combatants is an appropriate foregrounding to the sharp polarisation between the two worlds as so powerfully emphasised in the sixth book of the epic. This contrast is in Euripides brought out by the transition from the Prologue, which closes on the theme of the imminent war, to the central role assumed by Antigone in the *teichoskopia*. Here, however, the poet inverts the focus by looking outwards from the inside, while the *Iliad* brings us briefly inside, away from the outer sphere. The tragic treatment of the scene on the palace roof thus presents us with a strikingly sophisticated theatrical manoeuvre in the externalisation and creation of dramatic ‘space’.⁷⁰

The dialogic form of the Euripidean and Homeric interchanges reveals several modifications. Euripides reverses the gender roles employed in Homer, who sympathetically presents the ignorant and infirm Priam as receptor of information from a confident and authoritative Helen. Antigone’s equal ignorance requires her reliance on the old Paidagogus, and her naive curiosity appropriately corresponds with the scene’s emphasis on her virginity and the anomalous nature of this foray from her cloistered quarters.⁷¹ Of course, this marks a striking diversion from the Iliadic female interlocutor, Helen, as adulteress and as at least – notwithstanding Homer’s generally sympathetic treatment of her character – partial cause of the war. For Antigone herself, the motif of her virginity as a recurring theme in the play will become closely bound with her role as victim of a war for which she bears no responsibility. In this respect Euripides does pick up on an important aspect of the non-combatants in Homer, as the ultimate victims of the war. The early appearance of the virginity motif here in the Euripidean *teichoskopia* prepares the audience for the development of Antigone’s part in relation to her traditionally female role as the voice of suffering and of the personal sacrifices necessitated by war. It also draws attention to the play’s concern with gender-spatial distinctions,⁷² and foregrounds in particular the intrusion of the female into public and

⁷⁰ Cf. for further discussion of this topic 1.2 below.

⁷¹ Cf. 89-95 and 193ff. Critics have long noticed the framing effect on the scene of this theme, which draws in addition attention to its significance in the play. See again Appendix B.

⁷² Interesting that the *Iliad* makes no comment regarding the propriety of Helen’s appearance at the wall, although gender and space will come into interplay in the sixth book; the emphasis on the theme in Eur. contrasts the innocence and future suffering of the inexperienced Antigone with the guilt and dangerous sexuality of the Homeric Helen.

civic territory.⁷³ In Homer, of course, the theme of innocence again serves as a prelude to the events of Book Six, which casts into the spotlight the helplessness of Hecabe and Andromache in their futile and poignant adherence to the political and domestic life eventually destroyed by war, themes which preoccupied Euripides himself in the plays which bear the women's names. In our play, the theme of innocence as a point of contact with Homer is fully developed into an independent dramatic theme which underpins the presentation of the non-combatants.⁷⁴

Euripidean modifications are again evident at such points as Antigone's inability to see clearly her brother Polynices: ὁρῶ δῆτ' οὐ σαφῶς, ὁρῶ δέ πως / μορφῆς τύπωμα στέρνα τ' ἐξηικασμένα (161-2), which in marking a deft stroke of realism through her struggle to make him out from a distance again draws attention to the theatrical externalisation of the scene. It also evokes pathos in Antigone's longing for the kin from whom she is separated, and whom she wishes to embrace: περὶ δ' ὠλένας / δέραι φιλτάται βάλοιμι χρόνῳ (165-6); this may prefigure her passionate allegiance in later scenes to his cause in death.⁷⁵ The sharper poignancy of the Homeric Helen's futile straining to see her two brothers, unaware that they are already dead (236-44), highlights each poet's reliance on the themes of sight and vision in conveying the two scenes' naturalistic quality and strong visual power. Euripides emphasises this feature through a sustained focus on colour, in relation to both personal characteristic and military equipment: note especially the portrayals of Hippomedon, πάγκαλκον ἄσπιδ' ἀμφὶ βραχίονι / κουφίζων (120-1; and see 127-30), and Polynices, ὅπλοισι χρυσέοισιν ἐκπρεπής (168). The impression of sheer physicality⁷⁶ resulting from this is heightened by the sense of urgency, speed and movement on the battlefield as seen through the eyes of the excited young Antigone. The kaleidoscopic effect of the scene in switching abruptly from one warrior to the next increases the episode's dramatic immediacy and the audience's overall impression of vividness and action. This marks something of a divergence from the Iliadic precedent, in which the interlocutors' previous acquaintance with the warriors creates a series of

⁷³ We return to this in ch.4.1 below.

⁷⁴ The themes of victimhood and sacrifice are discussed fully in ch.4 below (see esp. 4.6).

⁷⁵ Antigone's affection for her brother, and the view of the Paidagogus that he has some justification for his attack on Thebes (154), also contributes to Eur.'s distancing from Aesch., who allows the audience no opportunity to consider events from the direct perspective of Polynices. Of course, Polynices in *Phoinissai* is not absolved from responsibility – as we will see in the next chapter – but Eur. gives a more balanced view of the two brothers than Aesch., who presents Polynices only through the eyes of the enemy and his potential victims.

⁷⁶ The effect of this is compounded by the heavy emphasis on Theban topography in the creation of a peculiarly individual political identity. See ch.3.1 below.

internal digressions within a relatively extended and decelerated narrative in the recognition and recollection of familiar faces. Yet the stamp of epic is imprinted on the Euripidean scene, which both pays a tribute to and marks a clear distinction from its Iliadic precedent.⁷⁷

1.2 *Septem: Shields and the Theatre*

However, despite the tendency of modern scholarship to view Homer as the primary influence on the Euripidean *teichoskopia*,⁷⁸ it becomes clear that the later tragedian owes far more to Aeschylus – and here especially to the central ‘shield scene’ in that poet’s *Seven against Thebes* – than to any other source. By the late fifth century the tragic genre had come of age; while Homer was yet a central intertext,⁷⁹ the poets were competing within a tradition of almost a century’s standing which had generated its own classics. In *Phoinissai*’s *teichoskopia* Aeschylean and Homeric influences are fused in a Euripidean *coup de théâtre* which invites the audience to recall the epic in which it was undoubtedly well-versed as well as *Septem*, the performance of which may even have been a living memory for some of the spectators. The reintroduction of several of the Aeschylean Argive warriors heralds the preeminent position enjoyed by *Septem* in *Phoinissai*’s literary heritage. Simple allusion is evident in the retention of characteristics well-known in the earlier play: thus is introduced Hippomedon: ‘how exulting, how fearful to look at’, ὡς γαῦρος, ὡς φοβερός εἰσιδεῖν, and more akin to a giant than a mortal man (127-30). In his imposing presence on the frontline (120) we remember well his massive bulk in *Septem* (488), his lust for battle and terrifying aspect (497-8). Tydeus, introduced early in both plays as an important member of the assault,⁸⁰ is granted by Euripides an ‘Aetolian war spirit’ (134),⁸¹ just as in Aeschylus he is ‘thirsting for battle’, μάχης λελιμμένος (380). There are shades of *Septem* again in Antigone’s comparison of her brother Polynices’ blazing armour to morning sun rays (167-9); we remember the visual impact of the

⁷⁷ For some useful remarks on the general reception of Homer in tragedy, see Hunter (2004) 241-5.

⁷⁸ Cf. e.g. Foley 118. Her overarching argument for Eur.’s wholesale rejection of his tragic predecessor(s) is more than a little misguided, as will become clear below under ‘Eteocles’ and ‘Chorus’. See also later in this ch. 1.5 and 1.6 on Soph.

⁷⁹ As, indeed, he was in *Septem*’s ‘shield scene’, which is heavily influenced by the literary device of *ecphrasis*, a prominent feature of early Greek poetry such as Homer and Hesiod: cf. Hutchinson (1985) 105-6.

⁸⁰ Note his prominence in the messenger’s speech at 1144, which may have implications for his inclusion in the disputed earlier portion of the speech (1104-40). On the textual difficulties of 1104-40, see for discussion Appendix C.

⁸¹ Cf. Mastronarde (1994) ad loc. on the implications here of ‘Aetolian’.

Aeschylean Polynices' descent on the city, his massive golden shield emblazoned with the image of Justice, *Dikē* (639-48).⁸² Then there is the familiar boastful arrogance of that arch-*hubristēs*, Capaneus, 'excessively loud-mouthed', στόμαργός...ἄγαν in Aeschylus (447) and, true to form, threatening 'terrible things', δεινὰ, against the city in *Phoinissai* (179). He had done just that in *Septem* (πύργοις δ' ἀπειλεῖ δεινόν, 426), as in Euripides he calculates his attempts on the battlements (180-1). This prepares the audience for his assault on the city and traditional *nemesis* in the shape of Zeus' intervention, as reported later in the first messenger's speech (1172-82). Tradition is again maintained in the appearance of the seer Amphiaraus (*Ph.* 173-4, *Septem* 568ff), presented relatively tamely in both plays in his pursuit of sacrificial ritual.

Yet it is also important that in *Phoinissai* the Homeric use of the internal spectator marks in the *teichoskopia* a distinct divergence from Aeschylus, in which the exchanges between Eteocles and the messenger rely not, as in Euripides, on the contrast between informed and uninformed spectators, but on the leader's ready and eloquent responses to his inferior. The messenger's report of events at the seven gates serves a particular function of informing the *audience* and of creating the impression of the city as surrounded on all sides. This is not to suggest that the Euripidean scene does not to some extent also function thus, but the Aeschylean scene's position – as well as structure and scale – in the play as a 'set-piece' lends the whole a degree of artifice which contrasts with the more naturalistic quality found in Euripides. Dramatic tension is created and maintained in differing ways. The later tragedian reveals a greater concern with theatrical and dramaturgical considerations, via which he may also establish his innovativeness in relation to the Aeschylean precedent. As already noted, Euripides' reliance on the theme of sight, as well as his transferral of the scene to the palace roof,⁸³ invite the audience to perceive the encroaching threat of the outside world on the theatrical arena. In Aeschylus, the heavy emphasis, particularly in the Parodos, on the *sounds* made by the approaching army⁸⁴ creates that sense of encroachment in correspondence with the play's continual concern with the distinction between inside and outside the city, and its internalised focus on Thebes under siege. In Euripides, the shifting focus of the action (both present-day and historical) between inside and outside the city is central to the artistic structure and

⁸² On the sun-ray motif, cf. also *Sep.* 430-1 and 445-6.

⁸³ On the use of the roof in tragedy, cf. Mastronarde (1990); on *Phoinissai*, see 255-7. Here in the Euripidean *teichoskopia* it is clear that the poet carefully stages the gradual movements of Antigone and the Paidagogos from the *skēnē* up to an open-air area akin to battlements (rather than an upper room), so that the old man guides the girl into, yet still protects her from, public view.

⁸⁴ The only visual feature of the assault is the rising dust at 81-2.

integrity of the play. *Phoinissai* relies on a series of arrivals and departures, on the blurring of spatial boundaries, in its development of the city's mythical history as well as of its present-day events.⁸⁵

It is a striking feature of *Phoinissai*'s intertextual relationship with *Septem* that Euripides in the manner of his earlier *Electra* also draws more explicit attention to his divergence from his predecessor. At 751-2 Eteocles in discussion with Creon over the city's defence strategy comments on the time-consuming nature of recounting each of the Theban warriors at the seven gates. Of course, dramatic 'time' is obviously limited given the imminence of the assault and of the brothers' final confrontation; Euripides' concern here for the demands of realism implies a pointed departure from the more overt contrivance of Aeschylus' extended 'shield scene'. Instead, the audience of *Phoinissai* has already enjoyed a condensed version of the Aeschylean episode in the earlier *teichoskopia*, well before the crisis-point of the Argive assault. The poet thus acknowledges his literary influence but establishes in a bold and overt manner his own adaptation of that influence to suit an individual dramatic purpose. This potential for criticism of Aeschylus' methods also draws attention to the effects of *Phoinissai* – and, by implication, *Septem* – as *performance* rather than merely as competing text. The metatheatrical aspect of the later poet's rivalry with Aeschylus⁸⁶ here underlines Euripides' concern with establishing a specifically dramaturgical distinction from his forebear. After all, in competing with Aeschylus Euripides was competing with the best; and to imply his own superiority to the poet who held the foremost position in the tragic tradition and who bore such vast influence on this play was surely his boldest claim to creative individuality and independent genius. This is lent extra weight by the probability that *Septem* had already attained classic status by this date, and had been re-performed,⁸⁷ which allows Euripides to make demands on his audience through comparison of the two plays. This in turn also enhances the sense of competition with a perceived masterpiece.

On this note, it is therefore appropriate that more sophisticated exploitation of *Septem* is found in the later disputed portion of the messenger's speech at 1104-40. The intertextual relationship of the passage with Aeschylus has, notwithstanding the question

⁸⁵ These arrivals, and their destabilising effects, are focal points of the play's choral odes: see for discussion Arthur (1977).

⁸⁶ Metatheatre as a generic concept is itself a means whereby Eur. establishes his divergence from Aeschylus elsewhere in the play, as, for instance, in the Choral role. See below 1.4.

⁸⁷ This is at least implied at Arist. *Frogs* 1021-4. Certainly the interpolated ending of *Septem* suggests that it was repeatedly performed before the creation of the master-texts in the archive.

of authenticity,⁸⁸ been generally underestimated in recent scholarship.⁸⁹ On the contrary, the passage's complex reworking of *Septem*'s shield scene is a vital point in favour of authenticity in our consideration of its relation to the authentic *teichoskopia*. The adaptation by Euripides of physical characteristics peculiar to the Aeschylean Argives to fit other warriors suggests sustained and conscious allusion to the earlier play without recourse to simple 'borrowing'. Figures familiar from *Septem* reappear with distinctively different armour (as well as at different gates) from their Aeschylean counterparts;⁹⁰ but internal shifting of detail retains the Aeschylean scene's stamp on the passage. The seer Amphiaraus, for instance, has in both plays an unmarked shield (*Ph*.1112, *Septem* 591), as befits the modesty and piety of his role.⁹¹ Yet the blazon of *Septem*'s Tydeus, with its bright moon, the 'eye' of night (390), is faintly evoked in the feature of Argos' manifold eyes on the shield of Hippomedon (*Ph*.1115-7).⁹² A stronger association is noted in the transference of the hubristic Aeschylean Capaneus' blazon, which depicts a fire-bearer declaring his intention to burn the city (432-4), to the Euripidean Tydeus' onslaught with a fire-torch, intending to burn the city: δεξιᾷ δε λαμπάδα / Τιτὰν Προμηθεὺς ἔφερεν ὡς πρήσων πόλιν (1121-2).⁹³ Likewise, the frenzied mares emblazoned on Polynices' shield (*Ph*.1124-7) recall Eteoclus' driving against the city of his excited steeds (*Septem* 461-4). Further, the devouring snakes that form Adrastus' blazon (*Ph*.1135-8) mark a type of hybrid between the snake-covered border of the Aeschylean Hippomedon's shield (495-6) and the depiction of the Sphinx carrying off a Theban on the armour of Amphion (541-4). And where Capaneus is referred to as a 'giant' in *Septem* (424), in Euripides he bears the image of a giant on his shield (1130-3). The sustained manipulation of the Aeschylean precedent draws attention to Euripides' debt to his forebear as well as to his own innovativeness.

Moreover, as in *Septem* the shields have symbolic functions. In Aeschylus as in Euripides the blazons are intended to be indicative of Argive arrogance and aggression,

⁸⁸ This study, as noted above in the Introduction, (very) cautiously accepts the passage as authentic; see below Appendix C.

⁸⁹ Cf. again e.g. Foley 127, who comments on the episode's 'minimal and cryptic' correspondences with the Aeschylean precedent.

⁹⁰ This is usefully elucidated in Mastronarde's (1994) tabular references on pp. 460-1.

⁹¹ This distinction from the boastfulness and arrogance of the other Argives was a traditional element of the story, retained by Eur. Cf. Mastronarde on 1112.

⁹² The particular difficulties of these lines are discussed below in Appendix C.

⁹³ It is an interesting point of distinction between the two poets that Eur. omits the written slogan on Capaneus' shield in *Septem*, 'πρήσω πόλιν' ['I shall fire the city'], although the conversion from direct speech to a future participle in *Phoinissai*, ὡς πρήσων πόλιν, cannot fail to constitute a deliberate evocation of the earlier play.

and scholarship on the earlier play has read various meanings into the emblems.⁹⁴ Yet there are in Euripides some interesting modifications appropriate to the play's overarching differences from Aeschylus. Capaneus' shield, for instance, bears the image of an earth-born giant, γηγενής (1131), which had pulled up the city from its very foundations and now bears it on its back. In alluding to the autochthony myth which constitutes the most prominent innovation in Euripides' representation of Theban myth, this blazon implicitly associates the legend of the Spartoi with Thebes' potential destruction. The main events of the play, in which the death of Menoeceus is necessary to Thebes' survival, strengthen this association in the cyclical connections drawn between the violent genesis of the first earth-born and the reverberating cross-generational consequences of that genesis. Importantly, the blazon also suggests the role of giants in the theogonic tradition, in which Aeschylus displays little interest.⁹⁵ The imagery highlights the themes of civic integrity and political salvation as a particular and ingrained preoccupation of *Phoinissai*'s myths. It is thus appropriate that the catalogue re-emphasises these themes through the image of the frenzied horses, now emblazoned on the shield of *Phoinissai*'s Polynices where in *Septem* it is Eteocles who bears a similar image (461-5).⁹⁶ The image of the horses is in both plays associated with civic disorder.⁹⁷ The stronger association in the later play⁹⁸ paired with the transferral of the blazon to Polynices bears a particular resonance in the light of his substantial role in the play, where in Aeschylus as in Sophocles' *Antigone* his presence is maintained beyond the city's borders as a voiceless menace to the Theban good. In *Phoinissai*, however, his part is central not only to the question of Theban stability and survival but also on a broader level to the play's contemporary political concerns, which we discuss in the following chapter. Polynices' silence is striking here, in contrast with the explicit claim to *dikē* he makes in *Septem* (642-8).⁹⁹ Yet the shield in *Septem* is the closest to a voice granted to Polynices; in *Phoinissai*, of course, he will have the opportunity to speak. The imagery here also points more locally to the nature of Polynices' assault on

⁹⁴ See for instance Zeitlin (1982).

⁹⁵ Cf. *Th.* 50 and 185-6.

⁹⁶ Eteocles is absent from the Euripidean catalogue. It is interesting that in *Septem*, which is continually concerned with the brothers' ultimately futile attempts to assert their individual identities, the near homonymy in relation to the Theban leader may deliberately undermine this attempt on the part of Eteocles in particular. See further Zeitlin (1990) 139-40.

⁹⁷ Cf. Foley 128 n.41.

⁹⁸ Note φόβωι in 1125 and μαίνεσθαι δοκεῖν, 1127. Cf. also Craik (1988) on 1124-6.

⁹⁹ Of course, the theme of *dikē* is transferred to and developed in the Euripidean *agōn*; cf. also the early Choral comment at 258-60. The absence of speech or written language in the Euripidean catalogue is a prominent point of distinction from Aeschylus. Goff (1988) 147 points out an interesting connection between this and the invention by Prometheus (who is alluded to at 1122) of writing and divination. See Goff 147 n.27 for refs. to this in *PV*.

Thebes, and the fallaciousness and hypocrisy of his claim to civic loyalty: for his actions are not for the purpose of restoration, but to annihilate the city.

The aggression and danger inherent in the emblem of the horses corresponds with a steadily increasing level of violence and monstrosity throughout the catalogue: note, for instance, the image on Adrastus' shield, which depicts the devouring of Theban children by snakes (1137-8). There is a pronounced element of the unnatural and grotesque here which contrasts with the earlier appearance of Tydeus, presented relatively mildly as a Titan Prometheus earlier in the catalogue (1122). The comparison may also, of course, allude to the later victory of the Thebans through their forethought, προμηθία (1466). The negative associations here in the catalogue can in addition be balanced with those of the victory and the use of stratagem by the Theban side: Eteocles employs a Thessalian 'trick', σόφισμα (1407-8), and the Thebans make a surprise attack on the unarmed Argives (1466ff.).¹⁰⁰ Moreover, it is also notable that Euripides relinquishes the careful ordering of the warriors and the opponents in defence which in *Septem* is central to the scene's structure in building up a sense of inevitability in advance of Eteocles' discovery of his brother's presence at the seventh gate.¹⁰¹ In *Phoinissai* this consideration is not central to the play's design; Euripides separates the fratricidal battle from the main assault in supplying a sense of closure to each of the play's two myths.¹⁰² Further, the questions of 'fate', pre-determinism, and individual autonomy as linked with the fraternal confrontation do not come into play to the same extent as found in Aeschylus,¹⁰³ thus obviating the necessity for the considered arrangement of the warriors in *Septem*, with Eteocles as seventh and last. The return to the Argives via the medium of retrospective narrative in the latter part of the later play, when the moment of crisis has passed and the assault has taken place, underlines the deliberateness of the earlier insertion of Eteocles' comment at 751-2. Euripides' indulgence in the Aeschylean precedent at a point he deems from a purely dramatic perspective to be more suitable re-emphasises his implicit demand for recognition and ascendancy in relation to his chief influence and competitor. It is also important that this personal rivalry carries with it an implicit comment on the evolution of Athenian theatre. By rejecting aspects of Aeschylean dramaturgy, Euripides draws

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Foley 129-30 on what she views as a discrediting of the Theban victory.

¹⁰¹ On the much-discussed question of the varying tenses in Eteocles' positioning of the seven defence warriors, cf. Hutchinson 103-5 and ad loc. See also Sommerstein (1996) 102-9.

¹⁰² Cf. further ch.4.7 below for the dramatic implications of this feature of the play.

¹⁰³ Cf. ch.3.4 below for discussion of causation in *Phoinissai*'s presentation of the Labdacid myth.

attention to his own adherence to different theatrical practices which involve a discrete view of dramatic realism.

1.3 Character: Eteocles

The figure of Eteocles in *Phoinissai* has often been subject to unfavourable comparison with his Aeschylean predecessor. Scholars have variously pointed out the distinction between the inexperienced and egocentric Euripidean character and *Septem*'s introduction of Eteocles as a level-headed military professional with his city's best interests at heart.¹⁰⁴ Of course, the Aeschylean Eteocles does direct a rational and authoritative organisation of the city's defence, where in the later play his counterpart relies on Creon's knowledge of military strategy.¹⁰⁵ It is also true that *Septem* emphasises Eteocles' piety, lending his character a moral authority absent in his Euripidean namesake.¹⁰⁶ Yet the two plays reveal that the ostensible distinctions between the two characters are scarcely so clear-cut. In the *agōn* of *Phoinissai* the conclusion of Eteocles' main argument (499-525) with promises of violent confrontation, his rejection of the balanced and rational advice offered by Jocasta, and the rapid descent of the conference into an exchange of threats and insults between himself and Polynices – all mark the hot-tempered impetuosity which in conjunction with an equally heedless thirst for political supremacy drives him to the final fatal confrontation with his brother, and to disaster for the city he had earlier professed to defend. Eteocles' – and his brother's – repudiation of his mother's counsel, and his heated and passionate self-defence, highlight the importance in the play of the female as voice of reason and moral authority. It also subverts the audience's expectation of trouble from the female;¹⁰⁷ it is Jocasta who is the voice of reason, and the male who is at once irrational and ill-advised.¹⁰⁸ This reversal is highlighted by the tentative judgements offered by the Chorus during the course of the *agōn*. Their attempts to effect reconciliation and their implicit disapproval of Eteocles' argument emphasise the association of the female role with the

¹⁰⁴ Thus, for instance, Lamari (2007) 13-4; and Foley 124ff.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. 707ff.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. 69-77, 216-8, 271-9 etc. The speciousness of the Euripidean Eteocles' claim to concern for the *polis* and its gods (cf. esp. 604ff.) is closely associated with his manipulation of sophistic argumentation. See again ch.2 *passim*, esp. 2.1.

¹⁰⁷ We remember the Paidagogus' warning words at 196-201.

¹⁰⁸ See ch.4 below for a full discussion of the play's gender dynamics.

promotion of political salvation, to which the behaviour of the males poses a grave threat.¹⁰⁹

We see something very similar in Aeschylus. In *Septem* the calm statesman of the play's opening gives way to the hot-headed soldier bent on bloody confrontation with his brother, regardless of the outcome for either himself or his city. The Eteocles who had earlier prayed to the gods for Thebes' salvation now rejects the wise advice, based on religious principles, of a group of women he had earlier anathematised. They remind him of the ineradicable pollution, *miasma*, that is fratricide (677-82), to which he can only reply that 'shame' must be avoided at all costs, for that is the only compensation for the dead: εἴπερ κακὸν φέροι τις, αἰσχύνῃς ἄτερ / ἔστω. μόνον γὰρ κέρδος ἐν τεθνηκόσιν, / κακῶν δὲ καῖσχερῶν οὐτιν' εὐκλείαν ἐρεῖς (683-5). Eteocles' passion for battle, founded on both a fatalistic sense of its inevitability and an Iliadic desire for martial glory,¹¹⁰ renders him insensible to rational counsel, indeed frenzied (686-8, 692-4). His rashness is lent greater emphasis by the stark reversal of roles between Chorus and protagonist as he contemplates fratricide. In his heedlessness Eteocles himself now represents the lack of moderation, *sōphrosune*, he had earlier so despised in the Theban women, whom he had perceived as the greatest threat to the city's morale.¹¹¹ It is now he who will potentially destroy his own city; whereas *they* have assumed the role of reasoned advisers who have the best interests of the city at heart. This emotionalism and impulsivity on Eteocles' part are suggested early on in his sudden outburst at the end of the Prologue, as he prays for civic salvation (69-77), and again in his initial response, swiftly checked, on hearing of Polynices' presence at the seventh gate: ὦ θεομανές τε καὶ θεῶν μέγα στύγος, / ὦ πανδάκρυτον ἄμὸν Οἰδίου γένος, / ὅμοι πατρός δὴ νῦν ἄραῖ τελεσφόροι (653-5).¹¹² The political authority of the Eteocles in *Septem*'s early scenes,¹¹³ and the defensive attitude to the *polis* professed by his Euripidean counterpart, give way in a bitterly ironic inversion to actions which are directly *destructive* of political stability.

Let us look a little more closely at the motivation of the two characters. The Euripidean Eteocles betrays an abiding concern with the protection of his own political

¹⁰⁹ See further on the choral role 1.4 below.

¹¹⁰ Cf. 717 and 719. The implications of this reasoning are discussed below.

¹¹¹ Cf. 191-2.

¹¹² See further Hutchinson xxxv-xxxviii on the 'modulations' in Eteocles' characterisation throughout the play.

¹¹³ The Solonian flavour of the metaphor employed by this Eteocles at 208-10 in likening himself to a fearless helmsman, cited by Lamari as evidence of his 'ruling qualities', 13-4, bears interesting comparison with its similar use by another flawed leader, Creon in *Antigone* (cf. e.g. 162-3, 188-90).

position and an all-consuming desire for absolute power, which has been cited as another point of distinction from his Aeschylean predecessor.¹¹⁴ Yet the Eteocles of *Septem* is equally absorbed in and motivated by personal considerations, even if those considerations are distinct from those of his successor. Euripides reveals a close knowledge of Aeschylus in what is not so much his invention as his modification and, importantly, modernisation of the nature of his Eteocles' personal considerations, *oikeia*, in engagement with the play's contemporary political flavour. The Aeschylean character's Homeric conception of the 'shame' culture which so greatly influenced the Iliadic heroes¹¹⁵ is updated in his Euripidean counterpart's sophistic exploitation of the concepts of shame, *aiskhunē*, and cowardice, *anandria*, in seeking to create an effect of alignment between his own interests and those of the city. Of course, in reality the only interests he serves are his own. Where the Aeschylean Eteocles fears the perceived slight to his reputation that would result from his avoidance of battle, in much the same manner as the same poet's Agamemnon cannot be seen as a 'deserter', *ἄπρόναυς*,¹¹⁶ in his Euripidean counterpart this heroic mentality is adapted to bring the play into line with late fifth-century intellectual cultures. 'Shame' now takes on a Calliclean hue¹¹⁷ in Eteocles' self-justification, which distorts the archaic conception of personal honour and sensitivity to one's own reputation and binds it closely with contemporary philosophical perceptions of power. This is underlined in Eteocles' Calliclean reasoning that to surrender authority to his brother would be slavery, *douleia* (520). Both characters believe themselves to be acting in the interests of the *polis*; yet both equally place their own private ambitions above the common good.

This question of ambition is important. The Aeschylean Eteocles, a military man in the Homeric mould, cannot face the slight to his own personal reputation, *timē*, that he believes would be the result of avoiding the fraternal confrontation. His self-justification on the grounds of the perceived moral propriety in his confrontation of his brother¹¹⁸ and

¹¹⁴ Cf. e.g. Foley 124, who comments: 'unlike his Aeschylean counterpart, Eteocles cannot resist concern with the *oikeia*, his private interests, as well as with, or even over, the *koina*' [public interests].

¹¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Hector's memorable words to Andromache at 6.441-6. The seminal discussion of the 'guilt' and 'shame' cultures is found in Dodds (1951), who views the two as separable and distinct. Modern scholarship, however, has inclined to a convergence of the two; see e.g. Goldhill (1986) ch.7. The most extensive discussion of *aidōs* is found in Cairns (1993).

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ag. 211-3. At *Sep.* 717 Eteocles refers to himself as a soldier, *hoplitēs*; at 683-5 he implies that to suffer ill without shame may yet bring glory, *eukleia*, implying his military aspiration to posthumous *kleos* as an extension of his more immediate preoccupation with *timē*.

¹¹⁷ The play's engagement with sophistic philosophy is discussed in ch.2 below; see esp. again 2.1 on rhetoric.

¹¹⁸ We return to *dikē* later in this section.

of the ineluctability of his family ‘curse’¹¹⁹ carries limited weight in the play’s presentation of his decision as not unequivocally positive. The suppression of the family curse for a large portion of the action allows for the development of Eteocles’ character as an autonomous individual who takes the decision to confront what is certain death in defiance of the counsel of others. This decision – as is made clear in the later *Antigone* – fulfils the Chorus’ prediction of catastrophe for the city at large, as well as for the surviving Labdacids. In these later scenes with the Theban women it is made clear that Eteocles is given a choice. They attempt to dissuade him from battle (686-8); he recklessly abandons any hope of salvation – indeed seeks to hasten on disaster: ‘Let [the whole house of Laius] go to the breeze’, ἴτω κατ’ οὐρὸν (690). The women tell him to resist the power of the curse, μὴ ’ποτρύνου (698-701); but he replies that he is already beyond help; the gods have forsaken him, so why should he ‘cringe’, σαίνουμεν, before death? (702-4). It is clear in the exchanges at 686-719 that Eteocles’ statements do not go uncontested; the implications of his behaviour are pointed out to him and he chooses to ignore them. It is also striking that while the Chorus speak in terms of human responsibility, Eteocles responds in those of the divine; he never actually answers them in their own terms. Heedless, he reveals a passionate sense of logic in conforming to divine decree, the inevitability of which he accepts and believes in but which also serves conveniently as pretext for a decision consciously and independently made. *Septem* thus does not present divine predetermination as the driving force behind events but more as a collaborative influence reliant on human autonomy in the accomplishment of disaster. Of course, questions of power and individualism bear interesting implications for the rest of the trilogy, since were the manner of Eteocles’ assumption of the Theban leadership known to us, it might have a significant impact on our perception of his behaviour in the final play. If – as in *Phoinissai* – he were presented as a usurper, his own responsibility in the unfolding of events would be magnified.¹²⁰

In Euripides, ambition is presented somewhat differently in this Eteocles’ all-consuming desire for power. The later poet associates his character’s political ambitions with the degeneration and corruption of the archaic concept of *philotimia*. In its etymological sense, this ‘love of honour’ is more closely associated with the simple patriotism of a character such as Hector, and of which the natural and desired consequence

¹¹⁹ Cf. 689-91, 702-4, 719.

¹²⁰ *Septem* may however hint at the possibility of Eteocles as a usurper; cf. 637-8, where the messenger reports of Polynices as an *andrēlatēs*, bent on exiling his brother as he himself was banished.

is his posthumous glory, *kleos*, in future generations.¹²¹ Eteocles' arguments reveal a patent disjunction between civic loyalty and personal gain, presented in the Homeric epic as causally related and complementary concepts. Instead, civic loyalty is professed as a pretext for, and is ultimately subsumed by, private ambition. Moreover, it is not the glory of a military reputation that the Euripidean Eteocles seeks, since external perception of his behaviour is scarcely a consideration as it is the priority of an Achilles, an Agamemnon, or the Sophoclean Ajax. Ambition is now placed within the localised context of late fifth-century Athenian politics, where the common good is abandoned in favour of individual supremacy, and where sophistic teaching exploits and perverts archaic standards of morality. Now *philotimia* is presented as part of the causal relationship between political discord – *stasis* – and civic dissolution.¹²² Indeed, it is not unreasonable to view this deterioration of *philotimia* and its detrimental effect on the *polis* as an embryonic concern of *Septem*, even if it is presented in a less overtly topical manner than in *Phoinissai*. Yet despite this there is more emphasis on concern for the collective good in Aeschylus, who clearly recognised the effects of destructive and selfish ambition; this was no new phenomenon in the late fifth century, which merely invented the rhetoric which allowed such ambition to be articulated so fluently. The Aeschylean Eteocles' genuine concern for civic welfare,¹²³ as emphasised in the play's early episodes, is eventually subordinated to his still stronger determination to satisfy his thirst for revenge as well as to his abiding preoccupation with his own military reputation.¹²⁴ Thus individual is placed above the city; and it is the ambitions of the individual which are associated with internal strife and civic breakdown.¹²⁵

The same principle applies to the later poet's presentation of Eteocles from a purely intellectual, rather than an emotional, perspective. Eteocles does not place the emphasis on justice, *dikē*, as is found in Polynices' speech (see 470, 490, 492, 496). He concentrates on what is 'fine' and 'wise' (499) – that is, the acquisition of the 'greater

¹²¹ We recall Hector's famous maxim at *Il.* 12.243: 'one omen is best, to defend one's fatherland', εἷς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης. In book 22, death imminent, he is determined to not to die 'ingloriously', ἀκλειῶς, but 'having done a great deed, which future generations can hear of', μέγα ῥέξας τι καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι (304-5).

¹²² See further ch.2.2 below.

¹²³ This is of course evident in the Prologue; cf. also his condemnation of the Chorus at 191-2 for their negative effect on public morale.

¹²⁴ Note also his reference to 'gain', *kerdos*, at 697, which underlines Eteocles' desire for what he believes will be a glorious military reputation (cf. also 684).

¹²⁵ The perception that the real threat to the *polis* comes from within is developed in the overtly political *Eumenides*, staged less than a decade after *Septem* in the choral allusion to *stasis* (976-87). This may also be adumbrated in Eteocles' own comment at *Sep.* 193-4, made with some irony in the context, since the *polis* will face destruction not at the hands of the Chorus but of the ruler himself.

part', *to pleon*, through his own strength and intelligence. At the close of his speech he mentions *injustice*, *adikia*, as acceptable only in the name of autocracy, *turannis* (524-5).¹²⁶ So he ends by admitting that his behaviour is not just, but seeks to absolve himself of moral responsibility by implying that what he seeks – *to kalon* and *to sophon* – constitute a goal which is superior to justice. The linguistic and intellectual sophistication of Eteocles' argument also recalls by association with its philosophical influences the Calliclean emphasis on intelligence, *phronēsis*, as collaborative with bravery, *andreia*, in the attainment of the greater part, *to pleon*, to which Eteocles strives (509-10). Thus personal gain is presented as the natural 'right' of the more intelligent and unattainable by others on account of their comparative weakness and intellectual inferiority. It is those weaker and less intelligent who seek to condemn as 'injustice' what Calliclean and Thrasymachean theory seeks to present as acceptable by virtue of its own 'logic'.¹²⁷ Eteocles' intelligence – and the manner in which he is ultimately caught up in the speciousness of his own reasoning – bears illuminating relation to contemporary historical concerns with the increasing disjunction between personal skill and political loyalty, and the manner in which human intelligence is employed not to the common good but ever more frequently to the advantage of the individual.

Dikē in Aeschylus is of course presented as central to the brothers' reasoning independently of external political and intellectual associations. It is important that the focus of *dikē* is for Eteocles different in the two plays, since its conceptualisation as manipulated by the Euripidean Eteocles constitutes the main theme, explicit and implicit, of his position in the *agōn* at least; beyond this, as with his brother, all thought for the implications of his behaviour is abandoned. The real concern and driving force behind his actions is, as we have already witnessed, the lust for power. In his Aeschylean counterpart, *dikē* is focused on Eteocles' perception of his own and his brother's behaviour and his own claim to the moral upper ground. Thus *Dikē* will send forth his warriors to the defence (415); and it is also *dikē*, he claims, that he should face his brother at the seventh gate: 'who has a greater right?' τίς ἄλλος μᾶλλον ἐνδικώτερος; (673). By an equally simple logic – in his perception – comes the evaluation of Polynices' behaviour as decidedly *not dikaion* (662-71). The play presents in distinction from Euripides a highly traditional

¹²⁶ Cf. the attitude to tyranny in Solon fr. 33.

¹²⁷ See further ch.2.2 below.

conceptualisation of *dikē* as closely associated with *Septem*'s theological background¹²⁸ as well as, characteristically of Aeschylus in general, with Zeus and cosmic order.¹²⁹ Polynices too claims to this principle of justice: he bears an image of *Dikē* emblazoned on his shield as symbol of his perceived right and actual determination to reclaim his possessions and political authority (644-8).¹³⁰ The two brothers' clashing claims to their individual conceptions of 'justice' invite the question of what *dikē* is in reality. The play uses the language of *dikē* to 'justify' anything; and what the brothers in *Septem* present as *dikaion* is far from any logical or reasonable conception of justice. Euripides also invites contemplation on the nature of justice yet presents its ultimate impotence from a late fifth-century historical perspective in relation to the destructive influences of sophistic teaching and individual political ambition.

This reworking and modernisation of the Aeschylean Eteocles on the part of Euripides marks a further exploitation of intelligence as a shared characteristic of the two figures. In *Septem* we witness in the 'shield scene' the quick eloquence and sardonic wit of Eteocles' responses to the messenger as he calmly refutes the arrogant boastings of the Argives: thus Tydeus' blazonry, depicting night (387-90), may soon represent the 'night' that is his death on the battlefield (400-6). Again, the assertion of Capaneus that Zeus' thunderbolts and lightning are akin to midday sunrays is coolly inverted in Eteocles' prediction that the god's very thunderbolt, in no way akin to midday rays, will prove Capaneus' nemesis (444-6).¹³¹ Aside from imparting an additional colour and interest into the scene, the harsh irony of Eteocles' repartees indicates a swift intellect and a related ability to manipulate language which in his Euripidean counterpart is applied to sophistic conceptions of power and personal ambition. This is contrasted with Polynices' declaration of his own simplicity of language and argument (cf. *Ph.* 469-70). The question of Eteocles' intelligence in both *Septem* and *Phoinissai* also, interestingly, prompts the audience to consider to what extent this is a characteristic inherited from his father

¹²⁸ We are again hampered by the loss of the two other plays in the trilogy, *Laius* and *Oedipus*, for a full appreciation of the curse in this and previous generations. See the general discussion of Hutchinson xvii-xxx; his approach to the curse and oracle (xxviii-xxx) is cautious given the lack of evidence. Cf. also Sommerstein 121-8.

¹²⁹ Cf. for discussion and refs. Hutchinson on 645-8.

¹³⁰ It is again a pity that the full history of the fraternal quarrel is lost to us, as we are precluded from gaining a fuller history behind Polynices' motivation in the final play.

¹³¹ Note also the black humour in Eteocles' view of the Sphinx emblazoned on Parthenopaeus' shield (539-44) as reproaching her bearer for the abuse cast upon Parthenopaeus at the hands of the city's defenders (560-2).

Oedipus (we think especially of the *Tyrannos*).¹³² It is thus clear that the characterisation of the latter figure is reliant on a sustained modification and adaptation of traits found in his predecessor.

1.4 *The Chorus*

In the role of the Phoenician Chorus who lend the play its title Euripides establishes a marked distinction from Aeschylus. In *Septem* the Chorus is integral to the main action and plays a significant interactive role, while in *Phoinissai* the Chorus' relative detachment from events allows for the odes' broad-sweeping historical perspective of Theban ills. The women's distant ancestral connection with Thebes¹³³ grants the Chorus the authority to perform this function while yet maintaining a sympathetic aloofness which focuses the interest on the chief protagonists, arguably to an unusual degree in tragedy. Of course, from both a visual and aural perspective the Chorus' foreignness establishes its highly original role, since their costume evidently did not appear Greek.¹³⁴ Their use of language is drawn to the audience's attention by way of dramatic convention; as in Aeschylus' *Persians*, the Chorus speak Greek, but such allusions as Jocasta's early reference to their 'Phoenician cry', Φοίνισσα βοᾶ (301-3), are intended to serve as reminder of their alien identity. Similar reminders are found at such points as their genuflection on the initial entry of Polynices, honouring their 'native custom', τὸν οἰκοθεν νόμον σέβουσα (294).¹³⁵ They are thus from an early point in the play established as outsiders, whereas in *Septem* the Theban Chorus' involvement in events is naturally central to the emotional power of their early role as panicked and helpless bystanders, as well as to their later futile attempts to dissuade Eteocles from battle.

The Euripidean Chorus' position in relation to the action, both 'inside' events and emotionally involved to some extent, yet detached to an extent unusual in tragedy, means that their connection with the play's development is a peculiarly complex one. The women's intellectual authority in their extensive knowledge of Theban history and comprehension of the city's current events is rendered more natural and credible through the early establishment of their distant ancestral connection with Thebes through the figure of Io (247-9). This also prepares for and explains their ability to engage with dramatic

¹³² On the point of hereditary characteristics in the Labdacids, see below ch.3.4.

¹³³ Cf. esp. 242-9.

¹³⁴ Note Polynices' comment at 278-9.

¹³⁵ Cf. Mastronarde ad loc. for refs. to the act of genuflection as non-Greek in tragedy and elsewhere.

events in an emotional and sympathetic manner. Yet on the other hand the Chorus' foreignness allows for the potential metatheatrical and decidedly unAeschylean implications of their role.¹³⁶ In the Parodos their wistful longing for their rightful part as worshippers of Apollo at Delphi in verses heavily reminiscent of the Euripidean 'escape ode'¹³⁷ establishes the women's identity firmly within the sphere of ritual external to their current situation. It also makes explicit their *choral* identity in relation to that sphere in their anticipation of enjoying ritual as a 'fearless chorus', χορὸς ἄφοβος (236). The establishment of the women's proper role as beyond the scope of the play and the emphasis on the anomalous nature of their part, as outsiders, within it, may imply a gesture towards dramatic realism on the part of Euripides. The women are presented as actual or 'real-life' figures with an identity discrete from the dramatic events and consistent with the part they might well play in contemporary socio-religious ritual. This marks their role as distinct from the more artificial or technical aspect of the tragic choral function in punctuating and elaborating on dramatic events. The women's unusual position and extra-dramatic identity is emphasised by the bipartite structure of the Parodos in contrasting the Chorus' point of origin (Tyre) and intended destination (Delphi) as peaceful and familiar settings with their current location at a Thebes under siege. Later in the play, the women's specific choral and ritual role is brought to the audience's attention at appropriate points of crisis as they turn to prayer for the city's salvation, and to mourn the Labdacid brothers' imminent destruction.¹³⁸ Yet these tentative movements towards the presentation of the Chorus in a metatheatrical context are not sustained as they are elsewhere in late fifth-century tragedy, particularly in plays with strong Dionysiac associations which exploit through choral self-referentiality the interrelations between ritual, cult, and the theatre.¹³⁹

The presentation of the Euripidean Chorus, broadly speaking, conforms to the play's intertextual relationship with Aeschylus in picking up on and modifying the choral role in *Septem*. Let us begin with the Chorus' dramatic function within the structure of the

¹³⁶ The contrast here is specific to *Septem*; scholarship has explored the metatheatrical function of the Aeschylean Chorus in the *Oresteia*, notably *Eumenides*. See e.g. Wilson & Taplin (1993).

¹³⁷ The bibliography on the 'escape ode' is not extensive; cf. however on the two much-discussed escape odes elsewhere in Eur. (*Hippolytus* and *Helen*) Padel (1974). See also ch.3 in Garrison (1995); or Walsh (1977).

¹³⁸ Cf. 676-89 and 1296-1307. It is important that these passages also exploit the Chorus' non-Greek ethnicity and mark the sustained tension between their foreignness and strong sense of identification with dramatic events.

¹³⁹ This is generally far more prominent in Soph. (e.g. *Antigone*) than in even late Eur., notwithstanding *Bacchae*. On choral self-referentiality in tragedy, see Henrichs (1994/5); he focuses on Soph., but see 86-90 on Eur. *Electra*.

two plays. In *Phoinissai* the choral odes construct the background to current events in establishing causal and thematic relations between past and present in both the Labdacid and autochthony myths while also linking the two myths through a complex nexus of imagery.¹⁴⁰ Verbal repetition and allusion throughout the odes¹⁴¹ contributes to the effect of a ring composition which lends coherence to the kaleidoscopic presentation of Thebes' history.¹⁴² Equally, the choral songs reveal sustained connections between the choral narrative and present-day dramatic events.¹⁴³ This marks a sophisticated development of the choral role in Aeschylus' *Septem*, where it is primarily the Second Stasimon which establishes the encroachment of the past on the present that was to dominate the action of *Phoinissai*. Here the Chorus' narrower focus on the Labdacid myth constructs the cyclical and inevitable pattern of ills which continues to beset the family. In elucidating the workings of the family 'curse' the ode establishes the cross-generational consequences of paternal transgression in the Labdacid line. The central stanzas allude to events treated in the two lost plays of the trilogy; while the 'grievous consequences', βαρεῖαι καταλλαγαί (767), of these past occurrences are made manifest in the present-day fraternal strife which frames the ode. The song as a whole serves as retroactive background to the First Stasimon and the Parodos, whose common tone of terrified anticipation establishes the broader consequences of the Labdacids' troubles while prefiguring the development of the play's main events. The ode also looks forward to the bitter lamentation for the brothers in the Third Stasimon (822-960), which brings the family's unhappy history to its conclusion. The Chorus' grief here for their fallen city and its ruler again looks back to their central part with Eteocles as well as to their expectation of suffering in earlier scenes.¹⁴⁴

From a perspective more personal to the Chorus as dramatic figures, we find similar points of contact between the two plays. These are focused on the interrelated questions of gender and age. The terrified young women who make up the Aeschylean Chorus adhere to the traditional female role within ritual and prayer in their retreat to the city's temples. Their fearful expectation from a heavily gendered perspective of the consequences of the city's capture – rape, slavery, maternal bereavement¹⁴⁵ – anchors their

¹⁴⁰ On the play's imagery see Barlow's (1971) index s.v. '*Phoenissae*'.

¹⁴¹ See Mastronarde's index s.v. 'repetition' (choral odes) for page refs. to the comm.

¹⁴² Scholarship has long noted the 'song cycle' that is *Phoinissai*'s choral odes: cf. e.g. Parry (1963) 53-242 and (1978) 166-73.

¹⁴³ See Arthur (1977). Cf. also Battezzato in Gregory (2005) 149-66.

¹⁴⁴ See further Hutchinson on the Second Stasimon.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. esp. 321ff.

interests in the private and domestic, as well as establishing their part as victims. The stereotypical presentation of the female as voice of suffering early in the play is adapted and inverted in Euripides, who establishes a gradually increasing sense of choral involvement in *Phoinissai*. Where in Aeschylus the near hysteria of the women in the play's first half is replaced by their relative detachment from the immediate crisis in offering rational counsel to their stubborn ruler, the pattern in Euripides is reversed. The play's early episodes present a generally aloof Chorus who offer only tentative advice to the Theban leader in exchanges where they serve as bystanders rather than, as in *Septem*, active participators. As the action develops, however, they reveal a growing sense of identification with the city's troubles and trepidation at their conclusion.¹⁴⁶ This becomes especially clear from the Second Stasimon onwards. Here an increasingly emotive quality in the Chorus' expression is clear in their fervent prayers for civic salvation and their wish for the non-occurrence of past troubles. The next ode in reaffirming the Chorus' connection with Thebes¹⁴⁷ emphasises their realisation of the 'shared griefs', κοινὰ ἄλγη, to which they alluded in the Parodos (243).¹⁴⁸ We note how the distancing effect created by the retrospective narratives of earlier odes, whose subject matter was firmly rooted in the distant past, has been replaced by a sense of immediacy, urgency, and anxious anticipation. In the Fourth Stasimon this is conveyed yet more strongly by direct self-reference (1054)¹⁴⁹ and metrical variety.¹⁵⁰

The increasing emotional involvement of the Phoenician Chorus consistently draws them from the outside into the action and highlights their role as victims of a war for which, like their Aeschylean counterparts, they bear no responsibility. This question of victimhood extends from personal suffering to their deprivation through the wider consequences of war of their rightful role in religious ritual. Unable to accomplish their journey to Delphi, the Chorus turn instead, like their Aeschylean counterparts, to futile prayers for the city's salvation (676ff). As the point of crisis approaches, they resort in the Fifth Stasimon to a pathetic lamentation for a city which has not yet fallen, and for

¹⁴⁶ This identification and involvement is tightly woven into the play's imagery, with the frequent exploitation of its title in connection with the violence, bloodshed, and death (*phoinix*, *phoinios/phoinios*, *phonos* and cognates) as recurring themes of *Phoinissai*'s parallel myths. See Craik on 41-2.

¹⁴⁷ See 828-9.

¹⁴⁸ Even here at this early point in the action the anaphora of κοινὰ (243-4, 247) lends a heavily emotive quality to the lines.

¹⁴⁹ Note also the emotive anaphora of γενοίμεθ' at 1060-1.

¹⁵⁰ The ode moves from an anapaestic opening to a combination of iambs and dochmiacs, which is particularly suggestive of extreme agitation and a strong point of contact with the early choral episodes in *Septem*. See Hutchinson 57.

brothers not yet dead.¹⁵¹ This fulfilment of the sole aspect of their female role to which they can in present circumstances adhere indicates the gross distortion of their rightful part in religious ritual – that of joyful worship and celebration. In *Septem*, we find something not entirely dissimilar in the women’s equally terrified and futile supplication of the gods and ritual prayers for deliverance. There too war prevents them from fulfilling their normal social and cultural role: prayer and lamentation are all that remain. The religious emphasis of the choral utterances is even stronger in Aeschylus, where the women as native Thebans are naturally more consistently engaged with the question of the city’s fate. In their fearful anticipation of the city’s capture their own implication in the war is brought out in the focus on loss of marriage (333-5) and sexual subjection to their masters in slavery (363-8), which emphasises the girls’ youth and victimhood in their deprivation of women’s expected place in society, *telos*. In Euripides the women’s virgin role as temple servants, *hierodouloi*, to Apollo¹⁵² eliminates this consideration¹⁵³ yet their enforced inability to fulfil their ritualised role in religious worship similarly constructs a bridge to the female role as victim, if from a differing perspective.¹⁵⁴

Both Aeschylus and Euripides bring the Choruses into confrontation with the chief male protagonists. In both plays this necessitates the generally anomalous involvement of the women in public concerns. In *Septem* Eteocles’ contemptuous attempts to suppress the Theban women highlights the breakdown of gender-spatial divisions in relation to *polis* and *oikos* that was to be fully developed in *Phoinissai*.¹⁵⁵ The women’s sustained intervention in civic life in their endeavours to dissuade their ruler from battle is picked up on and emphasised in the approaches made by the Phoenician Chorus towards the two brothers, the audacity of which is rendered still more striking by their position as foreigners to the city. Of course, the tone is different, since the foreign women, presented still very much as outsiders at this point, naturally cannot not display the same degree of emotional involvement as found in the Theban Chorus’ maternal stance towards their

¹⁵¹ Note esp. 1293-5, with the helplessness conveyed by the anaphora of *τάλαινα* (cf. also *τρομερὰν...τρομερὰν* in 1284-5, and *ἔλεος ἔλεος* in 1287). The motif of mourning for the still-living brothers recalls the lamentation in the house of Hector, yet alive, at *Il.* 6.499-502. Here in *Phoinissai*, notwithstanding their foreign ethnicity, exploited even here (1301-3), the Chorus are now drawn completely into the action.

¹⁵² See Mastronarde 208.

¹⁵³ Cf. however the prayer for children at 1060-1, elucidated by Mastronarde ad loc.

¹⁵⁴ See for further discussion ch.4.6 below.

¹⁵⁵ See for discussion ch.4.1 below; on the ‘space’ question in general, cf. ch.3.1.

headstrong ruler.¹⁵⁶ Yet the general effect is not dissimilar. We have already noted how in *Septem* the women's counsel inverts the gender-related prejudices of Eteocles and exposes the male as bearing characteristics traditionally ascribed to the female. In the later play, gender stereotyping is exploited and undermined likewise in the Chorus' defiance of the Paidagogus' early expectation of trouble from the female (196-201). The foreign women¹⁵⁷ likewise display rationality and wisdom in the face of male ill-counsel, *dusboulia*, and hotheadedness, of which they, like their Aeschylean counterparts, will become the victims. Again, as in Aeschylus, the male is heedless of the counsel and claims of the female. In the later play the Chorus' failed attempts to effect reconciliation and their equally futile claim to their rightful role within socio-religious functions is associated with Euripides' overarching concern with the disharmony between private and public life. This theme is again – as we have already seen – adumbrated in *Septem* and is through the myths of *Phoinissai* reflective of extra-dramatic topical anxieties concerning the breakdown in war of civic structures.

1.5 Sophocles

Antigone

The clash between Antigone and Creon over the burial of Polynices in the Exodos of *Phoinissai* constitutes the play's most explicit allusion to the work of the earlier tragedian, who had staged his *Antigone* some three decades before. The scene¹⁵⁸ is crucial to the play's development of Antigone's character from the naive and curious child of the early

¹⁵⁶ Note the affection at 677, and τέκνῳ at 686; striking from a group of women who have identified themselves as young (cf. 171, where they refer to themselves as *parthenoi*). This is more heavily evocative of Jocasta's later role in *Phoinissai*; see esp. 1.7 below on the influence on Eur. of Stesichorus.

¹⁵⁷ Eur. also exploits ethnic stereotyping in the Chorus' intellectual superiority to the Greek men in their perception of the speciousness of Eteocles' argument in particular (526-7). This inverts, or at least challenges, contemporary perceptions of racial superiority (see for similar refs. Mastronarde on 497-8). More specifically, the Chorus' reference to their non-Greekness here includes the decidedly Greek and modern term of *εὐνετία* (498), denoting 'good sense' or 'appropriateness', which flavours even their marginal part with the intellectual and philosophical cultures which pervade the *agōn*. The standard work on the 'Greek/barbarian' dichotomy is Hall (1989).

¹⁵⁸ Of post-1950 scholars who do not bracket the entire Exodos, only Fraenkel (1963) objects to the authenticity of the entire burial episode (1627-82), as well as Eteocles' instructions at 774-7; 1447-50 are generally accepted even by those who reject the burial-theme in the Exodos as a passing allusion to the events of *Antigone*. Within the Antigone/Creon scene, Mastronarde brackets 1634 as in all likelihood an interpolation, borrowing heavily from *Ant.* 29-30; and 1637-8 as metrically faulty (see ad locc.). Other more minor complaints are addressed by Mastronarde on 1639-82; and see *passim* on the scene. This study accepts the general integrity of the scene as an important part of the Exodos, with the main objections being to the several problems of Creon's speech at 1627-38 and the corrupt 1653. For discussion of the episode's internal difficulties and its place in the Exodos, see Appendix A.

teichoskopia to the bold young woman who will reject her planned marriage for a life tending to her exiled father. Her exit from the palace prior to the confrontation foregrounds in spatial terms her intervention in public and civic life. This is drawn to the audience's attention in Creon's command that Antigone should re-enter the palace (1635-6); this is her third exit from her proper quarters, following her earlier departure to the battlefield (1283), which came in bold contrast with her timid and novel steps towards the outside world in the early *teichoskopia*. In *Antigone* likewise the heroine's defiance of gender-spatial norms is made explicit early on in her departure from the palace for consultation with her sister Ismene (18-9).¹⁵⁹ Later in this play, of course, Antigone will cross beyond the city's boundaries in her attempt to bury her brother, and return to public territory for the exchange with Creon. The later play heralds the burial question as the matter of civic and religious importance which had been fully developed in Sophocles; it also picks up and expands upon the earlier dramatist's concern with gender and political authority in granting to the female moral weight in the face of male preoccupation with individual status.¹⁶⁰ This is made evident in both women's commitment to the burial in appeasement of their common sense of moral obligation to the dead, made explicit in Sophocles (74-7, 450ff, 943 etc.) and alluded to in his successor. The Euripidean *Antigone* in declaring that her brother's lack of interment is 'not lawful', οὐκ ἔννομον (1651), draws attention to the ethical implications of the non-burial from a broader political perspective.¹⁶¹ Here in *Antigone*'s wilful defiance of Creon the spirit of her predecessor is very much alive; note the bold dismissal of her opponent's edict (1647; cf. *Ant.* 469-70); her proud declaration of her intention to thwart it (1657; cf. *Ant.* 71-2); and her expectation of death as 'noble', *kalon*, reuniting her with her loved ones, *philoï* (1659; cf. *Ant.* 72-3, 96-7). This last, of course, also ties in with the clash between public and private interests as an overarching theme of both plays.

Both plays likewise draw attention through the character of Antigone to the ultimate disempowerment of women, since neither figure can wield any real civic power in the face of an autocratic ruler. The Sophoclean heroine's stubborn adherence to her principles comes at the ultimate price, and her successor finds that in a purely practical sense she has no power¹⁶² against an opponent rigorously committed to his misguided

¹⁵⁹ See Griffith (1999) ad loc.

¹⁶⁰ This links the *Antigone* of *Phoinissai* with the Chorus and with Jocasta.

¹⁶¹ See on the burial question below p.126 n.489.

¹⁶² The distinction between Antigone's (and indeed of all the play's female characters) actual power and moral/intellectual authority is an important one for *Phoinissai* as it was in *Antigone*; important too that while

perception of public interest. Both plays thus present gender roles in a more realistic manner in relation to contemporary experience. The manner in which this fundamental impotence of the female is revealed exposes striking modifications in the character of the Euripidean Antigone *vis-à-vis* her Sophoclean counterpart. In allowing his audience a glimpse of the earlier play Euripides highlights all the more powerfully by contrast his *rejection* of the passionate heroism accorded to the earlier character. Although his Antigone defies Creon over her planned marriage to Haimon (1673) – the implications of which we shall return to shortly – she also makes a gradual withdrawal over the question of burial. We see a diminution of her angry determination as she retreats with a series of requests which increase in their pathetic tone: instead she will wash Polynices' corpse (1667), or bandage his wounds (1669), or finally embrace his body (1671).¹⁶³ This, interestingly, presents a more conventional picture of female burial roles than in Sophocles, perhaps in accordance with the less dominant characterisation of the later Antigone, and marks a more pronounced element of realism in the later play. It is also more in accordance with female interests that the Euripidean Antigone had earlier at her brothers' death-scene expressed sorrow at their absence from her own future marriage and in their mother's old age (1436-7). This anchors her immediate concerns in the private spheres of family and *oikos* and affirms her feminine identity, which is underlined in her role in lamentation in the later scenes with Oedipus.

Yet what this invites is not a polarised distinction between the Euripidean Antigone as a traditionally female figure and her Sophoclean predecessor as a more 'masculine' character. We noted earlier how in *Phoinissai* Antigone rejects marriage with Creon's son: but it is important that it is not marriage *per se* which she rejects, but marriage with the son of the man who she deems to have treated her brother with such injustice.¹⁶⁴ Likewise, her prioritisation of her *philoî* necessitates her devotion to Oedipus in exile, which she naturally could not do were she married.¹⁶⁵ This associates her role with sacrifice as a prominent theme in the play, continually kept in the minds of the audience by the sustained references to her virginity.¹⁶⁶ Her departure with her father

the power ratios between the sexes are unequal, women are shown to be both morally and intellectually at least the equals, and not infrequently the superiors, of their male opponents.

¹⁶³ This retreat explains what has been misguidedly viewed as a problematic aspect of the *Exodos*, in which critics have queried Antigone's apparent double intention of burying her brother *and* following her father into exile. See again for further discussion Appendix A.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Mastronarde on 1673 for Antigone's tone here.

¹⁶⁵ See 1679, 1684. Of course, Eur. also had to adhere to the dramatic necessity of the surviving Labdacids' expulsion from Thebes, for which Antigone's choice provides an easy route.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. 88-91, 193-4, 1275, 1637 corrupt [cf. Appendix A], 1737-9 etc.

means her deprivation of her rightful *telos* as a woman – marriage and motherhood. Although this fidelity to the interests of her kin may be read as an affirmation of her feminine identity,¹⁶⁷ would not in reality marriage to Haimon and life in Thebes have constituted a more feminine destiny than a virgin's life of exile, the questionable propriety of which is drawn to our attention in Oedipus' own comment that such a fate would be 'shameful', αἰσχρὰ (1691)?¹⁶⁸ Antigone herself gives final thought to the maiden friends she will leave behind as she departs for a life of wandering 'in no maidenly fashion', ἀπαρθένευτ' ἄλωμένα (1739).¹⁶⁹ This draws attention to the anomalous nature of her future life, and to the loss of her expected social role. Sacrifice unites this Antigone with her Sophoclean predecessor, who likewise, if at a later stage, expresses her grief at her loss of marriage and motherhood (916-8; see also 909-10).¹⁷⁰ Both characters in their devotion to the *oikeia* – in their case, the family – are compelled by the merciless authority of the city to renounce any claim to their own still more private and individual interests.

Thus both plays reveal the difficulty in a simple 'gendering' of the two characters, who both make claims to their expected female roles yet who are forced to reject them. Both women's futile interventions into public life, in which each wields only moral authority which cannot translate to any practical efficacy, result in suffering, loss, and in the earlier play, a wretched death. The death-scene of the Sophoclean Antigone reveals a grotesque distortion of her desired female role in the virgin's 'marriage' in death with her betrothed, Haimon. Antigone's death by hanging – the usual female method of suicide in tragedy¹⁷¹ – is here associated with her virginity¹⁷² but the strongly sexual overtones in Haimon's clasping of her body and bedewing the girl's cheek with his blood makes this embrace a hideous consummation of the marital union.¹⁷³ In Euripides the interrelated themes of Antigone's virginity and lost marriage associate her actions throughout the play and her final enforced exile with an inversion and distortion of gender-related social norms, including those of religious ritual, in associating her character with other females

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Foley 142.

¹⁶⁸ This line is widely agreed to be unobjectionable, even to those dubious regarding large portions of the Exodos.

¹⁶⁹ This line is taken as the final genuine verse in the play as it is transmitted. On the likely ending of *Phoinissai*, see again Appendix A.

¹⁷⁰ On the difficulties of these lines, see Griffith ad locc. and on 904-15 for general discussion of the textual problems of the passage.

¹⁷¹ See for a general study of female suicide in tragedy Loraux (1987).

¹⁷² See Griffith on 1221-2; in contrast with Eurydice's death by the sword (1301), Antigone's hanging draws a connection with the unpenetrated state of her body.

¹⁷³ Griffith on 1238 recalls the similar detail at Aesch. Ag. 1389-90. Cf. the manner in which Haimon in *Antigone* is described as 'having accomplished the marital ritual', τὰ νυμφικὰ / τέλη λαχὼν (1240-1). On the marriage/death theme, see for further discussion Seaford (1987).

in the play as victims of civic upheaval.¹⁷⁴ The common factor of Haimon as highlighting in both plays the sacrifice imposed on Antigone reveals in Euripides an adherence to tradition; yet the later play makes a striking innovation in introducing another son of Creon's who will die as the result of others' mistakes. In the prophet Teiresias' announcement regarding the necessary sacrifice of Creon's son (930-59), an audience familiar with Sophocles expects Haimon; but Euripides disqualifies him in preference of another son, Menoeceus,¹⁷⁵ in his development of the autochthony myth which constitutes the later play's most prominent divergence from tragic tradition in the Theban myth. There is here a complex reworking of a pre-existing tradition which saw another son of Creon dying nobly on behalf of his city.¹⁷⁶ Scholarship remains divided on whether the Megareus of *Antigone* is to be identified with Menoeceus.¹⁷⁷ It is likely that Euripides picked up on the existence within the myth of another son and created the character of Menoeceus to suit his purpose of incorporating the legend of the Spartoi into the play. It is also interesting that where in *Antigone* Creon's wife Eurydice commits suicide on hearing of the death of Haimon (1282-3), in Euripides she is said to have died in Menoeceus' infancy, and Jocasta instead reared the boy, her nephew (986-9). This allows for the development of a quasi-maternal bond between Menoeceus and Jocasta, adding a further dimension to the play's themes of family and kinship and tying in with Creon's paternal love.¹⁷⁸ The grief endured by the father at the loss of the son he had tried to save (1310-21) recalls the closing scenes of *Antigone*, which presents from a different perspective¹⁷⁹ the public and personal consequences of Creon's political ill-judgement and re-emphasises, as Euripides does, the devastating effects on the family of ambition and war.

¹⁷⁴ See further ch.4.6 below.

¹⁷⁵ Mastronarde comments on the somewhat strained explanation for the disqualification of Haimon due to his engagement to Antigone (see on 944-6).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Ant.* 993-5, 1058, 1302-3, 1312-13; so too Aesch. *Sep.* 474ff., where Megareus, here explicitly associated with his autochthonic roots, is one of the seven defenders of Thebes. At *Ant.* 211 Creon is addressed as 'son of Menoeceus'; evidently the name is firmly ingrained in family tradition and may have been deliberately taken up by Eur. in *Phoinissai*, where Creon is again named as son of Menoeceus (690-1). If the younger Menoeceus is Eur.'s invention, the poet has drawn on the Greek custom of naming the male child after the paternal grandfather.

¹⁷⁷ The scholiast on *Ph.* 988 assumes common identity, as does Jebb (1900) on *Ant.* 1303; see also Vian (1963) 208-14 and Aelion [vol.1] 201-3. Mastronarde 28-9 views the Menoeceus theme in *Phoinissai* as straightforward innovation.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. 965 and Mastronarde ad loc.

¹⁷⁹ Of course, *Antigone*'s Creon is presented as decidedly less sympathetic than his Euripidean namesake; true also that in Soph. disaster results from Creon's despotic adherence to his conception of public interest, while in Eur. Creon seeks to *avoid* the demands of the state in planning Menoeceus' escape from the city and so death. There is thus a very subtle intertextual irony at work here. On the presentation of Creon in *Phoinissai*, see ch.4.4 below.

1.6 *Oedipus Tyrannos*

The presence in *Phoinissai* of Oedipus within the palace in building up the audience's expectation of his final appearance contributes to the play's panoramic view of the Labdacid myth and to its final emphasis on the complete destruction of the family. Euripides remains faithful to well-known tragic representations of Oedipus' self-blinding in Jocasta's report in the Prologue,¹⁸⁰ with a particular nod to the *Tyrannos* in the detail of the gold-brooch pins used as instrument.¹⁸¹ The incarceration of Oedipus within the palace by his sons (64-6) may well be an innovative detail; absolute certainty is impossible, given the limited evidence for epic treatments. In any event, the motif develops the background to the fraternal feud and the father's curse in *Phoinissai*. Of course, the brothers do not feature in the *Tyrannos*, at which point they are but children,¹⁸² and there is naturally no indication here of a familial altercation, which is an early feature of the myth¹⁸³ to be developed by Sophocles in the late *Colonus*. Yet despite the shift in the chronology of events between the *Tyrannos* and our play, the earlier drama is recalled by Euripides in various sophisticated ways. The role played by the prophet Teiresias associates his character with his familiar Sophoclean¹⁸⁴ role in offering advice – usually ignored, as in the *Tyrannos* and *Antigone* – to the city's ruler on the subject of the city's salvation.¹⁸⁵ Euripides adapts this motif to fit the play's autochthony myth and its parallel focus on civic welfare. The central exchanges between Teiresias and Creon on the necessity of Menoeceus' sacrifice (834-1018) recall the equally fraught scenes between the prophet and Oedipus in the *Tyrannos* (300-462). Euripides adapts in an episode of similar length the general pattern of the Sophoclean scene: here as there Teiresias is summoned by the ruler;¹⁸⁶ so too the respectful greeting of the prophet and the gradual increase of tension which is reflected in stichomythic passages as both Creon and Oedipus attempt to elicit

¹⁸⁰ See 61-2. Cf. also *Ant.* 49-52 and *Sep.* 783-4. It is an interesting diversion from tragic tradition that Eur.'s own *Oedipus* (which probably pre-dated *Phoinissai*, if by a small margin) sees Oedipus blinded by Laius' servants: cf. on the play Collard, Cropp & Gilbert (2004) 105-32. The blindness is also a likely feature of the epic *Thebaid* (see Mastronarde 22 and n.3).

¹⁸¹ Cf. *OT* 1268-70, where the pins are specifically those taken from the dead Jocasta's dress. There is no reason why this should be troublesome for *Phoinissai*, in which Jocasta survives: see Mastronarde on 62.

¹⁸² Cf. *OT* 1459-61. Jebb (1893) on 1460 points out that *andres* here does not mean 'grown men' but simply 'male'.

¹⁸³ Cf. fr. 2 and 3 of the epic *Thebaid* in West (2003b).

¹⁸⁴ We note that Teiresias does not feature in *Septem*.

¹⁸⁵ Of course, this follows a longstanding mythical tradition: the prototype is the exchange between Calchas and Agamemnon in the first book of the *Iliad*, together with Polydamas and, in the *Odyssey*, Theoklymenos and Halitherses. See also the predictions of Teiresias to Odysseus in *Od.* 11.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *Ph.* 849; *OT* 288-9.

information from the reluctant seer.¹⁸⁷ Where the Sophoclean Teiresias twice interrupts these hasty exchanges to expound with tantalising suggestiveness on Oedipus' past and likely future (408-28, 447-62), his Euripidean counterpart likewise offers two *rheseis* of slightly longer length (865-95, 930-59)¹⁸⁸, the first focusing similarly on the ingrained 'sickness', *nosos*, that is the Labdacids' presence in Thebes. In picking up from the *Tyrannos* the theme of pollution¹⁸⁹ Euripides prepares for the play's closing focus on the expulsion and exile of the surviving family members. The second *rhesis* of Teiresias places the scene firmly in context in dwelling on another aspect of Theban history – Cadmus and the killing of Ares' snake. In both the autochthony and Labdacid myths there is established a sense of ineluctable continuity as events from the past haunt and threaten to destroy the present.

The impulsive hot-temperedness of Oedipus in the *Tyrannos* is muted and translated to Creon and recalls a similar scene in the earlier *Antigone* (988-1090), in which stichomythic exchanges are again interwoven with two longer admonitory speeches on the prophet's part. It is also interesting that the continuity with *Antigone* here highlights Euripides' divergence from Sophocles in the *Tyrannos* in placing the prophet in confrontation with a less central figure – as opposed to, for instance, one of the brothers, or Jocasta – which in turn contributes to the diffused focus of the later drama. It is important in addition that Euripides emphasises the difference between the Oedipus of the *Tyrannos* and Creon in *Phoinissai*, since the former does ultimately – albeit after strong resistance – accept the truth of the prophecy. In Euripides, by contrast, Creon seeks in panic to avert its fulfilment; while even in *Antigone*, where he holds the city's leadership, his anxiety following the prophet's departure results in swift capitulation to the Chorus' counsel (1091ff). The particular impetuosity and impatience of Oedipus in the *Tyrannos* bears interesting implications for his presentation in *Phoinissai*, where he is said by Teiresias to have pronounced a curse upon his sons as a result of their ill-treatment of him as well as his own 'sickness' at his predicament.¹⁹⁰ Although the feud between father and sons is an ancient feature of the myth, there is little – if any – background to the altercation in the extant material; and it is the *Tyrannos* which develops the theme of Oedipus'

¹⁸⁷ See *OT* 356-65, 437-44; *Ph.* 915-29.

¹⁸⁸ It is also relevant that in *Phoinissai* the prophet scene is a prelude to the sacrifice of a young person, which is a common feature in Euripidean drama (e.g. *Heracleidae*, *Hecuba*, *Erechtheus*).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *OT* 97, 138, 241-2, 313, 1384-5, 1426-7.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. 872-7. In the Prologue Jocasta makes no mention of the sons' ill-treatment of their father (66-8); the incarceration of Oedipus is presented as the result of a desire to conceal his shame (63-5). The complexity of causation in the Oedipus myth is a constant throughout the play.

contribution to his own downfall. In Euripides, of course, it is the sons' behaviour which is the focus of the action; but these hints at their father's temper in the Knoxian sense¹⁹¹ imply an element of personal responsibility, or at least autonomy, in the unfolding of events. It is interesting how this is transferred from the Sophoclean Oedipus to a seemingly minor detail in the part of the Euripidean Teiresias, who alludes to a pre-existing hostility towards him on the part of the two brothers.¹⁹² The suggestion of the brothers' past negative behaviour towards the prophet echoes their father's actions in Sophocles and as in the *Tyrannos* contributes to the play's overarching multi-dimensional fabric of causation.¹⁹³

In the final scenes of *Phoinissai* the influence of Sophocles is especially strong. The helplessness of the blind and aged Oedipus who exits the palace¹⁹⁴ at his daughter's summons marks a painful contrast with the great king of the *Tyrannos*; the chronological switch is especially important here in heightening the pathos of the old man's helplessness. Yet the closing episodes bear illuminating comparison with those of the earlier play, in which likewise a once seemingly omnipotent ruler now faces a lonely and uncertain life of exile. Of course, in Euripides the exile is imposed subsequent to the brothers' deaths, reversing the pattern in all extant versions of the myth; and it is also true that in the *Tyrannos* the exile is presented as the fulfilment of Oedipus' own pronouncement of punishment for the killer of Laius. But the theme of his banishment is still an important point of contact between the two plays, especially since it distinguishes both dramas from other earlier versions of the myth, in which exile appears not to be a feature.¹⁹⁵ At the end of the *Tyrannos* Oedipus' future remains uncertain; in Euripides the potential for that future's realisation is suggested in Oedipus' own prediction of his death

¹⁹¹ See Knox's (1964) classic work on the tragic temperament of the Sophoclean hero (although it ought to be borne in mind that the main characters of Sophocles are in many important ways distinct as well as similar).

¹⁹² Cf. 865-6, 878-9. The previous offering of advice by Teiresias to the brothers may also deliberately recall his similar role in Stesichorus (see 1.7 below). It may also be drawn from *Il.* 1 and the suggested hostility there between Agamemnon and Calchas.

¹⁹³ This is not dissimilar to what we find in, for instance, Herodotus.

¹⁹⁴ Oedipus' incarceration in order to hide the shame of his pollution (63-5) is echoed in Creon's command that he should be taken into the palace to conceal him from public view at *OT* 1424-31. Eur. adds the detail of the sons' ill-treatment of the father in accordance with versions from the epic cycle (cf. frs. 2 and 3 of the *Thebaid* in West [Loeb] 2003b); and Aesch. (*Sep.* 786), where τροφᾶς is to be read as 'nurture'/'treatment', not 'birth' (so Hutchinson xxv).

¹⁹⁵ Epic versions, such as Homer and the *Oedipodeia*, have Oedipus ruling on following the discovery; in fifth-century versions his loss of power was a common feature. Earlier versions point at Oedipus' death at Thebes (cf. *Il.* 23 679-80, and Hesiod (fr.135) and fr.136 1.4 in Most ([Loeb] 2007 vol.II). Oedipus' death at Thebes is also hinted at in *Antigone*: see 49-52 and 900-3, where Antigone speaks of having offered libations at the graves of her parents and Eteocles. Cf. further Griffith ad locc.

at Colonus (1707),¹⁹⁶ to which Sophocles would return in his final play. The part played by Creon in overseeing the banishment in the Exodos of both plays bears interesting comparison. In the *Tyrannos* Creon is presented as firm but mild and sympathetic, easily swayed by his former ruler's request to see his daughters, and shows a gentle authority in commandeering the exile. In Euripides, however, he plays a role more correspondent with that of his despotic namesake in *Antigone*, impatient of Oedipus' common lamentation with his daughter and insistent on his immediate departure (1584ff): his tone is naturally appropriate to, and preparatory for, the immediately succeeding exchanges with Antigone over Polynices' burial.¹⁹⁷ It is also interesting that Creon has himself earlier experienced great suffering on account of a prophecy of Teiresias; now he is the one to inflict punishment.

This greater harshness on the part of the Euripidean Creon may seem entirely apt to an Exodos which tells only too powerfully of the ruin that has befallen Sophocles' hero, in contrast with the erstwhile imperiousness and obstinacy evident even in the closing lines of the *Tyrannos* in Oedipus' insistence on seeing his children prior to his self-imposed banishment. In that play his mental suffering and physical debility lend him, paradoxically, a greater degree of nobility and heroism than was accorded even to the king of the Prologue. Traces of his old pride are evident in his self-pronouncement as the finest man of Thebes, κάλλιστ' ἀνὴρ εἷς ἔν γε ταῖς Θήβαις / τραφεῖς (1380); and in his refusal to show himself unclean before the city: τοιάνδ' ἐγὼ κηλῖδα μηνῦσας ἐμὴν / ὀρθοῖς ἔμελλον ὄμμασιν τούτους ὀρᾶν; (1384-5). Yet is there not something very similar in Euripides, who likewise grants to the fallen king a lengthy speech delineating his woeful history (1595-1624)?¹⁹⁸ The old man's sense of dignity and honour remains in his closing refusal to beg Creon to renege on his edict, so as not to appear 'base', κακός, and to betray the 'noble birth,' εὐγένεια, of which he had been so proud in the *Tyrannos*: τὸ γὰρ ἐμόν ποτ' εὐγενὲς / οὐκ ἄν προδοίην, οὐδέ περ πρᾶσσων κακῶς (*Ph.* 1622-4). This is evident again in his later allusion to his defeat of the Sphinx, which brought him to the heights of glory (1728-31).¹⁹⁹ The recollection of his previous greatness and noble blood contrasts

¹⁹⁶ This study accepts – cautiously – the authenticity of this line. See Appendix A for discussion.

¹⁹⁷ Creon's harshness in the Exodos has been viewed as inconsistent with his portrayal elsewhere on the play; we should not, however, view this as a serious problem of the Exodos: see Mastronarde 593, and for further discussion, including that of Creon's stage-movements in the final portion of the play, see again Appendix A.

¹⁹⁸ This study accepts the overall integrity of what is a problematic speech. See for discussion Appendix A.

¹⁹⁹ On the irony of καλλίνικον here see Mastronarde on 1048; for the problems of transmission and defence of authenticity of 1728-31, cf. ad locc.

emphatically with Oedipus' general infirmity and sombre acceptance of a future yet unknown; as in the *Tyrannos*, it also underlines the completeness of his downfall. The emotional power of these closing scenes is heightened by the attention drawn to the corpses of the brothers and Jocasta. Oedipus' attempts to touch the bodies, guided in his blind helplessness by his daughter (1697ff),²⁰⁰ bear poignant resonance with the sightless movements of the broken king in the *Tyrannos*, unable to see his small girls before him as he laments their empty futures (1480ff). His living bereavement of his children as he faces life in exile is in Euripides translated to his actual loss of his sons to violent deaths.²⁰¹ There is also in Antigone's part here a lamentable realisation of the prospect which her father had predicted for her at the close of the earlier play. Sophocles in introducing the fallen hero's daughters, and Euripides in focusing on the bodies, with the suicide of Jocasta a common feature of both plays, both convey with great intensity the catastrophic effects of the longstanding curse on the entire family. Both dramas recapitulate in their closing scenes the continual encroachment of the past on the present as a common theme of both plays, which conclude likewise on a note of sombre acceptance of the inevitability of the curse's fulfilment, and of the general fragility of the human condition.

1.7 Stesichorus

The lyric poet Stesichorus had a profound influence on tragedy in general; his *Oresteia* in particular impacted strongly on Aeschylus as well as on Euripides, and his other poems are central to an intertextual appreciation of late Euripidean dramas such as *Helen*.²⁰² Yet it was his poem *Thebaid* which is most important for our play. The opening of *Phoinissai* with Jocasta's summary of her unhappy family history marks at the outset a striking divergence from the Homeric tradition of her suicide upon discovery of the patricide and incest.²⁰³ This set the precedent for Sophocles in the *Tyrannos*²⁰⁴ and probably

²⁰⁰ We think also of the assistance of Teiresias by his own daughter in *Phoinissai*; cf. 834-40; 953-4.

²⁰¹ This contributes to the general complexity in the play of kinship and generational continuity in the deaths of the sons before the father, contrary to all previous versions of the myth. The visual power of the scene, with the presence of the corpses before grieving relatives, bears illuminating comparison with the closing scenes of *Antigone* and Creon's lamentation over the bodies of his wife and son. The motif has something in common with the endings of *Medea* and *Bacchae*, two other plays in which a man is brought face to face in his lifetime with the destruction of his family line.

²⁰² See on Stes. and *Helen* the introduction of Allan (2008) 18-22.

²⁰³ Cf. *Od.* 11 277-9.

²⁰⁴ See also *Ant.* 53-4.

Aeschylus.²⁰⁵ Yet in Stesichorus' *Thebaid* the theme of the mother's mediation between the two feuding sons is clearly important for Euripides. The question of the unnamed mother's identity in Stesichorus is a difficult one.²⁰⁶ There is, however, a strong case for the survival of Jocasta, since the emotional power of the woman's speech would be strongly undermined were the mother-figure in Stesichorus to be identified as the brothers' stepmother, Euryganeia. The language she uses in Stesichorus is strongly suggestive of a biological link: note the heavy emphasis on her grief²⁰⁷ and the impression of close involvement in the current situation; so too the anxious foreboding of her future suffering, and the wish for death before seeing her sons dead and the city captured.²⁰⁸ The direct apostrophising of the brothers in the second part of the speech (218-31) reaffirms the impression of close engagement with the family's ills. The woman's address of the sons as παῖδες and φίλα τέκνα (218)²⁰⁹ is not conclusive evidence of her maternity, since *teknon* can be used to express the age relationship rather than the familial one; nevertheless this remains highly suggestive.

However, even if the mother were to be identified as the stepmother, Euryganeia, rather than the biological mother, Jocasta – and absolute certainty is impossible either way – this would not negate the case for Stesichorus as an important intertext in Euripides, who, recognising the emotional and thematic potential of having a mother present at the fraternal confrontation, could easily have transferred the mother's role here to his Jocasta. The presence of a maternal figure – not only as mother, but as woman, as non-combatant, as victim – is an important point of contact between the two texts. The woman's gentle persuasiveness in Stesichorus is translated to the authoritative role played by Jocasta in the Euripidean *agōn*; further, both texts posit the female as the voice of more stereotypically 'masculine' concern for the *polis* and of rational reasoning, highlighted by contrast with the passionate hostility between the two brothers.²¹⁰ Moreover, in both poets the female

²⁰⁵ The loss of the other plays in the *Septem* trilogy precludes absolute certainty on this point, although the silence surrounding the fate of Jocasta in *Septem* itself suggests that she was probably dead by this point.

²⁰⁶ Neither Mastronarde nor Hutchinson (2001) offers a definitive answer on this point. Campbell in his Loeb ed. of the text (1991) assumes that the mother is Jocasta; March (1987) 127-31 makes a lengthy case for the presentation of Oedipus' second wife Euryganeia.

²⁰⁷ Her ἄλγη (201) may also suggest the idea of pre-existing or even longstanding troubles (see Hutchinson ad loc.), which may support her long-suffering role as Oedipus' first wife Jocasta taken up by Eur. in *Phoinissai*.

²⁰⁸ Note the emotive repetition of μὴ...μηδέ...οὔτε...οὐδέ...μὴ (201-2, 204, 207, 210), and the heaviness and emphatic nature of her language (e.g. χαλεπὰς...μερίμνας in 201, θανάτου τέλος στυγεροῖο in 213, πολύστονα δακρυόεντα in 215 etc).

²⁰⁹ παῖδας is repeated also at 211 and 216.

²¹⁰ The mother in Stes. recommends the shaking of lots to determine the sons' futures in order to protect the city (218-31), evidently in the absence of their ability to resolve the quarrel.

intervention is ultimately ineffectual. Eteocles and Polynices as presented in the lyric will give no thought for either city or family,²¹¹ a feature common to their characterisation in Euripides. This apparently straightforward inversion of gender stereotyping in both texts is accompanied by a more nuanced representation of the women's identities, though, since the typically 'male' traits with which both are invested are powerfully contrasted with their female and specifically maternal roles as helpless bystanders to a war precipitated by the egotism of their male interlocutors. This is evidenced in the emotional force of their rhetoric²¹² as well as in the ultimate realisation of the Stesichorean mother's wish in the Euripidean Jocasta's final suicide. The survival of Jocasta in *Phoinissai* in moving away from the tragic tradition as we know it and closer to lyric also implies a deliberate departure from the dramatic framework which prescribed her premature end, and reaffirms both artistic individuality and the flexibility of myth. Euripides in keeping her alive marks a breaking out from convention and a defiance of expectation in a play which otherwise draws so heavily on earlier tragic dramatisations of the Labdacid legend. His lyric precedent thus affords the poet the opportunity to enhance his innovation and originality within the tragic canon.

Other dramatic gains are revealed in Euripides' adherence to and adaptation of Stesichorus. The lyric presents the mother's mediation between the two sons as taking place well before the fraternal battle; and Polynices' exile to Argos is advocated in order to avoid the predicted disaster which so heavily overshadows the poem (270-80). In Euripides the mediation scene occurs *after* the return from exile and at a crisis point of high dramatic tension. This is, of course, a necessary shift given the chronological limits of tragedy; it is also important that Euripides follows lyric in bringing the two brothers into direct confrontation in a manner unprecedented in previous tragic versions, which employ retrospective narrative by third parties in relating the final battle in the absence of a previous verbal confrontation.²¹³ Further, the need for negotiations between the two brothers, as offered by the lyric, was evidently highly desirable for Euripides, who required a plausible method of bringing Polynices into the city he is attacking. In

²¹¹ Cf. 285-7.

²¹² On Jocasta's speech in the *agōn*, cf. ch.2.1 and 4.2 below.

²¹³ This function is fulfilled by the messenger speeches in *Septem* and the Parodos of *Antigone*. The *agōn* in *Phoinissai* is of course the vehicle for the play's more pressing contemporary political concerns, although Polynices' introduction into the city and significant part in the play ought not to conduce to a more sympathetic presentation by Eur. of his character in contrast with earlier tragedies: this has been the (misguided) tendency of modern scholarship on the play. Polynices' presentation in the play is discussed in ch.2 below, esp. under 2.2. Mastronarde 26 also suggests possible Homeric influences in the fraternal confrontation.

Stesichorus, the mother's attempt to avert disaster by granting one son rule of Thebes and sending the other into exile with Oedipus' possessions as compensation (220-2) is adapted to the Euripidean agreement over a shared rule (478-80).²¹⁴ This allows the tragedian the opportunity for the study of power as a central theme of the play. The focus on human behaviour and motivation in Euripides distinguishes the play from the lyric, which evokes heavily the impression of impending doom and the inevitability of disaster. The mother's speech in particular conveys the impression of a family beleaguered by past, current, and the prospect of future evils. This appears to be suggestive of the family curse and the cyclical, cross-generational pattern of misfortune in tragic versions of the myth.

Yet it is Teiresias who indicates the prospect of future troubles for the brothers, and it is with his encouragement that the mother seeks to reconcile the sons. This role of his is important for the tragic tradition, since Stesichorus may well have established the prophet's stock role in the genre of the ignored sage. Of course, the type goes back to epic – Halitherses, Theoclymenus – but in tragedy's particular engagement with Theban myth the figure of Teiresias is especially prominent: he plays an important role in the *Tyrannos* and *Antigone*, and although he does not feature in *Septem*, we cannot dismiss the possibility of his having appeared in the lost plays from that trilogy. In both Stesichorus and Euripides his character is associated with the theme of political stability. Euripides adapts the prophet's role in lyric to *Phoinissai*'s autochthony legend and the necessity of Menoeceus' sacrifice while maintaining the thematic connection with the Oedipus myth through the imperative of civic salvation. Of course, the tragedy maintains direct contact between the prophet and the Labdacids in Teiresias' opening speech (865ff) on the subject of the doomed family's pollution of Thebes.²¹⁵ The allusion here to a previous altercation between the prophet and the Labdacid brothers reiterates the theme of the fraternal hatred and heedlessness to external counsel²¹⁶ which is made implicit in the lyric. The association of the prophet with a moral authority and wisdom – albeit ignored – has in Euripides additional implications for the play's presentation of its male characters, which recent

²¹⁴ On the problematic nature of these lines, cf. Mastronarde (who retains them) ad loc. Mastronarde 26-7 also views the idea of a shared autocracy as a certain innovation here, but we cannot dismiss the possibility that it may have featured in the *Septem* trilogy as background to the fraternal quarrel in the final play. In any event, the motif of alternating rule does not depend on the acceptance of 478-80, since it is firmly implied in 477 and is also picked up by Jocasta at 543ff.

²¹⁵ See Mastronarde on 865-95 and ad locc. on the passages (869-80 and 886-90) which have been the focus of textual objections (made chiefly by Fraenkel). Mastronarde rightly notes the disjointed and unsatisfactory effect of deleting these passages from the speech, which is also characteristically Euripidean in language and expression.

²¹⁶ And Eteocles himself alludes to having previously criticised the prophet (771-3).

scholarship has tended to contrast unfavourably with the strong characterisation of the women.²¹⁷

Yet although there is no mention of the curse of Oedipus on his sons in the extant fragments of the lyric, this does not preclude the possibility of its having featured elsewhere in the poem.²¹⁸ The presence of a curse does not exclude divine causation and related divination – as is amply demonstrated by the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus.²¹⁹ In our play the curse is modified and muted in Euripides' infrequent allusions to a pre-existing feud between father and sons,²²⁰ as derived from the epic cycle tradition. Of course, the very survival of Oedipus in *Phoinissai* is a likely divergence from Stesichorus as well as from previous tragic versions, since the division of his possessions (221-2) suggests that he was dead by this point. However, the possibility of Oedipus' exile in an earlier portion of the poem again cannot be dismissed; if this were the case, it would suggest that Stesichorus had set the precedent for pre-Euripidean tragic versions, which feature the exile prior to the fraternal quarrel. The later tragedian in reversing this pattern again indicates a deliberate expansion of the dramatic framework which not only distinguishes him from his main competitors in the genre and from lyric, but which also establishes the potential for a continuation of the myth – continuing suffering, and as in the later *Colonus*, final vindication.

This chapter has sought to show how through a sophisticated adaptation of his lyric, tragic, and epic precedents Euripides recreates the ancient legend yet allows for its later revival, in tragedy and beyond. The density and versatility of the Oedipus myth is thus perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in this panoramic drama which makes such full and sustained use of its literary heritage.

²¹⁷ See for discussion ch.4.4 below; and 4.7 on Menoeceus.

²¹⁸ Mastronarde 24 denies – too hastily – this possibility, although March 131 concedes that the curse could have featured in the lyric.

²¹⁹ The theme is especially prominent in the First and Third Stasima: see e.g. 362-4 (Δία τοι ξένιον μέγαν αἰδοῦμαι / τὸν τάδε πράξαντ', ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ / τείνοντα πάλαι τόξον), or 1025-7 (εἰ δὲ μὴ τεταγμένα / μοῖρα μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν / εἴργε μὴ πλέον φέρειν...). On the curse, cf. also the words of Cassandra at e.g. 1117-8 (στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει / κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου); and 1214ff.

²²⁰ References to the curse in *Phoinissai* come at 66-8, 474-5, 1050-1.

2. Politics and *Phoinissai*

A great deal of recent scholarship on tragedy has tended to focus on the extent to which political events and concerns as presented in the plays are relevant to contemporary Athenian life, and thus to explore the reliability of the genre as historical ‘evidence’. The placing of tragedy in its historical and civic context has sharply divided modern scholars, who have inclined either to put the emphasis on its parochialism and exclusively political function,²²¹ or on its universal aesthetic appeal as an art form.²²² One of the chief difficulties with such interpretations is the perceived need to ‘label’ tragedy collectively as fulfilling a sole function, which risks a reductive approach to or interpretation of a genre which in the fifth century alone produced 900 tragedies by a large number of authors, some almost certainly unknown to us, and whose surviving representatives differ so much in theme, location, emphasis, and dramaturgy. The central role played in the City Dionysia by tragic performances certainly does justify us in searching for contemporary allusion in the plays. However, that allusion need not preclude the emotional power of tragedy’s representation of the most extreme of human experience and suffering. Nor, for that matter, need an interest in recurrent or ‘timeless’ experience preclude allusion to the here and now. Both aspects are equally applicable to the genre: the intellectual and emotional interest of tragedy are not mutually exclusive, and may indeed be said in some instances to be complementary.²²³ Tragedy is, therefore, not to be defined in narrow or fixed terms.

One aspect of the reductivism attending either an exclusively political or solely aesthetic appreciation of the genre is that on either reading we neglect the varying degrees to which the individual dramas are concerned with contemporary politics. The political aspect of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* or the *Suppliques* plays of Aeschylus and Euripides is undoubtedly more pronounced than that of, for instance, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannos*. Equally our own *Phoinissai*, produced at a time of civic upheaval, concerns itself with historical experience to a far greater extent than, for example, *Medea* or *Helen*. What we thus find is a significant degree of fluidity both within the genre as a whole and within the separate corpora of the individual dramatists. This varying degree of political engagement is matched by a tendency to blur the distinction between dramatic engagement with politics in general, and interest in democracy in particular. There is no need to define the

²²¹ See, for instance, the essays of Longo and Winkler in Winkler & Zeitlin (1990); cf. also Seaford (1994).

²²² See e.g. the article of Griffin (1998).

²²³ Aristotle for one displays marked interest in the cognitive function of ‘emotion’; cf. Fortenbaugh (1975) ch.1; and see also Heath (1987) 71.

political interest as purely generic or specifically democratic. The difficulty inherent in scholarly inclination to either of these views is the tendency to proffer an interpretation in equally restrictive terms:²²⁴ but again, we need not resort to one or the other. Of course, some plays do reveal a marked interest in the mechanics of a developing democracy than others. Yet an individual play can, equally, concern itself with general political *and* specifically democratic concerns – as our own *Phoinissai* amply demonstrates. Further, while it is important that democracy is not always the chief focus of tragic politics, it is within a democratic culture that tragedy, the most exploratory of fifth-century literary forms, was able to address political questions and problems. Democracy with its emphasis on freedom of speech, *parrhēsia*, was a precondition for the exploration of these concerns in the public domain. Despite its origins in a pre-democratic era, the tragic genre flourished in correspondence with the growth of democracy.²²⁵ Tragic politics must thus be viewed as a blanket term applicable to differing degrees to each individual play for both a specifically democratic and a generally political discourse. The tendency of modern scholarship to view the genre in monolithic terms reveals a failure to appreciate fully the diversity of the plays, which cannot be reduced to a single model.

The pressing questions here are not only the extent but also the nature of the plays' relevance to contemporary experience. The setting of tragedy in the mythical world of itself allows for some distancing from fifth-century life; a certain 'heroic vagueness'²²⁶ in relation to the mechanics of political institutions, for instance, precludes a straightforward reading of the plays as mirroring contemporary practices or focusing *directly* on contemporary events and structures. The democracy of Argos in Aeschylus' *Supplikes*, for example, is an artificial construction reflecting the characteristics and concerns of a democratic government without evoking any specific contemporary democratic institution. In the same way the trial scene in *Eumenides* is no 'real' trial but rather a model trial which replicates without attention to literal accuracy some key features of Athenian trials to an extent sufficient to maintain dramatic plausibility. Yet at the same time the events of both plays are clearly identifiable with, even if they are not exact representations of, contemporary political concerns. This complex merging of the contemporary with the mythical can result in the intrusion of anachronistic features into the heroic settings. It is interesting that tragic anachronism is frequently deployed in conjunction with that

²²⁴ Cf. e.g. the firmly 'democratic' interpretation of Croally (1994), and the non-democratic – though perhaps not quite so restrictive – view of Rhodes (2003).

²²⁵ See Cartledge in Easterling (1997) 31-5.

²²⁶ Cf. Easterling in Pelling (1997) 26.

haziness of detail which allows the contemporary and the mythical to combine without too jarring an effect. Certain features we know to have been anomalous or absent in the Homeric poems are likewise withheld in tragedy, whose influencing by and sensitivity to the conditions of the heroic world restrains dramatic freedom to some extent.²²⁷ But at the same time, the tragedians *did* have licence to re-shape and recreate the heroic world; the hybrid setting of the plays, neither fully in the world of the epic poems nor in that of contemporary ‘reality’, allows the playwrights to explore at a more comfortable distance experiences which were real-life concerns. This in turn suggests the importance of anachronistic features in drawing the audience’s attention to those concerns.

This duality inherent in tragic anachronism calls for a similarly balanced view of the plays’ political emphases. Tragedy may *reflect* fifth-century developments without being specifically *about* them; the plays may mirror contemporary concerns without recreating current occurrences. We cannot assume that the plays are a direct response to specific events and situations, or that they would be experienced as such by a contemporary audience. Further, although these events may provoke the examination within the plays of contemporary experiences, we ought not to exaggerate the relevance of tragedy as a source of historical evidence – even in plays which do clearly recreate specific historical events, such as the early *Persae* of Aeschylus.²²⁸ Elsewhere, the novel function of the Areopagus in *Eumenides* reflects the democratic reforms instituted by the politician Ephialtes in 462, four years prior to the production of the *Oresteia*, so in this case the play is directly relatable to contemporary experience. However, the play’s heavy colouring by contemporary political culture, particularly in relation to Athenian foreign policy, does not presuppose a wholly accurate depiction of events. Equally it does not demand an authorial stance on the same. Tragedy’s representation of historical experience suggests a tension between the discursive or exploratory aspect of tragic politics and the exploitation of historical occurrences as a source of interest and artistic inspiration.

The complex relationship between literature and history should also alert us to the danger of reading tragedy as allegory. Real events or political practices are not recreated with absolute fidelity to contemporary experience; and so too dramatic characters ought not to be viewed as accurate representations of specific political figures. A view of the eponymous hero of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, for instance – or even of *Phoinissai*’s exiled

²²⁷ See Easterling (1985). She discusses tragedy’s careful evocation of features such as the written text and coinage, in order to avoid too sharp an evocation of the fifth-century world.

²²⁸ See Pelling in Pelling ch.1; cf. also his conclusion 216 and nn.10-11 there.

Polynices – as the banished Athenian politician Alcibiades, facing a problematic attempt to reintegrate himself into his native *polis*, neglects not only the individual and complex motivation and characterisation of the *mythical* characters, but also presupposes an absolute correspondence between historical experience and dramatic representation, which is incautious and inherently tendentious. Yet that is not to say that Polynices or Philoctetes cannot call to mind in varying ways Alcibiades’ circumstances and actions; the dramatic characters’ return to their homeland after a long absence, and their problematic relationship with that homeland, may for some viewers call to mind the experiences of the historical figure.²²⁹ This might have a particular appropriateness in the case of Polynices, whose attack on his homeland of Thebes was a topic of moral debate in later writers.²³⁰ However, the point stands that neither Polynices nor Philoctetes is characterised as ‘being’ Alcibiades; and further, that it is not solely through those specific dramatic characters that contemporary politics, or indeed the figure of Alcibiades himself, can be evoked.²³¹ It is also important that several key themes in *Philoctetes*, such as the marginalisation of individuals and their reintegration in life and death into society, emerge much earlier in the same poet’s *Ajax*. This again suggests that the plays cannot be too narrowly interpreted in terms of a single historical figure or event. In addition, there is a dubious selectivity in a reading which takes only one character from a play and invests that character with a historical identity.

Commonly related to an allegorical reading of tragedy is the question of the plays’ didactic function. The perception that tragedy ‘instructs’ its audience has frequently been paired with an exclusively civic reading of the genre, in the sense that as a political institution tragedy is obliged to educate the audience with the aim of civic improvement.²³² Such a reading appears to imply that tragedy can function as

²²⁹ For instance, moral/religious factors play an important role in the circumstances of all three figures: the questionable morality of Polynices’ attack on Thebes does not go unnoticed in *Phoinissai* and could recall Alcibiades’ relations with Athens following his banishment as a result of his alleged involvement in the destruction of the Hermae and profanation of the mysteries (Thuc. 6.28-9). Philoctetes’ wound is incurred as a result of his divine transgression (*Phil.*191-4). Bowie in Pelling (1997) also points out Alcibiades’ extreme physical hardness, which can equally be related to Philoctetes, 57; as can the concern with reputation and honour, *timē*. For more on Alcibiades and Polynices, see ch.2.3 below.

²³⁰ Cf. esp. Lysias 14.

²³¹ Cf. also again Bowie 58-61, particularly on the affinities between the Odysseus of *Philoctetes* and Alcibiades.

²³² Longo, for instance, views tragedy as created and performed for the ‘maintenance and reinforcement of community cohesion’, 18.

propaganda;²³³ that is, that the genre seeks to persuade the audience of a rigid set of political views and ideas, and in presupposing the audience's response to the performances such a reading also naively assumes that this response is uniform. Of course, we cannot deny the existence of a collective response, especially in a fifth-century audience which had experienced at first-hand the political developments which inform the plays to a greater or lesser extent, and which also to a large extent shared the same value system. Tragedy provides a shared opportunity for the audience to reflect on common social and political questions and concerns. Yet at the same time it also provokes a personal, emotional response in each of its audience members which is pre-conditioned not by the dramatic presentation *per se* but by the individual's own perception of and response to that presentation.

The didactic function of tragedy is an educative one, which promotes deeper reflection on and understanding of political questions, rather than a more straightforward instruction of the audience by a subjective authorial presence. To assume a particular stance on the part of the playwright is not the most productive way to approach the plays, and didacticism in this narrower sense, when paired with an allegorical reading of tragedy, implies a fairly crude form of teaching which precludes not only individual response but also ignores the questioning, probing nature of the tragic genre itself, which seeks to raise questions as well as to answer them. Tragedy encourages the audience to think *about* contemporary political experiences rather than telling it *what* to think. Propagandist readings of tragedy – either as a genre or of individual plays – are generally flawed, since they frequently rest on incautious assumptions relating to the playwright's moral and/or political views, which are scarcely easy to deduce from a genre almost entirely devoid of authorial presence. Further, the related reading of tragedy as inculcating a specific civic message is equally unsound, since it presents democratic ideology – that is, the set of ideas, beliefs, and expectations which represents the institution and practice of democracy – in a monolithic fashion. Democratic discourse is by definition fluid and diverse. Democracy itself was not static but evolving. Dispute and question within democratic ideology was certainly acceptable in, even essential for, democracy as a political institution; and it is this which is reflected in the plays.²³⁴

²³³ Ober and Strauss in Winkler & Zeitlin 237-70 offer a related thesis in viewing tragedy's use of rhetoric as aiming to persuade the audience of a certain political truth, whereas oratory itself seeks to persuade its audience to perform a certain political *action*.

²³⁴ See further Finley (1962) for a balanced and objective discussion of the Athenian demagogues. He too views dispute within democratic ideology as an integral part of the institution itself.

This is central to tragedy's educative function. The plays seek to explore and to analyse contemporary experience and simultaneously to examine the nature of Athenian ideology. Tragedy seeks to explore the complexity of the Athenian political identity and often reveals the vulnerabilities inherent in the ideology upon which the city's political identity is constructed.²³⁵ The plays seek to question and sometimes to challenge ideology. Yet that is not to suggest that it deliberately weakens or rejects that ideology; tragedy rather probes *aspects* of ideology without fundamentally rejecting the ideology as a whole, or the system which rests on it. Democratic ideology is itself a complex and multi-faceted entity which is expressed and explored in equally diverse ways. Yet there is no need to view questioning or even challenge of ideology as inevitably or even primarily subversive.²³⁶ If we look at Euripides' *Supplikes*, for instance, we see how ideology may be approached and examined, how its flaws may be exposed, how democracy in practice may be called into question, and yet its merits as political institution also affirmed. But it is generally characteristic of tragedy that it highlights those merits in a manner which is far from unambiguous. *Supplikes* expresses some concern about the functioning of democracy in practice, and in doing so suggests a disjunction between the constitution as depicted in ideology and its everyday reality. The Athenian king Theseus as champion of the democratic cause himself reveals certain tensions in its ideology: his initial refusal of Adrastus' request, and the eloquence which he condemns in the Theban herald yet which he himself deploys,²³⁷ as well as his use of Adrastus as support for a decision already made, perhaps do not sit too easily with the proud exposition of democratic ideals made by Theseus himself early in the play.²³⁸ But at the same time, Theseus does relent, and appeal to the people. The concern he expresses for his own reputation and for the city's interests²³⁹ - which might be viewed as undermining the democratic altruism openly celebrated elsewhere in Euripides²⁴⁰ - would not necessarily have been viewed in a negative light by a contemporary audience composed of a people no less sensitive to their own image²⁴¹ than the characters on stage. Democracy is ultimately triumphant; its ideology is in no way contradicted or subverted. Rather, the play exposes the fragility of

²³⁵ See again Pelling on *Persae*, and his conclusion 228-9.

²³⁶ Tragedy as subversive is argued by e.g. Goldhill in Winkler & Zeitlin 97-129.

²³⁷ On Theseus' rhetorical proficiency see Collard (1975) esp. on 513-6.

²³⁸ Cf. esp. 426-41.

²³⁹ Cf. esp. 339-51.

²⁴⁰ See e.g. *Heracleidae* 329-30.

²⁴¹ This was, of course, characteristics of the Greeks in general as well as of the Athenians in particular: see in general the intro. of Hall, esp. 3-13, on self-image in Greek culture.

ideology and the fallibility of expectation: actual experience does not always and absolutely correspond to popular belief.²⁴²

The fluidity of democratic ideology is represented in its differing treatments in the various literary genres of the fifth century. What we find is an ideological spectrum: at one end we may place civic oratory, including the funeral speech or *epitaphios*, which presents an image best suited to both the Athenians' self-perception and to their desired perception by other peoples, which they continually strove to maintain. The genre fulfils a more exclusively civic function in its celebration and advocacy of the ideals created and maintained by the *polis* than genres found at the other end of the spectrum, such as comedy and tragedy. As already noted, tragedy when it treats civic questions inclines towards a questioning of ideology – and that is to suggest no contradiction of or response to genres at the other end of the spectrum, but reveals rather a 'shift of register, not a tension or a clash.'²⁴³ The varying facets of democratic ideology are applied across the range of fifth-century literature. Tragedy with its ambiguous and shifting location between the mythic past and present was uniquely equipped to confront and treat more problematic issues in a manner not shared by other genres, such as lyric, which on account of both their composition for a more specific end - and indeed their very form - were unable to probe the implications and nuances of democratic ideology. Tragedy itself shares this diversity in democratic ideology. Individual plays reveal different approaches to the treatment of democracy. The plays' exploratory register does not preclude their ability to celebrate the city of Athens and all it stood for. The appeal of a play such as *Heracleidae*, for instance, to a city which prided itself on its tolerance of and clemency towards suppliants, would have been very great. Equally *Eumenides* in concluding on a triumphant note of newfound civic harmony correspondent with the elimination of violence, *bia*, by persuasion, *peithō*, and the channelling of *bia* through legal procedure, promotes Athens as a great and rapidly developing civilisation. Yet as with *Supplikes*, this celebration is neither unconditional nor one-dimensional: tensions may persist beneath the surface.²⁴⁴

Tragedy thus does not so much deconstruct, or contradict, ideology, as suggest the complex relationship of that ideology to contemporary reality. The intrusion into tragedy of contemporary events and experiences serves to illustrate that the ideal cannot always

²⁴² For more on *Supplikes* cf. the discussion of Burian (1985).

²⁴³ Cf. Pelling in Pelling 235. The present discussion is indebted to his argument there.

²⁴⁴ In *Eumenides* the play's closing note of conciliation and concord is tempered by a number of allusions to *stasis* in the prayers of the *semmnai theai* for continued civic stability: discord was to break out only the following year, and the democratic reformer Ephialtes had, according to several sources, been assassinated not long before the play's production (cf. e.g. Antiphon 5.68, Plutarch, *Pericles* 10.7).

hold. The ideal and the reality often fall short of the expectations the one imposes on the other. Yet we are not invited to deduce from this any comment on critique of either the ideal or the reality. That the plays seek not to indoctrinate but to inspire the audience to reflect upon the political events and experiences through which it had lived and was still living makes the tragic stage a uniquely stimulating arena for the presentation of problems and questions so often, and perhaps deliberately, left open-ended and unresolved.

2.1 *Phoinissai*: Oratory and Rhetoric

The production of *Phoinissai* against a background of intense civic ferment following the oligarchic revolution of 411 and the subsequent deposition of the Four Hundred as recounted in the final book of Thucydides' *History*, lays a framework for the play's abiding preoccupation with civic themes. The central debate, *agōn*, between Eteocles, Polynices, and their mother Jocasta introduces the question of language and rhetoric which was so prominent a concern in late fifth-century politics. The infiltration into Athenian intellectual and political cultures of sophistic thinking is reflected in an increasing focus on the teaching of language and oratory as a political tool.²⁴⁵ The recognition of the power of oratory and the potential for the abuse of rhetoric is a common theme in fifth-century literary genres, including oratory, tragedy, comedy, and historical narrative. *Phoinissai* likewise engages closely with the functions and effects of speech, *logos*, as key theme of the tragic *agōn* in general.²⁴⁶ The manipulation and abuse of rhetoric is an important topic in the play, as it had been earlier in Euripides in plays such as *Medea* and *Hippolytus*. In *Phoinissai* it is flagged emphatically by Polynices at both the beginning and the end of his main speech in the debate. The framing effect of the theme corresponds with the striking structural clarity of the speech, the conciseness and coherence of which purports to reflect the equal simplicity and straightforwardness of the argument therein. Yet Polynices' condemnation of his brother's rhetorical adeptness, which he contrasts with his own unembellished argument, rings hollow when we consider the remarkable affinities of his speech with the precepts of rhetoric. A stock feature of this is the opening distinction between linguistic simplicity as equalling truthful speech and the potentially misleading

²⁴⁵ On sophistic teaching and rhetoric, see Guthrie (1969) 44f and 179f. On Eur. and the sophists, see Conacher (1998), and Allan in Cropp, Lee, & Sansone (1999-2000) 145-56.

²⁴⁶ For a general introduction to the *agōn* form in Eur., see Collard (1975) and Lloyd (1992) chs. 1-2. On the structure of the *agōn* in *Phoinissai*, see Lloyd 83-93.

nature of oratorical artifice.²⁴⁷ Polynices' speech is carefully organised within a four-part structure, with proem and epilogue framing first his exposition on the current state of affairs (473-83) and his proposed strategy for the future (484-91), which forms not so much an argument as a plain statement of fact.²⁴⁸ His insistence on what is 'opportune', ὁ καιρός (471) is equally evocative of rhetorical style,²⁴⁹ and recalls the related concept of what is (most) 'appropriate', τὰ δέοντα,²⁵⁰ which in turn evokes the Calliclean influences in Polynices' general reasoning.²⁵¹ In particular, the medical metaphor he applies to his distinction between truthful and misleading speech (471-2) – the latter requiring the 'clever medicines', σοφὰ φάρμακα, that is specious language as disguise for the 'disease' which is the 'unjust', ἄδικος, argument behind it – is strongly reminiscent of the analogy between rhetoric and medicine evoked by Gorgias in *Helen*. Here Gorgias compares the effect of rhetoric on the mind with that of drugs on the body.²⁵² The allusion ironically suggests also the dangerous persuasiveness on which Gorgias goes on to elaborate.²⁵³ Polynices' condemnation of specious language as a mask for dubious reasoning – a point emphatically reiterated by the Chorus at 526-7 – quite naturally and with heavy irony invites closer analysis of his own 'argument', which is as conspicuous for what it omits as much as for anything else. The questionable morality of Polynices' attack on his homeland does not go unnoticed in the play, and for all his championing of justice, *dikē*, and the earlier focus on his sufferings in exile (385ff.), there appears to be no sufficient justification or excuse for the threat posed by the Argive invasion to the Theban population at large. Polynices has tended to receive an overly sympathetic treatment by

²⁴⁷ The antithesis between truth and falsehood is the opening note of e.g. Lysias 12. Fourth-century oratory was to develop this theme of the suspect quality of rhetoric: see e.g. the attack on Demosthenes at Aeschines 2.56-7. At 3.137 Aeschines refers to Demosthenes as a μάγος καὶ γόης, a 'wizard' or 'magician', in specific relation to the perceived malign influence on his audience of the orator's speeches. See Hesk in Goldhill & Osborne (1999) 206-30 on the theme of anti-rhetoric in the genre. Mastronarde on *Ph.* 469-72 also points to the echo in 469 of Aesch. fr. 176 ἀπλᾶ γὰρ ἐστὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἔπη ['The words of truth are simple'].

²⁴⁸ Lloyd 24 points out the affinity here with the first prosecution speeches in the first and third of Antiphon's *Tetralogies*.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Kennedy (1963) 66f and Radermacher (1951) B.VII.24.

²⁵⁰ On τὰ δέοντα cf. Macleod (1983) 52; for the rhetorical concept of ὁ καιρός he points (n.4) to the Spartans' words to the Athenians at Thuc. 4.17.1-2. Although there is undoubtedly some degree of overlap between τὰ δέοντα and ὁ καιρός a certain tension exists between the degree of subjectivity in the former, which presupposes the expression of what is most apt or accurate in the circumstances, and the avowed (since ὁ καιρός must in reality be subjective to some extent) objectivity in the latter, in the articulation of what is most appropriate.

²⁵¹ For Gorgias on *to deon*, cf. *Helen* 2.

²⁵² Cf. *Hel.* 14. For a similar comparison between speech and medicine cf. Isocrates 8.39. A related connection is drawn by Pythagoras at Plato, *Theaetetus* 167b-c, where he explicitly refers to the deceptiveness of political speeches in disguising unjust propositions.

²⁵³ See again *Hel.* 14, which expounds the various emotional effects of speech before concluding on the 'wicked persuasion', κακὴ πειθὼ, that can 'drug' or 'bewitch' the mind.

modern scholars; yet the play repeatedly draws attention to the implications of his actions.²⁵⁴ Polynices himself acknowledges that he has come to sack his homeland, although he is at pains to present himself as forced to do this.²⁵⁵ Yet Polynices' focus on the moral shortcomings of his adversary while neglecting the implications of his own behaviour cannot detract from the rhetorical contrivances of his own speech.²⁵⁶

The use of language as a persuasive and deceptive medium for the articulation of an argument devoid of principle is a pervasive theme in contemporary sources. Thucydides, for instance, reveals a marked concern with the elaboration of speech, *euprepeia logou*, and is a useful source of parallel themes explored by Euripides. In the Mytilenean Debate of the historian's third book, for example, Cleon expresses contempt for specious rhetoric and the susceptibility of its audience to its influence; yet as with Polynices, he relies on both the precepts he professes to despise.²⁵⁷ Cleon, introduced by Thucydides as 'most persuasive', *πιθανώτατος*, in the city,²⁵⁸ himself offers a speech heavily influenced in form and expression by the precepts of sophistic rhetoric. The novelty of expression, *καινότης λόγου*, as a defining feature of the speech²⁵⁹ is directly suggestive of sophistic influence and is thus ironically appropriate to Cleon's reasoning regarding the Mytileneans, which for all its appeal to justice is founded not on the principles of justice or moral rectitude but instead on an abiding concern with taking the course of action he deems to be most advantageous, ostensibly to the Athenians but also to

²⁵⁴ Those inclined to view Polynices more favourably than his brother are influenced by 154-5 and 258-60. Unbiased characters in the play – such as the Chorus here – indicate that he does have a just grievance, but this does not invite the audience to approve the invasion of Thebes. Furthermore, Polynices himself at 488 declares his intention to sack his fatherland, *patris*; and Eteocles at 605 reminds him that his actions mean he can expect no sympathy from the gods. Jocasta in the *agōn* will also tell Polynices explicitly that what he is doing is wrong. Polynices himself abdicates responsibility for his actions (see 433-4, 629-30), which are intended not in order to regain shared authority, as per the original agreement (478-80: see Mastronarde ad loc. for defence of authenticity), but to claim exclusive political rule, for which he is willing to kill his brother (634-5).

²⁵⁵ Cf. again 433-4, 629-30. We might think here of Alcibiades' case as presented to the Spartans at the end of Thuc.6, where he seeks to join with the Spartans in aiding the Sicilians: he is now turning against Athens as a result of necessity or compulsion, *ἀνάγκη*, in consequence of Athens' perceived betrayal of Alcibiades himself (cf. esp. 6.89.3-4). See further ch.2.3 below.

²⁵⁶ On Polynices' use here and elsewhere of techniques including alliteration, oxymoron, and *double entendre*, cf. Lloyd 86; for closer analysis of such features in the present speech, see Mastronarde *passim* on 469-496.

²⁵⁷ See 3.38.4-7. 38.7, incidentally, contains the only direct allusion to sophism in the *History*, and in appearing to evoke the public speeches made by the sophists in Athens marks a specifically topical reference. Cf. further Hornblower (1991) ad loc.

²⁵⁸ This implies rhetorical influence in particular, and corresponds with Cleon's portrayal in the *Wasps* and *Knights* of Aristophanes.

²⁵⁹ See 3.38.5. It is important that the concept of 'novelty' is on a contemporary cultural level inherently negative and in a rhetorical context suggestive of deceit or manipulation. Cf. Macleod 94, with Hornblower's qualification ad loc. on Thuc. 3.38.5. For the general structure and style of Cleon's speech, see Macleod 92-6.

himself. Scholarship has focused on the conflict here between justice and expediency, and the claim to the former as thin disguise for self-interest and the pursuit of what is expedient, *ta sumphora*, which triumphs throughout over what is just, *ta dikaia*, for all that Cleon seeks to present the two as complementary concepts.²⁶⁰

Contemporary experience thus infiltrates myth; yet it would be simplistic to read Euripides' presentation of that experience simply as a critique of or stance on contemporary intellectual cultures. It rather reflects contemporary anxieties regarding the potential for abuse of rhetoric, *logos*, in political contexts.²⁶¹ The teaching of language had by this time begun to assume a technical approach which could foster this manipulation of words and speech.²⁶² This is particularly applicable to the portrayal of Eteocles, who even more than his brother invites the audience to reflect on the precepts of sophistic rhetoric. His refutation (499ff.) of fixed definitions for concepts such as *to kalon* and *to sophon* 'recalls Protagorean relativism, Gorgianic scepticism, and sophistic manipulations of the *nomos-physis* ['convention' vs. 'nature'] dichotomy'.²⁶³ This focuses our interest on the manipulation of language from a different angle: Eteocles implies that it is only the actual *naming* of a certain concept which remains constant, while - and this is made explicit at the opening of his speech - their separate *definitions* are subject to re-shaping in accordance with individual, and hence varying and subjective, interpretations (499-502). Here, the distinction between name and meaning is put to a perverted use. The stipulation that equality is applicable only to the *naming* of individual concepts (501-2)²⁶⁴ is another manifestation of the abuse of words for a particular end. We may look again to Thucydides, who in his reflections on Corcyra at the end of the third book reflects on the lamentable lengths to which human intelligence can lead in man's ability to change not the *meanings* of words, but to alter one's own perception and evaluation of those meanings and with it one's ethical judgement on actions.²⁶⁵ Eteocles' championing of the power of

²⁶⁰ For more on Cleon's role in the debate, see e.g. Ober (1998) 94-104.

²⁶¹ Mastronarde, for instance, goes too far in suggesting that Polynices' repudiation of specious language constitutes an open attack on 'sophistic conceptions of truth and on positive evaluations of rhetoric' (see ad loc. on 469-72). This posits too close a relation between contemporary concerns and the mythical characters. Similarly Mastronarde's association of Polynices' refutation of the 'unjust argument', ὁ ἄδικος λόγος, with the 'lesser argument', ὁ ἥττων λόγος, familiar from such works as Aristophanes' *Clouds* would be more convincing if the latter term were actually mentioned by Polynices. As it is, the 'weaker argument' is equally evocative of earlier Euripidean agonistic scenes, for instance the part of Jason in *Medea*.

²⁶² For further sources regarding contemporary concerns about *logos*, see Hesk (2000).

²⁶³ Thus Mastronarde ad loc.

²⁶⁴ On 'equality' as *homonoia*, cf. Guthrie 148f.

²⁶⁵ See 3.82.4.

logos at 516-7 finds echoes in the *Helen* of Gorgias and in Plato's *Gorgias*.²⁶⁶ Eteocles also gives voice to similarly advanced ideas in his deification of autocracy, *turannis*, at 506.²⁶⁷ Yet – as with Cleon – there is revealed an inconsistency in Eteocles' closing admission that injustice, ἀδικία, is 'a very fine thing', κάλλιστον, if it is in the name of tyranny (524-5). The assertion that ἀδικία is acceptable, indeed admirable, here exposes the manner in which his reasoning constitutes a type of instrumentalism, in that it can explain or 'justify' any action. Eteocles' admission that unjust behaviour is excusable if it is used for the attainment of absolute power is not so very far from the attitude towards injustice offered by Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*: excess – especially in the name of attaining autocracy – may be called injustice, but the perpetrator of that injustice gains far more personal benefit by his behaviour than he would have gained by behaving 'justly': τὸ δ' ἄδικον [sc. τυγχάνει] ἑαυτῷ λυσιτελοῦν τε καὶ συμφέρον.²⁶⁸ Again, as with Polynices or indeed Cleon, Eteocles' rhetorical adeptness (here focused specifically on the sophistication of his ideas in contrast with his brother's sophisticated presentation of traditional ideas) is exposed as a mask for an argument based not on principle but on the desire for personal advantage.

In Jocasta's speech we are invited to examine *logos* from a different angle. Her articulation of highly traditional ideas stands in marked contrast with the sophistic theorising of Eteocles in particular. The formation of her argument for equality in scientific or cosmic terms suggests the traditional Greek association of the natural and cosmic orders.²⁶⁹ Her analogy of night and day's equal roles (543-5) to her recommended concept of equal rule is evocative in particular of Heraclitus and Parmenides, both of whom equate the alternation of day and night with a sense of justice or cosmic order.²⁷⁰ Jocasta's criticism of *turannis* and the attendant evils of ambition²⁷¹ and greed is again correspondent with conventional thought, which continually associated *turannis* with wealth.²⁷² The dangers of excess (inferred in Jocasta's recommendation that one should be

²⁶⁶ Cf. e.g. *Helen* 8; and Plato, *Gorgias* 456a-c.

²⁶⁷ Similar personifications, characteristic of late Eur., recur at 532 (*Philotimia*, ambition), 536 (*Isotēs*, equality), and 782 (*Eulabeia*, caution): on the deification of abstracts, cf. Kannicht (1969) on Eur. *Hel.* 559-60; and on the relation of the technique to contemporary intellectual cultures, cf. Craik on *Ph.* 506.

²⁶⁸ See esp. *Rep.* book 1 344a-c.

²⁶⁹ On this theme see e.g. Vlastos (1947).

²⁷⁰ See Mastronarde on 543-5 for refs. The original meaning of *dikē*, of course, denoted cosmic order: cf. Lloyd 91 n.81.

²⁷¹ *Philotimia* (532) is discussed under 2.2 below.

²⁷² See e.g. Soph. *OT* 380-1; *Ant.* 1168-9.

content with what is sufficient, τὰ ἀρκοῦνθ', 554;²⁷³ at 584 she warns against excess, τὸ λίαν) are reminiscent of, for example, the Herodotean and Pindaric association of great wealth and authority with insolence, *hubris*, and the related risk of divine resentment, *phthonos*, which may lead to disaster.²⁷⁴ We also note that aspects of Jocasta's discourse are echoed in later texts, such as Plato. In *Gorgias*, for instance, Socrates speaks of fellowship or communion, *koinōnia*, together with justice, as a cosmic principle governing the divine and human orders; the point is reiterated in the subsequent conventional association of *isotēs* with political harmony.²⁷⁵ We might also recall the related discussion in *Protagoras* of *adikia* as provocative of discord, or Socrates' exposition of a similar view in the *Republic*.²⁷⁶ The associated principle of *isotēs* as bound with friendship, *philotēs*, in the maintenance of political harmony – to which Jocasta alludes at 536-8 – is echoed in the proverbial principle cited in *Laws* that *isotēs* naturally engenders *philotēs*.²⁷⁷ The problematisation of the relationship between the natural and social orders to which Jocasta alludes was a feature of contemporary sophistic debates on the *nomos-phusis* dichotomy; we may look again to *Gorgias*, now to Callicles' dismissal of 'equality' in favour of a 'natural law' which dictates that the strong will and should inevitably gain superiority over the weak, and acquire the 'greater share', *to pleon*.²⁷⁸ Jocasta's speech is thus a sophisticated exposition of complex ideas drawn from traditional thought which were to be developed and manipulated in the context of sophistic debate and rhetoric in the Platonic texts.

Yet for all the conventionality of Jocasta's thought, it is striking in the extreme that she expresses herself in language fully correspondent with the precepts of rhetoric and with sophistic terminology, both of which relate her speech both structurally and stylistically to that previously voiced by Eteocles at 499ff. The structural coherence of the speech, answering separately to the individual arguments of each of the two brothers, is

²⁷³ Lines 549-67 have been subject to suspicion: Kovacs (2002) deletes the entire section, with poor justification; the passage coheres both structurally and thematically with the main body of the speech. Mastronarde ad loc. offers a cogent defence of authenticity.

²⁷⁴ We are reminded, for instance, of the story of Polycrates in Hdt.III and the implicit warnings offered by Pindar to the Syracusan ruler Hieron in *Ol.*1 and *P.*1. The connection in both writers between *to lian*, *hubris*, and divine displeasure is linked to Jocasta's own traditional view of the gods as wielding control over human fortune (555-6). See Mastronarde ad loc. for refs. to similar ideas elsewhere; and for the textual interpretation of 555-8. He rightly separates 555-7 from 558, which last forms a somewhat superfluous and reiterative *gnōmē* and is thus best deleted.

²⁷⁵ Cf. *Gorg.* 507e6-508a7. On the implications here of 'geometrical', γεωμετρική, in qualification of *isotēs*, cf. Dodds (1959) ad loc.

²⁷⁶ See *Prot.* 322b-d; and *Rep.* 352a-d.

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Laws* 757a5-6. On the relation between friendship and equality, see further Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 6-8.

²⁷⁸ Cf. *Gorg.* 483c-e.

matched by internal verbal repetitions which impart a clarity coloured by the rhetorical persuasiveness of Jocasta's impassioned tone, her use of *gnōmai*, exclamation, and rhetorical question.²⁷⁹ The first section of the speech in particular forms a neat response to the main points of Eteocles' argument: her conception of *sophia* as fixed and unchanging (530) – not unlike Polynices' earlier confident conception of *dikē* – picks up and repudiates Eteocles' relativist interpretation of 'wisdom' (499-502). The personification of *philotimia* (531-2) as the 'basest of gods' responds to Eteocles' honouring of *turannis* as the 'greatest of the gods', τὴν θεῶν μεγίστην, at 506. His view of *adikia* as *kalliston* if it is in the name of *turannis* (524-5) finds its balanced antithesis in Jocasta's recommendation that adherence to *isotēs* is 'finer', κάλλιον (535-6). Her exposition of the virtues of *isotēs* equally contradicts her son's repudiation of 'equality' at 501. It is particularly interesting that her argument against absolute power is heavily reminiscent in linguistic terms of, for instance, the sophistic theorising of Callicles or Thrasymachus, whose championing of power is upheld in Eteocles' desire for 'the greater part', τὸ πλεόν (509), an ambition against which Jocasta's opposition of the lesser share, τοῦλάχιστον, to τὸ πλεόν (539-40), seeks to warn. Jocasta's language thus makes the play's engagement with sophistic thought a complex one, in that there is no simple correlation between sophistic influence and moral degeneration. Sophistic(ated) rhetoric is not inherently evil or threatening; but it is dangerous in the wrong hands.

Of course, we note also the natural relation between τὸ πλεόν and greed, *pleonexia*, in Jocasta's subsequent denouncement of the grasping nature of the tyrant (552-3). We recall the Calliclean belief that the more powerful have a right to claim to τὸ πλεόν, grudged to them by the weaker, who for Callicles constitute the undifferentiated mass, and who interpret *pleonexia* as 'injustice'. Lacking the strength to acquire τὸ πλεόν, this party maintains its preference for *isotēs*;²⁸⁰ it attempts to assert its moral rights in the absence of the power to compel. Jocasta's condemnation of Eteocles' striving for material wealth neatly answers his earlier championship of τὸ πλεόν in her view of that concept as an advantage only in name (552-3). In her subsequent address to Polynices (568ff), shades of contemporary language recur in, for instance, the 'folly', *amathia*, to which Jocasta

²⁷⁹ See Mastronarde on 528-85.

²⁸⁰ Cf. *Gorg.* 483b-d. See also Thrasymachus' reasoning on the τύραννος as 'grasping', πλεονέκτης, *Rep.* 344a.

ascribes the Argive King Adrastus' assistance of her son (569),²⁸¹ and particularly in Polynices' own 'stupidity', *asunēsia*, in attacking Thebes (570).²⁸² The internal balance and coherence of the speech is heightened by the concluding exposition of the potential results of Polynices' attack (571ff), mirroring the same as directed at Eteocles (561ff). Note also the framing effect lent by the opening emphasis on *sophia* (530), and the closing attack on the *amathia* of both sons (584), which last reiterates the opening of Jocasta's address to Polynices on the same theme (569-70). The overall effect is one of high rhetorical sophistication achieved not only through the speech's clarity of structure and presentation but also through its remarkable affinity with contemporary intellectual cultures.

Yet for all the impressiveness of Jocasta's rhetoric, its impact on the dramatic action is negligible: her two sons, heedless, exit to battle and disaster ensues. This focuses our interest on another aspect of *logos* – its failure to effect persuasion and reconciliation. Historical experience offers similar exploration of the futility of rhetorical appeal: we need think only of the Plataeans in the third book of Thucydides, or the Melians in the fifth; here as in Euripides, the highest degree of linguistic sophistication and emotional power is fruitless in the face of human ambition and self-interest. The Plataeans' appeal is heavily reliant on the precepts of forensic oratory, both in expression and theme; the rhetorical intricacy of the speech, matched by the complex and ultimately self-defeating nature of the argument, is futile. It cannot disguise the Plataeans' inability to answer the Spartans' question regarding the Plataeans' own previous assistance of Sparta during the war. The speech is exposed as a tangle of contradictions which traps the Plataeans by the force of their own rhetorical adeptness. There is, of course, in addition a bitter irony in their dependence on oratorical technique within this pseudo-legalistic setting to which they themselves draw attention.²⁸³ The Spartans' cynicism is masked by the veneer of their claim to justice. In the Melian dialogue, the defeat of *logos* by human self-seeking is even more starkly represented, since the Melians' appeal to justice is met with a cynicism their

²⁸¹ The word recurs at 584. The language of *amathia* was common in the intellectual vocabulary of the second half of the fifth century, and suggests the association of an intellectual shortcoming with a moral culpability; cf. Mastronarde on 393-4 and Bond (1981) on Eur. *Her.* 347.

²⁸² We have already noted the Chorus' earlier approbation of Polynices' speech as 'sensible' or 'judicious', ξοφρά (497-8); on Eur.'s predilection for the language of intelligence, *sunesis*, cf. Mastronarde on 1506, and on the relation of the concept to contemporary intellectual cultures, see his n. on 1727.

²⁸³ They had expected a trial more in accordance with rhetorical practice (3.53.1), not one where the verdict has already been decided (53.4). The Spartans have set themselves up as impartial jurors when in reality their decision has indeed already been made – a decision based not on what is *dikaion*, but as with the Athenians in relation to Mytilene, on what is most expedient to themselves. For more on the Plataean Debate, see Macleod 103-22.

adversaries do not even seek to disguise. The Athenians' desire to protect and to increase their own power is plainly presented as an insuperable obstacle to the Melians' struggle for survival.²⁸⁴

This inability of rhetoric to withstand ambition is contrasted powerfully with Jocasta's faith in the concept of *logos*, as evident in her opening speech at the beginning of the debate: βραδεῖς δὲ μῦθοι πλεῖστον ἀνύτουσιν σοφόν (453). She praises reasoned debate as the means for the solution of conflict. But Eteocles' similar confidence in *logos* as the preferred option to brute force (πᾶν γὰρ ἐξαίρει λόγος / ὃ καὶ σίδηρος πολεμίων δράσειεν ἄν, 516-7) is ironic, considering that he himself will refuse to engage in reasoned discussion with his brother, and that violence will prevail over speech in direct contradiction of his assurance here.²⁸⁵ It is important that the *agōn* as a whole highlights the ambivalence of *logos* in its double meaning of 'word' or 'reason' (in both senses). *Logos* encompasses the concepts of both expression or language, or argument.²⁸⁶ Jocasta's confidence in the merits of reasoned debate emphasises the advantages of *logos* within a stable political setting. Her role as, arguably, the most intelligent character in the play, who seeks to uphold the best interests of the *polis*, implies the positive aspect of persuasive speech in contrast with the sophistic manipulation of *logos* found in the rhetoric of her sons. In a purely political context, as here, *logos* as a process of the *polis* is a means of treating collective matters; but its ultimate failure in the *agōn* suggests a fairly pessimistic view of its efficacy in the face of human ambition. The *agōn* in revealing the limits of reasoned persuasion in turn implies the limitations of human reason more generally as an organ of control over passion in all its forms.²⁸⁷ Yet that is not to suggest that the *agōn*, or indeed the play as a whole, is in any way anti-rhetoric. What it does is expose the strengths and – more prominently – the shortcomings of *logos*, which may be used as a tool for good or for ill.²⁸⁸ *Logos* will always struggle in the face of passion and violence; and its ultimate failure to reconcile the two brothers implies its limitations as well as the limitations of human intelligence of which *logos* in all its forms is a product. This is emphasised by the manner in which the play exposes in addition the holes in the

²⁸⁴ See further on the Melian dialogue the discussion of Macleod 52-67; and the comm. of Hornblower (2008) 215-256.

²⁸⁵ Mastronarde on 516 points out the military nuance in the verb ἐξαίρει, comparing Gorg. *Hel.* 8; the comparison is of course appropriate in the context of rhetorical manipulation; the suggestion of violence implicit in the strong verb here also corresponds with the triumph of *bia* over rational debate as the ultimate outcome of the *agōn*.

²⁸⁶ For a study of the functions of *logos* in tragedy, see Buxton (1982).

²⁸⁷ See further Dodds (1929) 97-104.

²⁸⁸ See on the positive functions of *logos* in the play ch. 4.2 below.

arguments of the brothers – that is, their reasoning (as opposed simply to their methods of expression) in their unsuccessful attempts at self-justification. The play thus offers a bleak recognition of the triumph of personal ambition and human emotion over logic and principle.

2.2 Public versus Private: *Philotimia*

The *agōn* in exploring the effects of personal ambition on political structures offers not so much a debate on differing power forms as a study in both the greed for and use (and abuse) of power, for which the two brothers' aims proves destructive not only to the *polis* but also to themselves. Ambition is thus revealed to be self-defeating. Further, despite the brothers' own firm claims to be acting in accordance with public interests,²⁸⁹ it is their own identical but incompatible ambitions which prove to be the greatest danger to civic stability. This perception that the real threat to the *polis* comes not from outside but from within provokes illuminating comparison with contemporary historical experience. Athens had recently seen the breakdown of democracy following the oligarchic revolution of 411, and during the subsequent conflict between the oligarchic and democratic factions the city struggled for stability in the face of its shifting political regime. Historical narrative perceives that the gravest threat to Athens' integrity is the civic discord, *stasis*, engendered by internal disagreements; indeed, it is *stasis* to which Thucydides for one (and Xenophon in the early part of his *Hellenica*) early on in his work points as the real cause of Athens' ultimate defeat.²⁹⁰ The oligarchic revolution, instigated by the leaders of the Athenian forces at Samos, had sown the seeds of dissension among a people forced to accept an unwanted regime.²⁹¹ The physical and political division between the oligarchic rulers in the city and the Athenian army on Samos, which sought to re-establish the democracy, was deepened by the internal divisions within the opposing factions as the Athenians on

²⁸⁹ Note esp. the moral stand taken by Eteocles at 604ff., denying his brother any share in the attack against which he waged war, and his prayer to *Eulabeia* at 782-3 for Thebes' salvation; Polynices for his part expresses his conviction at 629-30 that should the city fall his brother alone is to blame. The *agōn* of course exposes the fallaciousness of both brothers' claims to a moral higher ground.

²⁹⁰ Cf. 2.65.12: despite the magnitude of the Sicilian disaster in 413, Athens was still able to hold out against all its former and new adversaries; ultimately, however, κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας διαφορὰς περιπεσόντες ἐσφάλησαν ['Tripping up over their own private quarrels they were brought down.']. Sicily is later presented as something of an anti-climax, since it was not the end, or even the beginning of the end: what destroys Athenian power is internal dissolution.

²⁹¹ See 8.54.1.

Samos deposed those generals suspected of having oligarchic sympathies.²⁹² Meanwhile the oligarchs at home were divided between the more moderate and those who possessed individual political ambitions, not content with remaining equal in authority to their peers.²⁹³

Such was the background against which *Phoinissai* was produced. Let us look more closely at *philotimia* in both its dramatic and historical contexts. The two brothers' striving for exclusive political rule marks a complex relationship between self and *polis*: their mutual concern with self-justification²⁹⁴ and their professed patriotism²⁹⁵ fail to disguise the manner in which the welfare of the city at large is ultimately subordinated to their egotism as each goes to battle heedless of the consequences to both himself and the city. Polynices claims love for a *patris* against which the desire for material advantage has led him to wage war;²⁹⁶ he laments the breakdown in familial stability to which the fraternal conflict has led (cf. 374), but later in confrontation with his brother he will abandon any thought for domestic security (624). Yet the *polis* too stakes its claim, as Jocasta's concern for civic welfare in the Prologue makes clear (note especially 81-7). Her tone here, preparing the audience for the authoritative role she will assume the *agōn*, is developed in her later appeal to the city's precarious position: the attainment of *turannis* by either brother is impossible without widespread cost.²⁹⁷ This implies a continual conflict or antagonism between public and private interests – or, rather, between public and personal/individual, since for Eteocles and Polynices it is emphatically their own self-interest which is presented as inimical to and destructive of the home, *oikos*, as well as the *polis*. The conflict is drawn to our attention in Eteocles' later conference with Creon on

²⁹² See 8.76.1-2.

²⁹³ See 8.89.3. The final book of the *History* reveals a powerful association between the exploration of civic dissolution and a weakening of narrative integrity and structure. See Connor (1984) 214-21.

²⁹⁴ Note e.g. Polynices' vow at 490-3 and Eteocles' final words before departing to battle at 780-1. We recall the two brothers' comparable conflict between the brothers' claims to *dikē* in *Septem*: cf. for discussion ch.1.3 above.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Polynices' words at 358-9 regarding man's natural love for his *patris*. At 604ff. Eteocles offers a heated indictment of his brother's invasion, although it is interesting that unlike Polynices he never explicitly asserts his patriotism, but rather seeks to undermine his brother's, and to imply that his own interests are correspondent with those of the state.

²⁹⁶ Cf. 68, 473, and 483-4 for refs. to the material element in the fraternal conflict. Interestingly, this corresponds with older versions of the myth which centred the conflict on the division of Oedipus' possessions (cf. *Thebaid* fr.2 [West] and Hesiod, *WD* 161-3).

²⁹⁷ Cf. esp. 563-7 and 578-9. It is important that Jocasta's argument extends beyond the immediate potential consequences to the two brothers individually but also evokes the wider cost of war and its implications for non-combatants. These will include not only Jocasta herself, but Antigone, Oedipus, and Menoeceus, whose heroic act of self-sacrifice cannot prevent the ultimately fatal fraternal battle. For discussion of the war's consequences for the innocent, see ch. 4.6 and 4.7 below.

private and public interests, the *oikeia* and the *koina* (692). The stichomythic exchanges between the two reveal, however, no discussion of the family and the home, regarding which Eteocles will later make instructions to be fulfilled in the event of his death (757ff).²⁹⁸ His complete lack of consideration for the personal and emotional consequences to his family is matched only by his brother, and it is with a bitter irony that the ultimate triumph of the *oikeia* – that is, the self and private ambition – entails the brothers' own destruction.

It is interesting and important to note here that the play presents public versus private and *polis* versus *oikos* as fluid concepts which may take differing forms. In addition, the play does not place individuals on either side of a simple binary divide. The tension between *oikos* and *polis*, for instance, although it exists in the play from the perspective of its mythical and historical background, does not find expression in the motivation of the two brothers. Yet when we turn to Creon, forced to sacrifice his son on behalf of the *polis*, *oikos* and *polis* are placed in explicit opposition. Here it is not exclusively the self which is placed in conflict with the city, but the family and home, upon which the city places an intolerable demand. In a context which involves no conflict of interest, Creon is presented as a cool-headed and professional figure: when his advice regarding military strategy is sought by Eteocles,²⁹⁹ he reveals himself to be efficient and balanced.³⁰⁰ This is forcefully contrasted with his later reaction on hearing of the necessity of his son Menoeceus' sacrifice. Civic salvation demands too high a price: 'city be damned!' – χαίρετω πόλις (919). Creon's allusion to one's natural love for one's children as standing above and beyond political duty (963-6) lies in pointed distinction to Polynices' earlier assertion of man's native patriotism (358-9). Yet, crucially, Creon's sentiment is the clear one, and his refusal of the sacrifice invites not criticism of his behaviour³⁰¹ but highlights the extreme pressure imposed on him by the city, which here demands the subordination to its own interests of the individual and family. Creon will

²⁹⁸ See further Mastronarde on 692.

²⁹⁹ On the topicality of the debate on military strategy, see Garlan (1966).

³⁰⁰ This is highlighted by contrast with the impetuosity and evident inexperience of Eteocles in this scene (697ff.). The contrast has itself been viewed as echoing that between Nicias and Alcibiades at Thuc.6.9ff. (see Craik on 692-3), although the balance of prudence with irrationality or impulsivity, while common to military debate in the late fifth century, is also a *topos* of tragedy and especially of tragic stichomythia. Here the episode also recalls the exchanges between Eteocles and the Chorus in later scenes of *Septem*; while the rash and inexperienced Eteocles of *Phoinissai* contrasts markedly with his Aeschylean namesake in the early episodes of *Septem*. On this, see above ch.1.3.

³⁰¹ This has been the tendency of modern scholarship: but see ch.4.4 below.

uphold the *oikeia* insofar as he is able;³⁰² the unimaginably difficult position in which he finds himself, through no direct responsibility of his own, invites a higher degree of sympathy than this ostensible abdication of political duty might suggest.³⁰³ Further, his repudiation of the indirect heroism accorded to him should he allow his son's sacrifice (967) invites the audience to question likewise the value and nature of this glorious reputation, *eukleia*, which can only be won through the death of one's child. Yet ultimately the city is triumphant, and Menoeceus must die.

The concept of *philotimia* or personal ambition as presented in the play bears a particular relevance to contemporary historical experience. The Labdacid brothers' self-seeking is powerfully contrasted with the unconditional devotion to city and home expressed by Menoeceus in his final *rhesis* (991-1012).³⁰⁴ He alone in the play may reconcile the interests of the state and the individual, for he wants to save his city (and so his *philoi*) and, acutely sensitive to the opinions of others, he seeks to preserve his own honour by complying with the oracle. He cannot betray his city (προδότην γενέσθαι πατρίδος ἢ μ' ἐγείνατο, 996) or his family (πατέρα καὶ κασίγνητον προδοῦς, 1003), and abhors the shame (αἰσχρὸν γάρ, 999) and charges of cowardice (δειλὸς ὦς, 1004) he believes he would incur by fleeing the city, as his father Creon suggests. This invites illuminating comparison with the high hopes of the Periclean years for an Athens whose citizens would place the city above all else. The play portrays Menoeceus as a somewhat exaggerated representation of this ideal, just as Eteocles is a hyperbolic embodiment of its opposite. Contemporary experience was to illustrate the elusiveness of the ideal, and the disjunction between the aspirations of Pericles and the reality of political life. Athens clung ever more tenaciously to its own power and was in the final years of the war to become divided by individual ambitions and individual gains, ἴδιαι φιλοτιμίαι καὶ ἴδια κέρδη.³⁰⁵ The shifting sense of *philotimia* in the last quarter of the fifth century thus evoked increasingly negative implications of private political ambition in distinction to public ambition as a collective phenomenon, i.e. the people's prioritisation of the common interest. Traditional conceptions of ambition as found in the second great speech of

³⁰² An audience familiar with *Antigone* will note the intertextual allusion to the earlier play, in which Creon stands instead for the *polis*, while his opponent will seek to uphold the *oikeia* - the role Creon himself plays here in *Phoinissai*.

³⁰³ Creon also earns credit by his willingness to die for the *polis* himself as a more fitting and natural victim (968-9); cf. *Hec.* 383-8; *Andr.* 404ff.

³⁰⁴ 1013-18 are deleted in most modern texts; the lines are superfluous, merely reiterating Menoeceus' resolve in the main body of the speech.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Thuc. 2.65.7.

Pericles in Thucydides, which promotes the preservation of the Athenian city above all else even in the desperate circumstances of the plague,³⁰⁶ came to be subsumed by the furtherance of individual aims which forged an ever-growing disjunction between the interests of the individual and those of the city. *Philotimia* - the ‘love of honour’ reminiscent of Homeric conceptions of *kleos* – became increasingly overshadowed by the elevation of personal ambition over the collective good.

These themes are developed in the final book of Thucydides. Of course, it is with some caution that we make use of the historical narrative, since Thucydides is more valuable for historical perception than for dispassionate discussion; a well-known opponent of democracy, he obviously displays some degree of subjectivity. It is also true that he may be thought to present the oligarchs in a very cynical light. Yet as one of the most reliable extant contemporary historical sources, his narrative illuminates many of the political themes in *Phoinissai*. We can also gain some information from the *Athēnaion Politeia* attributed to Aristotle, although here again caution is to be applied as we are not given a full or extensive account of events, and there are discrepancies between this account and that of Thucydides; neither is a fully trustworthy source. The Aristotelian account focuses more on the technical aspects of the constitutional changes and less on the Four Hundred as individuals, so that it may seem to present the oligarchs more favourably. It mentions the initial institution of the Four Hundred as taking place in accordance with tradition.³⁰⁷ Yet it goes on to mention the particular intelligence and astuteness of some of the members, who sought to create the public impression that their election was brought about by popular consensus.³⁰⁸ This sets the scene for the Four Hundred’s gradually increasing hold on the city of Athens; the Five Thousand who originally appeared to assume authority following the collapse of the democracy were appointed ‘only in name’, λόγῳ μόνον, and the Four Hundred swiftly took over.³⁰⁹ In Thucydides, the appointment of the Five Thousand – a gesture towards a more democratic style of government – is referred to as a mere ‘political catchword’, σχῆμα πολιτικὸν τοῦ λόγου.³¹⁰ The Four Hundred are said to have abandoned any attempts to follow an ostensibly democratic style

³⁰⁶ See esp. 2.61.4.

³⁰⁷ *Ath. Pol.* 31.1.

³⁰⁸ *Ath. Pol.* 32.2-3.

³⁰⁹ *Ath. Pol.* 32.3.

³¹⁰ 8.89.3.

of government: πολὺ μεταλλάντες τῆς τοῦ δήμου διοικήσεως...ἔνεμον κατὰ κράτος τὴν πόλιν.³¹¹

We noted earlier that in Thucydides the oligarchic revolution in 411 was overshadowed by increasing dissent within the oligarchic faction – a dissent rooted primarily in a collective fear of external opposition yet ever increasingly in internal struggle for individual supremacy, as a growing division within the Four Hundred fostered a shared fear of internal opposition. Thus the appointment of the Five Thousand concealed behind the mask of propaganda for an ostensible movement closer to the newly abolished democracy the egotism of some of the oligarchs, who were dissatisfied with oligarchic rule and the equal distribution of power within even such a small party as theirs.³¹² Fear both for the survival of their collective supremacy and of the rest of the Four Hundred thus precipitates the striving for individual supremacy.³¹³ Yet what does unite the Four Hundred is the desire to retain the oligarchy and Athens' hegemony over its allies: power internal and external. The Four Hundred's attempts to sustain the oligarchy are rooted not so much in an interest in Athens' power at large as in their own individual authority – for which the *polis* will suffer if necessary.³¹⁴ The discrepancy between the public claims of the oligarchs and the private motives which dictate their political manoeuvres – as exemplified in the appointment of the Five Thousand – is aligned with the manner in which suspicion and fear breed a continual concern for the safety and political ascendancy of the individual.

This readiness to betray one's country for personal gain is clear in Eteocles' and Polynices' concealment behind an ostensible sense of civic duty and 'justice' their thirst for material and political advantage, which motivates the ultimate confrontation and precipitates civic breakdown. It is interesting that the distinction between *logos* and action, *ergon*, in relation to the machinations of the Four Hundred invites reflection on the manner in which human intelligence may be used – or abused – for the attainment of personal gain, *kerdos*; indeed, how there is thus drawn a sharp distinction between individual capability and political loyalty. Yet in reality, as we saw earlier, they fear for themselves: and it is this which informs their public announcement regarding the Five Thousand, who, in an ironic inversion of the promise to make the appointment in reality and not merely in

³¹¹ 8.70.1.

³¹² Cf. 8.89.3; note here the recurrence of ἴδια φιλοτιμία.

³¹³ Cf. 8.89.4: ἡγωνίζετο οὖν εἰς ἕκαστος αὐτὸς πρῶτος προστάτης τοῦ δήμου γενέσθαι ['And so each one strove to become the foremost leader of the people himself'].

³¹⁴ Note 8.91.3: as a last resort, the oligarchs would sooner admit the enemy into the city than allow themselves to be deposed by a newly re-established democracy.

name, ἔργῳ καὶ μὴ ὀνόματι, are never established by the oligarchs at all.³¹⁵ Thucydides had earlier introduced the key figures of the Four Hundred with heavy emphasis on their intellectual and personal abilities;³¹⁶ and there is a bitter irony underlining the subsequent focus on oligarchic developments in the historian's recognition of the manner in which these men's intelligence and skill are used not, as they could so easily have been, for the good of the *polis*, but for the furtherance of their own separate aims. This misuse and distrust of human intelligence may be traced back to the account of Corcyrean *stasis* in the third book: we saw there the focus on the manipulation of the meanings of words and the degeneration of traditional ideals: καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιώσει.³¹⁷ Here too Thucydides points to the discrepancy between public claim and private aim, between *logos* and *ergon*, and to the manner in which society is fractured by the suspicion and fear engendered by war, where man can look only to himself for protection.

Man's reliance on his own intelligence to further yet simultaneously to disguise motives of expediency and self-interest recalls our earlier discussion of the language employed in the *agōn* by the two brothers – especially by Eteocles, who cynically abuses the language of civic pride to create the impression that he seeks to serve the interests of the *polis*. Of course, he is also revealed at points to be overtly amoral; but it is important that Euripides seeks to emphasise the hypocrisy of both brothers. This is particularly evident in the reasoning of Eteocles on the subject of power and personal advantage, which finds several echoes in the words of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*. Callicles is a young Athenian politician on the cusp of his career, and although it is important that he is not actually a sophist – indeed, he views sophists as completely worthless³¹⁸ – his general outlook is similar to that of the Euripidean character. This is especially evident in Eteocles' determination to acquire what is fine, *to kalon*, which is revealed in his argument at 499-525 as the greater share (of power, of money), and which is attained through intelligence and courage. If 'justice' conflicts with this ambition, then Eteocles – like Callicles – is quite happy to discard justice. We noted earlier how Eteocles' striving for

³¹⁵ Cf. 8.89.2. Note also the manner in which Thuc. here undercuts oligarchic pretensions to fear of events in Samos and for Athens' security with 'so they said', ὥς ἔφασαν. The oligarchs' professed fears are soon unmasked by their real fears – for the loss of their own power and of the threat to their personal safety (91.3).

³¹⁶ Cf. 8.68. Indeed, as Thuc. stresses at 68.4, the overthrow of the democracy was no mean feat on the part of these clever men; we note again the language of *sunesis*, which takes on a certain element of danger and untrustworthiness and becomes oligarchs and demagogues alike in their pursuit of *to sumpheron*.

³¹⁷ 3.82.4.

³¹⁸ Cf. *Gorg.* 520 a1.

‘the greater part’, τὸ πλεόν (509), finds echoes in Callicles’ championship of might as the right of the stronger and the associated supremacy of nature, *phusis*, over convention, *nomos*. For Callicles believes that laws are the artificial construct of weaker members of society – in his view, the majority - created to restrain the strong and able. The natural way of society, he asserts, is that its stronger members, the minority, should and inevitably will gain superiority over the weak. This acquisition of what is advantageous to oneself, *to sumpheron*, is the natural and deserved result for those capable of attaining it. This, he goes on to posit, is the true meaning of ‘justice’: the superior rule the inferior and have a greater share.³¹⁹ Τὸ πλεόν and the related concept of greed or graspingness, *pleonexia*, suggest both material covetousness and desire for political authority and ascendancy.³²⁰ Eteocles’ exploitation of the concept of cowardice, *anandria* – it is ‘cowardly’, he believes, to give up τὸ πλεόν (509-10) – finds affinity with Callicles’ conviction that it is unmanly or shameful to allow oneself to be subjected to ‘injustice’, which Callicles defines as being left with a smaller, inferior share. Eteocles views Polynices’ potential reclamation of political authority as potentially shaming to himself: πρὸς δὲ τοῖσδ’ αἰσχύνομαι / ἐλθόντα σὺν ὅπλοις τόνδε καὶ πορθοῦντα γῆν / τυχεῖν ἢ χρῆζει (510-12). It is cowardice, he states, to allow oneself to relegate *to pleon* and take the smaller share: ἀνανδρία γάρ, τὸ πλεόν ὅστις ἀπολέσας / τοῦλασσον ἔλαβε (509-10).³²¹ This ruthless appeal to ‘manliness’ finds further echoes in Callicles’ belief that the ‘stronger’ maintain their authority on account of their ‘bravery and intelligence’, δι’ ἀνδρείαν καὶ φρονήσιν.³²² We recall again how Eteocles’ focus on the shameful of sacrificing τὸ πλεόν to his brother - which he views as ‘slavery’, *douleia* (520) – and his subsequent approbation of injustice, *adikia*, if committed in the name of gaining supreme power (εἴπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι / κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν, τᾶλλα δ’ ἐὺσεβεῖν χρεών, 524-5) – bears illuminating comparison with the arguments of Thrasymachus in the *Republic*.³²³ Thrasymachus posits as the ‘natural’ explanation of *adikia* man’s assertion of his personal freedom – which includes the claim to and taking of τὸ πλεόν.³²⁴

³¹⁹ Cf. *Gorg.* 483a-d.

³²⁰ There is a close association, especially in relation to *turannis*, between material greed and political ambition, in that the former both symbolises power and facilitates its retention.

³²¹ Cf. also Thuc. 3.82.4 on moderation as seen as a cloak for unmanliness or weakness: τὸ δὲ σωφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα.

³²² Cf. *Gorg.* 492a; see also 491b.

³²³ On the question of the general affinities between Callicles and Thrasymachus, see the article of R. Barney ‘Callicles and Thrasymachus’, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 edition ed. Edward N. Zalta) at <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

³²⁴ Cf. again *Rep.* 344a-c.

Eteocles exploits and manipulates the concepts of shame and honour in order to offer a type of justification for his behaviour. His allusion to his own sense of shame (αἰσχύνομαι, 510) and to a broader sense of shame on the city's behalf (Polynices' victory would be a reproach, ὄνειδος, for Thebes, 513) is designed to create the effect of alignment between his own interests and those of the city, when in reality the only interests he serves are his own. Again we note the disparity between public claim and private aim; we remember the manoeuvres of the Four Hundred, who likewise deploy in a public setting this false claim to patriotism in order to command the people's sympathy. We are also reminded of the concepts of language and intelligence, which were in contemporary experience continually and increasingly open to misuse. Callicles' citing of *phronēsis* as collaborating with *andreia* for the attainment of τὸ πλεόν implies the natural or expected dominance of the intelligent, who are distinct from the 'weaker' individuals in their ability to work for their own advantage. The less intelligent, unable to do this, feel shame and seek to 'enslave' their superiors by pronouncing moral judgement on their behaviour: the weaker praise justice because their own *anandria* means they cannot work to their own advantage.³²⁵ This evokes by association Thrasymachus' praise of the 'stronger', for whom committing *adikia* leads to personal freedom, which in turn provides natural means of gaining *to sumpheron*. The Calliclean emphasis on *phronēsis* in the attainment of personal *kerdos* once more unites intellectual ability and language as the vehicle for communicating intelligence. Intelligence may be abused to promote the acquisition of *to sumpheron*. In *Phoinissai*, the brothers' fallacious and cynical claims to *dikē* suggests not only the manner in which 'justice' is rendered impotent by *philotimia*, but also implies a growing distortion or confusion of the very nature of morality, which can thus no longer exist as a fixed and immutable guide for human behaviour.

Euripides thus maintains a close association between the characterisation of the participants in the *agōn* and contemporary experience. Eteocles himself in particular – as mouthpiece for the most modern and developed argumentation – is caught up in and ultimately convicted by his own cleverness. His character illustrates the sophistic manipulation of rhetoric and traditional philosophy which appeared ever more prevalent in late fifth-century Athenian political life. But he is not intended to 'be' a sophist, nor any specific political figure which may be associated with sophistic thought and rhetoric.³²⁶

³²⁵ Cf. *Gorg.* 492a.

³²⁶ De Romilly (1967) 118 comes too close to an allegorical reading of the play's politics in making an explicit association between the successors of Pericles (cf. Thuc. 2.65.7ff. on the *idia kerdē* and *idiai*

Euripides maintains a finely-balanced tension between the individual characters within the dramatic settings and the representation through those characters of the intellectual and political cultures of the late fifth century. Such allusion is designed to encourage reflection on contemporary concerns as well as to align the judgement and sympathy of the audience in response to the dramatic developments without imposing on it any authorial stance. Of course, this also enhances in the play a sense of realism which against the background of the political developments of 411-10 must have been especially gripping for an Athenian audience. It also underlines the relevance of the mythical events to the audience's day-to-day experience. It is in addition a particular point of interest that Euripides, in retaining the focus on the brothers' struggle for *turannis* and thus keeping within the heroic framework of mythical Thebes, engineers a slippage between the failings of autocracy, now in the distant past for a late fifth-century audience, and the political developments of contemporary Athens.³²⁷ For the oligarchs were prone to the same shortcomings of the tyrants of old – the same greed and ambition, and the same prioritisation of their own authority.³²⁸ The same applies – for Thucydides at least – to those democrats who sought to maintain and increase their own authority within the *polis*, as we note in his account of the Hermae and the profanation of the mysteries.³²⁹ It will become increasingly clear over the course of the *History* that this reveals not so much the flaws of any one political system, or even of a variety of political systems and processes. Rather, it points to the immutability of human nature and to man's inherent need for self-furtherance and self-protection.

2.3 Myth and History: Alcibiades and Athens

We stressed above the conflict between public and private, which became more prominent as the war progressed. One figure who features heavily in Thucydides' exploration of this conflict is the Athenian politician Alcibiades, in whom the historian's concern with self-

philotimiai of these men) and the Labdacid brothers. This appears to be rather inconsistent with her earlier valid refutation of Polynices as a thinly disguised Alcibiades, 109-11 (see further the next section 2.3 below). Her reading of the play as a vehicle for moral teaching presupposes the views of Eur. in a manner we have already been noted to be generally unfruitful.

³²⁷ See for further discussion below under 'Democracy and Power'.

³²⁸ See Thuc.'s comments on the tyrants at 1.17.

³²⁹ Cf. 6.27-8. At 28.2 Thuc. relates the implication of Alcibiades as a deliberate ploy by those envious of his authority and seeking political supremacy for themselves.

interest as productive of civic dissolution is rooted.³³⁰ Alcibiades has frequently been viewed as heavily influential in Euripides' characterisation of Polynices.³³¹ Both were exiles who had a problematic relationship with their native city, to which they displayed questionable loyalty. The theme of exile and its ills is emphasised in *Phoinissai* in the early exchanges between Jocasta and her son (357ff). In Thucydides, Alcibiades himself is first introduced as aiming for Athenian victory over Carthage and Sicily – successes which would earn him a material and professional advantage.³³² The focus here on the extravagances of Alcibiades' private life may be held up as the ostensible cause of Athens' ruin, since the Athenians, fearing that such personal licentiousness was the mark of a nascent dictator, turned against him, relegating political control to less able hands.³³³ Yet what is to emerge as cause of Athens' downfall is not the behaviour of any one party but – as noted earlier – a culture of fear, suspicion, and mistrust, which engenders *stasis*. The Athenians' banishment of Alcibiades following the destruction of the Hermae and his alleged profanation of the mysteries precipitates the diminution of an already tenuous civic fidelity. Thereafter the political aplomb for which Alcibiades was famed³³⁴ is turned to the advantage not of the city but of the man himself. Athens' quickness to mistrust Alcibiades, fearing as it did the overthrow of the democracy – ironic considering that the real threat to the democracy and political freedom was in fact the oligarchs – is mirrored in Alcibiades' own readiness to turn against his city. This becomes clear at the end of the sixth book of the *History* in his persuasion of the Spartans to hinder Athenian progress in Sicily by sending aid to the Sicilians, and to make things more difficult still by fortifying Decelea: a stark reversal this, coming from the most avid supporter of the Sicilian expedition. In the final book, Alcibiades' engineering of his return to Athens around the time of the oligarchic revolution is clearly the motive behind his association with Tissaphernes, which results in both a further weakening of Athenian power³³⁵ and his own increased influence among the Athenian forces in Samos. Alcibiades' exile was originally imposed through a fear for the stability of the democracy; it is now the breakdown of democracy which

³³⁰ Although Alcibiades' introduction recalls the manoeuvres of Cleon (cf. 6.15.2, where Alcibiades offers support for the Sicilian expedition, and 4.21.3 on Cleon's part in repudiating the Spartans' offer of a truce), Cleon's personal motives and aims are not the focus of close attention for Thuc.; cf. de Romilly 119 n.35.

³³¹ See e.g. Blundell in Sommerstein et al. (1993) 304; and Knox (1982) 22.

³³² Cf. 6.15.2, which emphasises the personal motives behind Alcibiades' promotion of the expedition.

³³³ Cf. 6.15.3-4. On the contrary, there is no reason to suggest that Alcibiades was or wanted to become a 'tyrant': cf. Seager (1967).

³³⁴ We note his own confident assurance at 6.16.6.

³³⁵ Cf. esp. 8.46.3-5. Later it will be noted how the association bears extra weight with Thrasybulus, the main influence behind Alcibiades's recall. Tissaphernes' potential benefit to Athens is the driving force here: cf. 81.1 and 88. Again the focus is on expediency, both for Alcibiades and the Athenians at large.

facilitates his return. Moreover, for all that his political motives incite suspicion, the man himself is utterly uninterested in the constitutional future of Athens.³³⁶

This background to Alcibiades' movements in the late war years points to several close affinities with the exiled Polynices. But it is important that the affinities are not confined to Polynices alone, since the problematisation of the theme of political loyalty is equally applicable to Eteocles. Following on from our argument above, this further complicates too close or exclusive an association between Polynices and Alcibiades. Rather, the brothers each display traits which may be traceable in the character of the Athenian politician, whose egotism illustrates the perceived decline in political morality in the late war years. The concepts of intellect and especially of rhetoric are again significant here. Alcibiades in working towards his recall employs both his commanding personality and intellect to the best of his own advantage: he dwells on the hardships of exile in order to evoke public sympathy – we may think of Polynices' early exchanges with Jocasta on the same subject – and exaggerates his influence with Tissaphernes in an ironic and deliberate play on Athens' natural concern with its own interests while serving Alcibiades' own.³³⁷ Yet – now in closer association with Eteocles – Alcibiades also perverts the language of patriotism and offers a spurious claim to civic loyalty. In the sixth book his considerable powers of rhetorical persuasion are employed in his argument that his own personal extravagances in fact represented his longstanding benevolence towards Athens as they were put to good use in improving the city's pan-Hellenic reputation.³³⁸ Yet in the case he subsequently presents for the Sicilian expedition Alcibiades' argument is unsupported by fact and, now like Polynices' opening speech in the *agōn*, relies instead on a profession of simplicity, in order to invite trust. Overall, his arguments work not because they are grounded in truth or reason but because they correspond with the Athenian inclination to activity, *πολυπραγμοσύνη*,³³⁹ and to the aggressive protection and expansion of its imperial power. Like both brothers in *Phoinissai*, Alcibiades seeks to present himself as bearing the best interests of the city at heart in order to command the sympathy of his audience. In his later negotiations with the Spartans, Alcibiades will again manipulate the themes of political loyalty and identity in presenting himself as the wronged party in order

³³⁶ Only Phrynichus suspects this truth: cf. 8.48.4. The interest and complexity of Alcibiades' presentation in Thuc. and other ancient sources have inspired a number of scholarly studies on the politician and his relationship with his native city. See, for instance, Gribble (1999), or Dupont (2009).

³³⁷ Cf. 8.81.2-3.

³³⁸ Cf. 6.16.1-3.

³³⁹ Etymologically the word connotes 'doing many things', i.e. busy; but may also hold a more negative inference in implying officiousness or meddlesomeness.

to detract from the moral implications of his proposal. Again we note the growing division between political skill and civic loyalty, and the abuse of rhetorical persuasiveness to ends antagonistic with the city's welfare.

A more specific or exclusive association between Alcibiades and Polynices is thus best confined to their mutual positions as exiles determined to achieve reintegration into their native *poleis* and their readiness to attack their city in the process. The language of friendship or fellowship, *philia*, is particularly relevant here. In his speech at Sparta, Alcibiades' reflection on the mutability of friendship and enmity and his ascription to the Athenians responsibility for his current plight is posited as false justification for his desire to aid the Spartans as well as for his previous injurious behaviour towards them at Mantinea.³⁴⁰ He again distorts the concept of *philia* in asserting that the exile's desire to reclaim his land by any possible means is the mark of a true patriot, a φιλόπολις.³⁴¹ It is striking that the term is used only by Pericles and Alcibiades; equally powerful is the distinction between the patriotism of the former in prioritising the city above all else, and the latter's sophistic exploitation of an ostensible sense of civic loyalty to mask the striving for personal gain. A similar concern is reflected in Polynices' repeated professions of love for his fatherland as placed in opposition to the consequences to that fatherland of his actions. Both he and Alcibiades, despite their best efforts to persuade their audiences to the contrary, highlight the shifting loyalties of the individual within the city as well as fragility of civic ties in war. The difficulty of Alcibiades' rehabilitation into the city he was so quick to betray³⁴² is filtered through the Labdacid myth, which presents both from a generic political and specifically mythical perspective the problematic nature of the traitor Polynices' relationship with his city.³⁴³

We noted earlier how of all the characters in the play it is only Menoeceus who can reconcile the interests of public and private. By dying he not only saves the city and his family, but also avoids the shame of an ignoble reputation. His act highlights the small comfort that is man's enduring nobility even in the face of the moral ugliness which surrounds him; yet this perception is tempered by the play's simultaneously bleak recognition of the lack of reward such heroism brings, the loss of youthful potential in

³⁴⁰ Cf. 6.89.3 and 92.3-5.

³⁴¹ Cf. 6.92.4.

³⁴² The ambivalence of or tensions in the relationship of Alcibiades with Athens is alluded to in *Frogs* (1422-32).

³⁴³ More specific to the myth is the question of Polynices' burial and the problems of identity and ownership in Thebes. See for discussion ch.3.4 below; and ch.4.5.

war, and the suffering imposed on the innocent as a result of human egotism. The human cost of war is brought closer to contemporary experience prior to the sacrifice episode in the intertextual reference (852-7) to Euripides' own *Erechtheus*, in which the daughters of the Athenian King are sacrificed for political salvation. Here the indirect heroism of Praxithea – which Creon rejects – in offering her daughters' lives is achieved only through the irretrievable breakdown of the *oikos* and bitter suffering. The mother is compelled to recognise that her child belongs to the *polis* and is hers only by birth, φύσει, further, that in the event of the city's fall, she will inevitably lose all her children.³⁴⁴ Although the act of sacrifice itself is rooted firmly in the heroic world, the themes of patriotism and noble death which underlie it are very much in alignment with the political concerns of contemporary Athens. It is particularly striking that Menoeceus' selfless sacrifice of his own life on behalf of his city echoes features of the democratic Funeral Oration.³⁴⁵ Menoeceus' steadfastness in the face of civic threat and his determined courage bear close affinity with the qualities praised by Pericles in the war dead: resoluteness and bravery – literally, 'manliness' – *andreia*.³⁴⁶ Parallels are evident also in these military men's hatred of shame and dishonour, which would be theirs had they surrendered and saved themselves.³⁴⁷ Menoeceus too displays an acute consciousness of his reputation, and abhors the thought of being shown up as 'base', κακός, were he to flee Thebes (1005). Pericles goes on to speak of the eternal glory accorded to the dead patriots, the surviving memory of whose heroism is the one compensation for their loss, both for the men themselves and for their families.³⁴⁸ This is implicit in Menoeceus' preoccupation with the opinions of others, and is bleakly recognised by his father Creon upon discovery of the boy's death: Menoeceus has indeed achieved a 'noble name', ὄνομα γενναῖον (1314). It is evident too in the Chorus' celebration of Menoeceus' valour (1054-66). The topical relevance of the sacrifice episode is reaffirmed in the young man's focus on the heroic concepts of shame and honour (note especially the fear of cowardice, 994, 1004-5), which contrasts powerfully with Eteocles' sophistic exploitation of the same themes in the earlier *agōn* scene.

Menoceus' sacrifice also underlines the overwhelming burden placed by the city on the individual. We noted this earlier in relation to Creon; the same will become true of

³⁴⁴ See fr. 360 38-40 in Collard, Cropp, & Lee (1995).

³⁴⁵ Cf. e.g. Plato, *Menexenus*; Lysias 2; or Gorgias' *Funeral Oration*. The seminal work on the genre is Loraux (1986).

³⁴⁶ Cf. Thuc. 2.42.2-3; see also 43.6.

³⁴⁷ See 2.42.4.

³⁴⁸ Cf. 43.2-44.1.

Antigone and Oedipus,³⁴⁹ as it is of Praxithea in *Erechtheus*. This demonstrates the extent to which the city and its interests curtailed the freedom of the people. Fifth-century democracy prided itself on supporting the freedom of the individual; yet contemporary experience reveals the extent to which the *polis*, more so than any other, imposed itself on its citizens and required of them the utmost in political allegiance. Euripides invites his audience to question the nature of democratic freedom, *eleutheria*, from within the mythical setting; and in the broader political context of the play, it will become clear that even democracy cannot provide the solution.

2.4 Democracy and Power

The themes of democracy and the destruction by war of the innocent bring us, finally, back to Jocasta. Her celebration of equality as conducive to political stability and lawfulness (535-8) focuses her speech closely on the constitution and its (perceived) advantages. This diverts the attention from the pressing topic of autocracy and underlines the importance of the democratic constitution within both her speech and the play's broader political context. Jocasta's promotion of political equality reveals a very subtle slippage between the concept of power sharing in the myth – that is, an alternating autocracy, *turannis*, as per the brothers' original agreement³⁵⁰ – and that of democratic power sharing. This last – the wielding of power for a fixed period before handing it over to another – was regarded by Aristotle for one as natural in a democracy, and so the slippage may not have seemed jarring to a contemporary audience. In any event, the language of egalitarianism employed by Jocasta is highly suggestive of the principles of democracy.³⁵¹ Her argument, as discussed earlier, is in relation to both style and reasoning closely associated with contemporary political and intellectual cultures. The idealism of Jocasta's championing of *isotēs* and its attendant advantage of civic harmony would have in all probability borne especial significance for an Athenian audience, whose democracy

³⁴⁹ Of course, dramatic necessity, including the implications of the Labdacids' presence in Thebes as a *miasma* within the city (cf. 867ff.), means the inevitable expulsion of the surviving Labdacids; but it is equally important that the role of Antigone in particular functions in highlighting, as it does in Soph.'s earlier play, the suffering of the individual as consequence of the demands of the *polis*.

³⁵⁰ Cf. 478-80, which have been called into question by various critics, notably Diggle (1994), who deletes all three lines. The lines, however, are thematically appropriate and technically sound. See Mastronarde on 479-90 for a comprehensive defence of authenticity.

³⁵¹ Cf. esp. 541-5. A similar principle is evoked at Eur. *Suppl.* 406-8. See also Aristotle, *Politics* 1317b1-3 on the democratic concept of ruling 'in turn', ἐν μέρει; cf. also the interpretation of this phrase by Hansen (1989) 16-7, who views this as a rotation of magistrates, rather than a rotation in attending the Assembly.

had so recently been destroyed by the same force of political dissolution from which it had sought to provide defence. Of course, it would be naive to read in Jocasta's speech any simple type of democratic propaganda or partisanship on the part of Euripides himself. Rather, the failure of her rhetoric, her inability to persuade, and her own ultimate destruction by a war instigated by man's political ambitions suggests that the constitution she upholds remains an *ideal* which historical experience has already proved not to be correspondent with democracy in practice. Yet that is not to suggest, either, that the play or the poet is in any straightforward way anti-democracy; rather that the play recognises, as Thucydides did, the fragility of *any* power structure in the face of human ambition. Democracy is not the, or indeed a, solution: contemporary experience exposed the difficulty in upholding the ideals of the constitution in the face of individual ambition.

Contemporary sources reveal once more the suppression of freedom that was the paradox at the heart of democratic experience. In the second book of Thucydides, for instance, it is implied that what was ostensibly a democracy was in fact a government headed by its most able and eminent member, Pericles.³⁵² In the following books imperial Athens' aims at the retention and expansion of its power bear out the truth of Pericles' perception that his Athens is now akin to a *turannis*, whose acquisition may seem to have been morally questionable but whose surrendering would be dangerous.³⁵³ It is important that the question here is not so much one of internal power structures but of empire - the acquisition of *external* power, which is not a focus of our play (though it is elsewhere in Euripides; it is most clear in *Trojan Women*). The chief point of contact with *Phoinissai* is the behavioural tendencies of those with political authority; the egotism and ambition of the autocrat Eteocles is aligned with the same proclivities found in contemporary leaders, both within the democracy and the oligarchy. In Thucydides the slippage is pushed further: Athens, before compared to a tyranny, now appears actually to become one. Again we approach Thucydides with caution: what we have here is not a merging of power structures. Constitutionally, democracy and autocracy remained distinct. But in terms of behavioural patterns of the figures within the separate constitutions, the similarities grow ever more apparent. Post-Periclean Athens revealed a growing inclination to act in accordance with the violent and repressive characteristics for which it had become

³⁵² Cf. 2.65.9, although NB ἐλευθέρως at 65.8. At 2.37.1 Pericles' concession to his democratic government's recognition of individual virtue, ἀρετή, points to the supremacy within it of leading figures such as himself.

³⁵³ Cf. 2.63.2. On Athens as a tyrant city, see also Aristophanes, *Knights* 1111-4.

known.³⁵⁴ This also bears out the validity of Pericles' emphasis on the necessity of retaining the city's power in the culture of mutual fear and suspicion to which Athenian control over its allies has led: aptly illustrated in the debate over Mytilene, which we discussed above. The rebellion of Mytilene against its erstwhile ally demonstrates the consequences of Athens' striving for hegemony. The self-interest of the empire – like that of the autocrat – is noted as natural by the Athenian speaker Euphemus in the sixth book of Thucydides. His perception that man defines his personal ties by their 'trustworthiness' hints again at the culture of fear and suspicion which will characterise Athens in the late war years, sharply contrasting with Pericles' vision of civic harmony, free from suspicion and resentment, as characteristic of his democracy.³⁵⁵

There is thus revealed a certain overlap between Athens' external image and its own self-image as its increasingly blatant self-interest comes to be recognised and accepted by democratic leaders such as Cleon. His echo of Pericles' comparison of Athens to a tyranny with the qualification that the city now *is* a tyranny³⁵⁶ suggests how Cleon in advocating the execution of the Mytileneans exploits the Periclean concern with imperial control. Yet in reality Cleon's interest in immediate advantage, achieved through violent means, displays little sympathy with Pericles' characteristic restraint and far-sightedness. Cleon's prioritisation of *to sumpheron* over *to dikaion* suggests also the alignment of Athenian strategy as dictated by motives of expediency with the city's increasing tendency to 'tyrannical' behaviour.³⁵⁷ We recall Jocasta's association of *isotēs* with political concord, and of the binding force of equality which builds a society free from envy or resentment, *phthonos* (535-45). Yet here as in contemporary experience hope is betrayed

³⁵⁴ This is demonstrated in Xenophon's lengthy account of the capitulation of Athens in 404 (*Hell.* book 2.III.1-IV.23). Cf. in addition Thuc. 1.122.3 and 124.3 for the Corinthians' comparison of Athens to a *turannos* in seeking to persuade the Peloponnesian allies to wage what they present as a war for the liberation of Greece. Of course, this may have been designed to gain a sympathetic hearing from the Spartans, who were known opponents of tyranny, having themselves expelled tyrants from Athens (as well as elsewhere): cf. 1.18.1-2 and Hornblower's n. ad loc. But the point of the comparison still stands, and prepares us for the analogy between Athens and the *turannos* developed later in the *History*.

³⁵⁵ Cf. 2.37.2; for Euphemus, see 6.85.1.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.* Cf. Connor 79 n.1 for further echoes of Pericles in Cleon's speech. For a defence of these echoes as deliberate, see Cairns (1982). These verbal echoes may tie in with, and highlight, the historian's concern with the general degeneration of the Athenian character in the post-Periclean age, and the failure of the statesman's successors to uphold in practice his hopes for the democracy; cf. Thuc. 2.65.7ff.

³⁵⁷ Of course, authorial subjectivity needs to be accounted for in the presentation of Cleon; Thuc. evidently disliked the man, as did Aristophanes: note e.g. the emphasis on Cleon's aggressive rhetorical style (*Wasps* 1034, *Acharnians* 380-1, and at numerous points in *Knights*). It is likely that personal hostility towards Cleon on the part of the two writers make for a biased representation of his character. However, despite distortions there is no need to doubt his alignment with a strong stance on the empire, or that both authors may reflect contemporary concerns about the practices of the demagogues. On Cleon, see also Hornblower (1983) 118-126; and Westlake (1968) 60-85.

by the civic dissolution engendered by the clash of individual ambitions. Yet it is not merely the demagogues themselves who face criticism.³⁵⁸ The focus shifts also to the disorganisation and lack of cohesion and control within the people at large, the *demos* – a point highlighted in the debate on the constitutions in the third book of Herodotus, which foreshadows the concern with the association of political freedom with lawlessness found in later writers.³⁵⁹

As the pressures of a seemingly endless war took their toll, democracy found itself open to erosion and ultimately subversion from different directions. Private ambition fostered division and enmity, and the *turannis* to which the political constitution of the war years is compared became irretrievably fractured by individual ambitions. In the final books of Thucydides the historian marks greed and ambition as characteristic of leading political figures – as they were of Athens’ broader hold on power – in comparison with the tyrants of old. The final book reveals further a slippage between the behaviour of the demagogues and of the oligarchs: both groups place expediency above all else, and both manipulate their political skills to that end. The striving for ascendancy within the oligarchy – again foreshadowed in Herodotus³⁶⁰ – is linked with the indiscipline and lawlessness which could characterise the *demos*, within which there is always one or more individuals striving for pre-eminence. This common aim for political supremacy brings us back to the figure of the *turannos*, viewed in Herodotus by Darius as a προστάς... τοῦ δήμου.³⁶¹ There is thus again revealed an overlap between the behavioural characteristics

³⁵⁸ See also Thuc.’s vicious treatment of the demagogue Hyperbolus at 8.73.3. His similar attitude towards Cleon may also reflect the concern of the *polis* with the conferral of authority in the Assembly to those of lower birth than the aristocrats: this being a people acutely aware of the concept of noble birth, *eugeneia*. Again, this is a recurrent concern elsewhere; Eur. himself picks up on the theme at *Supp.* 420-5, where once more the persuasion of the *demos* is a theme with negative connotations. We should note that the word πονηρός, as used here (424) of the man who employs specious rhetoric in a public context, can mean one of low social standing as well as ‘villain’, which is associated with this emergence of powerful lower-born demagogues in place of the aristocratic politicians.

³⁵⁹ We note esp. the criticism directed at the unruly masses by Megabyzus at Hdt. 3.81.2; cf. also the tone in which Thuc. describes the fining and then the re-election of Pericles as general early in the war (2.65.3-4). At 8.48.3 he uses the word ‘throng’, ὄχλος, in reporting the people’s placation through promise of financial gain in the establishment of the oligarchy. Again, subjectivity comes into play: but Thuc.’s evident dislike of democracy (cf. also Plato *Rep.* 562-3) is balanced by the concern elsewhere with democratic ‘transgressiveness’, *paranomia*. See e.g. Isocrates 7.20, who suggests the confusion of lawlessness with freedom in the democracy of the first half of the fourth century. Plato in the *Republic* (562-3) offers a related theory regarding freedom as both the definition and the destruction of the democracy in its perpetuation of lawlessness. In turn, this last is commonly viewed as productive of tyranny: see e.g. Aristotle *Politics* 1304b19-1305a10.

³⁶⁰ This is articulated by Darius at 3.82.3.

³⁶¹ Cf. 3.82.4.

within the democracy, the oligarchy, and the autocracy;³⁶² and ambition proves an internal threat to each. We return to our earlier perception of democratic Athens' similarity to a *turannis*;³⁶³ just as we marked also the fragility of the tyrant's hold on power: Pericles himself pointed to the danger in surrendering the city's imperial supremacy. So too will the late war years reveal the relative ease with which democracy is overthrown – this constitution which belonged to a people for which the age of autocracy was but a distant memory, and which was itself accustomed to ruling over others.³⁶⁴ Yet the overthrowers of democracy are, of course, themselves overthrown, as were the tyrants of previous generations. We recall the reflection of Lycophron's sister in Herodotus: 'tyranny is a slippery thing', τυρρανὶς χερῖμα σφαλερόν.³⁶⁵ The fates of the tyrants here in the third book attest to that truth; but this also points to the slippery nature of power in general within *any* political constitution. The aim for power both characterises and ultimately destroys the monarchy, the oligarchy, and the democracy alike. This theme of ambition is central to the debate in the third book of Herodotus, in which each of the three speakers betrays the self-interest³⁶⁶ which in Thucydides was to be recognised as constant and inevitable within any political constitution. When Darius speaks of the inevitability of tyranny to supply the necessary control over civic disorder which he views as a natural product of a democracy or oligarchy, he points to the ultimate ascendancy of individual ambition. Man's *hold* on power may be σφαλερόν; but the characteristics of *turannis* will endure, both in the Persian empire and in the Greek world.³⁶⁷

Thus, ultimately, the pursuit of power is both inevitable and self-defeating. This truth, as borne out by historical experience, also informs the brothers' actions in

³⁶² It is particularly interesting that an association may also be drawn between Darius' 'champion of the city' and Pericles, the 'foremost man' of Athens (Thuc. 2.65.9). Although some degree of caution must be applied in drawing this affinity, we remember that Herodotus' popularity from around the 420s closes what may be perceived as a gap between his generation and the readership of Thuc. On the Darius/Pericles link, see Pelling (2002) 147 and n.77 there.

³⁶³ Note again the tyrannical tendencies in the hubristic behaviour of the *dēmos*, as noted by Megabyzus at Hdt. 3.81.1. The blurring of the ostensible polarity between autocrat and the people becomes more marked in book 9 as the Persian empire gives way to nascent Athenian imperialism. See also Lateiner (1989) 172-9 for tabular refs. to affinities between tyrants and democracies.

³⁶⁴ Cf. Thuc. 8.68.4.

³⁶⁵ See 3.53.4.

³⁶⁶ Darius' ambition is clear in his subsequent ruse to win the throne (cf. 3.85-7); at 3.81.3 Megabyzus seeks to be one of the 'foremost men', ἀριστοί, and to wield power, κράτος. Less overt is Otanes' assumption that one of the seven – rather than anyone else – would be chosen as monarch were autocracy to be victorious (see also 83.2). Monarchy will bring no pleasure or advantage, he argues (80.2): personal considerations were primary for the tyrants (cf. Thuc. 1.17). Here in Hdt., 'even as Otanes abandons the political scheme he knows and abhors, he uses tyrant-speak to do so': thus Pelling 140.

³⁶⁷ The perception of *turannis* as 'slippery' does not jar with Darius' insistence on its durability. See again Pelling, esp. 149-55.

Phoinissai. Yet the futility of Jocasta's appeal is not to be read as a simple demonstration of the failure of democracy. Instead, it emphasises its vulnerability as a constitution, which a contemporary audience knew only too well. In highlighting in addition – as noted earlier – the disjunction between democratic ideology and practice, Jocasta's part in correspondence with historical experience reveals the inability of democracy to live up to the Periclean ideal; and Pericles' view was just that: an ideal. Thucydides' admiration for Periclean policy, and Jocasta's commitment to the principles of *isotēs*, represents praise for a way of political and social life which is, experience shows, easier to idealise than to practise. The prioritisation of the state over the interests of the individual is ever proven to be an unrealistic expectation. Where the state does take precedence, the consequences are as destructive as those resulting from the supremacy of the individual.³⁶⁸ Public and private will always struggle for co-existence. Yet this is not a problem merely of democracy, or a particular democratic failing: we have already seen the equal vulnerability of autocracy and oligarchy to the same destabilising influences of human ambition and greed. At the end of his *History* Thucydides marks with approval the institution of the Five Thousand and the moderate sharing of power between the few and the many.³⁶⁹ It was at this time, he notes, that the Athenians enjoyed the best form of government during his own lifetime. This government helped the state to recover from its desperate position. The novel concept of a mixed constitution, to which the Thucydidean passage appears to allude,³⁷⁰ suggests that the best form of government may be yet to be seen: historical experience has already charted the flaws and ultimate breakdown of autocracy, oligarchy, and democracy alike. Thucydides' approbation of a regime which is neither a formal oligarchy nor a democracy³⁷¹ suggests a necessary development in political government. But the appointment of the Five Thousand is not offered as an answer to a question perhaps deliberately left without resolution: that of which political constitution may both endure and conduce to civic stability. Thucydides' perception of the constancy of human

³⁶⁸ This is a particular concern of Soph.'s *Antigone*, in which Creon's prioritisation of the state ultimately destroys the individual and the *polis*; the play raises serious concerns regarding the nature of civic policy and the power of the city.

³⁶⁹ Cf. 8.97.2-3.

³⁷⁰ For refs. to scholarship on the mixed constitution see Connor 228 n.35.

³⁷¹ Scholarly opinion is divided on this question; see again Connor 229 n.36 for refs. to arguments for and against the Five Thousand's new regime as constituting a democracy. The comm. of Gomme et al. (1981) assumes that the constitution must be classed as an 'unusual' oligarchy, and that Thuc.'s apparent approval implies the historian's own oligarchic sympathies. It would be difficult to reconcile the treatment of oligarchs in this book as well as elsewhere with authorial partisanship on the subject of oligarchy. Thuc.'s failure to expand on the concept of a mixed constitution following this brief allusion at 8.97.2-3 suggests a difficulty in establishing any firm authorial stance. It must also be borne in mind that the historian's exile at this time precluded his first-hand experience of the Five Thousand's government.

nature³⁷² is aligned with the suggestion that perhaps there *is* no answer. The same is true of the *agōn* in *Phoinissai*, which as with historical experience invites the question of *what* power form can contain human nature, τὸ ἀνθρώπινον. The play's conclusion, pointing to continuing suffering beyond the scope of the drama as war enforces the departure of Antigone and Oedipus from a broken city, implies the same lack of resolution central to Thucydides' historical perspective. Myth and history intertwine; and the performance of the play against the background of an increasingly unsettled Athens reflects the anxieties of poet and audience alike.

³⁷² Cf. 1.22.4; see also again his reflections on Corcyra, where he marks the inevitability and universality of conflict and suffering not as a result of external factors but of the nature of mankind, φύσις ἀνθρώπων, 3.82.2.

3. Thebes: The Tragic *Polis*

The city of Thebes bears – perhaps more than any other tragic setting – a complex identity which is closely associated with its long and troubled history within the mythical tradition. The city's prominence in the tradition provided ample scope for the tragedians' reworking and reinvention of Thebes as dramatic *topos*. From Aeschylus' *Septem* to the late *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, the city and its legends continued to return to the Theatre of Dionysus and alongside Troy occupied a significant position in tragic myth.³⁷³ In *Phoinissai* the fusion of the Theban autochthony legend with the Labdacid myth, which had already been well-mined both on the tragic stage and in earlier literary treatments, both epic and lyric, lends a particular uniqueness to the city's character. It also affords Euripides the opportunity to construct for the city an especially innovative identity in both physical or spatial and thematic terms. The reverberations on every aspect of civic life of war and conflict unite the play with other late dramas which branch out into other areas of Theban myth, such as *Bacchae*; yet the drama retains a strong intertextual relationship with its dramatic precedent and chief literary influence, *Septem*.

3.1 Thebes and Dramatic 'Space'

The heavy emphasis in *Phoinissai* on the physicality of Thebes³⁷⁴ as individualised dramatic *topos* is connected with the centrality of the earth and the concept of the homeland, *patris*, to the complexities of the play's myths.³⁷⁵ The prominent featuring in the play of topographical characteristics³⁷⁶ familiar from Theban legend – the seven gates, the rivers Ismene and Dirce, the plain beyond the citadel, the tombs of Amphion and Niobe – suggests a particular concern with the evocation of a distinctively Theban sense of

³⁷³ Knox (1979) points out that Thebes comes second only to Troy in the known plays (33 against Troy's 68), 9; however, Troy's destruction in tragedy in contrast with Thebes' perennial survival is an important distinction between the two *topoi*. It also testifies to the conditioning of tragic myth by pre-existing legend. See further below under 'anti-Athens'.

³⁷⁴ Rawson (1970) 112-3 n.11 lists all the refs. in *Phoinissai* to the Theban land and *polis*, although she does not take into consideration the textual problems of the play, which affect her enumeration. This study's evaluation of the play's textual integrity places references to *gē* or *gaia* (and cognates) at 64 (mainly and quite naturally in the context of autochthony); *chthōn* 24; *patris* 17 (*patra* 1); and *polis* 32.

³⁷⁵ Rawson 114ff. discusses the conflict between family and fatherland in the play; caution however should be applied in evaluating her view that this is the 'main preoccupation' (112) of a drama which encompasses a variety of far-reaching themes. On the importance in the play's myths of the theme of the Theban land or soil, see for discussion 3.3 and 3.4; see also ch. 4.5.

³⁷⁶ For an annotated illustration of Thebes in the fifth century see Demand (1982) 46-7.

‘place’.³⁷⁷ This sense of topographical familiarity and realism constitutes more than a simple desire for geographical accuracy and verisimilitude, although Euripides may show more concern with the latter than either of his fellow tragedians.³⁷⁸ Theban localisation is throughout the play intimately linked with both dramatic effect and thematic significance. It is interesting that while the Choral odes focus predominantly inwards and backwards in the historical and external perspective of the Phoenician women, the main action reveals a marked concern with dramatic movement in the present time outside and beyond the Thebes of the *skēnē*, i.e. before the royal palace. This is aptly exemplified in the way the early *teichoskopia* scene focuses on the external battleground from the vantage point of the palace roof in a manner unique in extant tragedy. Apart from any intertextual echoes in the play, the device testifies to a particular interest in the narration of contiguous space which, if not unique, is at least highly unusual in the genre.³⁷⁹ The extension here of the Theban stage prefigures the significance in the play of the city’s immediate external surroundings as locus for key dramatic events. The kaleidoscopic pictorial effect of the depiction of the oncoming Argives in the *teichoskopia* through the visual agency of Antigone and, to a lesser extent, the Paidagogus, allows the audience to acquaint itself with the warriors familiar from *Septem*, while repeated reference to equally familiar Theban landmarks³⁸⁰ develops a concrete sense of external territory.³⁸¹

Further, this effect in lending substance to Jocasta’s earlier foreboding of the Argive assault imparts a sense of realism which heightens tension as the outside world is made to impinge on the theatrical arena. This tension between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the city is to become a significant motif in the play. Here the description of present-time events as *seen* in contrast with the retrospective narrative by the messenger of parallel events in *Septem* creates a particular urgency.³⁸² Events seen and those narrated are staged contemporaneously in the present moment. The narration of acting space and the division between the internal and external arenas will in the play become closely connected with the thematic problems of mythical Thebes. Here in the *teichoskopia*, the Theban plain,

³⁷⁷ It is important to note that Theban tragedies vary in their emphases on the city’s geographical identity: topographical interest is not to be assumed. On the fluidity of this theme within the genre, see 3.5 below.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Mastronarde 647-50.

³⁷⁹ For discussion of the theatrical manoeuvre in relation to the scene’s chief influences (*Il.* 3 and *Septem*), see above ch.1.1 and 1.2.

³⁸⁰ The city walls (115-6), Dirce (102, 131), and the tombs of Zethus (145) and Niobe (159-60) all make an appearance.

³⁸¹ This is also established, though in a different way, in *Bacchae*, which contrasts the palace and city of Thebes with the wildness of Cithaeron.

³⁸² The closest antecedent in tragedy for this physical focalisation as a means of making the invisible visible is probably found in the part of Cassandra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*; see 1107-11, 1114-8, 1125-9 etc.

which will later in the play become the central locus for external narrated action, is introduced (110-11) through the figure of Antigone, a young virgin in the unusual position of having quit her maiden quarters, the *parthenōnes*. Later, of course, she will with Jocasta make an active intrusion into the battlefield. Her novel exposure here in the *teichoskopia* to external events foregrounds the play's preoccupation with gender-spatial distinctions and the female role in the outside world of the *polis*.³⁸³ This suggestion of the later significance of specific areas of Theban territory is extended to, for instance, the river Dirce, which will be central locus in the First Stasimon and in the development of the play's autochthony myth, as will soon be made clear. The underlying religious associations of these Theban landmarks³⁸⁴ provide a fitting background to Antigone's closing prayer to the gods for civic salvation (182-92), which picks up in tone and theme on Jocasta's final lines in the Prologue. The imprecation is placed in characteristic balance with the imminence of the forthcoming assault;³⁸⁵ it is also important that the connection of Thebes with the gods and the theme of political defence prepares for the play's development of the city's complex and ambivalent relationship with its divinities.³⁸⁶

3.2 'Inside' and 'Outside'

This theme, foregrounded as we have already seen in the early *teichoskopia*, is central to the artistic integrity of the play and forms a bridge between dramatic structure and the thematic implications of the Labdacid and autochthony myths. In the Parodos the city of Thebes is introduced from the external perspective of the foreign women. The ode is constructed upon a triangular relationship between the Chorus' departure-point, Tyre, their planned destination, Delphi, and in stark contrast, the Thebes under siege in which the women are forcibly detained. The song presents Delphi as locus of peaceful fertility and joyful religious worship, in deliberate and powerful opposition to the focus in the strophe and antistrophe on the imminent battle at Thebes with the attendant imagery of violence and bloodshed.³⁸⁷ The contrast between events at Thebes and the Chorus' extra-Theban, proper role is balanced by the here antithetical divine influences of Dionysus as emblematic of vibrant fertility and ordered ritual at Delphi, and his opposite, Ares, as

³⁸³ See for discussion ch. 4.1 below.

³⁸⁴ On Dirce, see Easterling (2005) 57 n.38. Ismenus (101) evokes the Ismenion, Apollo's oracular shrine; on the cult of Amphion and Zethus, cf. Demand (57-9).

³⁸⁵ Cf. Easterling 57.

³⁸⁶ See for discussion 3.3 below.

³⁸⁷ The transition is strengthened by the *vōv dé* in 239.

synonymous with – and, as will become apparent, partial cause of – destruction at Thebes. The importance of Ares here in the context of the Argive assault prefigures the god’s centrality to the play’s autochthony myth; it is further significant that there exists the suggestion of a juxtaposition of Ares and Dionysus at Delphi.³⁸⁸ This in turn foregrounds the blurring and distortion of the two gods’ identities in a Theban context.³⁸⁹ The Chorus’ reporting of the visible threats of war, and, at the close of the ode, of the imminent arrival of Polynices, externalises the dramatic focus and invites the audience to perceive the threat encroaching on the city. The alignment of this technique with that employed to similar effect in the previous *teichoskopia* scene also invites an association between the Chorus and Antigone as bystanders or spectators as well as vulnerable non-combatants. Caught in a situation for which they bear no responsibility and over which they have no control, the Chorus here introduce the themes of victimhood and sacrifice which are bound so intimately with the gender dynamics of the play.³⁹⁰

In the subsequent episodes which build up to the central *agōn* the distinction between inside and outside the city is drawn powerfully to the audience’s attention in the expected arrival of Polynices. His clandestine entry into the city (261ff) and the subsequent protracted debate scene lie in marked distinction from previous tragic versions of the myth, which present Polynices as a voiceless menace outside the city, and focus on Thebes’ attempts to maintain integrity in the face of external threat.³⁹¹ Polynices’ actual entry into the city prior to the fraternal battle heralds a pattern established throughout the play of troublesome arrivals at Thebes, and the city’s associated difficulty in receiving, or rehabilitating, an ‘outsider’. His current appearance will, as the plot develops, be connected with a series of arrivals which occurred in the past and are the focal point of subsequent choral odes. All these arrivals are revealed to bear, and to have borne, ambivalent, though predominantly destructive, consequences for the city: Cadmus, the Sphinx, and Oedipus. Here Polynices’ appearance prefigures a conflict between his

³⁸⁸ Delphi and Thebes are linked by the motif of the slain serpent; the former is site of the serpent killed by Apollo (232), while pre-civilisation Thebes is home to Ares’ own serpent, also slain (657ff.). Of course – as Mastronarde points out on 232-3 – this lends a certain irony to the context of the Chorus’ idealisation of Delphi as religious locus, although the distinction in the status of each slayer must be borne in mind. Dionysus himself bears particular association with the snake or serpent, most prominently in *Bacchae*, which may reaffirm an association between Delphi and Thebes through the chthonic gods, who are integral to the Theban autochthony myth. On the Dionysus/serpent link, cf. e.g. Otto (1965) index s.v. ‘Snake’.

³⁸⁹ This is the central focus of the Second Stasimon: see again below under 3.3.

³⁹⁰ We return to this in ch.4 below.

³⁹¹ Aesch. in *Septem* exploits the antithesis between Eteocles inside and Polynices outside the city; the Parodos of Soph. *Antigone* depicts Polynices’ assault on Thebes from a purely external perspective, without even articulating his name.

professed love for and right to his *patris*, and his intrusion as exile into a city against which he threatens destruction. It is also interesting that for him, Thebes is a place of danger; he arrives fearing ambush (261ff). This reverses the associations of inside and outside earlier in the play, when in the *teichoskopia* the threat to the city is visible on the battlefield beyond; it also indicates the extent to which Polynices is alienated from his native *polis*. The difficulty of the exile's reintegration into his *polis*, and the questionable nature of his political loyalties, points to the themes in the Oedipus myth of usurpation and civic authority. The brothers' conflicting claims to sole political power and their ultimate defeat highlight the complexity of their relationship with the city, in whose best interests each confidently claims to be acting. Of course, their actions will result in the destruction of the *polis* and *self*-destruction in addition. The brothers' individual departures³⁹² from the city's centre and their mutually-inflicted deaths on the battlefield beyond develop the difficulty inherent in their civic ties through the association of their political identities with Thebes' physical territory. Their inability to find permanent integration into the city is balanced by their deaths on its borders, neither inside nor outside.³⁹³ Again theatrical space is mapped on to the mythical concerns of identity and individuality.³⁹⁴ Here the physical movement away from the stage, narrated in later time by the messenger, sustains for both the characters left onstage and the audience a continual awareness of the Thebes beyond the *skēnē*: this naturally results in a heightened anticipation of the development of 'outside' events. The fratricidal battle highlights the brothers' inability to share living-space in Thebes and their ultimate failure to divide their *kratos*: only in death are they – literally – united with the Theban soil.³⁹⁵ Their inability to find integration in Thebes provides the final manifestation of the forces at work in the Labdacid myth, which bears the inevitable pollution, *miasma*, in the paternal/male line as a result of Laius'

³⁹² Polynices exits after 635; on the disputed question of Eteocles' point of departure, see Mastronarde on 753, and *passim* on Eteocles's speech here (748ff.) for difficulties of text and onstage movements.

³⁹³ This is foreseen, not without poignancy, in the dying request by Polynices to be buried in his city, so that he may gain at least a small portion of land (1447-50) – this from one who had sought ownership of the entire city.

³⁹⁴ This may be further complicated by the brothers' incestuous connection; see Zeitlin in Winkler & Zeitlin (1990) 139-41 on the excessive closeness of the fraternal incestuous link as root cause of the brothers' ultimate inability to assert their individual positions in the *polis*.

³⁹⁵ A reading of καὶ διώρισαν κράτος at 1424 (cf. Denniston 1936 116) would suggest an ironic comment on the messenger's part on the division of the land only as place of the brothers' deaths, for all that they sought to gain absolute control of the city's territory. But manuscript tradition is strongly in favour of κοῦ over καὶ; and of modern editors only Kovacs in his Loeb ed. (2002) reads καὶ.

transgression against Apollo's oracle and his death at his son Oedipus' hands.³⁹⁶ In the present generation this is more specifically relevant to Polynices as effective stranger to and potential destroyer of his *patris*,³⁹⁷ and thus re-shapes the question of political identity to the more immediate concept of physical belonging in the problem of the traitor's burial.³⁹⁸

Following the *agōn*-scene the development of the Theban autochthony myth is heralded by a return to past time in the First Stasimon (638-89), the focal point of which is again the arrival at Thebes of an outsider, Cadmus. A sense of 'place' is once more important here. The ode in looking back to the earliest point of Theban history also looks outwards to Thebes' environs, specifically to the river Dirce, birthplace of Dionysus (649-56). The relocation of Dionysus to a Theban context prepares for the clash of the god's identity with that of Ares in the Second Stasimon, although here the contrast between the two is sharp. Dirce is especially important in the ode in prefiguring an antithesis between the imagery of fertility and vibrancy associated with Dionysus, and in the antistrophe the violence and death in the slaying by Cadmus of Ares' snake. The antistrophe brings its own balance of opposites in the genesis of the first sown men, which is abruptly juxtaposed with their mutual slaughter (670-5). The river and its immediate surroundings are thus associated both with life and with destruction. This is closely associated with the similar ambivalence of *gē* or earth, which in pre-civilisation Thebes had been productive of beauty and vibrant growth; yet subsequent to the snake's slaying is revealed to be hostile to life and propagation in the monstrous engendering of the sown men.³⁹⁹ Dirce as focal point for the first beginnings of the city's autochthony myth will be associated likewise in the forthcoming conclusion of that myth with the death of earth's last offspring, Menoeceus, in the same spot and in atonement for the snake's death.⁴⁰⁰ The

³⁹⁶ This *miasma* will affect the entire family and not merely the males in Jocasta's death and Antigone's final exile from the city. On causation in the Labdacid myth, see below 3.4. For discussion of the Labdacids' relationship with Thebes as 'earth' from a specifically gendered perspective, see ch. 4.5 below.

³⁹⁷ Although it must be emphasised that in Eur.'s version Eteocles's behaviour is no less reprehensible; the play presents him as a usurper who reneges on the agreement to rule for alternate years (cf. 69ff.; 481-3). Eteocles may not actually invade his *patris* but he is prepared to see it destroyed rather than surrender or even to share power, as his mother suggests.

³⁹⁸ Cf. again 1447-50, which prepares the audience for the importance in the Exodos of the burial theme. For defence of both the ref. and the theme in the play's closing episodes, see Appendix A. The later *OC* of Soph. will expand on these interrelated themes of the Theban soil, betrayal, and the problems of burial in the wanderings of Oedipus and the impossibility of his repatriation due to his status as parricide.

³⁹⁹ See for discussion of *gē* below 3.3. The concept of a destructive or transgressive fertility is an important link to the Labdacid myth, specifically in Jocasta's bearing against divine instruction of a son who was to commit patricide; and further, her engendering with that son of the offspring who were themselves to feud with their father (cf. 64-8) and to prove in addition each other's destruction.

⁴⁰⁰ This is clear in Teiresias' instructions at 931-5 and in the intention of Menoeceus himself at 1009-11.

close proximity to Dirce establishes the river as both point of origin and final destination in the myth. Topography thus proves an effective means of underlining both causal connection and inevitability.

The evocation of Thebes as physical entity is presented from a different angle in the Second Stasimon (784-833). The portrayal of Ares and Dionysus in fatal collision externalises the play's scope in evoking the threat posed to the city by the oncoming Argives. For the audience, of course, this perception of events beyond the *skēnē* sustains dramatic tension as well as anticipation of the brothers' confrontation. It is appropriate in this context that the ode focuses backwards as well as outwards in the apostrophising in the antistrophe of Mount Cithaeron, as the women express the common choral wish for the non-occurrence of past events, i.e. the survival of Oedipus and the visitation upon Thebes of the Sphinx. Past and present are juxtaposed and united, since historical experience now illustrates two more problematic arrivals at Thebes, those of Oedipus and the Sphinx. The former's is, like Cadmus', shown to bear ambivalent consequences. The arrival initially appears to be the solution; instead it simply redirects the problem. This is clear in Cadmus' destruction of the serpent, which leads to the genesis of the first earth-born and so, in the present generation, to the death of Menoeceus. There is a similar pattern in Oedipus' slaughter of the Sphinx; again, the destruction of a monster by an ostensible rescuer. Oedipus saves Thebes from destruction, but it also leads to the incestuous marriage and so, in the next generation, to the 'other battle', ἐρις ἄλλα (811), that is the fraternal conflict.⁴⁰¹ Again discord flourishes, θάλλει...κατὰ δώματα καὶ πόλιν (812-3).⁴⁰² Of course, the allusions to Oedipus also focus *inwards* in reminding the audience of the old man's presence inside the palace, and thus build on an expectation of his appearance.⁴⁰³ The thematic emphasis here on the distortion of familial ties and the illicit engendering of offspring (814-7)⁴⁰⁴ serves as an apt interlude between the breakdown of the *agōn* and the imminent fraternal confrontation. The themes also map on neatly and appropriately to the final stanza's recourse to the autochthony theme and the similar double-edged quality in the fertility of *gē* itself, which is to Thebes a 'most glorious reproach', κάλλιστον ὄνειδος

⁴⁰¹ The double-edged nature of Oedipus' arrival is made explicit in the Third Stasimon, which notes that his appearance was 'at first bringing gladness, then grief', τότε ἄσμενοις, πάλιν δ' ἄχη (1046).

⁴⁰² The unusual use here of θάλλει underlines the distorted nature of the fraternal relationship, which is productive of civic and domestic upheaval; it is striking that discord should 'flourish' in the context of the Labdacids, marking again an inversion of normal growth and fertility inherent in the family line.

⁴⁰³ This effect, compounded by repeated references to Oedipus throughout the play, is an important point in support of the authenticity of the Exodos and more specifically of Oedipus' part within it. See below Appendix A.

⁴⁰⁴ On the textual difficulties here, see Mastronarde ad loc.

(821). The tone of the stanza is ambivalent throughout, since civic glory in association with war and autochthony, here presented as closely-linked themes, also involves suffering and death in consequence. This bears close relation with Euripides' similarly ambivalent presentation of Menoeceus' sacrifice in the next scenes.⁴⁰⁵

The play's development subsequent to the sacrifice episode reveals a marked interest in movement and theatrical space both on- and offstage. Jocasta's exit from the palace in response to the messenger's summons (1067ff) prefigures her subsequent departure to the battlefield. Her re-entry, which shifts the dramatic focus away from the intensity of the preceding sacrifice episode, also points to the centrality of events in the Labdacid myth to the city's safety. It thus forms a thematic link between the death of Menoeceus and those of the brothers. Jocasta's final exit from the *skēnē* is delayed by the lengthy retrospective messenger narrative of the Argive assault. The messenger's speech (1090-1199) lends a vivid sense of detail and realism to Thebes' external territory, especially in the descriptions of the warriors at each of the seven gates.⁴⁰⁶ This adds to the audience's impression of the city beyond the stage as an actual entity in establishing the Aeschylean atmosphere of Thebes as surrounded and threatened on all sides. Yet the somewhat anti-climactic ending of the speech on the point of Zeus' intervention (1180ff)⁴⁰⁷ and the distinct impression of the temporary nature of Thebes' salvation⁴⁰⁸ focuses dramatic developments forwards and outwards to the plain as scene of the fraternal combat. Anticipation of this is heightened by the messenger's repeated references to Polynices' movements during the assault⁴⁰⁹ and, in contrast, a conspicuous lack of allusion to Eteocles, which leaves both Jocasta and the audience with the strong impression that more is yet to be told.

The abrupt departure of Jocasta and Antigone to the battlefield on the note of Jocasta's intended death should disaster have befallen her sons (1283) transfers the fates of all the Labdacid characters save Oedipus to the battlefield. It is ironic that not just the brothers but the family as a whole can only come together here, outside the city, and in

⁴⁰⁵ See esp. ch.4.7 below.

⁴⁰⁶ On the disputed portion 1104-40 see for discussion below Appendix C.

⁴⁰⁷ Foley views this as indicative of the gods' renewed support of the city as a result of Menoeceus' sacrifice, although it must be borne in mind that the punishment of the arch-*hubristēs* Capaneus was a staple of the myth (cf. Soph. *Ant.* 128-33; see also Aesch. *Sep.* 437-446).

⁴⁰⁸ Note the messenger's concluding comment that the city has been saved 'for today' (1196-7). This points, importantly, to the salvation of Thebes as hinging on a double condition: Menoeceus' sacrifice imparts a sense of resolution and closure to the autochthony myth; yet in the Labdacid myth, civic salvation yet hangs in the balance. A contemporary audience would also be reminded of the legend of the Epigonoι, sons of the seven attackers of Thebes.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. 1093-6, 1123-7, 1144ff., 1163-4, 1168-70.

death. The location outside Thebes firmly articulates the ultimate separation of the fate of the family from that of the city. The respective exits of the four characters sustain high dramatic tension as the re-entry of Creon in search of his sister (1310ff) delays news of the women's actions. In theatrical terms his appearance also, of course, lends realism to the chronological development of events. It is further important that Creon's entry contributes to the general confusion in the play of arrivals and departures. The cumulative effect of these is the suggestion of a Thebes which struggles to maintain its integrity in the face of external influence. In the second messenger speech (1356-1479), the outside world is brought vividly before the eyes of the onstage characters and of the audience with an immediacy and dynamism characteristic of the early *teichoskopia*, albeit here transferred to historical narrative. The bipartite structure of the speech neatly separates the fates of the men and the women, corresponding equally neatly with the order of their departures. The three deaths prefigure the final mass re-entry of the Labdacids (1480ff), the brothers reunited in death as they were never to be in life. It is poignantly appropriate that the young Antigone, sole survivor of a fruitless venture to prevent catastrophe, should instigate the first and final entry of the aged Oedipus (1539ff). For the audience the emotional and visual intensity of these brief moments which present the final reunion of all the Labdacids onstage was surely powerful indeed. The helpless old man drawn out from inside the palace together with the three corpses of his wife and sons brought in from outside lend a high pathos to a scene which above all emphasises the absolute destruction of the Labdacid family. Yet separation is quick and inevitable. The surviving Labdacids' necessary expulsion from Thebes again focuses the action forwards and outwards, once more beyond the city in which none of the family could ultimately find integration. The audience is also made aware of the full devastation of war, and of its consequences to non-combatants. Uncertainty of place in Oedipus' fatalistic prediction of his future movements (1687) ultimately gains coherence in pointing towards Colonus as his final home (1707-9).⁴¹⁰ The play thus suggests the possibility of a future beyond its scope and beyond Thebes, a city left behind still standing, while the exiled Labdacids face the prospect, here as yet unknown, which Sophocles was only a few years later to dramatise so magnificently in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

⁴¹⁰ Scholarly opinion remains divided on the authenticity of the ref.; the lines are retained in Mastronarde, although Diggle brackets the entire text from 1582ff. Although the five lines 1703-7 have been viewed by some critics as a borrowing from the later *OC*, it is not unfeasible that the cult of Oedipus at Colonus should have been alluded to by Eur. (rather than being the invention of Soph.); see Mastronarde's nn. ad locc.

3.3 Thebes and the Gods

Although the gods play a less prominent role in the plot of *Phoinissai* than in other late Euripidean dramas, they are nevertheless closely involved in the development of its myths. The gods' associations with Thebes are generally ambivalent, with both benevolent and potentially (as well as actually) destructive influences on the city. The play also suggests an ingrained opposition to the city on the part of the gods which may be traced far back into Thebes' troubled past. Ares, for instance, as pervasive influence in the play is closely associated with the land, *gē*, through the serpent whose slaying must find expiation through the sacrifice of Menoeceus.⁴¹¹ The presence of Ares' serpent in pre-civilisation Thebes as intimately connected with the earth links the city's foundation with the chthonic powers, which are here representative of primitive violence. This also prefigures the city's association with Ares as in this play emblematic of war and destruction.⁴¹² The ancient grudge borne by Ares as a result of the serpent's slaying (934-5) strengthens his association with the chthonic Erinyes as agents of vengeance and retribution in his demand for blood in atonement for bloodshed. The connection here of Ares with the chthonic rather than with the Olympian gods emphasises the problematic and more markedly negative nature of his relationship with Thebes in this play, particularly in connection with the autochthony myth.⁴¹³ This is unlike his presentation in another 'Theban' play, *Antigone*, which presents Ares in a protective capacity in relation to the city.⁴¹⁴ The corresponding demands of Ares and *gē* for the sacrifice of the last of the autochthons as condition of their future benevolence towards the city (936-40) suggests a distortion of their protective and nurturing capacities as balanced against the ambivalent consequences of earth's engendering of the Spartoi, or 'sown men'. This marks an interesting development of Ares' presentation in *Septem*, where the god is presented as at once erstwhile patron and destroyer of the city.⁴¹⁵ Euripides presents *gē* in particular as bearing

⁴¹¹ Sources vary on the exact parentage of the serpent/snake, on which see Fontenrose (1959) 308 n.61. Although Eur. does not make reference to Ares as the snake's father, that it is the offspring of *gē* is made clear at 931 and 935; and, as Mastronarde points out on 658, the 'warlike nature' of the Spartoi links in with their ancestral association with Ares.

⁴¹² It is important that this association may be transferred from the autochthony myth in which it originates to the fraternal conflict and Ares' role as the agent of the Erinyes in bringing the battle to its climax (cf. 253-5). See further below under 3.4.

⁴¹³ Eur. thus omits Ares in relating the marriage of Harmonia as a glorious episode in Theban history (823-5); of Ares as Harmonia's father (as at e.g. *Bacch.* 1332) or as protector (cf. 1338) he says nothing.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. *Ant.* 140.

⁴¹⁵ Ares' patronage of Thebes is stressed here; unlike *Phoinissai*, Aesch. alludes to Ares as father of Harmonia (135-42) and to his apparent assistance of Cadmus in the sowing of the serpent's teeth (412). The

a certain hostility towards its own, since the time when earth produced the Spartoi who were quickly to be lost through mutual slaughter (670-5). In present-day events, *gē* will also be revealed to be hostile to generation, growth, and life in the demand for the blood of its own offspring, Menoeceus, in the prime of youth and before his entry into marriage and parenthood.⁴¹⁶ This presentation of the earth suggests a propensity to violence and destruction within the city's identity, and a fundamental difficulty in and by Thebes of the promotion of health and fertility. It also implies the inherently problematic nature of autochthony as an anomalous form of reproduction, which in the wider thematic context of the play forms a link to the familial implications of the incestuous marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta.⁴¹⁷

In the second Stasimon the presentation of the opposites Ares and Dionysus as clashing influences heightens the audience's awareness of the fraternal battle which now reaches its conclusion outside the city. The prominence of Ares in the ode reaffirms the god's importance in the Labdacid myth. Here he is portrayed as a disruptive presence at the Dionysiac feast and as destructive of ordered ritual, as well as wholly immune to the influence of Dionysus himself.⁴¹⁸ The distinction between the two gods appears to be blurred in the ode's adaptation of Dionysiac terminology to Ares' martial movements at Thebes.⁴¹⁹ Yet their opposition remains stark, and the emphasis rests heavily on the destruction wrought by Ares. His perversion of Dionysiac activity indicates the natural incompatibility of war with the maintenance of social and religious structures, which is an overarching theme of the play. Here there is an especial aptness in the voicing of these concerns by a group of women prevented by the war from executing their religious duty.⁴²⁰ The ode presents this conflict as a historical problem: the allusion to Ares' inciting of the brothers to war reminds the audience of the god's longstanding and troubled

Chorus stresses this inversion of the god's role in their emphasis on the havoc wrought on Thebes; cf. Hutchinson on 104-8, and on the origins of Thebes, see for discussion Vian (1963) 158ff.

⁴¹⁶ Again, this is an important thematic link with the Labdacid myth. We noted earlier that the play's conclusion emphasises the irretrievable breakdown of the family; Antigone is a girl who chooses virginity over marriage, and departs into exile with an old man. Both are all that is left of the family; and neither is a source for regeneration.

⁴¹⁷ The motif of irregular or problematic fertility/reproduction is inherent in both the play's myths and is linked to the theme of interfamilial strife violence, as illustrated in, for instance, the destruction of the first autochthons, which serves as a 'mythical prototype' for the fraternal battle (Mastronarde 330). The distorted effect of autochthonic reproduction in particular is a central theme in the first half of Hesiod's *Theogony*, where an increasing sense of cosmic order coincides with the gradual elimination of asexual procreation.

⁴¹⁸ Ares' perversion of Dionysiac activity is similar to his portrayal in the second parabasis (if it is one) of Ar. *Acharnians* (cf. 977-85). Contrast the opening of Pindar, *P.1*, where Ares is open to the charm of music.

⁴¹⁹ At 789-91, for instance, Ares is said to 'breathe', ἐπιπνεύσας, the Argive army upon Thebes, and leads the enemy as a 'tuneless revel band', κῶμον ἀναυλότατον.

⁴²⁰ See for discussion ch.4.6 below.

association with the city, while linking him - as well as the 'sown men' - to the present-day fraternal battle.⁴²¹ The interest in Dionysus is centred more upon the god's performative and ritualistic associations and thus implies a flirtation with the metatheatrical. The tacit elision of the boundary between intertextual and extratextual Dionysiac cult underscores the association of Dionysus with civic cult and civilised order. In the immediate dramatic context, this also underlines what is at stake for Thebes. Dionysus' presentation here in the specific contexts of music and dance evokes the performative context of the play as a whole, since Dionysus was patron of those arts at the City Dionysia in Athens. The ode does not expand on Dionysus himself in close association with Ares, and, in turn, with the chthonic or the bestial. The affinity between the two gods, though always potentially present, is not developed as it is elsewhere in late Euripides.⁴²² Dionysus throughout the play fulfils a role far subordinate⁴²³ to that of Ares, whose influence is infused in each of the drama's myths.⁴²⁴

The potential or actual danger posed to Thebes by the gods serves as a connecting force between the Labdacid and autochthony myths. All the arrivals of outsiders at Thebes, which bear destructive and destabilising consequences for the city, occur at the behest of a god: thus Apollo decreed that Cadmus should come to Thebes from Delphi (642-4); equally Oedipus is to arrive at the city, having followed the advice of Apollo's oracle (1043-6); and Polynices' appearance fulfils that god's decree of bloodshed for the entire Labdacid family in the event of Laius' disobedience of Apollo's oracle, which forbade him from fathering a son (19-20). The sending of the Sphinx by Hades (810-11) underlines the city's association with the chthonic gods⁴²⁵ while also reaffirming the

⁴²¹ The underlying association between the two myths picks up on 350-3, where Jocasta speaks of some unidentified avenging agency as having 'revelled destructively' (Craik), κατεκόμασε, in the house of Oedipus.

⁴²² The most prominent exemplum is of course *Bacchae*, which marks in Dionysus the god's own 'share of Ares' (302) in foregrounding the 'battle' waged on Cithaeron (see esp. 761-4).

⁴²³ Zeitlin 143 however sees the influence of Dionysus as framing the play, from the early point of Laius' drunken transgression against Apollo's oracle (εἰς...βακχεῖαν πεσὼν, 21), to Antigone's final role as a 'bacchant of corpses' (1489). But the allusions seem tenuous at best, especially since Laius' drunkenness presupposes no direct influence on the part of Dionysus; and Antigone's self-titled role reflects more the distortion of her proper virgin's role in religious ritual. Zeitlin's further ref. to 1753-7 is undermined by the textual problems of the play's close: this passage is unlikely to be genuine. See further Appendix A.

⁴²⁴ On the metatheatrical aspect of tragedy see again the discussion of Henrichs.

⁴²⁵ This association need not involve any specific involvement of Hades here in the myth, but the connection with the underworld/chthonic has a general appropriateness; at 1031-2 the Chorus is vague as to which of the gods sent the Sphinx, although φόνιος may suggest Ares (cf. Mastronarde on 1032). If so, this would form a neat link back to Ares' ancient grudge over his serpent, as well as tying the autochthony and Labdacid myths together in suggesting the god's role as general nemesis of Thebes. An association of Ares with the Sphinx may be implied not only in the Sphinx's role as avenging power (as consequence of the serpent's death; it is

danger posed by *gē* to the Theban *polis*. This is clear in the identity of the Sphinx's parents: the creature is the offspring of *gē* and Echidna (1019-20). This implies a double association with the chthonic, which picks up on the theme of the earth's monstrous fertility. In the legend of the Spartoi the earth has demanded the death of one of its own in expiation for the loss of its serpentine progeny, which had represented the primitive and potentially violent aspect of pre-civilisation Thebes. So too here does the offspring of *gē*, like the serpent of old, pose a grave threat to the city. The consistency of this pattern of dangerous arrivals suggests an inherent instability or weakness in the very foundations of the city, which renders it especially susceptible to disorder. This is a quality which unites city and ruling family. The idea of a fundamental vulnerability on the part of Thebes ties in appropriately with the ambivalent nature of *gē* and the destructive potential inherent in the myth of autochthony. It also unites the motifs of internal and external dangers posed in varying ways to the city through the events of the two myths. The arrivals of outsiders are productive of strife and destruction; yet the city is equally threatened from within, both by the very earth, and by the actions of those who seek absolute power.

The play's presentation of the collusion of Ares and *gē* in their mutual avenging purpose is balanced elsewhere by the complex and apparently divisive nature of divine will. The gods seem to be operating individually and at apparent cross purposes. Cadmus' arrival at Thebes, that 'beginning of ills', *arkhē kakōn*,⁴²⁶ as the fulfilment of Apollo's oracle also leads to his offence against Ares in his preparation for ritual as he acknowledges the accomplishment of his behest.⁴²⁷ The sowing of the serpent's teeth on the instructions of Athene (667)⁴²⁸ and the resulting cross-generational consequences may suggest a certain disjunction in intention between the goddess⁴²⁹ and Apollo on the one hand and *gē* on the other. But as the play develops, it becomes clear that despite - or even because of - their conflicts, the gods operate as a collaborative force in contributing to the city's ills; this presentation of divine purpose, characteristic of Euripides, is a

a 'cursed Erinys', 1029) but also in their mutual connection with *gē*. The Scholiast on *Ph.* 1064 marks Ares as sender of the Sphinx; on the Sphinx in general, cf. Fontenrose 308-10.

⁴²⁶ Such is the effect of Jocasta's opening words in the Prologue: see Mastronarde on 3-4. On the textual difficulties of 1-2, widely regarded as spurious, cf. Mastronarde 139-41.

⁴²⁷ Cf. 662 ἐπὶ χέριβας, and see Mastronarde ad loc.

⁴²⁸ On the textual difficulties here see Mastronarde ad loc.

⁴²⁹ Apollodorus 3.4.1 also has Athene in an instructive role; in Stesichorus (cf. Fontenrose 316 n.78) she does the sowing herself. Whether directly or indirectly involved, Athene as associated with the genesis of the Spartoi bears interesting implications for the autochthony myth through the goddess' martial connections, especially appropriate here, and in her own single parentage (cf. 666 ἀμάρτορος). Although Athene is not prominent in the play, her appearance here may point to the complex gendering of her role in an autochthonic context. See further ch.4.5 below.

fundamentally Homeric one. It is Apollo, after all, who decrees the necessity of Menoeceus' sacrifice, which will appease Ares and *gē*. Apollo and *gē* are also linked in the Labdacid myth, since it is the god who sends Oedipus to Thebes, and earth, as we have already seen, produced the Sphinx: both *gē* and Apollo seek to avenge a past wrong.⁴³⁰ Of course, Apollo also sent Cadmus as both destroyer of the serpent and founder of Thebes: this ambivalence between the god's stabilising and destructive influences on the city is reiterated in his sending of Oedipus, at once saviour of Thebes through killing the Sphinx, and potential destroyer of the city through the incestuous marriage with Jocasta and subsequent events.

Further, Apollo is also linked with Ares through that god's continual association with the present-day fraternal conflict. This is most evident in the Parodos and Second Stasimon; Ares is an important presence as the Labdacid curse is fulfilled.⁴³¹ This underlying unity of the gods is affirmed in the pervasive syncretism in the play which ties in with the general ambivalence of the gods' associations with the city while also, ironically, exposing the characters' ignorance of this ambivalence or of divine purpose in general. Thus, for instance, the Chorus prays to Demeter as identifiable with *gē*, 'nurturer of all things', πάντων...τροφός, for succour (685ff). Earth, of course, is *trophos* not only of life and beauty but is also productive of violence and death. So too does Antigone in the *teichoskopia* invoke, appropriately for a scene which emphasises her virginity, the chaste goddess Artemis in association with Hecate (110) as potential saviour of the city.⁴³² Yet later, in the second Stasimon, Artemis will be connected with Cithaeron, which is of course linked with Oedipus and the Sphinx, underlining the negative connotations of the mountain in relation to events at Thebes.⁴³³

⁴³⁰ i.e. the killing by Cadmus of the serpent, and Laius' disobedience of Apollo's oracle.

⁴³¹ Of course, Ares may also potentially feature in a metaphorical sense in martial contexts, which may caution against too literal a reading of his association with Theban ills. But not all references can be dismissed as metaphor, and the connection of Ares with the onset of Theban troubles arguably invests even the metonymic use with a thematic significance.

⁴³² Artemis as civic goddess at Thebes is suggested at *Sep.* 146ff. and 154. It is interesting that Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* notes the existence of a temple of Artemis at Thebes (book 9.17.1), although there is little evidence elsewhere for the presence of a major cult of Artemis in the city.

⁴³³ Cithaeron had protected the exposed infant Oedipus (803-4), with catastrophic consequences for the city; so too was it home to the Sphinx which was likewise to be a bane to Thebes.

3.4 Curse

Phoinissai reveals a complex relationship between the gods as agents of predestination and the human characters which perform autonomous and psychologically plausible actions that contribute to the accomplishment of dramatic events. Divine and human influences are presented as complementary and collaborative forces. The play also suggests an open-ended and multi-faceted fabric of causation within its two myths. In the sacrifice of Menoeceus, there is a sense of absolute ineluctability in the young man's implication in a past transgression for which he bears no direct responsibility. Menoeceus is caught up in events not of his own creation, and to this extent his fate is more obviously determined by factors beyond his control. This aligns his role closely with those of the other non-combatants in the play as victims of the wider reverberations of war.⁴³⁴ Yet it is also important that the inevitability of Menoeceus' death is not overstated in the text. He makes it clear that it is his choice to die, so that he is not accused of cowardice or betrayal, and to save the city and his family (997-1012). Individual responsibility on the part of the play's characters is firmly embedded in the play. In Menoeceus' case, the accomplishment of the sacrifice is reliant for dramatic effect and plausibility on the coherence of 'fate' or predestination with Menoeceus' personal or individual sense of principle or morality. The Homeric culture of shame which for him renders avoidance of death intolerable is presented as collaborative with the pre-ordained and unavoidable pattern of events. Thus cultural factors are presented in large part as shaping Menoeceus' decision to die: especially his fear of cowardice and sense of obligation to his *philoï* as well as to his city. These cultural precepts present certain implications for as well as highlighting the autonomy of Menoeceus.

In the Labdacid myth the questions of predetermination and responsibility are presented with a great degree of complexity on multiple levels and from a cross-generational perspective. It is a consistent feature of the play that causation in the unfolding and final accomplishment of the family curse is presented as varied and indefinite. The characters display a persistent vagueness in their (attempted) explanations of events. This inconsistency or uncertainty is due to the presentation of those events specifically from the perspective of the characters, who are directly involved and who must thus naturally be assumed to display a certain degree of bias or subjectivity. There of

⁴³⁴ This is discussed fully in the next chapter.

course exists no objective external comment on the development of the curse both chronologically anterior to the play's action and during its present-time events. The limitations of human knowledge as an intrinsic theme in the myth thus rule out an explicit and objective explanation of causation in events. Yet the play still provides a full exploration of the tension between fate as synonymous with the curse, fixed and inevitable, and the facilitation of its fulfilment by the varying degrees of autonomy and control on the part of the human characters. In the Prologue Jocasta tells of Laius' disobedience to Apollo's oracle as the result of madness or inebriation, and emphasises specifically Laius' autonomous and individual act of will in yielding to pleasure, ἡδονή (21), in the full knowledge that contravention of the oracle was decreed to be his own undoing. This is the *arkhē kakōn* for the Labdacids. It also locates the problems of the myth in personal responsibility and, interestingly, in passion, which will likewise prove true – as we saw in the previous chapter - in the case of the two brothers in the present generation.

These questions of passion and of pleasure suggest a certain susceptibility or weakness on the part of Laius which renders him more prone to transgressive behaviour. The concept of a sexual transgressiveness in particular is a recurrent one, and is picked up by Jocasta in her later description of having borne Oedipus 'lawlessly', ἄνομα (380). There is here the suggestion of impulsiveness and a lack of regard for the consequences of his actions on the part of Laius. This is emphasised by the explicit warning of Apollo against Laius' fathering of a son (17-20); but Laius disobeys in a moment of drunkenness, εἷς...βακχείαν πεσὼν (21). His yielding to pleasure suggests self-indulgence and thus conscious human action – and so responsibility - as a collaborative force within the predestined pattern of events. We see something similar in the case of Oedipus. Jocasta in the Prologue goes on to describe the separate departures of father and son to Delphi, the one to ascertain whether the son he exposed were still alive, and the other to discover the identity of his parents (32-8). Again, the themes of knowledge and ignorance come into play: Laius' awareness of Apollo's edict, and of his own transgression, is balanced against Oedipus' lack of, and desire to obtain, knowledge. Further, the acquisition of knowledge as shared motive of both parties also points to an inherent and inherited characteristic of curiosity or inquisitiveness which contributes to the development of events. On Oedipus' part in particular, this quality reminds the audience of the king's presentation in the earlier

Tyrannos, where the quest for information is the driving force of the plot.⁴³⁵ Apollo and Delphi are marked as the focal points of ‘destiny’ in the sense that Apollo’s grievance towards Laius precipitates the convergence of father and son at Phocis. But the convergence requires the separate and individual self-willed actions of Oedipus and Laius.

The patricide itself is in causation not dissimilar. Oedipus’ haughty refusal - being ‘proud’, μέγα φρονῶν (41) - to give way to Laius’ chariot, and the resulting quarrel which culminates in the latter’s death, point to the impetuosity and quickness of temper common to his character in the *Tyrannos* and again invite us to think of the earlier plays.⁴³⁶ Laius’ own intransigence over the meeting, having his chariot driven on so that it injures Oedipus (41-2),⁴³⁷ implies a common stubbornness again displayed by the Oedipus of the *Tyrannos*, who is mostly impervious to the pleas of those around him. Thus events take place as per Apollo’s plan; yet divine control is not foregrounded. Oedipus’ – and indeed Laius’ - impulsiveness and hot temper suggest a native inclination to behaviours which can more readily cohere with external influences in the accomplishment of what is ‘fated’ or ‘destined’ to happen. In relation to the incestuous marriage, it appears that in this play at least Oedipus’ innocence is assured, since there is no mention of his pre-knowledge of this part of Apollo’s plan.⁴³⁸ On the point of the marriage, the play inclines sympathetically to the presentation of an Oedipus who was utterly ignorant.⁴³⁹ This may suggest the ineluctable fulfilment of a divine plan, especially since – as noted above - both Oedipus and the Sphinx were sent to Thebes by gods, which seems to confirm the inevitability of the fated incestuous union. The emphasis in the Prologue on the original transgression of Laius, who it is made clear was fully aware of the predicted consequences of his actions and seeks to avoid them through the exposure of his son, strongly implies the revisitation of past events on subsequent generations.

⁴³⁵ Although in *OT* it is also the oracle which induces him to leave Corinth (cf. 787-97), while in *Phoinissai*, by way of contrast, the controlling power of the oracle is not stressed.

⁴³⁶ We remember from *OT* Oedipus’ threats against the reluctant herdsman and Teiresias; and the killing not only of Laius in accordance with divine plan, but of his entire entourage for good measure (813).

⁴³⁷ Mastronarde ad loc. suggests that the wounding here is narrated as a deliberate echo of Laius’ earlier wounding of the infant Oedipus prior to his exposure (26).

⁴³⁸ We are reminded in contrast of *OT*, in which the marriage is clearly mentioned as part of Apollo’s plan (791-2); and it is also made clear that Oedipus’ attempts to avoid the fulfilment of this plan were ultimately futile (794-7).

⁴³⁹ Cf. Jocasta’s words at 53; at 381 she merely says that Oedipus married her ‘for ill’. At 869 Teiresias appears to view the marriage as unhappy consequence of Laius’ transgression; the antistrophe of the Third Stasimon reflects on Oedipus’ misfortune; and Oedipus himself in his later speech in the Exodos (1595-1624) likewise views himself as unhappy victim of divine purpose.

This becomes clear in the presentation of the fraternal feud in the current generation. Oedipus at the end of the play speaks of having passed on to his sons the curse he received from his father, ἀρὰς παραλαβὼν Λαΐου καὶ παισὶ δούς (1611).⁴⁴⁰ Here he suggests a lack of autonomy in his inevitable transmission of the *alastōr* pursuing him as a result of Laius' wrongdoing.⁴⁴¹ This *alastōr* is externalised as a separate agency akin to the avenging spirits of the Erinyes,⁴⁴² whereby the curse reaches fulfilment through human intermediaries.⁴⁴³ Oedipus himself reiterates this idea of his own part as an intermediary in ascribing the curse and the self-blinding to the influence of 'some god' (θεῶν του, 1614). But again it is important that this – like Jocasta's earlier inability to identify the exact cause of the present troubles⁴⁴⁴ – is the perception of the *characters* as involved individuals. The difficulty for those involved in finding a starting-point – unlike the Chorus – is a recurrent motif in the myth. These limitations imposed on the audience's understanding of events necessitate the examination of individual perception against that of other characters in the play to establish the authority of the explanation offered. Teiresias had also ascribed the blinding to a divine agency (870-1); yet Jocasta presents it as Oedipus' autonomous and conscious reaction to the discovery of the truth (60-2).⁴⁴⁵ The curse itself is seen by Oedipus as imposed by himself, as a result of external influences, on his sons. Jocasta appears to support this in speaking of Oedipus as having been made sick by his lot, τύχη (66), and therefore, by implication, not in full control of his actions. Yet the Chorus in the Parodos suggest Oedipus as possible instigator of the troubles, and thus responsible, αἴτιος (351); the antistrophe of the third Stasimon continues in a similar vein: Oedipus, having made his doomed marriage to Jocasta, γάμους δυσγάμους, brought 'pollution' to the city, μυαίνει...πτόλιν, and now brings his sons to a 'bloody contest', μυσαρὸν εἰς ἀγῶνα.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁰ This line retains its integrity and sense in what is a problematic speech. See for textual discussion Appendix A.

⁴⁴¹ For interpretation of this line see Mastronarde ad loc.

⁴⁴² In the Parodos the Chorus sings of Ares as bringing to the brothers 'the woes of the Erinyes' (253-5). At *Sep.* 70f. the Erinyes is closely identified with the curse. On Aesch., see below.

⁴⁴³ On *alastōr* cf. Mastronarde on 1556.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. 379: 'one of the gods', θεῶν τις, is behind the brothers' feud; see also 350-3 with Mastronarde's n. ad loc.

⁴⁴⁵ This again harks back to the *Tyrannos* which clearly distinguishes between divine-decreed 'fate' as unconsciously fulfilled prior to the play's action, i.e. the patricide and incest, the ἄκουρα (1230); and the ἐκόνα (ibid.), autonomously accomplished within the scope of the drama (i.e. the self-blinding and Jocasta's suicide); we might add the self-imposed exile and very discovery of the truth. Oedipus will himself reiterate this distinction at 1329-32, when he says that Apollo accomplished his ills (i.e. the patricide and incestuous marriage) but the blinding, in reaction, was consciously done by Oedipus himself.

⁴⁴⁶ See 1043ff.

This diversity in explanation finds some solution in the background to the curse's transmission from father to sons. We are told of Oedipus' mistreatment by his sons, who according to Jocasta incarcerated their father in the palace in order to conceal the shame of the incest and self-blinding (63-5). This quarrel between father and sons was an established feature of the myth,⁴⁴⁷ and links in appropriately with the play's exploration of inherent and inherited traits. Oedipus' by now well-known hastiness and quick temper may well have been factors in the imprecations uttered against his sons, provoked as he must have been by their ill-treatment of him.⁴⁴⁸ The questions of passion and of violence are again valid here in Oedipus' reaction to the quarrel. For the sons, their treatment of their father is reasonably situated in the same pattern of shared and hereditary qualities which again enable the fulfilment of a pre-ordained chain of events. Of course, the concept of an innate or inherited human characteristic which contributes to the accomplishment of catastrophe bears interesting implications for the questions of autonomy and responsibility; how far one can be held responsible for one's native or hereditary tendencies is a difficult question to answer. But even so, the characters' failure to exercise self-control or self-restraint in their behaviour does imply the force of human responsibility for events. Of course, there exists here in addition the possibility of the *exploitation* of native tendencies in the humans by a god or gods bent on achieving individual aims.⁴⁴⁹ This is further complicated by the inequality of knowledge among gods and humans; the former are assumed to be omniscient, while the latter decidedly are not. Yet lack of knowledge, or lack of complete knowledge, cannot be assumed to correspond with a (complete) lack of responsibility: and it remains valid that the brothers' treatment of their father, and his utterance of the curse, rest at least in part on individual and conscious behaviours which make them easy, almost compliant, victims of their destiny.

This is further explored in the fraternal relationship and the brothers' ultimate destruction. Eteocles is presented as a usurper, having broken his promise that the brothers would rule in turn.⁴⁵⁰ Polynices himself will later emphasise that his initial departure, with the intention to return to rule when his turn came, was to avoid the fulfilment of the curse (473-80).⁴⁵¹ Of course, his apparent autonomy here is balanced by his ascription to the

⁴⁴⁷ See again fragments 2-3 of the *Thebaid* in the Epic Cycle (West 2003b).

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. the words of Teiresias at 876-7: Oedipus' *nosos* or 'sickness' (i.e. his suffering on account of the curse) and his sense of dishonour at his sons' treatment of him is the double cause of his curse on them.

⁴⁴⁹ The classic statement is found at Aesch. *Per.* 742.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. 74-6; 481-3.

⁴⁵¹ See Mastronarde on the textual problems of 478-80, which he retains in the text. The distinction between Polynices' and Jocasta's explanations need not be problematic. The mother's view, naturally subjective, of

external influence of a δαίμων his arrival at Argos and subsequent alliances in that city (413).⁴⁵² His lack of certainty on this point (οὐκ οἶδ'), however, again indicates the inability of the human characters to pinpoint the exact nature of causation in the unfolding of events. The play as a whole marks a tendency in the characters to see divine influence where it may not always exist, though in a world such as that of the Greeks divine will is everywhere and thus invites the audience to think in the same terms. This is Polynices' perspective on events: elsewhere it is clearly revealed through his rhetoric and actions – like those of the other characters – that he makes a series of intelligible and plausible decisions which highlight his autonomy within the situation. This is emphasised in his return to Thebes, which is clearly rooted in Polynices' individual political ambition and sense of injustice at his brother's behaviour. It is clear that he voluntarily attacks his city.⁴⁵³ Further, when reminded of his chance to flee his 'father's Erinyes', which may be identifiable with both the curse imposed by Oedipus and that imposed on him as a result of Laius' actions, Polynices will reject all thought for salvation: ἐρρέτω πρόπας δόμος (624). This attitude is reminiscent of Eteocles in his later exchanges with the Chorus in *Septem*, which we have already discussed earlier in this study. The equally stubborn ambition and conviction of personal moral rectitude as shown by the Eteocles of *Phoinissai* harks back to our earlier perception of common inherited qualities which facilitate the breakdown of the fraternal relationship, just as they had contributed to the discord between sons and father. This is reaffirmed in the failure of the *agōn*, which descends into an exchange of threats and recriminations. The audience is again minded to think of the Oedipus of the *Tyrannos*, and here actions of both father and sons are brought to bear in the collapse of the fraternal relationship. The inherited curse of Oedipus and divine influence⁴⁵⁴ presupposes the input of external factors in shaping the outcome of events: but again, this is the Chorus' perception, based on partial rather than absolute truth, and indicative of the multi-layered nature of causation. The omnipresent and inevitable force of predestination provides a framework for events; but it requires for dramatic effect and character

Polynices as wronged exile prefigures the emotional intensity of their reunion prior to the *agōn*. There is no reason to suppose – although again there is no objective comment in the text to confirm it – that Polynices' departure could not have been instigated by either one or other of the reasons cited, or indeed both.

⁴⁵² Both Mastronarde and Craik are inclined to identify the *daimōn* as Apollo. This may seem the likeliest option in the light of subsequent events at Argos; but the text does not, and need not, provide a definite answer.

⁴⁵³ See esp. 484-93. There is no reason to take at face value Polynices' protestations (433-4, 630) regarding his own unwillingness to wage war, since the play makes clear – as we saw in ch.2 above – that his assault on Thebes is motivated by material greed and a thirst for political supremacy.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. 250-5, 1306, 1426.

‘intelligibility’⁴⁵⁵ the unfolding of those events as directed and influenced by human choice.

The cyclical nature of the Labdacids’ ills is reaffirmed in the final expulsion of Oedipus and Antigone from Thebes. We have already heard from Teiresias of the *nosos* in the city as a result of Laius’ original transgression (867-9). This ‘sickness’ has been perpetuated by Oedipus’ acts of patricide and incest – acts which like Laius’ were voluntary, but which were – unlike his – committed in ignorance. We are again confronted with a series of human acts which may be located on a spectrum of autonomy and of knowledge. The fratricide, brought about by a series of collaborative determinants, has now cast an additional pollution, *miasma*, upon the city. The religious implications of this pollution caused by the Labdacids’ presence in Thebes also recur in the question of Polynices’ burial as an important theme of the Exodos.⁴⁵⁶ Creon, new ruler of Thebes, also perceives the need to free the city from the *alastōr* besetting Oedipus (1593-4). The ultimate departure of father and daughter in accordance with Creon’s instructions – which are plainly influenced by Teiresias’ earlier comments (867-9, and especially 886-90)⁴⁵⁷ – affirms the sense of a divine power operating in the background and driving events on to their final conclusion. That this power is to be identified with Apollo is confirmed in Oedipus’ own prediction of his extra-Theban future (1703ff). The god’s role in the myth appears to come full circle, and his will is ultimately inevitable. But again it is equally important that other factors come into play. Dramatic necessity requires the departure of the surviving Labdacids. Further, fixed and unavoidable though that departure might be, it is also the departure of two characters that react independently, individually, and similarly to the predicament in which they find themselves. Antigone will not countenance the prospect of the marriage fated to be hers, and insists on accompanying her father into exile (1673ff). Nor too will Oedipus himself seek to dissuade Creon from his edict (1622-4). Both make conscious decisions to follow the course of action they deem best under the circumstances. For another pair of characters, there may have been a different future. The

⁴⁵⁵ See for discussion on this theme Gould (1978).

⁴⁵⁶ See below Appendix A; and also above ch.1.5.

⁴⁵⁷ 886-90, retained by both Mastronarde and Craik, are deleted by Fraenkel; yet 1590-1 clearly invite a cross-reference to the play’s earlier events, even if they are not specifically included to recall 886-90, which this study retains. In the broader context of Teiresias’ speech at 865-95, esp. his opening focus on the longstanding ‘sickness’, *nosos*, in the city in consequence of the Labdacids’ troubles (867-9), 1590-1 are not wholly incongruous or unexpected (despite Craik’s n. ad loc.). It seems more likely that Creon seeks to overplay the prophet’s earlier comments not so much to exaggerate his own newfound importance and authority (Craik), but more as justification for behaviour which may appear unnecessarily harsh and unfair. See also Mastronarde’s n. ad loc.

play's final conclusion is thus brought about by a complex interweaving of coherent and complementary strands drawn from divine, human, and dramatic motivation.

In closing, we may glance back to the similar treatment of causation in *Septem*. It is a pity that the loss of the two other plays in the trilogy, *Laius* and *Oedipus*, precludes an evidence-based reading of Aeschylus' treatment of the curse prior to the action of the final play. Yet certain hints in the surviving play may offer clues. In the second Stasimon, the Chorus' reference to the quarrel between Oedipus and his sons (785-90) suggests again the importance of this feature in the myth.⁴⁵⁸ It also prefigures the development in *Septem* of individual autonomy in Eteocles' coherent series of motives in choosing to confront his brother at the seventh gate. His early reference to the curse (70) reminds the audience of the pre-existence of the fate imposed on him by his father and the overarching influence of Apollo. But from that point on until his discovery of Polynices' presence at the seventh gate, the force of predestination is suppressed; the dramatic focus is firmly upon an Eteocles who makes a series of intelligent – or at least comprehensible – decisions which gradually narrow his freedom of action. In the end, he voluntarily, and eagerly, opts for battle with his brother. The Prologue's emphasis on Eteocles' sense of civic duty and diligent contribution to the city's protection is suggestive of his warrior's devotion to his *patris*, evident again in his angry exchanges with the terrified Chorus of Theban girls, whom he can view only as a grave threat to public morale (191-2). The central 'shield scene' reaffirms Eteocles' organised control of the defence in his appointment of the warriors at each gate, with himself seventh and last (ἐμοὶ σὺν ἑβδόμῳ, 282). This promise, made before the women, is carried through the whole episode and builds up his preparation to fight. Upon discovering the identity of his opponent, his belief in the curse's inevitability means that he feels wholly unable to avoid battle: hence the heartfelt but only momentary outburst of emotion (653-5) before he steels himself against what he views as the inevitable final confrontation.

But it is not only Eteocles' fatalism which precipitates his departure to battle. His firm conviction of the justice of his cause in protecting his city from enemy invasion (673) coheres with his genuine sense of civic duty, as already made clear earlier in the play. This in turn is importantly linked to the sense of shame he clearly experiences at the thought of reneging on his earlier promise to fight. Of course, as we saw earlier in relation to Menoeceus, cultural limitations again bear some weight on the question of autonomy here.

⁴⁵⁸ On τροφᾶς (786) cf. above p.53 n.194.

Eteocles' Homeric sensitivity to personal reputation and honour means that the perceived slight to his *timē* that avoidance of battle would incur is intolerable. Yet he still makes the conscious decision to fight in the knowledge that he is unlikely to survive. Further, he seeks to conceal neither his fatalism nor his own thirst for what he perceives to be military glory, spurred on as he is by a fear of cowardice. It is also important that in Eteocles' subsequent urgent exchanges with the Chorus, his impetuosity and single-mindedness render him deaf to the women's pleas; his inflexibility and hot temper, familiar traits in the male Labdacids,⁴⁵⁹ affirm the self-willed nature of his exit to battle, for all that Eteocles suggests otherwise (709).⁴⁶⁰ His responsibility in choosing a course of action which he views as the correct choice but which the play does not present as unequivocally positive affirms the authority of individual human will – no less so than in the assault on the city of Polynices, who is clearly motivated by a thirst for revenge as passionate as his brother's lust for battle (631ff). Again, the final fratricide is brought about by the co-existence of collaborative and inter-dependent factors as the driving force behind the realisation of 'fate'.

3.5 Thebes as the 'anti-Athens'

The staging in Attic tragedy of Thebes as *topos* for the most extreme of human experience – infanticide, incest, insanity – has given rise to a perception of the city as an anti-type of Athens which functions as an 'other' place in which those experiences may be explored at a comfortable distance from the home city-state.⁴⁶¹ Thus the idealised city of Athens with which we are familiar from the Funeral Oration⁴⁶² and which finds its place in tragedy especially in suppliant plays, is contrasted implicitly and explicitly with its 'shadow self' in Thebes as locale for civic discord and transgression.⁴⁶³ Thus the displacement to the 'other' setting of the 'irreconcilable, the inexpiable, and the unredeemable' negates any risk to Athens' (self-) image.⁴⁶⁴

It is of course true that mythical Thebes bears a long and troubled history, as testified in the choral odes of *Phoinissai* and as is evident in the abiding interest displayed

⁴⁵⁹ As pointed out by the Chorus at 677-8 (cf. also 750ff.).

⁴⁶⁰ On Eteocles' characterisation see further ch.1.3 above.

⁴⁶¹ The seminal discussion is Zeitlin in Winkler & Zeitlin 130-67.

⁴⁶² See for a general study of the Funeral Oration Loraux (1986).

⁴⁶³ Cf. Vidal-Naquet in Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (trans. Lloyd 1988) 334-8.

⁴⁶⁴ Zeitlin 144-5.

in the city by the epic poets and other early Greek writers.⁴⁶⁵ Thus naturally the tragedians continue to return to Thebes – as well as to Troy, likewise so rich in potential – whose prominent positioning in their mythical repertoire provides ample material for the exploration and reshaping of the city’s legends. However, the primary objection to the ‘anti-Athens’ thesis is the irreducibility of Thebes to a single ‘type’ or model. For all the partiality of the Greek poets to the Theban myth *par excellence* that is the Labdacid legend, the city’s depiction in myth as a whole does not invite the association of Thebes with specific and constant patterns or themes – of autochthony, for instance, or incest. The Thebes of the tragic and pre-tragic genres was individual and varied: Homer mentions the Labdacids, but he also alludes to other Theban myths which were to provide inspiration to the tragedians – to Antiope, her twin sons, and to Alcmene, mother of Heracles;⁴⁶⁶ as, indeed, do Hesiod and Pindar.⁴⁶⁷ When we reach the fifth-century tragic stage, the Labdacid myth may occupy the foremost position in the ‘Theban’ plays of Sophocles, as well as *Septem*, and our own *Phoinissai*; but the latter breaks from tradition in its exploration of Cadmean and autochthonic legend. A different branch of this legend provides the body for the same poet’s *Bacchae*. Equally his *Heracles* and *Supplikes* must be taken into account, the latter – like the late *Colonus* of Sophocles – featuring a non-Theban setting but persistently concerned with Theban characters and events. Then, of course, there remain the fragments: of Euripides’ *Antiope*, or Sophocles’ *Niobe*; Niobe’s husband Amphion had provided inspiration for Aeschylus in a play of the same name. Sophocles himself had written an *Amphitryon*, and Aeschylus wrote a Pentheus trilogy; and so it goes on. Our perspective on Thebes as dramatic entity is inevitably and irremediably distorted by the accident of survival, which threatens to impose reductive neatness on a set of phenomena which were more complex than the extant material suggests.

The diversity within the Theban mythical repertoire is matched by the diversity of the city’s depiction in tragedy; so, for instance, the Thebes of *Phoinissai* is in various ways importantly distinct from that of *Bacchae*. A purely physical perspective highlights one of these differences: *Phoinissai* in the main focuses internally on a city threatened from the outside, while *Bacchae* looks beyond the city to the locus of Cithaeron and explores the city’s attempts to contain its inhabitants. The common theme of civic dissolution finds

⁴⁶⁵ See e.g. Hesiod, *WD* 161-3; Homer, *Il.* 4.378 and 406, and *Od.* 11.271-80; Stes. *Theb.*; and the fr. of the Theban epic cycle.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. *Od.* 11.260-70.

⁴⁶⁷ See Hes. *Th.* 975-8; and Pind., *Isth.* 7.1-15.

widely differing dramatic and thematic treatments. Elsewhere the tragedians were equally at liberty to place as much or as little emphasis on Theban geography as they pleased; this may be a greater concern for Euripides than it was for Sophocles: in our play, for instance, the audience develops a far more intimate acquaintance with the city as physical ‘place’ than in, for instance, *Oedipus Tyrannos*. Of course, the differing emphases are clearly linked with the distinct scopes and implications of the plays’ myths. The broad-sweeping historical perspective of *Phoinissai* and its union of the play’s two major Theban legends are wholly distinct from the earlier play’s intense and narrow focus on one character and dramatic events within a short temporal scope.⁴⁶⁸ Thematic diversity again comes into play: gender, for example, occupies a far more prominent position in our play than in a drama such as *Heracles*; and the political concerns of the *Tyrannos* are distinct, as well as significantly less prominent, than those of *Antigone* – or even, again, of *Phoinissai*.

The dangers of reductivism also caution against the isolation of Thebes as *the* ‘anti-Athens’. It is true that tragedy does tend to avoid associating the negative with Athens, and that it often displaces to an ‘other’ setting questions and problems relatable to the home *polis* yet which can be explored at a safe distance from it. Of course, the concept of an ‘other’ place within the inherently ‘other’ world that is heroic-age myth on the fifth-century tragic stage may be seen as problematic; but tragedy gains a further sense of dislocation – and thus greater distance – through the use of mythological non-Athenian settings in the plays’ examination of, yet simultaneous escape from, the present. In Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* there is a clear tension between the ‘heroic vagueness’⁴⁶⁹ of the play’s mythical setting and its clear relatability to contemporary experience in developments on the Areopagus, the democratic reforms of 462, and to potential political instability at Athens. Yet there is elsewhere on the tragic stage an added dimension of comfortable distance in the relocation of political concerns relevant in contemporary experience to a *non*-Athenian setting. The tragedians evidently exploited the centrality of ‘other’ places in the mythical repertoire within which they worked and by which they were conditioned to a significant extent. Thus it is clear that any non-Athenian setting may function as an ‘other’ *topos*, be it Greek (Argos, Sparta, Corinth), or non-Greek (Troy, Thrace, Persian Susa). It is also important that as Thebes is not to be viewed as bearing a

⁴⁶⁸ It is important, however, that *OT* does construct its own sense of ‘history’ as bearing influence on the present-day action, but it does this through the media of report and recollection on the part of the main protagonists. Further, this is constructed in specific relation to Oedipus’ own past, in contrast with the more externalised and extensive ‘narrative’ of the choral odes in *Phoinissai*.

⁴⁶⁹ See the introduction to ch.2 above.

sustained and recognisable pattern of topographical or thematic characteristics, nor is any other non-Athenian setting to be seen thus: the Argos of Aeschylus' *Supplikes*, for instance, is in many ways significantly different from that of the same poet's *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, which equally do not reveal the same political – and in particular, democratic – emphasis of the earlier play. Thus Argos cannot be said to function as a 'middle-term' between Thebes and Athens, as has been suggested;⁴⁷⁰ and the positing of Argos as such is in turn especially revealing for the limitations of the 'anti-Athens' thesis. This essentially structuralist or semiotic reading of tragic geography fails to take into account, or allow room for, the fluidity and change in approach on both individual and generic levels. It is also important that the examination of the 'self' (i.e. Athens) through the agency of the 'other' extends beyond the question of physical location and distance. The Greek identity is constructed upon a series of polarities between 'self' and other: man versus god, male versus female, or Greek versus barbarian.

Further, closer examination exposes the tensions inherent in any of these schematic polarisations which may be found in tragedy. The *Persae* of Aeschylus creates a certain affinity between two ostensibly so different peoples in presenting the Persians not only as everything that the Athenians are not – but specifically, as everything that the Athenians strove not to be, and in turn, everything that they *could* be. Of particular importance for the breakdown of the 'Greek versus barbarian' antithesis is the play's theological framework, which is constructed upon the traditionally Greek precepts of surfeit, *koros*, insolence, *hubris*, and retribution, *nemesis*. The articulation of the play's ethical and theological design through the part of the dead Persian king Darius suggests the ease with which the Greeks were able to transfer to 'other' cultures the traditional Hellenic conception of religion: other Greek texts find this an engaging theme; Herodotus, for instance, is especially illuminating on the subject.⁴⁷¹ The play suggests in the Persians' downfall and suffering a certain sympathy for the 'barbarians' and an approach to human vulnerability (ultimately Homeric in inspiration) which elides the Greco-barbarian divide and locates the root causes of self-destruction not in ethnicity but in human nature, individual and collective. Of course, that is not to preclude an element of triumphalism in the downfall of Athens' enemies; but the play does reveal a balance between similarity and difference. Self and other are not mutually exclusive. The creation of this effect in an 'other' territory – a non-Greek one for good measure – and through an ostensibly alien

⁴⁷⁰ Zeitlin 146-7.

⁴⁷¹ See e.g. the speech of Artabanus in debate in book 7.

people cushions it impact on the sensibilities of a fifth-century Athenian audience, which is invited to perceive the existence of the self in the other, and vice versa.⁴⁷²

This interdependence between self and other is equally applicable to the Thebes versus Athens theme. In Euripides' *Supplikes*, it would seem clear that Thebes is persistently and negatively contrasted with Athens; and to be sure, the play's production around the time of the battle of Delium in 424⁴⁷³ makes some degree of anti-Thebes bias in the play plausible at a particularly low point in Athenian-Theban relations (and a readiness on Euripides' part to exploit this), which were troubled throughout the second half of the fifth century.⁴⁷⁴ The intrusion into the play of the current Athenian spirit towards Thebes is supported by the play's concern with themes doubtlessly pressing in contemporary experience – particularly those of religion in war-time, the politics of lamentation, and the burial of the dead. Yet as in *Persae*, there are clear tensions revealed in the contrast drawn between Athens and Thebes. This contrast has of course a political aspect in the play's examination of democracy *vis-à-vis* autocracy. The distinction is immediately apparent in the violent heartlessness of the Theban herald as poised against the rationality and clemency of the Athenian king Theseus in his concession to the Argives' burial. The championing by Theseus of the democratic cause is tempered by the underlying suggestion of a certain disjunction between the constitution in ideology and in practice. It is important that the play creates this effect without any simple tendency towards subversion; and equally important that in a contemporary context Theseus' concern with personal and political expediency⁴⁷⁵ would not necessarily impact negatively on his and thus by proxy Athenian image: he does ultimately relent and appeal to the people. But at the same time his initial imperviousness to Adrastus' pleas⁴⁷⁶ and his persuasion of the people by the means of the same rhetorical aptitude against which he had inveighed in the Theban herald⁴⁷⁷ suggest not so much an outright alignment of democratic and autocratic rule – although some blurring of this antithesis perhaps cannot

⁴⁷² Cf. again the discussion of Pelling in Pelling (1997) 1-19.

⁴⁷³ Thuc. 4.97. The general consensus is that the play post-dates Delium; cf. Collard (1975) 8f.

⁴⁷⁴ During the Peloponnesian War the Thebans were firm allies of Sparta, which eventually in 427 helped them to defeat Plataea, which had been supported by Athens during Thebes' previous attempts to take the state. The battle of Delium in 424 saw Thebes wreak destruction on the Athenian forces.

⁴⁷⁵ See esp. 334-351.

⁴⁷⁶ We are also reminded of Adrastus' own words at 253-6: he came for help, not judgement or punishment.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Theseus' own intentions at 346ff. and the later criticism of the herald's eloquence at 426. Note also the herald's own comments regarding the manipulation of language in order to attain personal gain, *kerdos idion*. On Theseus' own rhetorical adeptness, see Collard esp. on 513-63. The theme of language and its abuse in a political context was discussed in ch.2.1 above.

be wholly denied⁴⁷⁸ - as a more nuanced and subtle exposure of contemporary recognition of the difficulties of making democracy work in practice.⁴⁷⁹ It is interesting that the play's setting in Eleusis, here part of Athenian territory, allows for some element of distance from contemporary experience – but significantly less so than would be accorded were the play set over the borders in Boeotia, in Thebes itself. This implies the pressing nature of contemporary political concerns, emphasised to the audience by their exploration in a setting which might seem uncomfortably close to home. Yet that is not to say that civic ideology is directly challenged or contradicted. It is more that the superiority of Athenian democracy is established in a more questioning and complex manner. The historical background to the play implies that Thebes *is* deliberately selected as negative exemplum of the autocratic state – but there may also be a tension between Thebes' dramatic role as reflective of contemporary Athenian attitudes towards the city, and its function in highlighting autocracy-related problems in general. In turn, these problems may or equally may not be problems specifically of *Theban* autocracy.

This is an interesting concern of *Oedipus at Colonus*. At 919-20 Theseus says to Creon: 'It is not Thebes which has educated you to be evil; the city does not like to nurture 'unjust men'', ἄνδρας ἐκδίκους. This implies a separation of the Theban identity from the behaviour of the city's inhabitants; it may also suggest a fault in autocracy as a constitution which might be seen as fostering negative behaviour. In the same vein, it could be said that it is the constitution which is contrasted with Athens and Athenian democracy. The distinction between Thebes and the actions of its representative is confirmed in Theseus' assertion that the city at large would not approve Creon's behaviour (921-3), and that that behaviour brings undeserved shame on Thebes (929-30). The concession in this play to Thebes' potential for good also reveals a certain disjunction between contemporary historical experience and dramatic theme. There is an illuminating contrast here with a play such as Euripides' *Supplikes*; for although it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of Athenian-Theban relations at the time of the Sophoclean play's production, it is clear that they had not improved significantly since the staging of the Euripidean play two decades earlier.⁴⁸⁰ This respect for Thebes from a sympathetic character in a play which does present on one level, as *Supplikes* does, a favourable

⁴⁷⁸ We discussed this as a historical theme in the concluding section to ch.2 above.

⁴⁷⁹ Support for this view is evident from *Orestes*, which raises similar concerns in the part of the demagogue in the 'trial' of Orestes (cf. esp. 889-94).

⁴⁸⁰ Following Athens' defeat in the war Thebes would in 404 propose the utter annihilation of the city, although in the following year it covertly supported the restoration of Athenian democracy in order to establish a supportive force against Sparta, from which Thebes had become detached at the end of the war.

portrayal of the home city and its representatives as against their flawed and misguided Theban adversaries, ought not to puzzle the critic. Rather, it reveals the flexibility of the treatment (by the genre and individual authors) of this - as so many - aspects of the fictive (and through it the real) world, and in addition the fallibility of assuming a straightforward correspondence between contemporary experience and dramatic representation.⁴⁸¹ Further, there is also the suggestion that Thebes at large is not beyond redemption. Theseus in implying that Creon's ill-counsel, *dusboulia*, is a personal fault - even if it is also a fault of the constitution he represents - rather than a generic tendency of the Thebans, points to the city's potential for positive action.⁴⁸²

Further tensions are revealed in the ostensible distinction between the two *poleis*. Theseus in his generous evaluation of Creon's behaviour displays no naive trust in his antagonist,⁴⁸³ since this is the same man who is also quick to suspect an Athenian conspiracy with Creon (1028-33).⁴⁸⁴ Theseus' suspicion cannot have failed to bear some contemporary resonance when one considers the events of 411,⁴⁸⁵ with the oligarchic revolution and the culture of mistrust which pervaded Athens. This not only cautions against too idealised a view of Athens' presentation in the play, but may also point to the fragility of the *polis* in general in its vulnerability to internal threat - to destruction at the hands of its own inhabitants. When one considers also Theseus' earlier words to Creon in exonerating Thebes from its ruler's misjudgement, this may also hint at the possibility that what is happening at Thebes could happen to any city, Athens included. Again, as in *Persae*, an 'other' place and an 'other' people are used to expose indirectly the vulnerability of the 'self'. There is no need to overstate this and view Thebes as the - or even a - negative paradigm from which an idealised Athens is to learn a cautionary lesson. If we take the Athens of the *Colonus* as the pre-war city and the Thebes as what war-time Athens could become without due care,⁴⁸⁶ this comes dangerously close to allegory, and implies a one-dimensional subjectivity scarcely consistent with the systemic vagueness which Easterling has plausibly identified as at the heart of tragedy's success as a communicative medium.⁴⁸⁷ Instead, plays such as the *Colonus* or *Supplikes* engage in a

⁴⁸¹ See also 606, where Theseus seems surprised at the possibility of enmity between the two cities.

⁴⁸² See Easterling (2005) 12-14 for discussion of Thebes' hope for purification and salvation; she refers specifically to the second Stasimon of Soph. *Antigone* as well to the moral role of the Chorus in *OT*. We return to Thebes' potential for good at the end of 3.5 below.

⁴⁸³ Thus Zeitlin 167 in attempting to explain Theseus' apparent sympathy for the Theban cause.

⁴⁸⁴ As pointed out by Easterling (1989) 14.

⁴⁸⁵ See also Jebb's (1928) n. on *OC* 1028.

⁴⁸⁶ So Blundell in Sommerstein et al. (1993) 304-6.

⁴⁸⁷ This was discussed in the introduction to ch.2 above.

civic discourse which exposes the nuances and tensions inherent in the Athens-Thebes antithesis and encourages the audience to consider political problems and questions which may be applicable to the power structures of any *polis*, *as well as* – if not necessarily or exclusively – to Thebes or Athens in particular.

This is important to our appreciation of recent responses to the ‘anti-Athens’ school of thought. The dissociation in *Oedipus at Colonus* of Creon’s actions from Thebes and the Theban identity may lead to a conception of the city as a generic *polis* exploited in tragedy as convenient ‘other’ territory for the safe exploration of political topics which may be pertinent to any *polis*. It is true that in the broadest terms Thebes can be used thus, and true also that events at Thebes invite reflection on the problems and very nature of political life. But – as we noted earlier – not only may any non-Athenian *topos* perform this function, the thesis that Thebes can function as any ‘other’ *polis* also implies a view of tragedy’s political discourse as entirely generic, i.e. non-Athenian. Tragedy was, indeed, exported to other parts of Greece – although in fact during the fifth century it may have been the tragedians rather than tragedy which were exported.⁴⁸⁸ However, tragedy’s rooting in and centrality to the civic Dionysia equally presuppose a strong (though not necessarily exclusive) element of Athenocentrism. There is no reason to preclude the co-existence in tragedy of general and specifically Athenian questions and problems of politics and society. As we have already noted earlier in this study, the variety and fluidity in the plays’ political emphases presuppose an interest in the political, the democratic, the Athenian, or the non-Athenian. In a recent paper arguing against the ‘anti-Athens’ thesis, Easterling, for instance, relies heavily on the dissociation of the Theban identity from problems explored in ‘Theban’ plays. Thus of *Antigone* she writes that the heroine’s arguments concerning divine and civic law are not ‘questions that have a special, specifically Theban setting’, just as Creon’s edict regarding Polynices’ burial implies the potential of any leader to make the wrong decision.⁴⁸⁹ Yet Easterling’s emphasis on the suppression, as she sees it, of Thebes both in name and in physical feature in this most political of plays requires some qualification. Firstly, the implication that Thebes, as Greek

⁴⁸⁸ There is not a great deal of evidence for the performance in the fifth century of Athenian plays outside Athens. See e.g. Pickard-Cambridge (1968) 42-56 and part VII; and Wilson (2000), esp. 279-302 and 309-10; and cf. also Taplin (1993), esp. ch.3.

⁴⁸⁹ Easterling (2005) 62. It is worth noting, however, that the legal question of burial in the play corresponds in some respects to Athenian law on the subject; so, as Thebes becomes a type of hybrid in legal/ethical terms between the two cities, nor either can Athens be easily dismissed from the equation. On burial law at Athens in relation to treason, cf. Macdowell (1978) 176-8 and 255-6. See also more recently Griffiths’s comm. on *Antigone* (1999) 5-8 and 29-33.

city, cannot bear too close an association with serious or even insoluble religious and political problems,⁴⁹⁰ needs to be approached with some caution, since we cannot take it for granted that the Athenians would necessarily have felt any great compunction in associating with the negative, or even destroying completely, on the tragic stage a city with which they had long had in reality a troubled relationship.⁴⁹¹ A reading such as Easterling's seeks to impose a particular conception of panhellenism which overlooks the element of conflict and competition of which the Greeks were acutely aware, and which was especially prominent in the most overtly 'panhellenic' locales or contexts such as Olympia or Delphi.

Easterling's emphasis on the importance of Theban topography, the separation of which from the political problems of *Antigone* forms the basis of her argument for Thebes as generic *polis*, may cause difficulty. We noted earlier the varying focus on the city's geography from play to play; this fluidity hampers to a significant extent the use of Thebes' physical features as a hermeneutic base for a general argument.⁴⁹² The Thebes of *Antigone* is not the Thebes of *Phoinissai*; and there are plays where Thebes is significant but not the dramatic setting, such as Euripides' *Supplikes*; or *Oedipus Tyrannos*, which is set in Thebes but which reveals no sustained interest in creating a sense of Theban 'place'. Yet both these plays in varying ways and to varying degrees address concerns relating to (Theban) politics. Easterling's thesis errs in countering the opposing view with one equally monolithic: she answers Zeitlin in Zeitlin's own terms in offering a reading which is equally inflexible. It is important that for all that Thebes may function as a useful non-Athenian locale for the exploration and questioning of civic ideology and political problems, it is not to be grouped anonymously with Argos, or Susa, as merely *any polis* – just as Argos or Susa do not themselves solely fulfil this function. For equally Thebes as Thebes does have its individual and widely varying political identity across the tragic genre. The city reveals its own history and specifically Theban problems. Further, we may also say that this duality in the city's dramatic identity highlights the complementary

⁴⁹⁰ Easterling 57-8 and n.43; and 62 with n.54.

⁴⁹¹ A further point is equally important: the mythical heritage of the Athenians was a greater influence on the tragic poets than any common anxiety regarding the unpropitious dramatic treatment of a city with which Athens had long been at war. Thebes in myth is not destroyed as Troy is; tragedy likewise must keep the city standing.

⁴⁹² For instance, on *Ant.* 1015 Easterling 62 comments that Teiresias 'mentions no place names: it is 'the polis' that is sick.' She seems here and throughout her argument to over-emphasise the anonymity of Thebes: certainly the failure of burial is an important cultural concern, but within the scope of the play and of Theban myth it is also first and foremost a specifically Labdacid and Theban one. Furthermore, whenever anyone speaks of the *polis* in this play, the *polis* is Thebes.

nature of the Theban role as ‘any’ *polis* and specifically as ‘Thebes’: the city may be seen as an ideal setting for general political problems because its troubled past and present breed such fertile ground for them. For, after all, Thebes *is* different; and the tragedians continually return to it. In *Phoinissai* the two separable yet closely interdependent aspects of the city’s dramatic function – as mythical Thebes with its own specific problems and as more anonymous or flexible political entity – co-exist in a finely-balanced relationship. Euripides indulges in the city’s wealth of myth by uniting the autochthonic and Labdacid legend in a massive Theban *tour de force*; yet he also looks beyond the mythical past to examine pressing contemporary political themes which can be related both to any city and/or to the home city of Athens.⁴⁹³ Thus the themes of usurpation and political loyalty, of the use and abuse of human intelligence – questions especially apt in late fifth-century Athenian society – are given voice by the dramatic characters in their own individual mythical setting and are as central to the subject matter of the myth as they are to the contemporary world.

Two themes in our play which are variously treated as supportive of the ‘anti-Athens’ thesis elucidate our main argument. The first is the death of Menoeceus, which when considered in the light of the intertextual reference to Euripides’ earlier *Erechtheus* (852-7) suggests a straightforward contrast between Thebes as negative exemplum⁴⁹⁴ of a ritual barely acknowledged and with questionable influence on the city’s fortunes, and Athens as positive model of civic victory as a result of political loyalty. But could not the ostensible polarity rather indicate the implications of sacrifice as a wider political theme, both within the mythical worlds of Athens and Thebes, and on a broader contemporary level in association with the problems of political loyalty in any *polis*? Moreover, it would be difficult for a contemporary audience to accept at face value this apparent element of Athenian triumphalism, since recent historical experience had revealed only too clearly the fragility of the *polis* and the impermanence of civic ties. Indeed, the allusion to *Erechtheus* may also suggest the particular importance of the sacrifice theme in association with the death of Menoeceus. Although such selflessness in response to the needs of the *polis* was lauded in the war years, the loss of Menoeceus and the intense suffering of Praxithea, who in the earlier play offers up her children for the city, also imply from a heroic-world

⁴⁹³ We ought, however, to qualify this by underlining the especial importance of Athenian politics in our play, as is evident in the relocation to the heroic-age autocratic Theban setting the pressing concerns of late fifth-century Athenian democracy, notwithstanding the fact that the Athenians had by this time seen all of these factors played out across the Greek world during the two decades of the Peloponnesian War.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. Foley (1985) 129; de Romilly (1967) 134; so too again Zeitlin 143.

perspective the ruthlessness of the overriding claims made on the individual by the *polis*. By association, the tension and potential conflict between public and private interests is revealed.

Yet furthermore, these problems are in addition and importantly problems of the Theban myth. Menoeceus' death, as we saw earlier, occurs in response to the demand by Ares for the expiation of Cadmus' ancient transgression. The demand by *gē* for the blood of the last of the autochthons and the conditional nature of the earth's and Ares' benevolence towards the city highlights the ambivalent and problematic relationship between Thebes and the gods. The intimacy - even inseparability - of Menoeceus' personal identity with the land which gave him birth⁴⁹⁵ suggests the complex relationship of the autochthons with the earth. This link may appear at once especially, indeed unnaturally 'close',⁴⁹⁶ yet also inseparable from violence and bloodshed. This association with the earth and thus specifically with Thebes is strengthened by the necessary performance of the sacrifice on the same spot as the slaying by Cadmus of Ares' snake. The balance between the violence in the genesis of the Spartoi and in the death of their last descendant also points to a type of inherent propensity to disorder in the city's identity. It is interesting that another late Euripidean drama, *Bacchae*, suggests a similar theme in associating the autochthonic Pentheus' rebellion against Dionysus with the earth-born giants' battle with the gods.⁴⁹⁷ A predisposition to transgressive behaviour on the part of Pentheus is further implied in his threats against Dionysus and the Maenads, his lack of self-control, and his lawlessness.⁴⁹⁸ Autochthony and its implications are not a prominent theme in this play; but at the same time in *Bacchae* as in *Phoinissai* the sustained impression of the continual revisitation of, and threat to, the present-day by the past underlines the peculiar individuality of the mythical problems as distinctively *Theban*. For

⁴⁹⁵ Note the repeated references in his rhesis (991-1012) to his *patris*, *gē*, and *polis*. It is hard to imagine how this articulation of a whole-hearted sense of political allegiance supports the 'anti-Athens' thesis in this instance, since such a quality could scarcely have been viewed negatively by an Athenian audience, especially in the final decade of the fifth century which revealed the tenuousness of civic loyalties. This last was discussed in ch.2.2 above.

⁴⁹⁶ Mastronarde on 673 suggests a latent sexual, near incestuous undertone in the reunion of the Spartoi with the earth which gave them birth (670-5). We should, however, be cautious in reading a similar theme in Jocasta's death-embrace of her sons (1457-9), which Mastronarde links back to the Spartoi's deaths (and see his n. on 1687). An unambiguous association between incest and autochthony as thematic patterns at Thebes, as is also the inclination of part II of Zeitlin's essay (cf. also for refs. on this association 141 n.9), again risks oversimplification both of the themes and of Thebes itself. However, Mastronarde's observation regarding the repetition of the verb *ξυνῆψε* in the context of violent/fatal meetings in the play is a valid one.

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. 543-4. An illuminating link to this and to the birth of the Spartoi in *Phoinissai* is found at Hesiod *Th.* 185-6, where their appearance *τεύχεσι λαμπόμενοι* (cf. also *Ph.* 939-40) prefigures an ingrained predisposition to violence.

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. 231-2, 240-1, 246, 331, 671.

all their applicability to external *topoi*, these problems are firmly rooted in the city's identity.

Our second theme is that of gender, which will be discussed fully in the next chapter and so need not occupy us at any great length here. The unusually prominent role of women in *Phoinissai* and their intervention in political affairs have been viewed as a simple inversion of male-female stereotypes and as a simultaneous failure on the part of the female characters to fulfil their expected role in social and religious structures. From here it is a short step to a polarised distinction between Athens and its theatrical alter ego, where Theban women serve as a foil to those of the home *polis*.⁴⁹⁹ It is of course true that in our play women are granted a striking intellectual authority, especially in the role of Jocasta; and that she and Antigone will make equally striking intrusions into the traditionally 'male' worlds of the *polis* and war. It is also true that they, like the foreign Chorus, will not perform their 'female' roles in ritual. To be sure, this non-fulfilment of or non-conformity to social roles may easily be viewed as a specifically 'Theban' problem, which might be borne out in other plays set in the city: *Bacchae*, for instance, draws a close association between ritual and the breakdown of civic integrity and social norms. In specific relation to the Labdacids, the heroine of *Antigone* laments her failure to attain her expected *telos* of marriage and motherhood.⁵⁰⁰ In our play - where again Antigone will sacrifice the same future - the problems of the female role are closely associated with the implications of the myth, specifically in the dynamics and inevitability of the family curse. The brothers' egocentrism and abdication of political and domestic responsibility necessitates the (fruitless) intervention of Jocasta as voice of rationality and reason. The fraternal quarrel has prevented proper adherence to ritual; thus Jocasta is dressed in mourning for her still-living sons (322-6), and her daughter will end as a 'bacchant of corpses' (1489).⁵⁰¹ This distortion of women's ritual roles⁵⁰² underlines the destabilisation of cultural norms as a result of the war at Thebes. The brothers' actions will result not only in their own destruction, but in that of their mother and their sister's futures.

However, it is scarcely so simple. It is important that on the one hand the complexities of Theban myth(s) do indeed contribute to the distortion and difficulties of the female role. But on the other, gender roles at Thebes, like the city itself, cannot be so

⁴⁹⁹ Thus Goff (1995) 353-65.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. 909-10, 916.

⁵⁰¹ Cf. *Soph. El.* 164-5.

⁵⁰² We note a similar emphasis in the death scene of Antigone in *Soph.*'s play, where the strongly sexual imagery implies a grotesque type of marriage rite between Antigone and Haimon. We looked at this in ch.1.5 above.

easily compartmentalised or viewed as conforming to an immutable model. The extant corpus of Theban plays indicates widely varying emphases on and treatments of gender and the role of women. Further, the fluidity between mythical representation and contemporary socio-political concerns presupposes a certain tension between the reading of gender roles at Thebes as a specific or exclusive problem of that city, and as a general exploration of problems potentially pertinent to civic life at large – be that in Athens, or any *polis*. This is especially true given that there is no cultural discrepancy between the onstage alien city and the offstage ‘real-life’ city as place of performance, since Athenian women had comparatively few rights. In addition, the ultimate failure in *Phoinissai* of the female to wield any real practical power in civic affairs may be construed as more true to contemporary life, imparting realism to the representation of myth. This potential bridge between Thebes and Athens undermines the anti-*polis* thesis.

The presentation of gender roles in *Phoinissai* is intimately bound with the conflict between public and private interests, which as we saw earlier in this study was a particular problem in late fifth-century Athens. The Labdacid brothers’ pursuit of their own private ambitions at the expense of the public good, the *koina*, also involves the destruction of another type of private interest – that relating to the family and home.⁵⁰³ The abandonment by the males of their stereotypical roles in civic or public affairs is balanced against the voice of the female as at once representative of the city’s interests yet also of her ‘traditional’ or expected role, the claims of the *oikos*.⁵⁰⁴ This tension in the female role is also revealed in Antigone’s drawing of attention to the necessity of Polynices’ burial. In Sophocles’ *Antigone* the heroine’s pursuit of her own private aims – i.e. devotion to kin – highlights as here the interdependent nature of the *oikeia*, private interests, and the *koina*, the concerns of the state: the city is directly affected by the question of Polynices’ (non-) burial. The relevance of the public-private conflict in contemporary Athens implies some potential for at least the partial separation of these problems from the fabric of the Labdacid myth. Now, it is of course true that individual responsibility, action, and circumstance have their place: in *Phoinissai* the makeup of a character such as Eteocles, or Polynices – like their father before them – may predispose him to (self-) destructive behaviour. Likewise, it requires the peculiar wilfulness and spirit of the Sophoclean

⁵⁰³ Thus Polynices laments the ‘hatred between family members’, ἔχθρα...οἰκεῖων φίλων (374), yet will later relegate all care for hearth and home (624), having along with his brother ignored his mother’s pleas for a reconciliation.

⁵⁰⁴ Jocasta expresses sorrow for the wasted trouble of having breastfed her sons, and for her loss of their support in her old age (1434ff.); Antigone will mourn her brothers’ absence at her wedding (1436), and will eventually lose her chance of marriage.

Antigone, which may again be an inherited characteristic,⁵⁰⁵ to bring the political questions of the play to the fore; and the misguided sense of civic duty in a ruler such as Creon to highlight through the error of his own political decisions the inseparability and mutual dependence of public and private.⁵⁰⁶ So the problems are revealed through the individual characteristics and actions of the mythical characters; but – and, ironically, one element of the ‘anti-Athens’ thesis will help us here – the possible function of Thebes as an ‘other’ territory for the exploration of civic questions also suggests the potential for the clear transference of those concerns to a contemporary audience in any city, including and perhaps especially Athens. An Eteocles or a Polynices retains his own individual mythical identity, yet that identity is also shaped by and correspondent with the character traits found in contemporary political figures. These traits – selfishness, for example, or greed – are in turn themselves relatable on a broader level to human nature, *to anthrōpinon*, and historical perception of the constancy of human behaviour. The patent applicability of the mythical substance to external circumstance reveals a sustained tension between the special or ‘different’ complexities of the Theban identity and the tragedians’ presentation of those problems as relevant on a broader political and/or specifically Athenian level.

We noted earlier the possibility for redemption at Thebes, and the city’s potential for positive action. In the fragmentary *Antiope* Euripides looks back to the foundation of the city and goes beyond its troubled beginnings in *Phoinissai* to create a Theban identity from the external standpoint of the play’s setting at Eleutherae, on the borders of Thebes and Attica. The creation at the end of the play of an extra-dramatic future for Thebes – one of predicted concord and prosperity in the dispatch under Zeus’ orders of the twin brothers Amphion and Zethus to found the city⁵⁰⁷ – now points to the city and its construction as signifying prospective good. This contrasts sharply with the suffering in the play’s main action. But here at the end, we have the promise of a Thebes which is quite different. In the mutually complementary integration within the city’s foundation of the separate powers as represented by Amphion and Zethus⁵⁰⁸ there exists a newfound unity and coherence productive of positive action. This is focused on the constructive influence of

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. the Chorus’ comment at 471-2. See above under 3.4 for discussion of inherited/inherent traits in the Labdacids.

⁵⁰⁶ This question of character individualism is supported by the variety of their tragic personifications: the Creon of *Antigone* is not the Creon of *OT* or *Phoinissai*; the Sophoclean Antigone is importantly distinct from her Euripidean counterpart, and so on.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. fr.c col.ii 86-103 (pp 290-2 in Cropp, Collard & Gilbert 2004).

⁵⁰⁸ Hermes at fr.c col.ii 86-95 speaks of Amphion’s music as lightening the burden of the builders as Zethus directs the founding.

the Dionysiac at Thebes, and the potential harmonious co-existence of martial activity and musical quietude.⁵⁰⁹ This may be contrasted with the discordant and destructive nature of these apparent opposites, represented in the gods Ares and Dionysus, elsewhere in a Theban context such as *Bacchae*.⁵¹⁰ Here in *Antiope*, however, the positive nature of the Dionysiac at Thebes is emphasised by contrast with its ambivalent influence at Eleutherae, where it is associated with conciliation and ritual worship but is also seen as productive of violence and frenzy. That the Dionysiac may be presented with some ambivalence in a non-Theban context – one not too distant from Athens for good measure – and in association with integration and harmony in a Theban setting bears significant implications for a polarised antithesis for the Dionysiac at Thebes and outside it.⁵¹¹ The external focus on Thebes⁵¹² as the locale for an extra-dramatic future implies its potential for resurrection and reconstruction in myth, and reaffirms the diversity and mutability of the city's tragic identity. If *Antiope* were staged – as is possible, although not certain – as final play in a trio consisting also of *Hypsipyle* and *Phoinissai*,⁵¹³ it affirms the ultimate survival of Thebes and Theban myth, despite the events of the first two plays which associate the city with conflict and suffering. For after all, Thebes must remain standing; the city's survival in tragedy signifies the extent to which the genre was shaped by a longstanding mythical heritage in which the city does not fall as Troy did. Yet that in itself suggests also the durability and permanence of Thebes as dramatic locale. Tragedy ensures Thebes' survival so that the genre itself can continue to return to it and to propagate the city's myths. Thebes remains; and there is thus an ultimately life-affirming quality in its

⁵⁰⁹ The debate in the play on the respective virtues of activity and inactivity is recreated in the philosophical context of Plato's *Gorgias* (485e3-486d1).

⁵¹⁰ It is also evident to some extent, as we have already seen, in the second Stasimon of *Phoinissai*, although we must again bear in mind the limitations the play imposes on the representation of Dionysus and the Dionysiac.

⁵¹¹ This is the main direction of a more recent article by Zeitlin (in Carpenter & Faraone (1993) 147-82), in which she concedes some potential for good at Thebes, yet still seeks to apply a polarised schema to the Dionysiac at Thebes as generally negative, and as positive in non-Theban contexts. She may err primarily in basing her argument on the presentation of Dionysus and the Dionysiac influence, since these range widely across the scope of the tragic corpus, and as widely in the plays set at or directly concerned with Thebes.

⁵¹² There is no reason why this should be problematic, or impact negatively on Thebes' presentation in the play, as suggested by Zeitlin 181-2 in arguing that the Dionysiac at Thebes – and indeed the city itself – can only be positively depicted from an extra-Theban viewpoint. She is still firmly inclined to the 'anti-Athens' in further explaining the positive depiction of Thebes as due to its depiction from the vantage point (because in close proximity to Athens) of Eleutherae, 182. This not only passes over the dramatic conflicts of that location in the play, but also appears to overlook Zeitlin's own earlier concession to the possibility of Theban-type problems in relation to Athens (in the context of Eur. *Ion*, 170). This again undermines an unequivocally positive reading of Athens' depiction in tragedy. On the problems of autochthony in *Ion*, see Loraux in Winkler & Zeitlin 168-206.

⁵¹³ The question of *Phoinissai*'s companion plays was discussed above in the Introduction to this study.

endurance despite – perhaps even because of – the suffering to which it was home, and to which the poets would always return, καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι.

4. *Polis and Oikos*: Women and Gender Roles

The dynamics of gender and the importance of the female role in Attic tragedy is a popular area of modern scholarship and thus needs no lengthy treatment here; although as introduction to a play such as *Phoinissai*, in which gender-related themes are especially prominent, a brief overview of the topic is required. It is widely acknowledged that as evidence of contemporary social structures and specifically of the female role therein tragedy is not to be relied upon as an entirely realistic source; equally true that no one literary genre of the fifth century can fulfil this function. Individual genres were able to present gender roles in a manner best suited to their individual and various purposes. The fluidity and diversity of this presentation across the fifth-century texts precludes a definitive evaluation on the basis of any one genre, or even a number of genres, of gender roles in contemporary Athenian society.⁵¹⁴ Tragedy – like oratory, comedy, or any other literary genre – may present a distortion of ‘reality’, which indicates the fallibility of assuming a straightforward correspondence between dramatic representation and contemporary experience. But since creative literature ultimately has its roots in the collective experience of a culture, the genre does suggest the potential relevance of gender-related themes in the plays to fifth-century society. It is also important that generic subjectivity across the fifth-century literary canon is extended to ‘authorial’ subjectivity within the tragic genre. To perhaps a greater extent than any other literary form, tragedy was able to manipulate myth to suit an individual artistic conception. The plays’ varying emphases on and treatments of gender equally indicate a serious difficulty in a monolithic appreciation of the subject within the genre as a whole.⁵¹⁵ Further, an authorial monolith is to be avoided likewise: the individual tragedian was at liberty to approach gender in varying ways from play to play.

The limitations of a reductive appreciation of tragedy, which we have already noted elsewhere in this study, are evident also in scholarly attempts to interpret the unusually prominent position of women in the plays. The licence granted in tragedy to the female in terms of both independent expression and physical movement may be viewed as a transgressive, even subversive, representation of women who, as is evident in socio-anthropological studies of ancient Athens, were if not entirely secluded certainly severely

⁵¹⁴ Thus Foley (1981) 129-36 points out the distinction between women’s relative marginalisation in prose texts, for instance, in contrast with their prominence in drama, particularly tragedy (although cf. 127 n.2). This may indicate the differing ideological emphases of different genres; see the introduction to ch.2 above.

⁵¹⁵ See also for discussion Goldhill (1986) ch.5.

restricted in their legal rights and social roles.⁵¹⁶ This has given rise to various psychoanalytical approaches which seek in the Athenian male psyche the explanation for tragedy's apparently anomalous focus on the female.⁵¹⁷ Of course, the exclusively male authorship of fifth-century texts inevitably means that women in tragedy come filtered through male perceptions, however sympathetic.⁵¹⁸ When one considers also that an evidently ingrained suspicion towards the female in Greek literary culture is found as far back as Homer's Helen and Hesiod's Pandora,⁵¹⁹ the psychoanalytical interpretation is a compelling one. But it also seeks to impose too narrow a reading of a single genre, and overlooks what is often contradictory evidence from other literary texts as well as a broader evaluation of female and gender roles in a wider cultural context, which - as noted above - cannot be deduced from any one genre.⁵²⁰ Equally reductive are readings which marginalise the importance of women as individuals and view their roles as vehicles for the exploration of the male psyche.⁵²¹ There is an additional risk here in positing gender and the female role(s) as the sole or main preoccupation of the genre; while the theme was in tragedy evidently an important one, it is only one of the genre's various and complex concerns. It is also important that the plays do not always approach gender through the subject of male-female conflict. While this is a common theme in tragic gender dynamics, some plays may focus almost exclusively on male characterisation and psychology – such as *Oedipus Tyrannos*; and the same poet's *Electra* explores interfamilial conflict from the central focus of the mother-daughter relationship. Likewise, the tragic female herself does not function as a single 'type':⁵²² we can speak of similarities, but a Clytemnestra is not a Deianeira, nor is a Phaedra an Antigone. Tragic females no less – arguably, even more –

⁵¹⁶ The scholarly literature on the topic is vast: see e.g. Gould (1980); and Cohen (1991). Cohen and Just (1989) in particular have questioned the extent of women's actual seclusion; it is probable that this, for a number of reasons, is overstated in the sources available to us. Even so, the fact that women's movements, power, and visibility were restricted is undeniable.

⁵¹⁷ The seminal psychoanalytical approach is found in Slater (1968).

⁵¹⁸ We may think here of the justly famous choral ode of Eur. *Med.* (410-30), in which the Corinthian women imagine the tales to be told were women to wield authority in literary expression.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. Hes. *Th.* 512-4, 570-93; and *WD* 60-82. The perception of women as devious or dangerous is a pervasive theme of early Greek hexameter poetry and is particularly prominent in the *Odyssey*. For a study of the female in the epic, cf. Cohen (1995) parts I and II.

⁵²⁰ Cf. Foley's (1975) response to Slater 31-6.

⁵²¹ See Zeitlin (1996) 341-74.

⁵²² Zeitlin (1990b) relies heavily on this line in an earlier argument focusing on gender in Aeschylus. She also posits too close a correspondence here between gender distinctions in the plays and contemporary reality.

than their male counterparts are characterised as individuals with equally individual and psychologically plausible reactions to their own circumstances within the dramas.⁵²³

That there is no one model for the presentation of gender-roles and of the female in tragedy reveals in turn the limitations of the structuralist approach, which seeks to impose a binary pattern on gender and gender differences. Thus the plays cannot be said, for instance, to contrast implicitly and straightforwardly a dysfunctional heroic world with a developed fifth-century society,⁵²⁴ since they present not so much a simplistic binary view of past versus present but rather a more nuanced presentation of gender-related themes – *philia*, for example, or revenge – which may bear contemporary resonances while retaining their centrality to the heroic-age setting.⁵²⁵ Likewise, the well-worn dichotomy between the male as representative of ‘culture’ and the female of ‘nurture’ reveals severe limitations.⁵²⁶ A sharply polarised distinction between male and female behavioural patterns and socio-political roles involves also a similar demarcation between male and female ‘space’, that is between the female as representative of the home, *oikos*, and the male, of the city or *polis*.⁵²⁷ Tragedy may adhere to conventional stereotyping and thus impart a certain sense of realism to its depiction of domestic or private affairs, *oikeia pragmata*, but at the same time the genre also challenges expectation and convention. This need not be uniformly subversive; tragedy suggests the difficulty of imposing any type of neat structure on ‘real life’ just as we cannot impose the same on literature. Here as in so many ways tragedy looks to epic for its precedent, since the sixth book of the *Iliad* sets up definite boundaries between male and female roles and physical ‘space’,⁵²⁸ yet also presents women as representative of civic life and order, while their men fight to the death on the battlefield beyond. In addition it depicts that order by showing its subversion. Tragedy likewise exposes definite tensions in the nature/culture and *oikos/polis* polarities in its more questioning approach to men and women’s co-existence in society.

These tensions are sustained and pervasive. Let us start with ‘nature’ versus ‘culture’. The representation by women of irrationality, emotionalism, or a threat to the

⁵²³ On the theme of individualism in Greek literature in general, see Pelling (1990), and more specifically in relation to tragedy Easterling in the same volume, 83-99. Cf. also again Gould (1978).

⁵²⁴ This is one of the lines taken by e.g. Allan on Eur. *Medea* (2002).

⁵²⁵ This we saw to be equally relevant to our discussion of tragic politics; see the introduction to ch.2 above.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Ortner in Rosaldo & Lamphere (1974) for a refutation of the ‘culture’ versus ‘nature’ thesis. See also our discussion below of *Medea*, which shows the breakdown of the dichotomy.

⁵²⁷ Cf. Shaw (1975) 255-66; for a response see Foley (1982) 3-6, and for more detailed discussion Foley (1981) 148-63.

⁵²⁸ We remember again Hector’s words to Andromache at 6.490-3. For discussion of the book’s gender dynamics see the essay of Arthur in Foley (1981). See also the introduction to the 2010 ed. of book VI of Graziosi & Haubold.

public and political spheres - in which the male traditionally bears an authoritative and tutelary role - is a commonplace of gender stereotyping.⁵²⁹ Tragedy taken as a whole allows women to bear out this stereotype to some extent: perhaps our most powerful example is Medea, who may be said to represent the furthest extreme of female violence and wilfulness, or 'nature'. But rather than presenting her merely as the agent of a vitriolic revenge which bears out all the (male-constructed) prejudices relating to both her gender and non-Greek ethnicity, the play also questions *why* she is driven to kill her children. The drama maintains in addition a sense of female solidarity on the part of the Chorus, who despite their horror at Medea's actions can at least sympathise profoundly with the female lot. It is important that Medea is allowed to articulate this last in her great speech to the Corinthian women early in the play. In focusing on the unfairness and hardships borne by women, the drama not only establishes a sensitive appreciation of female suffering, but also and more importantly in constructing a bridge to the female role as victim points to Medea's part specifically as victim of male insensitivity and *dusboulia*.⁵³⁰ For all that the audience cannot but sympathise to some degree with the broken Jason at the end of the play, the main action scarcely reflects well on his behaviour and exposes starkly his calm disregard for the bonds of *philia* which is so important a theme in the drama, and which is intimately bound with Medea's revenge.⁵³¹ His patronising and cavalier attitude towards his wife is paired with a complete inability to view his actions from her perspective; and his attempts at self-justification fail to hold. It is also ironic that while he exploits her gender and especially her foreignness as evidence of her inferiority to himself and as explanation for her actions, Jason is scarcely presented as shining exemplum of the Greek male.⁵³² Further, Medea herself is presented on one level as typically Greek and bearing masculine characteristics, yet on another, and without clash, as woman, wife, and mother⁵³³ who makes perhaps the strongest of all tragic claims for the importance of women's role in society and the injustice of her treatment within it. So what the play presents is not a simple inversion of gender stereotypes but a blurring of gender (and simultaneously racial) differences which suggest also the significance not merely – or even chiefly – of 'nature' in the female's presentation, but of 'nurture' – women's external

⁵²⁹ We have already noted this in e.g. Eteocles' attitude towards the women in *Septem*; similarly the stance of Creon in *Antigone*, or the title-character in Eur.'s *Hippolytus*.

⁵³⁰ This theme is still more powerfully represented in the fragmentary *Tereus* of Sophocles; see esp. fr. 583R.

⁵³¹ See on this topic Easterling (1977). Medea also (in her abhorrence of mockery) espouses a view of self and society which is Greek and even heroic.

⁵³² See e.g. ch.3 in Allan ('Greeks and Others', 67-79).

⁵³³ Cf. further the classic article of Knox in Segal (1983) 272-93.

circumstances, over which they have no control, including and especially the behaviour of men. Thus ‘nature’ might suggest that women’s suppression, in the commonly articulated prejudices of a Jason or a Creon, is necessary to avoid outbreaks such as Medea’s; but equally ‘nurture’ implies that it is perhaps this very suppression which, in seeking to stifle the female claim, in fact precipitates the outbreaks of ‘nature’ it sought to contain.⁵³⁴

It is thus clear that there are no definitive and polarised models for male and female behaviour. Men are not necessarily, for instance, revealed to be more ‘rational’ or less emotional than women, nor do they always display intellectual superiority to their female counterparts. The *dusboulia* or ill-judgement of the Creon of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, for instance, proves a direct cause of his own and his city’s downfall. Women’s display of ‘male’ characteristics and vice versa, as found in *Medea*, is common across the tragic corpus, perhaps most memorably in the massive figure that is Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra. Her ‘masculine’ intelligence or ‘man-counselling heart’, ἀνδρόβουλον...κέαρ,⁵³⁵ is pitted against the intellectual inferiority of the unsuspecting Agamemnon, who reveals a contrasting inclination to both female and oriental habits in his use of the purple tapestries. Still weaker and more subject to scorn is Aegisthus, who unlike his predecessor cannot even brave the exclusively ‘male’ sphere of war.⁵³⁶ Tragedy presents a wide spectrum of feminised males: we may think, for instance, of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* and its continual exploitation and inversion of gender stereotypes. Heracles expresses embarrassment at his weeping ‘like a girl’ when brought on to the stage fatally wounded,⁵³⁷ and Deianeira dies a peculiarly masculine death by the sword. Yet both figures are united by their susceptibility to passion, *erōs*. Deianeira’s death on the marital bed and via a penetrative wound to the abdomen rather than the usual female recourse to hanging⁵³⁸ is strongly associated with her female, sexual identity, in particular relation to her husband’s betrayal of their marital bond. This tension in the presentation of male and female roles again recalls a character such as Clytemnestra, who like her tragic successors Medea and Deianeira is granted the voice of the wife and mother in her sexual jealousy over Agamemnon’s infidelities and bitter grief at the loss of her daughter Iphigeneia at her husband’s hands.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁴ This is an important qualification of Just’s (1989) view of the female in tragedy as what women could and would be without proper restraint. See his ch.9 for discussion.

⁵³⁵ *Ag.* 11.

⁵³⁶ As pointed out by the Chorus at *Ag.* 1625-7.

⁵³⁷ *Trach.* 1070-5.

⁵³⁸ On the theme of female suicide in tragedy see again Loraux (1987).

⁵³⁹ Cf. e.g. *Ag.* 1412-25; 1521-9.

In *Septem*, a similarly nuanced picture of gender differences is presented. The opening of the play casts Eteocles in the mould of the authoritative and self-controlled civic leader who has the best interests of the *polis* at heart. The hysteria of the terrified Theban girls who make up the Chorus is anathema to the coolly self-assured ruler who in the central ‘shield scene’ calmly and ironically refutes the boastings of the oncoming Argives. Yet the second half of the play reveals something of a role reversal. Here it is the Chorus who play the part of logical, rational advisers to an Eteocles bent on bloody confrontation with his brother in the full knowledge that it is likely to prove fatal. The women beseech him not to yield to his ‘wild desire’, ὠμοδακῆς ἥμερος, to kill his brother (692-4). Now it is he who represents irrationality, emotionalism, and a lack of self-control – the very absence of *sōphrosunē* he had earlier abhorred in his female antagonists: now he is ‘carried away’ by a ‘consuming folly’, θυμοπληθῆς...ἄτα, which makes him ‘raging’ with the spear (δορίμαργος, 686-7). Here, as in our play, the question of the *polis* and its salvation is central to the play’s gender dynamic. It is Eteocles whose departure to battle, heedless of the women’s pleas, proves the real threat to civic stability. It is the women who now speak for the city, and who prioritise its welfare.⁵⁴⁰

Religion is also central here. The Chorus’ allusion to the *miasma* incurred by the city in the event of fratricide⁵⁴¹ lends them a moral authority which in connection with their concern for the city establishes the centrality of women to public and political life through the spheres of prayer, of sacrifice, and of lamentation. This is established as a focal point of the Choral odes in the earlier part of the play in affirming the female role as victim of war – war instigated by their male counterparts, and which evokes again the causal relationship between male *dusboulia* and female suffering. But as the play develops the women are shown to be more than victims; as their hysterical prayers to the gods are transformed into the calm advice, based on the religious principles to which they are devoted, later offered to their headstrong ruler, the women reveal a moral and intellectual superiority to Eteocles. This centrality of the female role to public and religious spheres – or ‘culture’ – is a prominent theme of tragedy: in Euripides’ later *Supplices*, for instance, the strong contemporary resonances⁵⁴² in relation to the theme of religion in wartime

⁵⁴⁰ For more on Eteocles’s interaction with the Chorus, see above ch.1.3 and 1.4; and ch.3.4.

⁵⁴¹ *Sep.* 681-2.

⁵⁴² See the introduction to ch.2 above.

underline the importance of women in life as in literature even in the androcentric society of late fifth-century Athens.⁵⁴³

It is in the tragic theatre especially significant that this overlap between public and private is realised in physical, spatial terms.⁵⁴⁴ While in the broadest terms women were confined to the domestic or private spheres of influence in fifth-century society, their roles in religious and so cultural life meant that they did enter into the public sphere of the *polis*.⁵⁴⁵ While we must again avoid positing too close a relation between women's physical movements in the plays and those in contemporary society,⁵⁴⁶ it is nevertheless an important feature of tragedy that women's extra-*oikos* movements are closely and continually associated with their roles as mouthpieces of the political and public concerns which are often rooted in, and equally pertinent to, the *oikos* and private life. Thus when Antigone in the Prologue of Sophocles' play steps out of the palace to confer with her sister Ismene on the subject of their brother's burial, her departure from her usual quarters prefigures her private, domestic, familial concerns as intimately bound with the female role in relation to the broader interests of the *polis*. These are concerns also relatable to contemporary Athenian society.⁵⁴⁷ Antigone thus speaks, and stands, for both self and city. Creon's insistence on women's necessary seclusion, in the spirit of Eteocles before him,⁵⁴⁸ and his imperviousness to the religious and moral arguments of Antigone, only highlight the absolute centrality of the female 'voice' in a public life where the actions of the males so often fall short. This last recalls us to *Medea*, where a similarly bold exit from the domestic sphere on the part of the heroine⁵⁴⁹ works to the same effect if with differing emphasis. Medea's public exposition on the female lot before an 'internal' audience of the Corinthian women and an external one composed in great part of Athenian adult males,⁵⁵⁰ and her particular emphasis on the physical and emotional hardships of childbearing, convey the clear message of women's indispensability to the *polis* in their reproductive roles which ensure the continuity of the *oikos*. As the mothers and wives of the men who now and in the future will take an active role in public life, women form a fundamental

⁵⁴³ On the 'politics of lamentation' as a general theme see for discussion ch.1 in Foley (2001).

⁵⁴⁴ For a general discussion of women's physical movements in tragedy see Easterling (1987).

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. esp. Gould 50-1.

⁵⁴⁶ See Easterling's response to Shaw on drama versus 'real life', 16-7.

⁵⁴⁷ We discussed this point in ch.3.5 above.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ant.* 578-9. Easterling 22 makes the important point, however, that Creon's attitude here is linked not so much (or at least not exclusively) to common male prejudices but to his tyrannical inclinations, which she compares (with less weight) to those of Aegisthus in Aesch. *Agamemnon*.

⁵⁴⁹ Both women draw this fact to the audience's attention: cf. *Med.* 214; and *Ant.* 18-9.

⁵⁵⁰ Although the presence of women and children in the audience cannot be ruled out, it is a safe assumption that they formed the minority. See Pickard-Cambridge 263-5; and Csapo & Slater (1995) 286-93.

part of social and political infrastructures. Thus private cannot be wholly divorced from public; nor can *oikos* from *polis*, female from male concerns; and the overlap is tightly bound with both plays' dynamics of theatrical and gendered 'space'. It is on this note that we turn to *Phoinissai*.

4.1 Women and the Theatre: Gender-Spatial Dynamics

The female characters of *Phoinissai* are granted a particular liberty of physical movement in a play which focuses strongly on the public and political life in which they take an active role. The theme is drawn to our attention early in the play in Jocasta's exit from the palace to speak the Prologue. This prefigures the significance of her part later in the play and points to the unusual dynamism of women's physical movements as a motif in the action. Here in the Prologue Jocasta's closing emphasis on her fearful anticipation of her sons' imminent confrontation anchors her immediate interests in the welfare of the *polis*, to which the fraternal quarrel poses a serious threat. She has attempted to call a truce between the brothers, arranging that they should meet in the city: ἐγὼ δ' ἔριν λύουσ' ὑπόσπονδον μολεῖν / ἔπεισα παιδὶ παῖδα πρὶν ψαῦσαι δορός. / ἥξειν δ' ὁ πεμφθείς φησιν αὐτὸν ἄγγελος (81-3). Her authoritative role in instigating the debate between her sons prepares for the central part she will play in the public sphere of the *skēnē*, before the royal palace. It is here, of course, that she speaks for the *polis* - not only in the immediate dramatic setting of a Thebes beleaguered by war, but also on a broader contemporary level in her articulation of concerns relating to power structures in general as well as her promotion of democracy in particular. Her main role here, of course, is to try to mitigate the effects of the quarrel, and to prevent its potential destruction of the city. It thus becomes clear that Jocasta's exits from the palace are consistently associated with the active role she seeks to take in public and political life.

After the failure of the *agōn* and in the face of imminent disaster, Jocasta's public role shifts from the *skēnē* to the off-stage and exclusively 'male' world of the battleground beyond. This intrusion, in what appears to be a flagrant defiance of gender-spatial demarcations, marks the final stage in the play's development of Jocasta's physical movements from *oikos* to *polis* to beyond the *polis* and her ultimate death on its borders. It is important that the play repeatedly draws attention to the anomalous nature of this intrusion: the timid Antigone expresses anxious surprise at her mother's summons prior to

their mutual departure to the battleground.⁵⁵¹ The unusual quality of Jocasta's actions here is underlined in her own reference to her daughter's necessary abandonment of customary girlhood pastimes: οὐκ ἐν χορείαις οὐδὲ παρθενεύμασιν / νῦν σοι προχωρεῖ δαιμόνων κατάστασις.⁵⁵² In the women's absence, the fact of their departure is reiterated twice by the Chorus (1322-3, 1329). Creon's return to the stage is predicated on the necessity of Jocasta's assistance in the burial rites of Menoeceus (1317-21). Her absence at this point highlights the failure or inability of the female to fulfil her rightful, familial, and thus *oikos*-based role.⁵⁵³ Jocasta's departure for the battlefield represents female incursion into male 'space'; she demands the messenger lead her way: ἡγοῦ σὺ πρὸς μεταίχμι'. οὐ μελλητέον (1279). Her death on the battlefield by the 'male' agency of a sword, in lieu of her expected performance, as a woman, of funerary rites for her nephew, suggests an inversion of her proper role as closely connected with, and visually revealed in, her physical movements both on- and offstage. But it is important that Jocasta's public or political – and hence stereotypically 'masculine' – role is not associated with any practical efficacy or with choice. The inversion is forced upon her by the circumstances of a war precipitated by the greed and ambition of her sons.⁵⁵⁴ Her arrangement of the debate, her role within it, and her ultimate exit to the battleground, all end in failure. Her vain attempts to avoid catastrophe lend her a moral and ethical authority which cannot, however, translate to any real power to change the course of events. The audience is thus not invited to read any genuine sense of control or power in Jocasta's physical movements in the play,⁵⁵⁵ which thus maintains a certain realism as well as pathos in the fruitlessness of women's political interventions.

This brings us aptly to Antigone, whose character and changing role in the play is closely and consistently associated with the development of her physical movements. The

⁵⁵¹ Cf. 1270ff.

⁵⁵² Cf. 1265-9. These lines have been deleted by Fraenkel but are retained in most modern edd. of the play, and are accepted in this study likewise as authentic. The lines are thematically apt in developing the play's recurrent concern with the non-fulfilment by women – and especially by Antigone – of their expected social and religious roles. They also correspond – as pointed out by Mastronarde on 1265 – with the focus in both the Parodos and the Second Stasimon on the contrast between wartime disruption and musical quietude. On the more specific difficulties of 1266, cf. Mastronarde ad loc.

⁵⁵³ See further below under 4.6.

⁵⁵⁴ This is not to suggest that the play operates with any simple antithesis between the sexes; elsewhere other male characters are sympathetically presented, for all that modern scholarship on gender in *Phoinissai* tends to view the male characters in a negative light. See below 4.4 and 4.7.

⁵⁵⁵ This is the main flaw in the argument of Lamari (2007), which posits a stark contrast between what she sees as the emphasis on female power and dynamic physical movement in *Phoinissai* and the opposite in *Septem*, which she views as focusing exclusively on male authority. On the contrary, the gender dynamics of both plays are significantly more complex than is implied by a polarised reading of this type, and are in many ways similar. See again for discussion ch.1.3 and 1.4 above; and further below under 4.3 and 4.4.

play marks a trajectory in Antigone's extra-*oikos* movements which sees her develop from the enthusiastic innocent of the early *teichoskopia* to a young woman powerless as her mother was to bring to bear any successful influence on public affairs, and who is ultimately compelled to leave the *polis* behind. The *teichoskopia* emphasises Antigone's inexperience of men and the male domain of war to which she is here witness in the Paidagogus' opening and closing comments on the novelty of this departure from her *parthenōnes*.⁵⁵⁶ The emphasis on the impropriety of Antigone's potential exposure to the sight of strangers (92-3; later the Paidagogus quickly dismisses his charge at the approach of the foreign Chorus) highlights the extent of her character's development throughout the course of the play. Here the old man's concern for the conventional proprieties which befit the virgin daughter of a royal house underlines the scene's function as a type of initiation for Antigone into the public sphere. The uniqueness for her of this experience is well brought out in her rather naive admiration of the battleground scene and her eager soliciting of information from her aged chaperone. It is also important that the theatrical ingenuity of this scene in its extension of dramatic 'space'⁵⁵⁷ maintains some distance from the martial scene and so deliberately precludes Antigone's foray into the public domain from assuming any real dynamism at this point. But the episode does prefigure the later importance of her role in the public sphere, partly through the particular attention she naturally pays to her view of her brother Polynices. Her warm and emotional response to her glimpse of him (161-9) may prefigure the part she is later to play in the question of his burial. It is also important that her subordinate role here in the early scene, guided as she is by the Paidagogus who introduces his charge to the outside world, is later inverted in Antigone's own guidance of another old man, her father Oedipus, this time *away* from the *polis*.

Euripides maintains this effect of the young girl's innocence in Antigone's next departure from the *oikos*, well into the play at the crisis point of the fraternal battle. Her earlier exit to the palace roof was with the prior permission of her mother and under the auspices of a male guardian. This departure, in striking distinction from the bold fearlessness of her Sophoclean counterpart,⁵⁵⁸ comes in response to the summons of her mother (1264ff), who - as we have already seen - has from the outset assumed an active role in public life. Again we note Antigone's inexperience; again she turns to her

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. 88-95, 193-5.

⁵⁵⁷ See for discussion of this point ch.1.1 and 1.2 above.

⁵⁵⁸ See above the introduction to this chapter; and for discussion of the Euripidean Antigone in contrast and comparison with her Sophoclean predecessor, see ch.1.5 above.

interlocutor for instructions. Further, she herself now expresses shame or modesty, *aidōs*, at her departure from her *parthenōnes* and her entry to public company.⁵⁵⁹ Yet the subsequent intrusion, at her mother's bidding, into the brothers' death-scene on the battleground heralds the transformation which becomes apparent at her re-entry to the stage subsequent to the messenger reports of the catastrophic events outside the city (1480ff.). The manner in which Antigone now assumes centre stage in her aria is aptly paired with a discarding of the gender-related proprieties of which she had earlier been so conscious. Now she makes no attempt to conceal herself from public attention either in appearance or behaviour.⁵⁶⁰ In a gesture which both echoes and inverts her earlier movements, when she was called from her maiden quarters by both her mother and the Paidagogus, now it is she who calls forth her blind and helpless old father from the palace (1530-8); and she who informs him of their family's demise (1546ff.), leading him in mourning where once she was passive. Her active role here prefigures her confrontation of Creon on the subject of Polynices' burial (1643ff.). Her initial insistence on this, in the spirit of her Sophoclean predecessor, marks an active intervention in political affairs and draws attention, albeit briefly, to the moral and ethical implications of (non-) burial which had been fully developed in the earlier *Antigone*. Yet as with Jocasta, the physical and moral position in public life assumed by Antigone is allowed to carry no weight. Her gradual withdrawal over the question of burial is followed by her enforced departure from the city. Now she faces an uncertain life of exile beyond its territory, far from the security of the *oikos*. Her final exit, supporting the infirm Oedipus, highlights the complete reversal of her role throughout the course of the play, which brings her by stages from the *oikos* into the public life from which she is finally rejected. The play thus gradually takes her away from the ideal world upon which conventions and traditions of gendered 'space' and culture are based; and through the path of her physical movements also removes her ever further from her domestic *telos* of marriage and motherhood. Antigone's experience of public life is therefore closely connected to her female role as victim, and to the sacrifice of her rightful and expected function within the public sphere.

⁵⁵⁹ Note esp. 1275-6. The language here is important in relation to Antigone's actions in subsequent scenes: for discussion see below under 4.6.

⁵⁶⁰ See esp. 1485-9.

4.2 Women and Speech: Gender and Rhetoric

The scope of women's physical movements in *Phoinissai* corresponds with the equally striking licence granted to them in terms of independent expression of opinion, intention, and ideology. As the defining literary genre of fifth-century democracy, of which individual freedom of speech, *parrhēsia*, was a hallmark,⁵⁶¹ tragedy in general reveals a marked interest in the functions and effects of language and rhetoric. It also seeks to examine gender and gender differences through the medium of speech, a theme fundamental to an appreciation of the plays in their theatrical and performative contexts, and one especially complex given the exclusive use of male actors.⁵⁶² Although in a generic context the particular rhetorical licence granted to women in our play is obviously far from exceptional, *Phoinissai* does more markedly and consistently associate the theme of women's speech with the play's political concerns. Even so, Euripides does not invite an exclusive association of female speech with late fifth-century democratic structures.⁵⁶³ The play does display significant concern with rhetoric which is political – but not exclusively so. The concept of rhetorical persuasion, *peithō*, is central to the play's political and gender-related themes. We have already seen how Jocasta's great speech in the central *agōn* bears a remarkable affinity with contemporary philosophical discourse as well as with traditional Greek intellectual cultures. It is also, equally strikingly, very much *au fait* with late fifth-century precepts of sophistic rhetoric. Here rhetoric is used to persuade, in order to effect reconciliation and political concord. Jocasta's speech seeks not to dissimulate or to manipulate, but to set out her clearly articulated view of the advantages of democracy and the pitfalls of autocracy. The clarity and strength of her argument is well conveyed in the careful organisation and balance in the structure of the speech. She addresses each of her sons in turn, pointing out to each the wrongness of his motives before warning them both of the consequences of success as well as of failure in their planned actions. Both are reminded of the dangers of excess and the attendant

⁵⁶¹ Although it must be noted that *parrhēsia* is also, in a different way, characteristic of comedy, which is more overtly engaged with fifth-century democracy.

⁵⁶² See on this topic in general McClure (1999), and the article of Griffith in McClure (2001) 117-36.

⁵⁶³ Saxonhouse (2005), for instance, proposes that Antigone's role specifically in the play's final scenes is that of the 'political actor' and closely associated with democratic *parrhēsia*. Although the play makes a reference to democratic freedom of speech in relation to the exiled Polynices' deprivation of civic rights (391), it does not otherwise display any real interest in it, or invite a 'gendered' reading of the concept. It seems clear that Antigone's role in the 'burial scene' scene with Creon serves partly to highlight the potentially destructive professional shortcomings of the autocratic leader, a key theme in the earlier *Antigone* by which this scene is clearly influenced. But it is also clearer still that the female character in the play who most firmly assumes the role of the 'political' speaker is not Antigone but Jocasta.

implications in relation to the gods; and the speech is framed by the antithesis between wisdom and folly (529-30 to Eteocles, 569-70 to Polynices, 584-5 to both).⁵⁶⁴ In more specific relation to Jocasta's female (and specifically maternal) role, it is also significant that the speech is coloured by a strong emotive quality, particularly in its frequent use of rhetorical question and its direct apostrophising by turn of the feuding brothers. The emotional effect is heightened by her use of the word τέκνον (535, 582) – which is also reminiscent of the Chorus' later exchanges with Eteocles in *Septem*: they address him as φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν (677) and τέκνον (686). Here in Euripides, Jocasta's words maintain the audience's awareness of the close relationship between speaker and addressees.⁵⁶⁵ In addition, *peithō* is here used, of course, in a positive and constructive sense, which inverts traditional conceptions of women's capacity through the medium of speech for guile and deceit.⁵⁶⁶ This inversion is strengthened in the political context of the *agōn* by the misuse on the part of the male participants of language as they present arguments characterised by the linguistic and rhetorical sophistication of Jocasta's own, but with logic and reasoning which are, unlike hers, consistently revealed to be both deceptive and morally void.

In the brothers' arguments there is also revealed an emotional colour distinct from the parental concern of Jocasta's speech. Their inability to see beyond their own identical and clashing ambitions and their hot-headed determination to achieve them sees the debate descend into an exchange of threats and insults. Speech reveals the brothers' mutual lack of self-control. They also – unlike Jocasta – use speech to dissemble. Jocasta relies upon the power of rhetoric to convey intelligent and considered political argument, but her sons use speech fallaciously and soon exchange it for violence, for action rather than debate. The abuse by the brothers of their powers of rhetoric is flagged in Eteocles' sophistic repudiation of the uniformity or immutability of words and their meanings (499-502). It is also Eteocles who abandons speech and breaks up the debate: words are no longer needed, and the battle will speak for itself (588-9). And despite Polynices' implicit and explicit condemnation of specious rhetoric, and the ostensible simplicity of reasoning and expression in his own main argument,⁵⁶⁷ his own self-justification does not, as we have already seen, hold water, since the play highlights the discrepancy between his actions and

⁵⁶⁴ For more on the speech's arrangement and its verbal echoes of elements of both the brothers' previous speeches, see Mastronarde on 528-85.

⁵⁶⁵ This point is comparable to the speech of the mother in Stesichorus' *Thebaid*, which is still more emotive and persuasive in tone: see for discussion ch.1.7 above.

⁵⁶⁶ *Peithō* is not in tragedy presented as exclusively or even primarily negative. For discussion of the theme in Eur., see Buxton (1982) ch.5.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. esp. 469-72, 494-6.

his stance as victim. Speech on the part of both brothers is thus revealed to express reasoning and motivation which will prove directly destructive of the *polis*. On the other hand, Jocasta's use of rhetoric is associated with concern for the interests of the city and for the ties of the *oikos* with which the city is so closely bound, and which are dismissed by the two brothers. *Peithō* on her part is used for the good of the *polis*; by the two brothers, it is used to its detriment.⁵⁶⁸

The problematisation of *peithō* in the play is focused on its failure to achieve its intended aim. This failure is, in relation to gender, realised in importantly different ways. The brothers abandon attempts at reasoned discussion; violence, *bia*, triumphs over *peithō*. Jocasta, though, has only moral – rather than practical – authority: she cannot ultimately change events. In the context of gender, logic is thus separated from power. The brothers present arguments which are founded on dubious principles: rhetoric becomes thin disguise for egoism and personal ambition. Yet for Jocasta, as arguably the most intelligent character in the play, *peithō* fails in a different way: it cannot be associated with any practical efficacy in the face of ambition, *philotimia*, and, ultimately, *bia*. On a contemporary politico-historical level, this reflects the failure of *logos* and the inability of rational argument to hold sway in a world divided and shaken to its foundations by war. Of course, in this larger dimension the problems of speech go beyond the simple questions of gender. But in the specific context of *Phoinissai*, the failure of female persuasiveness is associated with the disempowerment of women, whose good sense is rendered impotent, and who are ultimately unable to make any practical intervention in a city gravely threatened by the gross inadequacy of its rulers. Again an element of realism is maintained, since – as so often in tragedy – women may wield a moral and intellectual authority in civic affairs which cannot translate to power in practice.

This is reaffirmed in the role of the Phoenician Chorus, who in the *agōn* attempt to effect reconciliation between the brothers, and who express their disapproval of specious rhetoric.⁵⁶⁹ They too are ignored, and, like their counterparts in *Septem*, highlight the female role as victims of war for which they bear no responsibility. For Antigone, the focus on speech gains more clarity later in the play, particularly in her confrontation of Creon over the question of Polynices' burial. Of course, this Antigone – as already noted – fails to maintain the passion and obstinacy of her Sophoclean predecessor; but the brief

⁵⁶⁸ The point of contrast here is specifically the brothers' behaviour (not that of all the male characters) versus Jocasta's; see again 4.4 below.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. 497-8, 526-7. The Chorus's interventions are conventional in content and in form, but this does not diminish their thematic significance.

glimpse of the earlier character draws attention, albeit briefly, to women's attempts to assert a political 'voice'. This supports the more typically 'masculine' intervention in public affairs that we see in Jocasta; but it is also important that Antigone in emphasising the importance of burial also highlights the claims of the family and *oikos* by attempting to accord her brother some semblance of funerary rites. With Jocasta, too, intervention in the public domain is inseparably connected to her role in the *oikos*. These private and domestic concerns are here and throughout the play subordinated to the power of the *polis*. Women thus stand for, and are caught between, the conflicting and divided spheres of public and private life. This also points again to women's association with victimhood and sacrifice. Antigone's loss of her role in ritual is clearly articulated not only in her passionate refusal of marriage to Creon's son Haimon (1673-5), but also in her preceding aria (1485-1538), as well as in the closing exchanges with her father Oedipus (1683ff). Here female speech is used to articulate grief and loss; and perhaps still more powerfully for the fruitlessness of women's political actions, it resonates throughout the closing scenes and beyond as Antigone departs for a bleak future in exile.

The closing emphasis on the female role as victim brings us finally to Menoeceus, who is linked through the theme of sacrifice to Antigone and the play's other female characters. The play importantly does not associate Menoeceus exclusively with male or female characteristics or roles.⁵⁷⁰ His use of rhetoric is similarly complex and nuanced. Following Teiresias' pronouncement of the necessity of Menoeceus' death, and prior to the sacrifice itself, the boy affects collusion with his father Creon's frantic plans for his escape (960-90). Yet although Menoeceus' words here are deliberately misleading, the audience is not invited to view this in a negative light, since the deception enables Menoeceus to undertake his fated and desired role in dying on behalf of the *polis*. When balanced against the specious language employed by the two brothers to conceal motives detrimental to the city, Menoeceus' heroism is thrown into still sharper relief. In his final *rhetosis*, the positive function of rhetoric as expressive of genuine political allegiance is heavily emphasised: εἶμι καὶ σώσω πόλιν / ψυχὴν τε δώσω τῇσδ' ὑπερθανὼν χθονός ('I will go and save the city, and I shall give my life, dying on behalf of this land', 997-8). There is a distinctively masculine element in Menoeceus' speech, which distinguishes him from the female characters and which again contrasts strongly with the sophistic manipulations of rhetoric on the part of the two brothers. This is clear in his determination

⁵⁷⁰ We return to this below under 4.7.

to protect his family and his city. By dying, Menoeceus will avoid the personal shame, *aiskhunē* (999), and charges of cowardice, *deilia* (1004-5), that he perceives he would incur by avoiding the sacrifice. He will achieve this (992) while saving, rather than betraying, his loved ones, *philoī* (1003-4). This sensitivity to the ‘guilt/shame’ culture of the heroic world is, of course, exclusively and intrinsically masculine,⁵⁷¹ and would recall for a contemporary audience many of the better-known heroes of Homer.⁵⁷² More specific to the contemporary political atmosphere of the play is Menoeceus’ identification with the sense of civic loyalty embodied in Pericles’ ideal citizen, which is a recurrent theme in the democratic Funeral Oration, as noted earlier in this study. When viewed alongside the egoism of the two brothers, and the moral ugliness for which their rhetoric provides thin disguise, Menoeceus’ speech offers some hope and consolation in an otherwise bleak world. This precludes a reading of the play as in any straightforward sense anti-rhetorical. Rather, it presents rhetoric as tool for good or ill, as variously manipulated either in a positive sense – as in the cases of Menoeceus, Jocasta, and to a lesser extent Antigone; or in a negative one, as revealed by the two brothers. Rhetoric thus becomes the benchmark for the play’s examination of the tragic consequences of ambition, and of the wider effects of war to which that ambition has led.

4.3 Gender Roles and Conflict: Men, Women, and the *Polis*

The Chorus

The association of the female characters in *Phoinissai* with public and political life suggests the particular challenge posed by the play to gender-based conventions. The play draws deliberate attention to these stereotypes and on one level at least seeks to question and even to invert them. In the early *teichoskopia* the Paidagogus’ concern with gender-related proprieties is paired with a general suspiciousness of women, which is a familiar motif in tragedy: he is eager to avoid the ‘carping lot of females’, φιλόψογον...χρῆμα θηλειῶν, that is, he believes, the approaching Chorus (198). Yet the behaviour of the Chorus – and that of the play’s female characters in general – will, as already noted, persistently defy such prejudices. The Chorus’ extensive narrative of Theban history

⁵⁷¹ Although it is present in the case of Medea, for instance; yet this trait remains a typically ‘male’ one.

⁵⁷² It might be interesting to compare here another suicide who dissembles through speech to reassure a loved one – Sophocles’ Ajax. Here, however, though the fear of shame and mockery are correspondent with Menoeceus’ reasoning, the deception is focused entirely on the personal considerations of the speaker.

invests their dramatic role with a particular intellectual authority as they provide external comment on and background to the current events. This authority is heightened by their relative detachment, as foreigners, from those events, which allows for a generally far more objective and dispassionate analysis of the city's troubles than is usually found on the part of the tragic Chorus. From early in the play the Chorus assume an active part in the plot's development. They address Polynices directly (293ff.) in a move especially bold given their position as unmarried, non-Greek girls;⁵⁷³ and they imperatively call Jocasta forth from the palace so that she may greet her son (296-300).⁵⁷⁴ Prior to the *agōn*, the women encourage Jocasta to effect reconciliation between the brothers (443-5). During the course of the debate, they offer tentative but astute comment on the brothers' arguments in their cautious approbation of Polynices' argument (497-8),⁵⁷⁵ and then in their more stringent critique (526-7) of Eteocles' subsequent speech. Their condemnation of his use of sophistic argumentation and rhetoric is particularly striking given their position, age, gender, and ethnicity, and thus focuses attention on these themes which are central to the political discourse of the play. This also, of course, lends the Chorus a moral authority shared by Jocasta and, to a lesser extent, by Antigone. In addition, the Phoenician women's stance on the brothers' behaviour here in the *agōn* lends extra weight to their part as intelligent bystanders in events perpetuated by the misguided ambitions of the two men. This in turn subverts stereotypical conceptions of gender power and dramatic authority: it is the women who represent rationality and wisdom; and the women who likewise uphold the typically 'male' concern for the *polis* and political stability. The inversion is strengthened by the brothers' abrogation of political responsibility and their deafness to the considered and rational arguments of Jocasta. In the context of gender convention, the brothers' (self-) destructive behaviour also casts the old Paidagogus' conviction of women's troublesome nature in a somewhat ironic light.

Yet there are important ways in which the women uphold gender-based tragic convention. The Choral odes reveal a growing sense of the women's personal involvement in events and a heightened emotional tone. This does not detract from, or undermine, the moral and intellectual authority with which they are invested for a large part of the play;

⁵⁷³ On the identity of the Chorus see Mastronarde 208-9.

⁵⁷⁴ On the textual problems of 291-2 cf. Mastronarde ad loc.

⁵⁷⁵ Here, of course, Eur. exploits in addition ethnic stereotyping in inverting common prejudices regarding a lack of rationality and moderation on the part of non-Greeks. In *Phoinissai*, as in *Medea*, it is the Greek males whose self-seeking behaviour is exposed, in contrast with the articulation of principled argument by non-Greeks, and women at that. The inversion is strengthened by the Chorus' use of the word ξυνετὰ (498), a catchword of contemporary Greek intellectual cultures.

but it is also important that the drawing of attention to the women's ambiguous ancestry and distant connection with Thebes⁵⁷⁶ lends credence to their growing helplessness and horror in the face of approaching catastrophe. This is effectively conveyed by the increasingly emotive quality of their language in later odes. The Chorus' grief and inability to change events, despite their well-meaning and principled advice, point to their role as victims in a war over which they have no control. This is, arguably, enhanced by the accidental nature of their involvement as non-Thebans, and their implication in dramatic events is a very realistic detail in the women's role. The theme of victimhood again unites them with their counterparts in *Septem*, who articulate clearly the fate awaiting them in the event of the city's capture. This essential 'femaleness'⁵⁷⁷ in the Choral role unites these women with Jocasta and Antigone, for whom likewise an impotent display of moderation or 'good sense', *sōphrosunē*, is rewarded only by further suffering. It is also significant that the Choral role is in the play strongly associated with religion and religious ritual. The women's heartfelt prayers to the gods for salvation⁵⁷⁸ underline their role in public and cultural life; their religious faith and devotion, shared by Jocasta and Antigone,⁵⁷⁹ serve as another point of contrast with the brothers, who relinquish all thought for the gods as well as for the *polis*.⁵⁸⁰ An additional poignancy is lent by the Chorus' inability to fulfil their rightful and desired role in ritual; they have, of course, been prevented by the Theban war from reaching their intended destination of Delphi, where they are to worship Apollo. Fervent prayer in the midst of that war is their sole and vain claim to their expected and longed-for cultural role. As with Jocasta, Antigone, and in several important ways Menoeceus - as we will see shortly - the female role in its most traditional and 'tragic' - if far from exclusive - function thus demonstrates the wider reverberations of war and its indiscriminate victimisation of the innocent.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. esp. 243-9 and 676ff.

⁵⁷⁷ Cf. also e.g. Eur. *Tro.* 197-213; *IT* 143-77.

⁵⁷⁸ See 586-7; and again 676ff.

⁵⁷⁹ Jocasta: 84-7, 555-6, 571-2; Antigone: 182-92, as well as her allusions to divine law in the later scene with Creon, esp. 1652 and 1653 [corrupt].

⁵⁸⁰ Eteocles himself draws attention to the implications of his brother's assault on Thebes (cf. 604ff.), although Polynices is confident of the gods' support (626-35): but neither brother can justifiably claim a higher moral ground.

4.4 Men: Creon, Teiresias, Oedipus

The play's tendency to contest gender-related prejudices and stereotypes does not, as already noted in relation to the female characters, entail a wholesale reversal of the traditional and individual roles of men and women. Modern scholarship has tended to posit an overly straightforward and polarised distinction between these roles, and to view the play as presenting a clear inversion of male and female functions in the *polis*. Thus the male is seen as unwilling or unable to uphold civic authority, and the female as upholding that authority in the men's stead.⁵⁸¹ Of course, this is – as we have already seen – to some extent true; but the play's gender dynamic taken as a whole does not conform to a monolithic pattern or 'type.' The male characters are not consistently or exclusively associated with negative behaviour, particularly that which is destructive of civic stability. It is also important not to overestimate the significance of female influence in the play, for as we have already noted in relation to Jocasta in particular, the women in the play are not granted any real efficacious or practical authority.⁵⁸² Indeed, the mismatch between moral authority and formal power is vital to the play's representation of gender. Further, the drama does not necessarily seek to suppress or undermine male authority from an exclusively 'gendered' perspective. The actions of the brothers are relatable not only in the immediate dramatic context to ill-judgement, *dusboulia*, as a flaw on the part of the males, but also on a broader level to *to anthrōpinon* and the fragility of civic loyalty in war. A similar principle may be applied to Creon's veto on the burial of Polynices. Certainly within mythical Thebes this indicates – as it did in *Antigone* – the misguided harshness of a new and inexperienced ruler; but here as there it also ties in with the play's wider examination of the pitfalls of autocracy as a political constitution.⁵⁸³ The fact of Creon's maleness may be detached from his political (mis-) judgements.

It is also important – without undermining the extent to which the two brothers in particular do bear personal responsibility for their actions – that political obligation and civic (non-) decisions are consistently related to the apparently insoluble conflict between public and private interests. Creon again provides apt illustration of this point. The

⁵⁸¹ Thus, for instance, Goff (1995). The chief flaw of her argument is in her presentation of a uniform model for Theban gender dynamics which fails to take into account the individual and nuanced treatment of the theme in other 'Theban' plays. See above ch.3.5; and on Menoeceus, see below 4.7.

⁵⁸² It is further significant that the general benevolence of the female towards the city is not to be exaggerated; the very earth or *gē*, a distinctly female entity, has an ambivalent relationship with the *polis*: see ch.3.3 above under 'Gods'; and for further discussion see below under 4.5.

⁵⁸³ This was discussed from various perspectives in ch.3.5 above; and see also ch.2.4.

sacrifice scene allows for an entirely original examination of the theme; in addition, for an audience-member with Sophocles in mind, the refusal of this Creon to espouse the absolute authority of the state is ironic. The contrast between the two characters is clear in the Euripidean Creon's passionate abdication of any sense of political obligation and hasty eagerness to prevent the city's cognisance of the prophet's instructions (962-72). Creon's refusal to allow his son Menoeceus to die for the city can be – and has been – seen as further evidence of male inadequacy.⁵⁸⁴ Viewed against absolute standards of patriotism his apparent abandonment of any thought for civic welfare (χαίρετω πόλις, 919) may be felt to invite outright condemnation. But imperfect as it is, Creon's failure to sacrifice his son for the city is a long way from the ruthless self-interest of his nephews, and is best viewed instead as the psychologically plausible and natural response of a father placed in an unimaginably difficult position, where the city imposes on and threatens to destroy the private and familial. The necessity of the sacrifice also calls into question the nature and value of political 'heroism' which in this instance requires the death of an innocent, and ties in with the play's overarching concern with the perennial struggle between individual and society. Creon himself articulates this in consciously rejecting the glory, *kleos*, which would be his, were he to permit his son's death (967). The previous intertextual allusion to Euripides' earlier *Erechtheus* (852-7) would have recalled for a contemporary audience, and deliberately, the bitter implications of sacrifice on behalf of the state.⁵⁸⁵ Creon's readiness to give his own life for the city, being of an age where it would be more natural for him to do so (968-9), invites a significant degree of sympathy, both because it gives him a degree of courage and also because it indicates that it is not the idea of death for the city *per se* which he rejects, but that his son should be the victim. There is also his instinctive and unconditional parental love – interestingly, like that of his sister Jocasta – which is deliberately and powerfully contrasted with Polynices' earlier profession of love for the *patris* against which he wages war.⁵⁸⁶ Unlike the case of the brothers, the situation in which Creon finds himself in relation to the sacrifice⁵⁸⁷ is not the result of any direct or

⁵⁸⁴ So Lamari 19, who comments on Creon's 'shocking' lack of even the 'passive heroism' that would have been his had he obeyed Teiresias' instructions. Lamari seeks completely to suppress male authority in the play (cf. esp. 18-20); her views on Creon are shared by Foley, who views Creon's patriotism as 'suspect', 109.

⁵⁸⁵ Thus the example of Praxithea in this play can scarcely be held up as representing the simple glory of political loyalty, in contrast with the apparent political 'failure' of Creon (see Lamari 19).

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. 965-6 as against 358-9.

⁵⁸⁷ It must be admitted that Creon's treatment of Oedipus at the end of the play may invite harsher judgement, since he is quick to give credence to Teiresias' words regarding the *miasma* of the Labdacids' presence in Thebes (1590-1; cf. 867-9 and 886-90, retained in the text by both Mastronarde and Craik), yet

personal responsibility but is rather the unfortunate outcome of a hereditary obligation to atone for an ancestral transgression. In the Labdacid line, it is an important distinction that the forces of both pre-destination and human autonomy collaborate in the perpetuation of catastrophe.⁵⁸⁸ Creon's part in the play illustrates that it is not just women – nor even those without power and influence – who are swept aside by the destructive forces unleashed by unbridled ambition. His position – and to a greater extent that of his son – shows that victimhood is not just a female prerogative.

It remains to glance briefly at Teiresias and Oedipus, both of whom have been viewed as somewhat colourless in character as well as weak and ineffectual on a purely practical, dramatic level.⁵⁸⁹ It is an important point of contact with other Theban plays that Teiresias fulfils his generic function of the ignored prophet. In *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*, for instance, failure to heed the seer's advice results in bitter regret on the parts of the plays' characters. Yet it is important there, as it is in *Phoinissai*, that while the characters usually fail to give him credit, the text certainly does not. The part of Teiresias, as the spokesperson of Apollo, carries a moral and religious authority on a textual level, just as on a purely dramatic one it instigates a significant development in plot. It is in addition through the part of Teiresias that the play develops its background themes of Thebes' troubled history in relation to both the autochthonic and Labdacid myths. The prophet's exposition on the necessity of the sacrifice to accomplish civic salvation unites the two myths in conveying the impression of Thebes as inherently diseased or polluted, and is particularly illuminating in relation to the city's relationship with the gods.⁵⁹⁰ This forms an important association with the broad-sweeping perspective of the Chorus, and as with the women contributes to the moral and intellectual authority of the prophet's role while emphasising its part within the play's dramatic context. The associated themes of knowledge and self-recognition again recall the Sophoclean plays and underline the validity of Teiresias' role in offering a more informed perspective on events.

readily repudiates the prophet's advice regarding the sacrifice. But again, Creon's differing reactions to the two necessities are far from unrealistic and do not significantly undermine his generally sympathetic characterisation in the play.

⁵⁸⁸ For discussion of causation in the play, see ch.3.3 and 3.4 above.

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. again Lamari *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁰ It is further important that while the other characters' views of causation in the myths will naturally be to some degree subjective, this is not necessarily true of the role in the plot of the prophet-figure, who as outsider and Apollo's spokesperson bears a less biased and more judicious appreciation of events. In addition, the prophet's authority in the play may be affirmed by the pre-existence of an epic-tragic motif of the prophet-warner.

We come finally to Oedipus, who makes a long-awaited appearance in the final scenes of the play. In the context of his grief and lamentation – a part chiefly if not exclusively ascribed to female characters – quickly followed by his enforced exile, it might be easy to deny him any real dramatic authority or indeed presence. It is of course true that the play's frequent references to Oedipus prior to his appearance focus on his wretched helplessness, emphasised by the man himself in his main speech (1595-1624). Yet Oedipus' appearance with his daughter⁵⁹¹ serves the dramatic and thematic functions of uniting all the Labdacids, living and dead, onstage; and even here – as noted already – the great king of *Oedipus Tyrannos* is traceable in his stubborn pride and fatalistic acceptance of his desperate circumstances. In addition, there is the important point of Oedipus' future. While the play's close points to continuing suffering for both father and daughter, it also hints – if only fleetingly – at the glory that is yet to be Oedipus' in his reference to his ultimate death at Colonus (1707-9). In suggesting the prospect that was to be realised in Sophocles' final play, *Phoinissai* underscores the heroism of this ruined and helpless old man, despite – indeed because of – his experiences. In this way it is not unreasonable to read in his part – and those of the other minor male characters – dramatic as well as thematic significance which contributes to the unity and coherence of the play as a whole.

4.5 Myth

Phoinissai's complex yet unified nexus of gender-related themes forms the basis of and connection between the play's two myths of autochthony and of the cursed Labdacids. The focal point of both these myths is the physical entity of the Theban earth, *gē*, which is consistently associated with an ambivalent productivity poised between its life-giving fecundity and its engendering of violence and destruction.⁵⁹² The essential femaleness of earth is emphasised in the persistently interrelated themes of fertility and marriage within the play's mythical fabric.⁵⁹³ There is the autochthonous offspring of *gē*, returned to the

⁵⁹¹ There is no real cogency in the contention (see Lamari 19) that Oedipus' reliance on Antigone as a result of his blindness and infirmity excludes him from any type of dramatic importance, just as the same cannot be said of Teiresias' dependence on his own daughter (see 834-40). The motif does not so much support the play's emphasis on female authority as, in the case of Antigone at least, underline the extent to which women are deprived through no fault of their own of their expected social and domestic roles. See again below under 4.6.

⁵⁹² This was discussed in ch.3.1 above; see also 3.3 on *gē*'s troubled relationship with the city.

⁵⁹³ For refs. in the play cf. Mastronarde 8 n.1.

earth in death; and the cross-generational breakdown of familial relationships in the Labdacid line. The illicit birth of the son who grew up to commit patricide and incest leads, in the present day, to the fratricidal feud between the incestuous offspring, which forms the culmination of a cyclical pattern of intra-familial violence. The two myths as constructed upon a conflict of gender-representations suggest also an equally complex gendering of the earth as balanced against its doubled-edged influence on the city's fortunes. Autochthony and incest as pivots of the myths are both, of course, aberrations in the process of reproduction, excluding 'normal' sexual procreation. Each myth examines the encroachment of the past on the present and, in differing ways, the ultimate necessary destruction of the family and its bloodline as a result of its anomalous origins. Both the Labdacid and the autochthonic lines are ultimately made extinct: Menoeceus as last of the earth-born will die unmarried, without offspring; likewise, the two surviving Labdacids will not continue the family line. The younger males die leaving only the aged Oedipus, soon to die at Colonus, and Antigone, who faces a life of exile and who in the earlier eponymous play of Sophocles dies a childless virgin.⁵⁹⁴ Incest and autochthony in their common benchmark of dangerous or illicit fertility both involve an unnatural inwardness in their reproductive processes.

Yet the two themes are also in important ways distinct in forming separate strands of instability in the play's myths. The autochthony myth is focused on the gendering of earth, which is consistently presented as a female entity in the play's emphasis on its fertility in both its positive and negative aspects. Yet autochthonic associations are not exclusively female, even if Euripides places little emphasis on the male role. The origins of the Spartoi are traced back to the passive role played by the snake and Ares as its owner/father.⁵⁹⁵ It is also interesting that the poet alludes to the virgin goddess Athene, who commands Cadmus to sow the teeth of the slain snake.⁵⁹⁶ She is here described as born of no mother, ἀμάρτορος (666), which in alluding to her own asexual genesis implies a bias towards her patrilineal associations and recalls her characterisation in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.⁵⁹⁷ This is interesting when balanced against the general mythical presentation

⁵⁹⁴ See also Zeitlin in Winkler & Zeitlin 150-2. She points out (152 n.27) the etymology of Antigone's name, 'anti-generation', as reflective of the inability of her line as a result of the anti-family acts of patricide and incest to adhere to normal patterns of generational continuity and propagation.

⁵⁹⁵ See again ch.3.3. Of course, the male role by way of contrast finds greater emphasis in the Athenian myth of autochthony, where the attempted rape of Athene by Hephaistus results in the impregnation of earth with his seed (cf. Apollodorus *Library*, 3.14.6).

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. 666-8; on the textual difficulties in these lines, cf. Mastronarde ad loc. At 1062-4 the Chorus suggest that Athene was also instrumental in inciting Cadmus to kill the snake.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. esp. *Eum.* 736-8.

of Athene, which reveals some ambivalence between her male and female characteristics. Our text in referring exclusively to her paternity implies some degree of significance in the male contribution to the genesis of the first autochthons. It is important not to exaggerate the importance of this; but it does suggest a certain tension in what appears to be a heavily gynocentric conception of Theban autochthony.⁵⁹⁸ In the actual birth of the Spartoi, this tension is developed into the specific ambiguity of the earth's relationship with its offspring, which are born only immediately to die an abrupt and violent death. The genesis of the first earth-born fully armed and ready for battle⁵⁹⁹ suggests the (self-) destructive nature of the earth's fertility. Earth destroys the life of which it had been the source. This may be seen as an extension of the hostility of Earth as reactive to violent intrusion. We have already seen this in the consequences of Cadmus' sowing of the snake's teeth. The reunion of the Spartoi with their φίλα γᾶ (673) affirms the closeness of the biological connection, but also implies the unnaturalness of this link, and perhaps sexual or incestuous connotations in addition.⁶⁰⁰ Yet the double-edged nature of earth's relationship with its own also indicates a difficulty in positing a straightforward association between earth and mother, since earth is presented not as nurturing and life-giving, but as anti-life and anti-growth.⁶⁰¹ This is also implied in its engendering of the snake whose destruction was necessary for the propagation of Theban civilisation. In addition to the specific implications of the Theban myth, at issue here is the inherent fragility of civilisation, always achieved at the expense of nature but always vulnerable. Here the presence of the snake as a potential threat (657-61) underlines the bestial, primitive aspect of the earth's fertility. This is reaffirmed elsewhere in the play – notably in the Third Stasimon – by the figure of the Sphinx, another of the earth's offspring, which robs Thebes of its own. This ambiguity is confirmed in the present-day necessity of Menoeceus' sacrifice. Earth demands the death of the last of its own descendants before it will show its benevolence towards the city.⁶⁰² It is presented now as a direct danger to the *polis* at large. In an exclusively autochthonic context, and as with the first generation of Spartoi, Menoeceus'

⁵⁹⁸ In the broader context of Athene's more central role in the Athenian myth of autochthony, this may in addition imply the difficulty in the 'gendering' of the goddess, poised as she is between her female associations with weaving and trickery (this last suggested in the name of her mother, Mētis, swallowed by Zeus), and the nurturing role she assumes in relation to the first earth-born, Erichthonios (cf. *Il.* 2 547-8; Eur. *Ion* 270); and her military/martial affinities, unmarried state, etc.

⁵⁹⁹ See 670ff. and 939-40.

⁶⁰⁰ See however above ch.3.5 n.496.

⁶⁰¹ Compare the actions of Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn*, following the abduction of her daughter Persephone: see esp. 305-9, 450-6, 471-3.

⁶⁰² Cf. 937-9.

death underlines the association of earth with violence and bloodshed and again implies an innate hostility on the part of earth towards its own progeny. The death of the young man on the cusp of adulthood emphasises this resistance of earth to the promotion of life and fertility.

Gender also bears some implications for the Labdacids. The distortion in the autochthony myth of the normal female role in specific relation to fertility and reproduction forms a strong point of contact with the problems in the family of Oedipus. Laius' illicit engendering of his son sets up a set of circumstances in which Oedipus is united in marriage with and fathers children by his mother. The consequences of these events ultimately result in the extinction of the race, the final generation of which is cut off violently and prematurely, and without issue. Yet there is a differing emphasis here which highlights the *male* contribution to the family's woes. Laius fathered Oedipus in the knowledge that this was forbidden by Apollo. Although there is no suggestion of sexual violence here, the motif of an illicit incursion on the female will be reiterated in the incestuous marriage of Oedipus with Jocasta, and the production of their four offspring. The effect of this is – as with the genesis of the 'sown men' – to bring into existence a group of people which should not exist. In the present generation, the fraternal feud over political power may be to some degree implicated in the 'femaleness' of earth. The assault on the Theban *gē* by Polynices' army⁶⁰³ and the similarly destructive consequences of his brother's autocratic ambitions suggests, in adherence to the patrilineal pattern, an encroachment on the female which thematises unnatural conduct on the part of the males. The attack on the city is productive of violence and death. Again there is revealed an inversion of the female's normative life-giving and nurturing role – but, in important distinction from the autochthony myth, this inversion presents the female as innocuous. The males in all three generations of Labdacids are linked by an infringement of norms of sexual behaviour in which the female is cast into the role of victim. This provides an illuminating contrast with the presentation of the female in the myth of Theban autochthony.

The theme of sexual aberration as causally related – at least in part – to the present-day feud is highlighted by the Chorus in the Second Stasimon: with their incestuous

⁶⁰³ Repeated references to this thematise the assault: cf. e.g. 511. Elsewhere allusions point to the assault more specifically on the *polis* and *patris* (e.g. 570, 1628-9); for discussion, see below.

parentage, the brothers were never to avoid difficulty and discord (814-7).⁶⁰⁴ The audience is also, as noted earlier, made aware early on of Oedipus' ill-treatment at his sons' hands and his imposition of the curse, as well as of the circumstances surrounding the prior killing of Laius. All these actions imply the triumph of passion over reason, just as in Laius' original transgression sexual passion is presented as the dominant force. The common theme is an inability, or at least failure, to exercise self-control. In the present generation this is transferred from a sexual context to the clash of wills over the leadership of Thebes. Here too the brothers' behaviour indicates the subordination of logic and reason to passion and emotion, couched in the contemporary socio-political context of sophistic ethics and rhetoric. It is further important that the complexities of identity and political ownership in the present generation may at least in part be connected with the brothers' anomalous origins. The play presents the incestuous genesis of the two brothers as one in a series of breaches against the natural order which perpetuates the strand of instability present in the family as a result of its members' previous transgressions. This is implicitly illustrated in Jocasta's exposition during the *agōn* on the permanence and stability of the naturalness and rhythm of the cosmological order. This brings the theme of the fraternal feud further away from questions of gender and closer to those of personal (in addition to political) identity. The anomalous nature of the brothers' coming into being – the incestuous marriage between their parents representing unnatural or excessive closeness between kin – may in part be linked to their determination, and ultimate failure, to assert their separate identities through the (male) concerns of public and political identity.

Thus far we have been considering male-female conflict in Theban myth. It is important, however, to note that male violence is not exclusively or even principally exercised against the female. The cross-generational pattern of events in the Labdacid myth also reveals discord between sons and fathers, and emphasises not exclusively gender conflict as a focal point in the myth, but the importance of the male role within it – as father, son, brother, and political leader. Laius' transgression against Apollo's oracle results in his deliberate exposure of the son to what the father assumes will be certain death. The fulfilment of Apollo's oracle in the patricide – albeit committed by an Oedipus ignorant of his paternity – obviously represents the utmost in the violation of the son-father relationship. The Prologue develops this evident cycle in alluding to the feud between

⁶⁰⁴ These lines are desperately corrupt: see Mastronarde ad loc. for discussion of the difficulties.

Oedipus and his sons (63-8). The sons' mistreatment of the father leads to the imposition of the curse which contributes in part to the breakdown of the present-day fraternal relationship, which ends ultimately in their mutual slaughter. The implication of an inherent disharmony in the familial relationship between males is in *Phoinissai* transferred in addition to the brothers' problematic relationships with the Theban *polis* – Eteocles as apparent usurper of the city's leadership, and Polynices as wager of war against Thebes. It is striking that of the many references in the play to the Theban land or city, those pertinent to the Labdacid myth in particular (as opposed to the autochthony myth or more generalised references) are predominantly expressed by the terms *patris*, and, less commonly, *polis*.⁶⁰⁵ *Patris*, though a feminine noun, etymologically, of course, denotes the concept of the 'fatherland,' and by association 'homeland' or native land. Both brothers fail to maintain their positions within their *patris*. This is especially true of the exiled Polynices, whose failed reintegration into the city against which he threatens destruction reaffirms the invalidity of his attempts at self-justification. This failure is also suggestive of the male Labdacids' incompatibility with their *patris* as androcentric conception of the Theban land or soil. This stands in parallel and complement to, rather than nullifies or undermines, their incursion on *gē* as earth or female. Yet the play's emphasis on the motif of the *patris* implies a greater degree of complexity in the male line's relationships with the *fatherland* in correspondence with the longstanding and cross-generational distortion of male familial relationships. In the present generation the antipathy between males and *patris* is ultimately exemplified in the two brothers' deaths on the city's boundaries, neither inside nor outside, in no fixed place.⁶⁰⁶ Even in death a concrete sense of belonging is unattainable. This is extended to the question of Polynices' burial and the moral and ethical implications of the traitor's interment within the land he attacked. The close of the play reaffirms this problem of belonging in Oedipus' enforced departure to an unknown future, where he too has no fixed place (1687). The subsequent allusion to Colonus (1707) points forward to the last play of Sophocles, which in exploring the question of Oedipus' (Theban) identity confirms the inability of the male line to (re-) integrate into the *patris* in the impossibility of the repatriation of the parricide.⁶⁰⁷

However, the questions of identity raised by the brothers' relationships with the *patris* also invite the audience to consider to what extent the conflict is a gender-based

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. above 3.1 n.374 for enumeration of all the play's various references to the Theban land and city.

⁶⁰⁶ At 1361 the second messenger reports the brothers as having stood between the Theban and Argive armies.

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. *OC* 406-7; and see the n. of Jebb (1928) ad loc.

question. *Patris* may, importantly, suggest ‘land of the father(s)’, which in its associations with inheritance and political standing is still a male-focused problem but not one hinging on the concept of male-female conflict. Here the problems are focused more on the problems of ancestry, in which *patris* may connote ‘land from the father(s)’, and bears a political dimension absent from the conception of *gē* (or *chthōn*). *Patris* thus encapsulates exclusively male rights, roles, and responsibilities in relation to inheritance both civic and familial. The centrality to the brothers’ relationship of these questions of civic identity and belonging is supported by the heavy political emphasis on the fraternal conflict. The brothers’ competition for their patrimony is placed within the broader context of the play’s examination of different power structures. The feud is focused on their inability to resolve the problems of their ancestry, which originated in their father’s birth. In the present generation, the struggle for exclusive rule, wealth, and civic status politicises what is not so much a problem of gender conflict – or even a problem of the males’ interrelationships – but of a dysfunctional family whose several transgressions disrupt and pervert the natural order of generational continuity and familial *philia*. The play’s heavy emphasis – specifically in the context of the Labdacids – on the themes of marriage and fertility illustrate the extent to which the family’s problems are centred on the complexities of sexuality and sexual transgression. We have already seen how the play emphasises the responsibility – or culpability – of Laius in consciously transgressing against Apollo’s oracle. The play highlights Laius’ personal and conscious failure to control his sexuality.⁶⁰⁸ Subsequent events – the death of Laius, the marriage of Oedipus to his mother, and the production of the incestuous offspring – are presented, with varying degrees of emphasis on the characters’ autonomy and responsibility, as further distortions of sexual and familial norms of behaviour. The incestuous conception of the four children of Oedipus and Jocasta, following on from the illicit birth of Oedipus himself, perpetuates a cycle of intra-familial discord which culminates in the extinction of the final generation. There thus emerges a cross-generational pattern of sexual transgressions which imply an inherent and inherited vulnerability or predisposition on the part of the family members to

⁶⁰⁸ It would be interesting to consider the rape by Laius of Chrysippus as broader mythical background with which a contemporary audience would probably have been familiar. This was the subject of *Chrysippus*; and although the possibility that *Phoinissai* was staged with this play and *Oenomaus* is a remote hypothesis (see above the Introduction to this study), the existence of the rape elsewhere in the Labdacid myth invites reflection on this problem of Laius’ sexual behaviour as a wider theme. Of course, the fact that there is no reference to this aspect of the myth to be found in our play means that we cannot consider it to have any serious influence on Eur.’s presentation of Laius here; but it is thought-provoking when viewed in the wider context of the Oedipus myth. For an interesting discussion of the mythical background of the Labdacid curse/Chrysippus theme, see Lloyd-Jones (2002).

destructive sexual behaviour. This predisposition (whether willed or not) may represent a form of sexual deviation which is both a cause and emblematic of a wider pattern, ingrained in the family, of unnatural and self- or mutually destructive behaviour.

We come finally to Antigone, whose final departure into exile in lieu of her expected marriage to Haimon reaffirms the distortion of normal patterns of generational continuity. The play traces her development from timid and sheltered virgin, *parthenos*, who in the *teichoskopia* gains only a glimpse of the world beyond the palace, to young woman forced to relegate the conventional proprieties of her age and sex for a life devoid of domestic or familial ties. Towards the end of the play, Antigone is now a woman who enters and refuses to leave public space;⁶⁰⁹ who confronts her ruler, and who makes threats against the life of his son, to whom she was betrothed (1675). This violent rejection of a conventional future in favour of one which her own father describes as ‘shameful’ (1691) emphasises the extent to which Antigone, as a result of the transgressions of her relatives, is separated from a woman’s normal place within civic structures.⁶¹⁰ Euripides underlines this perversion of Antigone’s normal female role in the associations of her aria and subsequent exchanges with Oedipus with traditional wedding ritual and song.⁶¹¹ Antigone must in consequence of her family’s cursed history forfeit her *telos* and face a bleak future.

4.6 Women and Ritual: Marriage, Sacrifice, Death

We noted earlier that women’s function in the *polis* entails a more stereotypically ‘masculine’ involvement in civic affairs which precludes the practical fulfilment of their more rightful or conventional roles within religious and social cultural life. It was also noted that this is not a personal initiative on the part of the female characters but rather the result of circumstances beyond their control. *Phoinissai* focuses not so much on its

⁶⁰⁹ At 1660 Creon orders his men to take her inside; Antigone persists (albeit briefly) in clinging to her brother.

⁶¹⁰ Although we have already noted that there is undoubtedly an element of Sophoclean wilfulness in Antigone’s refusal to marry Haimon, this is surely as a result of his father Creon’s treatment of her family rather than of an aversion, as with the Danaids to whom she compares herself, to the idea of marriage *per se*. Antigone’s behaviour appears to stem more from the desperate circumstances in which she finds herself as a result of her family’s errors; it would perhaps be injudicious to view her attitude to marriage (and, by implication, sex) and her repudiation of gender-based proprieties as straightforwardly indicative of an inherent tendency to ‘abnormal’ or transgressive (and thus associated with her family background) behaviour. This is the line taken by Swift 60-9, who places heavy emphasis on what she views as the (inappropriate and self-willed) sexualisation of Antigone in the latter episodes of the play without taking into sufficient account the external factors contributing to the girl’s behaviour – those beyond her control, and importantly related to the civic (as well as familial) disorder for which she bears no personal or direct responsibility.

⁶¹¹ Cf. Swift 68-9.

disordered gender dynamic as an isolated theme, but on the manner in which political upheaval contributes to this disorder, and the destabilising effects of war on social infrastructures. The non-fulfilment by women – and men – of their traditional *oikos*- and *polis*-based responsibilities is continually associated with the tensions and disharmony between the public and private spheres.⁶¹² The female characters attempt fruitlessly to bridge the gulf, but in their forays into the civic sphere threatened by the two brothers, they highlight the disunity between those spheres. In venturing to speak and act for the males in public life, Antigone at least, as the only surviving woman in the family, is forced to neglect her role in ritual as well as her expected entry into marriage and motherhood. But it is equally important that other women in the play attempt, in vain, to adhere to their traditional roles. Jocasta attempts to prevent the destruction of her family as well as of the *polis*; the Phoenician Chorus, caught in the midst of the war, pray to the gods for salvation; and even Antigone makes her momentary attempt to tend to her brother's corpse, as was expected of her mother. The play repeatedly draws attention to the women's awareness of and yearning for their traditional roles. The Chorus in the Parodos wistfully imagine themselves beyond their immediate situation, in peaceful worship of Apollo at Delphi. Jocasta laments her failure to preside over Polynices' Argive marriage as is 'customary', νόμιμον, and 'fitting' for her as his mother (345). This theme of marriage⁶¹³ will be a particularly important one in relation to the virgin Antigone, whose initial reaction to the sight of her dying brothers is grief at her own loss of their presence at her planned union with Creon's son Haimon (1436-7).⁶¹⁴ This inability of the women to honour their *oikos*- and ritual-based responsibilities⁶¹⁵ is closely associated with the destruction of familial *philia* and the attendant distortion of generational continuity – the sons dying before the parents, and the mother's suicide over her children's corpses. In the same vein, the women are forced instead into what is almost a grotesque distortion of their

⁶¹² It is partly for this reason that Goff, for instance, errs in offering an exclusively 'Theban' interpretation of gender in *Phoinissai* and other Theban plays, since the relevance of problems explored in our drama to the political structures of any Greek – and especially the Athenian – *polis* suggests that gender-related concerns as a key aspect of socio-political themes are applicable in a general, non-Theban context, as well. This was discussed in ch. 3.5 above.

⁶¹³ On the loss of marriage cf. also Megara's words to her sons at Eur. *Her.* 476-84.

⁶¹⁴ The fraternal role in Antigone's marriage has already been drawn to our attention in Eteocles' departing instructions to Creon at 757-9.

⁶¹⁵ Although this is obviously a more female-centred problem, it also bears relation to the male characters: Ant. points out her brothers' failure to support their mother in her old age (1436). Jocasta herself had earlier alluded to her sense of loss at Polynices' absence and his Argive marriage (cf. 337ff.). See Mastronarde on 1436-7 on the themes of betrayal and abandonment as typical of lamentation.

roles; Jocasta is dressed in mourning, hair shorn, for her still-living sons,⁶¹⁶ and Antigone, like the Chorus, may not engage in religious ritual,⁶¹⁷ and instead ends the play as a ‘bacchant of corpses’.⁶¹⁸

Antigone herself as the only surviving female Labdacid⁶¹⁹ provides a particularly detailed study of the interrelated themes of gender, ritual, and sacrifice. Her repudiation of marriage to Haimon in favour of her more immediate obligation to her father is developed in her later aria⁶²⁰ which, with a bitterly ironic twist in the present context of lamentation⁶²¹ as a traditionally female prerogative, also underlines the extent to which circumstances have divorced her from social convention and expectation.⁶²² Here the language of *aidōs* is employed in highlighting Antigone’s abandonment of the proprieties of which she had earlier been so conscious. Prior to the fraternal battle she had expressed embarrassment and a sense of helplessness, *aporia*, at Jocasta’s hasty summons from the palace (1264ff.). The audience will remember the similar hesitation of the Paidagogus in the earlier *teichoskopia* at his charge’s novel foray from her maiden quarters. This oft-repeated motif of Antigone’s virginity in the aria⁶²³ emphasises the reversal in her attitude.⁶²⁴ Antigone’s departure from the city for a lonely life of exile in the company of her aged and helpless father necessitates the loss of her conventional social role, for which even her defiant Sophoclean predecessor expressed grief, and thus denies her the fulfilment of her womanhood. This emphasises the completeness of the inversion in her physical movements; where once she was sheltered from public space, now she is in full view – not merely of the *polis* but also of the wider world as she goes into exile. That this contradicts all social and personal expectations of a young woman in Antigone’s

⁶¹⁶ Cf. 322-6; and 371-3.

⁶¹⁷ Cf. Jocasta’s allusion to this ‘maidenly’ pursuit as having no place in the current circumstances (1265-6, retained by Mastronarde and Craik).

⁶¹⁸ See 1489. Her later reference to her former participation in ritual (1753-7) cannot be counted as authentic; on the problems of the play’s ending, see Appendix A.

⁶¹⁹ Although Jocasta in the Prologue alludes to her second daughter Ismene (57-8), no mention is made of her elsewhere in the play; Eur. evidently encourages the audience to forget about her.

⁶²⁰ This portion of the Exodos (1485-1538) is accepted as authentic: Mastronarde provides a cogent defence (554-5); and cf. again Appendix A.

⁶²¹ Thus Antigone exposes her hair for tearing and her breast for beating (1490-1; cf. 1524-9); and see Mastronarde on 1490-1. On the linguistic and metrical features pertinent to the speech’s function as lamentation, cf. Mastronarde 555ff. and *passim* on the aria.

⁶²² On the play’s marking of this development through the medium of Antigone’s physical movements, see above under 4.1.

⁶²³ Cf. 1487; and see 89, 194, 1275 etc.

⁶²⁴ She is unashamed at revealing her face uncovered, for instance (1485-9), or at the loosening of her gown (1491). Mastronarde ad loc. on 1489 has a valuable note on the proper sense of αἰδομένα here, i.e. that Antigone feels no shame at her maidenly blushing, an interpretation with which Craik’s translation corresponds.

position⁶²⁵ reaffirms her female role as victim as well as highlighting again the suffering imposed by war on the innocent. Yet at the same time her deprivation of her *telos* also *defies* gender-related convention, since in the absence of her father's needs Antigone's adherence to her betrothal and life in Thebes would surely have constituted a more conventional and thus 'feminine' prospect than an uncertain future devoid of any domestic or political ties.⁶²⁶ The play's conclusion thus underlines her loss of the social role which is rightfully hers while serving its most fundamental dramatic purpose in the final expulsion of the surviving Labdacids from the city. This sacrifice on the part of one who is at once morally innocent and physically pure also forms a significant element in the play's structural and thematic unity in its association with the character who pays the ultimate price for civic as well as familial loyalty: Menoeceus. Both characters are presented as victims of others' actions; and both place others above themselves.

4.7 The Death of Menoeceus

The figure of Menoeceus and his death on behalf of the *polis* is constructed upon a complex interplay of male and female characteristics and gender roles. As has already been seen, gender and male-female roles in the play can be neither polarised nor compartmentalised. Yet the tendency of modern scholarship to take a monolithic view of the drama's gender dynamic has almost invariably included a sustained effeminisation of Menoeceus' character which usually hinges on a persistent desire to reduce the importance attached to the male role and a correspondently exclusive association of the city and civic welfare with the female.⁶²⁷ However, Menoeceus' ability, unique among the play's cast of characters, to reconcile public and private interests is balanced by an equally nuanced 'gendering' of his role. On the one hand, it is true, of course, that human sacrifice for the *polis* almost invariably requires a female victim; true also that the terminology employed by Teiresias in alluding to Menoeceus' virginity, a prerequisite of the sacrificial victim,⁶²⁸

⁶²⁵ Note that she herself reiterates the point at 1739 (which this study retains as authentic) in specific relation, again, to her virginity.

⁶²⁶ Foley however views Antigone's sense of filial commitment as a '*more* feminine destiny' [my italics] than life in Thebes, which would have meant marriage to Haimon rather than the deprivation of ritual worship upon which Foley focuses, 142. This does not wholly correspond with her otherwise judicious and sensitive appreciation of the sacrifice made by Antigone in order to accompany her father into exile.

⁶²⁷ Thus, for instance, Goff 356; and Lamari 19-21.

⁶²⁸ See Parker (1983) 79-81.

is generally applicable to the unmarried girl.⁶²⁹ It is in addition made clear in Menoeceus' *rhexis* that his self-sacrifice is motivated in significant part by a domestic and family-centred concern, as well as love for his *philoî* to whom he expresses a passionate sense of obligation and devotion: refusing to die would constitute a 'betrayal' (1003). This support for the claims of the *oikos* and private life shows a strong affinity with female-centred interests and thus underlines the 'feminine' dimension of Menoeceus' characterisation. This is reaffirmed by the manner in which Menoeceus, like the play's female characters, seeks to do his utmost for the promotion of civic welfare in a way the other males fail to do.⁶³⁰ Further, the focus on his youth and virginity, and in addition the fact that, like Antigone and the other women in the play, he is the morally innocent victim of a war for which he bears no responsibility, emphasise the injustice of his predicament. As with Antigone, Jocasta, and the Chorus, Menoeceus will be deprived of his rightful and expected role within civic structures. The important motif of his virginity links this loss particularly with marriage and by association parenthood. This forms another tie with the female and especially, of course, with Antigone. Both characters are implicated in, and forced to suffer for, an ancient fault in their family lines which throughout the play and in both of its myths continually return to haunt and threaten the present.

However, there are several important ways in which Menoeceus' characterisation and specifically his political role are clearly distinct from that of the female characters. Firstly, his actions in defence of civic interests are able to bear a practical efficacy in a way the women's cannot. Without dwelling at length on the undoubtedly ambiguous effect of the sacrifice on the dramatic plot,⁶³¹ we may, however, note that this ambiguity is central to the play's structure, and corresponds with the necessity for resolution in its two parallel yet separable myths. 'Ironic' interpretations of the episode have relied on its separation from the main action and the perceived failure of the characters to pay the loss of Menoeceus any significant attention.⁶³² Yet this is not true of all the characters: the Chorus close the third Stasimon in celebrating Menoeceus' bravery (1054-66); the first

⁶²⁹ Cf. Goff 356 and n.7 there; she places particular emphasis on Teiresias' use of the word colt, *πῶλος*, at 947, although Mastronarde ad loc. notes that the term can be used in relation to the male in the absence of the sexual/marital connotations which are central here. Craik ad loc. also has an interesting note on the contrast between the colt and the wild animals with which the Labdacid brothers are associated (cf. esp. the mares of Potniae emblazoned on Polynices's shield, 1124-5); although as Mastronarde points out on 947, in the particular context of Menoeceus' unwed state *πῶλος* also suggests a need to be tamed or 'broken in' to a place within civic structures.

⁶³⁰ On this theme in particular relation to Menoeceus' speech, see above under 4.2.

⁶³¹ See for a sensitive discussion Foley 132-6.

⁶³² Cf. e.g. Conacher (1967) 241-2; and Vellacott (1975) 199.

messenger alludes to the political salvation achieved through the sacrifice (1090-2); Jocasta expresses sympathy for Creon's loss (1204-7); and Creon himself is naturally devastated by his son's death (1310-21). The play does not ignore Menoeceus, and any perceived lack of attention on the part of the characters is psychologically and dramatically plausible, since many of the characters are in no position to react to his loss, given the crucial state of current events. The sacrifice can provide only temporary – or at least partial – resolution as one of the two 'methods of salvation', μηχαναὶ σωτηρίας (890), required for the city's salvation. Resolution and closure in *both* of the play's myths are required before civic salvation can finally be attained.⁶³³ Thus Menoeceus' death cannot be said to bear no influence on the action, since it provides closure to the play's myth of autochthony and allows the drama to return to its traditional mythical course: the deaths of the brothers and the expulsion of the surviving Labdacids from Thebes.⁶³⁴

Further, and now on a purely thematic level, the 'masculinity' of Menoeceus is ardently articulated in his unshakeable loyalty to his city. It is also important that, unlike his father, Menoeceus expresses confidence in Teiresias' authority, as underlined in his concession that even in the absence of oracular command men are willing to sacrifice their lives in war (1000-2). When divine influence does exist, as here, it is implicit in his reasoning that refusal is still more unacceptable; therefore he will follow the prophet's instructions to the letter (1010). Although in the context of the play's gender dynamic this religious faith might seem more aligned with the female, it in fact serves to heighten Menoeceus' authority in civic affairs and affirms his traditionally 'male' pragmatism in public and political life. This is again strengthened by contrast with the behaviour of the Labdacid brothers. In addition, as noted earlier in this study, Menoeceus' political loyalty is related not solely to that of the epic heroes but also and more importantly to contemporary historical experience. The tension between public and private, and the increasing subordination of the former to the latter in the declining years of the fifth

⁶³³ Although Teiresias' allusion to the necessity of a 'cure', φάρμακον, at 893 refers to Menoeceus' sacrifice, the language of 'sickness' and the need for a 'cure' is common to both of the play's myths (cf. e.g. 66, 867ff., and 937ff.).

⁶³⁴ It may be noted that the separability of the play's two myths and the correspondent need for a double φάρμακον might be underlined by the unprecedented separation of the Argive assault from the fraternal battle: the distinction is reaffirmed by the two separate messenger speeches which relate these two events (1090-1199, 1356-1424). Foley's conviction, 109, that Zeus' intervention at the crisis point of the Argive assault (cf. 1180ff.) is indicative of the influence on the action of Menoeceus' sacrifice is an important point; but, as noted already, it is in adherence to a long mythical tradition that Eur. alludes to this punishment of a *hubristēs* (cf. Mastronarde on 1180). This again points to the importance of overdetermination in Greek literature (including tragedy) and thought: divine intervention does not supersede or nullify human action and responsibility.

century, stands in stark contrast with the complementary nature of Menoeceus' motives.⁶³⁵ The selfless offering of his own life is posited in implicit contradistinction from those who were so quick to betray their city, shaken as it was by constitutional upheaval.⁶³⁶ Euripides transfers to the sacrificial ritual in its heroic-age setting the bravery, *andreia*, of the war dead which was held in such high esteem by Pericles, who spoke of their valour, ἀνδραγαθία, in fearlessly giving up their lives for the *polis*. These men escaped the 'shame' of putting their own lives first and acquired the glorious reputation of patriotic death.⁶³⁷ In Menoeceus' death we recognise the rarity of such heroism both in mythical Thebes and contemporary Athens, where war exposes the inherently self-seeking nature of most of those living through it.

The multi-dimensional presentation of Menoeceus' character, and the mutually interdependent nature of his motives, is matched by the generally ambivalent tone of Euripides' treatment of the sacrifice episode. It does not seek to convey any type of lesson or moral;⁶³⁸ nor does the poet seek to impose any simple judgement on war and wartime practices.⁶³⁹ Instead it affirms the selflessness and courage of the young man and at the same time emphasises and laments the loss of youthful potential. In this sense Menoeceus is aligned not only with Antigone, but with all the young men who are victims of war. The play also recognises the inability of public and private to co-exist in complete harmony, for even here their apparent unity is ultimately overshadowed by the most finite price paid by the individual in response to the demands of the *polis*. The earlier allusion (852-7) to the sacrifice theme of *Erectheus* ties in with the drama's bleak recognition of the necessity of sacrifice as a cure for the political evil engendered by human ambition and greed. It also reaffirms the suffering and divided loyalties of those left behind: Praxithea cannot tell whom to invoke first, her *patris* or her dead family.⁶⁴⁰ The exploitation of the individual by an impersonal and ruthless city exposes the limitations of personal freedom in a society shaken by war, and in the broader political context of the play highlights through the autocracy of heroic-age Thebes the vulnerabilities of late fifth-century democracy. The

⁶³⁵ This is reiterated at 1013-8, generally bracketed (of modern editors only Craik retains these lines in the text) as an unnecessary and repetitive coda to Menoeceus' main argument. On the internal difficulties of the lines see Mastronarde 431-4.

⁶³⁶ This was discussed in ch.2.2 above.

⁶³⁷ Thuc. 2.42.3-4.

⁶³⁸ Cf. for instance de Romilly (1967) 114-6, who assumes an unequivocally positive view of Menoeceus' heroism as against the self-seeking of the Labdacid brothers. We discussed the nature and limits of tragic didacticism in the introduction to ch.2 above.

⁶³⁹ Thus Vellacott 203.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. fr. 370 35-40 in Collard, Cropp & Lee (1995).

presentation of Menoeceus and his sacrifice are thus pivotal within the play's thematic and structural frameworks; as representative of both *polis* and *oikos*, public and private, male and female, he bridges and illuminates all the gender-related concerns and nuances of the play.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to unite and elucidate the main themes of *Phoinissai*. What has emerged over the course of our discussion has been the remarkable sophistication of the play, which has proved it worthy of a study of this kind. In the opening chapter we saw how the drama's engagement with its intertexts reveals an unusual density of literary interest and theme, drawing upon other works of the fifth century as well as upon that most pervasive influence on tragedy in general, the Homeric epic and intervening lyric. *Phoinissai*'s relationship with other tragedies in particular reveals a highly skilful manipulation of myth and dramatic technique and a marked self-consciousness on the part of Euripides, which place the drama firmly within its agonistic context, as the audience is invited to recall earlier masterpieces of Athenian theatre. The play's exploitation of its literary influences also emphasises the durability and flexibility of ancient myth, which – as seen in the second chapter – is re-shaped to bring *Phoinissai* into line with contemporary historical experience. The play's topical relevance, particularly in its exploration of sophistic thought and rhetoric, and the use and misuse of power, makes it very much a drama of its day without compromising the integrity of its myths or the universality of its themes. The intellectual interest of the play's political and philosophical elements is testament to the particular exploratory and adventurous quality of Euripides' engagement with 'real-life' problems and concerns, which are especially prominent in *Phoinissai*. This makes the play an illuminating contribution to our understanding of late fifth-century political life; yet – as we saw in the myth-focused third chapter – its events are also firmly rooted in the Thebes of the heroic world. The particular interest revealed by the drama in Thebes as mythical, dramatic, and physical entity establishes the importance of *Phoinissai*'s position in the extant corpus of 'Theban' plays, others of which have generally been granted greater attention in modern scholarship. Our discussion has also revealed the peculiar individuality of Thebes as dramatic *topos* – the distinctiveness and uniqueness of Theban characteristics, which are perhaps nowhere in extant tragedy better illustrated than in *Phoinissai*, which stages the myths of Oedipus and of autochthony in a city brought to life for the audience through sustained attention to details of location, movement, and staging. In the final chapter we aimed to explore gender and gender roles from the perspective of the individual characters and in relation to the dramatic context of war and upheaval. This revealed the inter-dependence of and tensions between the often polarised worlds of *oikos* and *polis*: the fractured gender dynamic of *Phoinissai* exposes

the complexity and conflict of the interests and priorities of the men and women in the play, while also opening up larger questions relating to the representation of gender and society in Greek theatre in general. It is this wider relevance of issues explored in *Phoinissai* which this study has sought to emphasise throughout; from politics to women to tragic 'space' and competitive self-positioning, *Phoinissai* offers a broad sweep of the most important concerns of the genre and thus merits a more prominent position in the study of tragedy. Yet that is not to undermine the play's value as individual and highly original work, or the maturity of the drama and its poet, and of course by implication its audience. For all that the sophistication of *Phoinissai* is – arguably – no 'new' characteristic of tragedy in general, it remains that the play is a most highly developed and powerful example of Euripidean drama.

Appendix A: The Exodos

The Exodos (1582ff) has long been a subject of scholarly debate. Rejected as completely spurious by Powell, Page, and more recently by Diggle in his 1994 OCT, it presents manifold linguistic, stylistic, and dramatic difficulties. Defended in its entirety only by Meredith, the Exodos has since antiquity been viewed as a poorly-constructed and superfluous conclusion to a play already marked by its length and thematic density. However, as has already been made clear in the Introduction to this study, the concluding episodes taken as a whole return to and provide resolution for several thematic questions flagged as important in the main bulk of the play. The Exodos is thus integral to the main text; and the difficulties it undoubtedly poses do not undermine its authenticity to an extent sufficient to warrant wholesale excision or even significant deletion of the text. These difficulties, listed in the order of their appearance in the Exodos, are: 1) Oedipus' speech at 1595-1624, which presents a particularly convoluted train of ideas and is linguistically troublesome; 2) Antigone's confrontation with Creon over the question of Polynices' burial (1635-82). Here the difficulty lies not so much in the confrontation *per se*, but in Creon's physical movements and in one or two particularly problematic lines. 3) The very ending of the play. Lines 1740ff in particular are certainly spurious and invite reflection on the point and nature of the play's actual conclusion.

1) Oedipus' speech. This is viewed by even the generally conservative Mastronarde as the most problematic part of the Exodos. It has been rejected in its entirety by West⁶⁴¹ and in part by Kitto⁶⁴² and Fraenkel.⁶⁴³ The main point of defence of the existence in the original Exodos of a *rhexis* on the part of Oedipus is the fact that the play repeatedly and deliberately reminds the audience of the presence of the old man inside the palace, incarcerated by his sons and plagued by his unhappy family history.⁶⁴⁴ This builds up an expectation of his appearance in the final scenes of the play. The longstanding and cyclical nature of the Labdacids' ills, emphasised throughout the play, also suggests that the final appearance of Oedipus to make a long exposition on his family's troubles and his

⁶⁴¹ See West (1990) 316. His preference for the excision of 1595-1624 as well as the first two lines of Creon's subsequent speech (1625-38) seems a little ruthless. As noted already, the impact of Oedipus' (and his family's) suffering is strengthened by his speech, which also prepares for the old man's poignant reliance on his daughter Antigone in subsequent scenes.

⁶⁴² Cf. Kitto (1937) 110.

⁶⁴³ See Fraenkel 89-94.

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. 66, 327-30, 872-6 for refs. to Oedipus in the context of the fraternal feud; his actual name is mentioned frequently elsewhere (e.g. 254, 283, 353, 379, 628, 813, 1044 etc).

own suffering would be neither unexpected nor inappropriate. The speech taken as a whole heightens the emotional power conveyed by the reunion of the remaining Labdacids onstage in the final scenes of the play and lends weight to the audience's impression of the ineluctability of the family's ultimate destruction. Further, partial excision as proposed by Fraenkel (who deletes 1595-1614) ruins the structure of the whole, which runs quite naturally from the curse imposed on Laius by Apollo and Oedipus' own acts of patricide and incest, to the deaths of his sons and finally to the aporetic appeal to Creon.⁶⁴⁵ Moreover, εἶέν in 1615 would be an odd opening to a speech, although it works perfectly well following 1595-1614 (these lines delineating Oedipus' current and past predicaments and the next section, 1615ff, opening on the common note of *quid faciam?*⁶⁴⁶ as Oedipus turns to query his future). Εἶέν certainly *can* open a speech – or even a scene – but generally, as Mastronarde points out, when the speaker seeks to hasten the action following on from a lyric or messenger's narrative, or another 'delaying element'.⁶⁴⁷ Were Oedipus' original speech to have begun thus, it would have been an oddly matter-of-fact response to Creon's verdict of exile at 1584-94.

Let us look more closely at 1595-1614. The lines are admittedly tautologous and hyperbolic, but that is scarcely sufficient justification for wholesale rejection.

1596-7

The first main objection is to 1596, which is deleted by Mastronarde on the grounds of the superfluity of τλήμων' and the 'unidiomatic use' of εἴ τις ἄλλος. It is true that τλήμων' is otiose following ἄθλιον in 1595. Mastronarde's objection is not to εἴ τις ἄλλος in isolation, but to its combination with τλήμων' in a different case and with the 'superfluous' ἔφω at the end of the line. The ἔφω *is* superfluous; but although the verb is normally left to be supplied, it is always implicitly required. That it actually is supplied here is not so jarring as to cause real difficulty. What does arouse some suspicion is the proximity of ἔφω in 1596 to ἔφυσας in 1595. This makes the lines a little clumsy. Yet there needs to be some form of emotional reaction to Creon's edict on the part of Oedipus, and the latter's response here is not particularly excessive, even if it is expressed somewhat unsatisfactorily. In 1596 the use of τλήμων' in the accusative appears quite

⁶⁴⁵ Craik notes on 1595-624 that this type of bipartite structure is not unprecedented in speeches made by characters experiencing extreme emotional suffering: she cites examples from *Andr.* (395ff.) and *Her.* (1340-93).

⁶⁴⁶ Mastronarde on 1595-624 cites *Med.* 502ff., and *Her.* 1281ff.

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. Mastronarde on 1615 for refs. – mainly in Eur. Mastronarde also points out here that more than half of the uses of εἶέν in tragedy (most common in Eur.) occur mid-speech or at a point of transition within a stichomythic exchange.

straightforwardly to be following on from and emphasising ἄθλιον in the previous line, both describing Oedipus as the object of ἔφυσας, of which the subject is μοῖρα. Εἴ τις ἄλλος (ἔφυσ) in 1596 merely underlines the extreme and unusual wretchedness of Oedipus' circumstances ('O Fate, how miserable and wretched you have made me from the start, if ever a man [i.e. any other man] was!'). 1596 can thus quite reasonably be retained in the text.

1597-1599

1597-9 have been taken to task by Fraenkel, who objects to the use of μ' in 1598 when ὄν, referring to the same person (i.e. Oedipus, still as object of ἔφυσας) has already appeared in 1597. But as Mastronarde points out *ad loc.*, this is not unprecedented in passages where a clause comes in between the relative and the verb which governs it. Secondly, the use of γονή in 1597 is isolated in tragedy if used anatomically, i.e. in the sense of 'womb'; and if it has its usual meaning 'birth' then, in Fraenkel's view, the phrase ἐκ γονῆς jars with εἰς φῶς...μολεῖν, 'to come into the light', i.e. to be born. It may seem that γονή is almost certainly intended to mean [through/by] 'bearing' or 'birth' (i.e. from [my] mother [Jocasta]) rather than 'womb', which is unattested elsewhere in verse.⁶⁴⁸ But if we take ἐκ with γονῆς this would seem to make ἄγονον, 'unborn', in 1598 problematic, as noted by Fraenkel, since the fact of Oedipus' having not yet been born has already been established in the previous line (πρὶν...μολεῖν). If we take ἐκ with μητρὸς ('from my mother...') this necessitates the awkward use of the genitive γονῆς if we retain the more familiar meaning of 'birth': 'from [my] mother through/by birth'. But 'through' or 'by' would work more naturally with a dative rather than a genitive. It seems more acceptable that ἐκ goes with γονῆς rather than with μητρὸς, giving the translation as 'from birth from my mother'. This sounds awkward, but works grammatically. Of course, we then still have the tautologous ἄγονον in 1598. This is of course factually redundant but rhetorically it is not entirely incongruous in the context. We may also consider whether the meaning of γονή as 'womb' is really impossible here. It may be a hapax in tragedy but that does not make this meaning inconceivable, and syntactically it would work perfectly well, i.e. 'from my mother's womb'. Perhaps, however, we might err on the side of caution and translate the line as: 'whom [sc. Oedipus; subject μοῖρα, 1595] even before I came into the light from birth from my mother...' This does sound a little clumsy, but it makes reasonable sense of a difficult line.

⁶⁴⁸ Although cf. Pindar, *N.7.84*, which may offer a precedent.

On a different note, it is interesting that scholars have perceived the influence of these lines on the *Frogs* of Aristophanes (1183-5).⁶⁴⁹ The Aristophanic passage has itself been taken to respond to the opening line of Euripides' own *Antigone*, although some caution must be applied to the contention in Valckenaer's 1824 edition of *Phoinissai* that Aristophanes makes deliberate reference to the passage in our play in order to undercut the reference in *Antigone*. Furthermore, the Aristophanic reference⁶⁵⁰ is not so close to what we have in *Phoinissai* to make reference to this play certain. The Aristophanic passage opens the possibility that this line is based on the opening of the *Antigone* - but the appeal to external evidence remains uncertain in the absence of undeniable echoing.

1600-1604

In line 1600 of Oedipus' speech Fraenkel objects to αὖθις ('again'; here more likely 'in turn').⁶⁵¹ This appears to be but a minor infelicity – if indeed it is an infelicity at all, since it could quite easily and naturally mean 'in (his [i.e. Laius']) turn'. This would correspond well with Oedipus' train of thought here ('I was condemned to become a parricide even before I was ever born, and when I was, Laius in turn added to this ill-luck in putting me out on Cithaeron, which resulted in my being rescued, and if I had not survived, none of the subsequent events would have taken place' etc.). Though the αὖθις is a little prosaic, it seems unobjectionable in a context where Oedipus is recounting his miseries. It also works well with the play's establishment of a self-perpetuating and cross-generational cycle of misfortunes in the Labdacid line. There is thus no real reason for deletion, although alternatives have been proposed.⁶⁵² The next three lines (1601-3) are largely unobjectionable and can reasonably be retained in the text.⁶⁵³ Οὗ in 1604 has been objected to by Fraenkel,⁶⁵⁴ and has been misinterpreted by Craik, who objects to its vagueness and lack of clear antecedent.⁶⁵⁵ She translates it as 'from that fate' (i.e. Oedipus dying on Cithaeron, and specifically becoming plunder for wild beasts: cf. 1603), but it seems much more likely that Oedipus is simply speaking of [the place] 'where' (i.e. Cithaeron) he was rescued. In any event, although the phrase can be reasonably

⁶⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. more recently Dover (1994) on *Frogs* 1184f.

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. *Frogs* 1183-5: ἀλλὰ κακοδαίμων φύσει / ὄντινά γε, πρὶν φῦναι μέν, Ἀπόλλων ἔφη / ἀποκτενεῖν τὸν πατέρα, πρὶν καὶ γεγονέναι.

⁶⁵¹ Fraenkel 90. Both Craik and Mastronarde ad loc. cite the example of Eur. *Ion* 312 for the sense of 'in turn'. Mastronarde also cites a similar usage at *Ph.* 478 and 487.

⁶⁵² Mastronarde cites both αὐτίχ' and αὐτός as possibilities in place of αὖθις. Αὐτός seems the more attractive option if emendation is to be made, although αὖθις is, despite Fraenkel, perfectly acceptable.

⁶⁵³ See esp. Mastronarde for a useful n. on 1603.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. Fraenkel *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ See Craik *ibid.*

interpreted, we cannot retain οὐ σωζόμεσθα, since the subsequent wish for the destruction of Cithaeron – beginning in the second half of 1604 – presents difficulties (see below) which mean deletion of the entire four lines (1604-7) is the best option.

1604-1607

The lines 1604-6, in which Oedipus wishes that Cithaeron had been cast down to Tartarus before it gave him shelter, were seen as a ‘groteske Vorstellung’ by Friedrich,⁶⁵⁶ with whom Fraenkel is inclined to agree.⁶⁵⁷ Editors such as Craik have objected to the ‘strange rhetorical hyperbole’⁶⁵⁸ of the lines, which in the context is not especially exceptional – although it is precisely this exaggeration which makes many critics suspicious. Despite the existence of a variation on the same theme in the *Oedipus Tyrannos*, as pointed out by Fraenkel⁶⁵⁹ – it is not unlikely that these lines are an actor’s interpolation, since their bombastic quality is not really comparable with the relatively mild wish as expressed by the Oedipus of the *Tyrannos*, who asks of Cithaeron the reason for the mountain’s failure to end his life. In *Phoinissai*, on the other hand, the wish for the actual annihilation of the mountain itself is odd and raises profound suspicions. Such a sentiment in relation to a human being or even a god might be acceptable – but for a mountain it is incongruous. In 1606-7 the chief problem is the idea of Oedipus’ ‘slavery’ to his foster-father Polybus (here oddly referred to as δεσπότης of Oedipus), which is inconsistent with what we hear in the Prologue (28-31) and with the Sophoclean version. Mastronarde is quite rightly unconvinced by the suggestion that Euripides adds this detail to the myth in order to evoke greater sympathy for Oedipus. Apart from the fact that Oedipus really requires no additional support in his invitation of sympathy, this would be an oddly un-emphatic way of introducing such a novel element to the myth. There is a strong case here for the deletion of all of 1604-7, which add nothing satisfactory to the overall tone and content of the speech.

1608-1610

If 1604-7 are deleted, the transition from 1603 to 1608 is not jarringly abrupt and works perfectly well with his train of thought: κτανὼν (1608) could work following on from 1603, in which Oedipus recounts his having been left on Cithaeron by Laius. That his survival and the subsequent years before the death of Laius are passed over is not really problematic. Of course, this does mean that there is something of a chronological hiatus in

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. Friedrich (1939) 284 n.1.

⁶⁵⁷ Fraenkel *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ Craik *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁹ Cf. *OT* 1391f.: ἰὼ Κιθαίων, τί μ’ ἐδέχου; τί μ’ οὐ λαβὼν / ἔκτεινας εὐθύς...

Oedipus' switch from his abandonment on Cithaeron to his killing of Laius (1608); but what Oedipus is doing here is picking out the highlights (or rather lowlights) of his miserable past. To the audience, Oedipus might seem merely to be eliding the episodes from his own past, such as the quest for information regarding his parentage and the fatal meeting with Laius at Phocis. This was already well-known from the *Tyrannos*, which had in all probability become an established classic by the date of *Phoinissai*'s production.⁶⁶⁰ It is therefore not unfeasible that Euripides should have passed over the generally uneventful years of Oedipus' upbringing with Polybus at Corinth, about which we have already heard from Jocasta in the Prologue (see again 28-31), and which occurred prior to his departure to the Delphic oracle of Apollo in pursuit of information regarding his parentage (cf. 32ff). We must also bear in mind that although critics work on the assumption of accretion, we cannot exclude the possibility of some substitution – that Euripidean passages have been ousted by intrusive material.

1611-1614

A perceived dramatic inconsistency⁶⁶¹ in 1611-14, in Oedipus' having 'received curses' from his father Laius which he then passed on to his own sons, need not trouble us much. Oedipus appears not so much to be mentioning a specific curse, *ara*, which was called down on him by his father; rather, he sees his own predicament as an extension of his father's misfortune, inherited and inherent in the family line, and which he has now transmitted to his own sons. The question of Oedipus' actual responsibility in the transmission of the curse to his sons is not definitively established here; but as we have already seen elsewhere in this study this is by no means inconsistent with the play's presentation of autonomy in the Labdacid family.⁶⁶² Indeed, he does go on to say (1612-14) that he would not have blinded himself nor cursed his sons without the prompting of 'some god' (θεῶν του, 1614); again, this accords with the play's perception of the co-existence – indeed collaboration – of *thumos*, passion, and *moira*, fate. These lines (1611-14) contain no linguistic anomaly except for ἔμ' in qualification of ὅμματ' in 1613. An elided ἔμα would be a hapax in all poetry, which has led many critics to reject the line as spurious – although, as Mastronarde points out ad loc., one isolated hapax does not necessarily point with certainty to inauthenticity. We can either keep the line as it stands,

⁶⁶⁰ Although Mastronarde's suggestion that 1606-7 (see ad loc.) as they stand may be a faulty attempt at repairing a flawed text (rather than a wholesale interpolation) must not be dismissed without consideration, the lines do appear to be desperately corrupt.

⁶⁶¹ Cf. Fraenkel 91; Pearson (1909) ad loc. also finds the lines problematic.

⁶⁶² See above ch.3.4 for discussion.

or follow Reeve's suggestion and emend the ἔμ' to τὰδ', which would make equal sense ('these eyes' [of mine]).⁶⁶³ The initial portion of Oedipus' speech is, we find, worth saving, despite the existence of localised difficulties; this is a corruption of the original text, rather than a complete interpolation. The remainder of the speech (1615-24) may be passed over, since it is viewed by all modern editors and critics (except for Diggle in his wholesale rejection of the final part of the play) as generally unobjectionable.

2) Antigone's confrontation with Creon. It is clear that, in the first instance, the burial question must have played an important part in the Euripidean Exodos. The theme has been alluded to at 775-7 and 1447-50, and it is natural to suppose that the audience would have expected some type of resolution in the closing scenes of the play. That is not to imply the necessity of a full-scale exploration of the religious and ethical implications of (non-) burial, as was the prerogative of Sophocles' *Antigone*; but the motif in our play is nevertheless an important one. Antigone's express intention both to bury her brother and accompany her father into exile has been viewed by a number of scholars as inconsistent: she could not in any practical sense accomplish both. But it does become quite clear over the course of her war of words with Creon that Antigone, lacking the boldness and spirit of Sophocles' heroine, gradually capitulates over the question of burial (1667-71).⁶⁶⁴ She clearly accepts its impossibility – at her hands, in any event. The refusal to marry Creon's son Haimon is both psychologically plausible (she could not bring herself to marry the son of a man who seeks to banish her helpless father from Thebes, cf. 1673) and dramatically convenient, since it provides conclusion to a matter already alluded to at several points in the main body of the play.⁶⁶⁵ It also allows for the accompaniment into exile of her father by Antigone, which in turn appeases the necessity for the final expulsion of all the surviving Labdacids from the city.

Objections to the burial-scene usually start with Creon's speech at 1625ff. Fraenkel, indeed, is alone among twentieth-century critics (who retain the bulk of the Exodos) in proposing the wholesale deletion of 1627-82, thus eliminating the entire scene between Antigone and Creon, on the grounds that it is the work of an interpolator bent on an overt representation of the similar exchange in Sophocles' *Antigone*. He also finds the episode, with its belligerence on the part of Antigone and aggressiveness on that of Creon,

⁶⁶³ Cf. Reeve (1972) 464.

⁶⁶⁴ 1741ff., where Antigone mentions her renewed determination to bury her brother, are undoubtedly spurious. On the play's end, see below.

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. 757-60, 944-6, 1436-7.

somewhat distasteful – which Mastronarde quite rightly dismisses as ‘inappropriately puristic.’⁶⁶⁶ Fraenkel also recommends the deletion of Eteocles’ instructions to Creon regarding the burial at 774-7,⁶⁶⁷ which he needs to do in order to eliminate the possibility of audience expectation; although it is a little inconsistent that Fraenkel should then follow the majority in retaining Polynices’ own directions at 1447-50, which clearly indicate the conventional concern with burial and prepare the audience for its re-emergence in the Exodos. Unless we excise the earlier references, the play does invite the audience to expect a return to the burial theme in the Exodos. The Antigone-Creon scene is also a valuable point of contact with Sophocles in a play which elsewhere and otherwise engages thoroughly with that dramatist. Euripides has his Antigone ultimately admit the impossibility of her burial of Polynices. Her retreat over the matter, in a sharp divergence from Sophocles, is unfortunate for Fraenkel’s argument that the scene’s similarities to the earlier dramatist mean that interpolation is the likely interpretation. Instead, Euripides allows his audience briefly to recall the angry defiance of the Sophoclean heroine before developing his Antigone into someone quite different. From an intertextual perspective, this is an important point in establishing Euripidean innovation in the play.

In this scene, the contemporary cultural importance of the burial question is flagged but left unresolved – which would not necessarily have been offensive to the moral sensibilities of a fifth-century audience. Further, capitulation on Antigone’s part is more in line with gender stereotyping, so her failure to accomplish her ambition would scarcely jar with an Athenian audience - especially given Euripides’ reputation for realism. It is important that the burial theme is not allowed to overwhelm the Exodos: Kitto, for instance, rejects both the exile and the marriage themes in preference of a more satisfactory conclusion in Oedipus’ departure alone and Antigone as remaining in Thebes to accomplish the burial, with her death implicitly expected.⁶⁶⁸ This reliance on a close alignment of events from Sophocles is not in itself unreasonable, but one hesitates to base the implicit presence of untold events in one dramatist on the text of another dramatist. Kitto’s thesis also necessitates the deletion of lines in Antigone’s later exchange with Oedipus in which she reiterates her intention to accompany him into exile.⁶⁶⁹ The contention that these lines are the work of a later interpolator is inconsistent with the fact

⁶⁶⁶ See Mastronarde on 1639-82.

⁶⁶⁷ Cf. Fraenkel 34-6 and 35 n.5.

⁶⁶⁸ See Kitto (1939) 104-11.

⁶⁶⁹ Kitto rejects 1710-22 (see 109), which have their fair share of difficulties but which Mastronarde at least retains in the text; we return to this below.

that Antigone's intention is already mentioned in a passage considered by Kitto to be Euripidean (e.g. 1683-1701).⁶⁷⁰

Before looking at the textual problems of the passage the question of Creon's physical movements⁶⁷¹ must be considered. Critics have disagreed over the point of Creon's entry. Fraenkel⁶⁷² and Reeve⁶⁷³ place his entry immediately prior to his speech at 1584ff. Fraenkel's argument that it is normally an entering character who orders those already onstage to cease from an action does not have sufficient cogency here.⁶⁷⁴ He also objects to Creon's long silence between 1356 and 1584. Further, the intervening messenger speeches contain no reference to Creon, their addressee; and Creon himself makes no response to the speeches where one would be expected. These last two points have been authoritatively answered by Mastronarde, and the reader may be referred to his argument.⁶⁷⁵ As for Creon's long silence,⁶⁷⁶ there is sufficiently important action taking place onstage to warrant this withdrawal into the background – this would not necessarily have been distracting for the audience which, as Mastronarde points out,⁶⁷⁷ would have its attention firmly and naturally focused elsewhere. It thus seems entirely reasonable to retain Creon's presence onstage from 1308 until 1682, when there comes a natural point for his departure following his reiterated command of exile.⁶⁷⁸

Mastronarde proposes two passages for deletion in Creon's opening speech (1625ff), viz. 1634 and 1637-8, although he defends the bulk of the speech. Mastronarde objects to 1634 on account of its similarity to *Ant.* 29-30, viewing it as an interpolation

⁶⁷⁰ See Kitto 111.

⁶⁷¹ Critics have also objected to the apparently unsatisfactory and inconsistent nature of Creon's characterisation. This is not to be exaggerated, since Creon is scarcely intended to be an important focus of the *Exodos*, and his behaviour here is not such a difficulty that it cannot cohere with his general characterisation in the play (which is not of any very great interest to Eur. in any case, unlike Creon's presentation was to Soph. in *Antigone*). See Mastronarde 593.

⁶⁷² Cf. Fraenkel 71-6.

⁶⁷³ Cf. Reeve 461.

⁶⁷⁴ See Mastronarde on 1584, where he argues against the examples cited by Fraenkel from elsewhere in tragedy.

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. Mastronarde on 1308-53.

⁶⁷⁶ This is scarcely unprecedented in Eur.: Fraenkel himself (72 n.2) points out a comparable example in *Supplices*, where Adrastus stays onstage, and silent, on two occasions for a similar length of lines, although Fraenkel does not view Adrastus as functioning similarly to Creon here. See, however, Mastronarde *ibid.* and n.1 there.

⁶⁷⁷ See again on 1308-53.

⁶⁷⁸ Mastronarde, however, prefers to retain the presence of Creon and his men onstage beyond this point in order to ensure the ultimate departure of Antigone and Oedipus (see his n. on 1682). From both a dramatic and emotional perspective, though, the departure of Creon and his men is preferable here as it allows for the audience to focus entirely on the pathetic predicament of the helpless surviving Labdacids as they prepare to quit the city. The emotional effect of this is especially powerful given the continued presence of the corpses of Jocasta and the brothers, which, remaining onstage until the close of the play, bring home to the audience the completeness of the family's destruction.

from a manuscript quotation of that passage, rather than an actor's interpolation.⁶⁷⁹ There is no cogent reason to assume Euripides' deliberate, almost verbatim, evocation of the earlier play,⁶⁸⁰ but equally the possibility of an actor's interpolation here, inserted for both emotional effect and intertextual reference, should not be dismissed. When we consider the popularity of Sophocles, an actor's interpolation is entirely possible; it may be a very early one. Whatever its origin, the line cannot be Euripidean; it has a certain parenthetical quality,⁶⁸¹ the switch from the imperative in 1630 to infinitive here is abrupt; and the repeated command is rather weak following on from the forceful four previous lines. Therefore deletion seems the best option. In 1637-8 Mastronarde sees an insoluble metrical fault caused by the ἐπιούσαν in qualification of ἡμέραν. Although the alternative and metrically appropriate ιούσαν is a little awkward when its natural sense is 'current' or 'passing' – as opposed to 'coming' (i.e. 'future', which is what Creon wants here) – it is not so offensive, despite Mastronarde's opinion to the contrary, that it cannot be used at all; and indeed other modern editors do print ιούσαν.⁶⁸² 1638 is admittedly weak, and it is true that the question of Antigone's marriage has already been heralded at 1587-8 – which is not to say that a repeated reference here would be wholly inappropriate. If the reader can tolerate the emendation of ἐπιούσαν to ιούσαν in 1637, then the couplet could be retained. But the lines are unsatisfactory; and although deletion emphasises the abruptness of Creon's ordering of Antigone to take herself inside, δόμων ἔσω (1636), the tone is scarcely inappropriate in the context (autocrat addressing subject). Further, as Mastronarde points out *ad loc.*, the marriage theme has already been alluded to at 1587-8, which itself prepares for its importance in the following scene.

We now turn to the confrontation proper, beginning with Antigone's address to Oedipus at 1639ff and the shift to her stichomythic exchange with Creon (1646ff).⁶⁸³ Internally, the scene poses few problems; the most intractable is probably 1653, viewed by Mastronarde as corrupt rather than as an interpolator's work.⁶⁸⁴ It is difficult to find a suitable translation for the line as it stands; it seems complete emendation is necessary to render a plausible meaning. Loosely translating δαίμων as 'life', as suggested by both Pearson and Craik, would give a more reasonable sense, viz. 'he [sc. Polynices] gave up

⁶⁷⁹ See Mastronarde *ad loc.*

⁶⁸⁰ Despite Podlecki (1962) 367 n.20.

⁶⁸¹ Mastronarde comments on the line's superfluity following the strong θάνατον ἀνταλλάσσεται in 1633.

⁶⁸² Thus Craik; and Kovacs (2002).

⁶⁸³ 1639-72 are deleted by Friedrich (see his discussion at 284-6); the reader is referred to our discussion above of the necessity of the exchange in the original text.

⁶⁸⁴ See *ad loc.*

his life to fate', but such a meaning is generally odd and incongruous in this context.⁶⁸⁵ Excision appears to be the easiest option here – but that implicates Creon's response in 1654, which poses no textual difficulty and which is clearly intended as a riposte to Antigone's comment in the previous line.⁶⁸⁶ Indeed, his reply may help us with 1653. One might start with τῷ δαίμονι (dative) and perhaps τὴν τυχήν or τὴν δίκην, i.e. ἔδωκε τὴν τυχήν (or δίκην) τῷ δαίμονι ('he paid the penalty to the god'); although here δαίμων is probably better translated as its secondary meaning of 'lot', i.e. 'fate'. This idea of Polynices' 'paying the penalty/price' specifically to *fate* or *fortune* is especially attractive in the broader context of the myth, which establishes the pattern of an ineluctable cycle of woe for the family, which for the brothers can only result in mutual slaughter.⁶⁸⁷ So οὐκ οὐκ ἔδωκε τὴν δίκην τῷ δαίμονι might be a reasonable possibility. The use of δική as opposed to τυχή might be preferable as it is answered smartly by Creon in 1654 ('Let [Polynices] pay his δική in relation to burial to boot', i.e. lack of burial is a suitable punishment for a traitor). It is also thematically appropriate given the brothers' stubborn attempts to 'justify' their actions during the earlier *agōn*.

The other main objections to the scene relate to 1660, 1664, and 1673. At 1660 Creon's command to his men to take hold of Antigone and lead her indoors is not obeyed. Presumably the men *did* move forward in order to execute their leader's command, but stopped short of making physical contact with the desperate Antigone, who now clings to her brother's corpse (1661). This reticence or hesitation on the part of Creon's men is not dramatically implausible.⁶⁸⁸ 1664, in which Creon again vetoes the burial of Polynices, is objected to by Fraenkel as the work of a *Bearbeiter* who clumsily imitated the style of Sophocles at *Ant.* 246-7 and 429.⁶⁸⁹ The real problem here is the qualification of κόνις, 'dust', by ὑγρή, 'damp'. Since the adjective is not really suited to the noun,⁶⁹⁰ the contention that it is used predicatively rather than attributively (i.e. [no one will make the]

⁶⁸⁵ Both Pearson and Craik (see ad loc.) cite a possible affinity with the sense of δαίμων as 'life' at Plato *Rep.* 617d-e. This, however, is repudiated by Mastronarde (*ibid.*) as 'not normal' in either classical or later Greek.

⁶⁸⁶ Further, Mastronarde (*ibid.*) views the question in 1655 as following on more naturally from 1654 than from 1652.

⁶⁸⁷ This finds support in the common use in Aesch. of δαίμων as the 'evil genius' in the specific context of the family, which obviously corresponds with the presence of the cross-generational family 'curse' in the *Oresteia*, as well as, in all three tragedians, in the family of Oedipus.

⁶⁸⁸ Cf. Mastronarde (1979) 108, where he argues against Fraenkel's insistence that this failure of minor figures to carry out a main character's spoken orders is the error of an interpolator.

⁶⁸⁹ See Fraenkel's argument at 108f.

⁶⁹⁰ Alternatively the adjective may be used in its secondary meaning of 'fluid' or 'flowing', which would work reasonably well if the attributive construction is retained, lending the sense of loosely scattered earth or the like.

dust moist [around this man]) is an attractive option and finds cogent support in Mastronarde, following on from earlier scholars,⁶⁹¹ although Fraenkel does not agree. He objects to the translation of θήσει as ‘make’ (namely ‘make the dust moist’), rather than ‘place’ or ‘put’, which would be necessary if the adjective were to be used predicatively. However, the predicative use does appear to be perfectly acceptable, as is the translation of θήσει in such a way as to suit this construction. The Greek is very dense but the predicative use could work: ‘No one will place earth/dust upon this man and make it damp [with libations]’.

Finally, we turn to 1673. Fraenkel dislikes the ζῶσα here as spoken by Antigone (viz. ‘Shall I live to marry your son?’), following on from Pearson, who views it as incongruous (see ad loc.). Fraenkel suggests that this is again the work of an interpolator, since it recalls *Ant.* 750 [ταύτην ποτ’ οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὥς ἔτι ζῶσαν γαμεῖς]. Pearson assumes, mistakenly, that what Antigone means here is that she expects to die on the accomplishment of her brother’s burial, but – aside from the fact that Antigone has already quite clearly backed down on this point – in fact the line reads better when taken as implying that she would rather die than marry a son of Creon’s (much like the Sophoclean Creon’s own contemptuous comment that ‘no woman will rule me while I am alive’,⁶⁹² which implies something of the English expression ‘over my dead body’). Indeed, while Fraenkel is probably right to assume there to be deliberate evocation of *Ant.* 750, there is no real justification in its excision, since there is nothing linguistically or metrically wrong with the line. The echo is defensible as a covert intertextual reference to the earlier play, which is highly effective when one considers the reversal between the Sophoclean Haimon’s passionate pursuit of his betrothed and the Euripidean Antigone’s equally passionate repudiation of his hand in marriage. Thus it would work perfectly well in the context. The subsequent exchanges between Antigone and Oedipus (1683 until approximately 1709) are generally unobjectionable.⁶⁹³

3) This brings us to the play’s very end. The lyric exchange between Antigone and Oedipus at 1710-36 is problematic. The main difficulties lie in 1714-5, 1722, 1723-4, 1730, and 1732-3. These are not, however, so intractably troublesome to warrant outright

⁶⁹¹ See ad loc.

⁶⁹² Cf. *Ant.* 525, as cited by Mastronarde on *Ph.* 1673.

⁶⁹³ Objections have, however, been made to 1688-9 and 1703-7; both passages are defended cogently by Mastronarde ad locc. and the reader may be referred to his nn.

deletion of the whole passage. The metrical trickiness of 1714-5 is not insoluble.⁶⁹⁴ In 1722, ὥστ' ὄνειρον ἰσχύον [ἔχων] the main objection has been to the accusative of respect used here in ἰσχύον (viz. 'like a dream in strength', i.e. 'as weak as a dream').⁶⁹⁵ The general sense of the line, following on from 1720-1, appears to be [Antigone encouraging her aged father]: 'Walk this way...place your foot here, in the manner of one [who is] as weak as a dream'. The participle ἔχων, which is bracketed in Mastronarde, appears to be as a gloss for the accusative of respect, supplying the sense of 'having the strength of a dream' (clearly applying to Oedipus rather than his foot, as noted by Mastronarde ad loc.). The line would probably be better without the ἔχων, which *is* simply a gloss; without it the reader easily understands Oedipus as the subject. There is no difficulty in this given the content of 1720-1, and in the broader context of the daughter's gentle encouragement of her helpless parent. In 1723-4, Oedipus invokes Creon as the instigator of exile (δυστυχεστάτας φυγάς). The troublesome point here is the ἀλαΐνειν. As noted by Mastronarde ad loc., manuscript tradition has ἐλαύνων, the subject of which is Creon, and the object being the δυστυχεστάται φυγαί. But Mastronarde also notes that the participle cannot be used in isolation in reference to Creon, whether he is onstage or not. Mastronarde reads ἀλαΐνειν, following Musgrave's conjecture, commenting that the accusative of exclamation is perfectly acceptable here. He also notes that the third-century BC Strasbourg papyrus offers no extra space for a text longer than what is found in the manuscripts, which cautions against the retention of ἐλαύνων plus the necessary addition of fillers to qualify the participle. Craik follows Valckenaer in supplying ἐλαύνειν, leaving the audience to understand Creon as the intended subject. Mastronarde objects to the absence of reference to the subject here, and in the context it does seem a little incongruous that after an exchange of some forty lines between father and daughter, and the likely exit of Creon after 1682, Oedipus should now refer indirectly to the new ruler. Furthermore, ἀλαΐνειν is more appropriate to the thematic context, which focuses on the uncertainty faced by the exiled old man, now completely reliant on his daughter for physical guidance and aid.

In 1730 the problem lies with μειζο- ('half-') in qualification of παρθένου, which is followed by κόρας [sc. the Sphinx, whose defeat is now recalled by Oedipus]. Παρθένος and κόρη are generally used synonymously in poetry. Παρθένου may not, as Mastronarde notes ad loc., have appeared in the Strasbourg papyrus. Yet this does not necessarily

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. Mastronarde ad loc.

⁶⁹⁵ This is a common image of the weakness of old age: cf. Mastronarde on 1543-5.

require its deletion. If we accept the juxtaposition of παρθένου and κόρας, rather than seek to analyse the potential distinctions between the two terms,⁶⁹⁶ then the question remains whether to retain μειξο-, which is Wilamowitz's conjecture. Μειξο- would indeed work well here – better than the unnecessary excision of παρθένου, which *is* superfluous when followed by κόρας but not to the point of appearing intolerable. Μειξο- (παρθένου) recalls the identical epithet applied by the Chorus to the Sphinx at 1023. There appears to be no reason why it cannot work just as well here. 1732-3 are problematic and possibly 1732 at least is interpolated. Antigone here seeks to suppress her father's recollections of victory over the Sphinx, as per the immediately preceding lines (1728-31). The scholiast on the play advises 1732 to be read as a question, i.e. 'Do you renew your reproach of the Sphinx?', and indeed Mastronarde reads it thus, as does Kovacs, although Craik prints it simply as a statement. If we are to retain the line – which does provide some cushioning before Antigone's newly authoritative tone in 1733 – it does appear to be better read as a question, since this adds a touch of abruptness as, albeit still gently, she seeks to set him on his way into exile, to face the future (cf. 1734-6) rather than to dwell excessively on the past. Furthermore, as Mastronarde notes, the question suits Antigone's intention to repress Oedipus' feeble attempts at nostalgic self-congratulation. This is clear in her use of ὄνειδος, which undercuts her father's sentiments regarding his 'victory'. This word is a solid point in defence of the line, since it picks up on the earlier stichomythia between father and daughter where Antigone alludes to Oedipus' defeat of the Sphinx, to which he replies that that day brought him both prosperity and destruction (1688-9), i.e. killing the Sphinx was a glorious feat but led to the incestuous marriage with Jocasta, which was his reward for the victory (cf. 45-9). Antigone thus implicitly reminds him that his victory was not the great glory it may have seemed.⁶⁹⁷ This motif of the ambiguity of an ostensible triumph and its destabilising consequences is pervasive in the play.⁶⁹⁸ In 1733 the use of αὐδῶν is not strictly speaking necessary but it is perfectly tolerable. Antigone's command, ἄπαγε..., is colloquial but again not intolerable, even with the αὐδῶν. Her tone is appropriate given the context and her relationship with her addressee. She here places a little more emphasis on her previous gentle exhortations as the play moves towards their final exit. In conclusion, it appears that the difficulties of this whole episode are not

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. again Mastronarde *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. also the Chorus' comment at 1046 that Oedipus' arrival at Thebes was τότε' ἀσμένους, πάλιν δ' ἄχη.

⁶⁹⁸ Interesting also that ὄνειδος is used by the Chorus of the genesis of the 'sown men', a κάλλιστον ὄνειδος (821) for Thebes, which encapsulates this ambiguity. See further Mastronarde on 1689.

insurmountable and are adequately to be ascribed to corruption of the transmitted text rather than to wholesale interpolation.

Lines 1740 -1766, where the extant play ends, are almost certainly spurious. These lines are absent from the Strasbourg papyrus, which contains the lines up to 1736, after which there is a clear gap to the right of this line. This is compelling evidence of interpolation – more convincing than the internal difficulties, which are not insubstantial. Moreover, Antigone’s reiterated intention to bury her brother at 1745-6 is clearly not Euripidean, since - as we have already seen – she has already clearly abandoned that ambition.⁶⁹⁹ Although there is no real inconsistency in the dialogue, which recaps on the family’s woes, it is a little odd that Oedipus should suggest his daughter meet for the last time with her peers and make a final sojourn to Cithaeron (1747-52). This interrupts the impetus to immediate exile.⁷⁰⁰ Then his repeated reference to the Sphinx at 1760 is somewhat tedious after 1728-31, and especially subsequent to Antigone’s advice to abandon the subject at 1732-3. The trochaic address by Oedipus to an imaginary audience of Thebans at 1758ff is highly suspicious. The first two lines are no final bow by Euripides to the great king of the *Tyrannos*,⁷⁰¹ but more likely a clumsy remodelling by a later interpolator of the relevant passage from the closing scenes of that play, viz. 1524-5.⁷⁰² There is in addition no suitable addressee onstage for Oedipus’ speech here; he refers to the Sphinx – again – at 1760; the switch from the third person in 1758-9 to the first in 1760-2 is clumsy, especially within the repeated relative clauses in 1759-60. Mastronarde notes further the similarity of 1761 to 627, where Polynices comments on his unjust expulsion from Thebes; and the manner in which Oedipus’ fatalistic remark at 1762-3 expands on Jocasta’s words at 382. These points do not in isolation appear to be cogent enough justification for deletion of the passage, since if this part of the Exodos were Euripidean the dramatist could well have meant to allude deliberately to the words of Jocasta and Polynices, now dead but still onstage. But all the difficulties cumulatively point to excision as the preferable option. Partial excision does not really work well here;

⁶⁹⁹ Craik’s suggestion (see ad loc.) that Ant. could accomplish both the burial and the accompaniment of her father into exile is highly unconvincing.

⁷⁰⁰ Incongruous though the passage is in the context, it does not, however, warrant Meredith’s suggestion that Oedipus’ advice to his daughter here is indicative of his mental infirmity (see Meredith 1937 102). Craik’s n. on 1747-9 - that Oedipus seeks to soften the blow of departure by encouraging her daughter to perform acts of farewell – is more attractive, although excision is still the preferable option.

⁷⁰¹ Thus Meredith 103.

⁷⁰² It must be noted, however, that these lines in the *OT* have themselves been suspected. On the problems of *Ph.* 1758-63 see further Mastronarde ad loc. and n.2 there; it seems more likely that the problem lies with the Euripidean passage rather than with the *OT* ref., but we cannot wholly dismiss the possibility that the problem may be with both. On the problems of the *OT* ending (1424-1530), see the article of Kovacs (2009).

Valckenaer's original suggestion that 1758-9 alone could be deleted is rightly dismissed by Mastronarde, since 1760 cannot open a speech. Deletion of 1759 only, on account of its connection with the *OT* passage, fails to resolve the switch from third person in 1758 to first in 1760, and in fact makes it even more abrupt. Thus complete excision is necessary.

The play's end comes, therefore, shortly after 1736, although a case could be made for the preservation of 1737-9. These lines, in which Antigone recaps her own plight, would ease the transition into the final lines of the play in place of the rather abrupt *θανεῖν πον* in 1736. Further, the allusion to the anomalous nature of her own departure from the city (*ἀπαρθέεντ' ἄλωμένα*, 1739) highlights Antigone's role as victim in implicitly recalling her lost marriage and thus ties in with the thematic interest of the play. Neither of these points makes retention of the lines absolutely necessary, but as they are linguistically and metrically perfectly sound,⁷⁰³ they might remain as they stand, with the separate miseries of father and daughter reiterated before the play finally closes. The final lines (1764-6) cannot work. The Chorus' prayer for victory breaks the dramatic illusion and is thus unsuited to tragedy. Further, the sentiment seems somewhat unsatisfactory in closing, although the Choral end does not necessarily have to relate to the main action of the play. A lyric addendum following 1739, perhaps in commiseration with Antigone's words in the previous lines, would work well as conclusion to an Exodos which underlines the development and importance of the girl's role. Further, it would also be well-suited coming from the female Chorus, who have in common with Antigone their loss of their normative cultural role, as has been discussed elsewhere in this study. Alternatively, one could insert a final comment on the ineluctability of divine-sent misfortunes, which is appropriate to the tone of the characters' attitudes throughout the play. This would be acceptable, but is complicated by the fact of the Chorus' generally superior knowledge and insight in contrast with those of the main cast of characters, who generally appear to be less inclined to dwell on their own responsibility in the outcome of events. The Chorus, on the other hand, tend to demonstrate a more sensitive appreciation of the misjudgements to which the main characters are and have been prone. Thus a closing comment on the limitations of knowledge, or a more general sentiment regarding the fragility and vulnerability of the human condition, in the context of the ultimate omnipotence of the gods, might be appropriate. The ending of *Helen*, produced two years before our play, offers a variation on this theme in alluding to the inscrutability of divine purpose and the

⁷⁰³ Cf. Mastronarde ad locc.

unpredictability of events motivated by the gods' will (1688-92). These lines also appear at the close of *Bacchae*, *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, and - with minor adjustments - *Medea*. Of course, we ought not assume that the lyric ending to our play would have been identical, but it is highly probable that it would have been very similar. Evidence from the extant plays where the textual integrity of the ending is without question suggests that a comment on the general fallibility of mankind and the ultimate inevitability of divine will is more likely than a lyric coda focusing solely on Antigone (and possibly Oedipus). Alternatively, there might simply have been a brief and sympathetic gesture from the Chorus, as is found at the end of *Trojan Women*. The Choral coda is often formulaic, signalling simply that the play is at an end. Thus the surviving Labdacids are left to exit at last for a future yet unknown, paving the way for Sophocles' return to the myth in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Appendix B: the *Teichoskopia*

The *teichoskopia* scene early in the play was suspected by earlier scholars who, heavily influenced by Aristotelian conceptions of dramatic unity, tended to condemn the episode's perceived failure to integrate into the play's structure. Yet the general consensus among modern critics is that despite certain textual anomalies within the scene, the *teichoskopia* is Euripidean. Mastronarde observes that a Prologue consisting solely of Jocasta's opening speech followed immediately by the Parodos, though certainly possible, would be highly uncharacteristic of Euripides, who usually – if not always – has two opening scenes.⁷⁰⁴ Secondly, the metrical form of the *teichoskopia* itself is not inconsistent with – indeed is typical of – Euripidean methods; the alternation of spoken trimeters on the male part and a sung role on the female's is commonly found.⁷⁰⁵ Other critics have commented on the increasing length in Prologue-speeches as we move through the extant corpus, and on the structural isolation of opening scenes as characteristic of late Euripides.⁷⁰⁶ Of course, generalities such as these cannot in isolation be offered as proof of a scene's authenticity, but they are a useful starting-point. There is further the question of the episode's (lack of) impact on the dramatic action. This (not unreasonable) objection is raised by Burgess;⁷⁰⁷ even so, the scene's non-effect on the play's *events* does not predicate its failure to add anything to the drama in thematic or aesthetic terms. The *teichoskopia* does indeed stand independently within the drama, but its interest does not lie purely in its theatricality. This, indeed, is the starting-point of Dihle (1981), who is rare if not unique among modern critics in discounting the scene, viewing the episode as a later creation for performance in its own right and as subsequently interpolated into Euripides. To be sure, the theatrical interest of the scene is substantial, but that is not its sole interest, which appears to be the view of Burgess, who otherwise cogently defends the scene's authenticity.⁷⁰⁸ She speaks of the episode as 'literarily ununified' in relation to the rest of the play.⁷⁰⁹ But on the contrary, the thematic relevance and interest of the *teichoskopia* within the play's overall structure is, in fact, the most persuasive evidence of the episode's genuineness.

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. Mastronarde 171.

⁷⁰⁵ Mastronarde *ibid.* See also 173-8 for detailed metrical analysis of the *teichoskopia* scene.

⁷⁰⁶ See Burgess (1987) 105-6. *Phoinissai*, in fact, as pointed out by Burgess, has the longest Prologue-speech of all at 87 lines.

⁷⁰⁷ Burgess 104.

⁷⁰⁸ See 107-8.

⁷⁰⁹ Burgess 108.

Firstly, we consider the question of Theban topography. The scene's introduction of familiar physical features such as the river Dirce (131), the tomb of Zethus (145), and that of Niobe's daughters (159-60) imparts a local flavour which prepares the audience for the emphasis in the Choral odes on Thebes' topographical identity. More importantly, however, the *teichoskopia* foregrounds the concern with gender and gender roles which is so prominent in the play. The scene is framed by this theme, at the opening in the Paidagogus' solicitous attentions to the propriety of Antigone's exposure to the public (92-5), and at the end in his haste to avoid the approaching Chorus (193-201). The focus on women and their normal social roles importantly points to the development of the theme in the subsequent action. This also picks up on the striking position previously held by Jocasta as speaker of the Prologue, in which her authoritative tone – particularly at the end of the speech – prefigures her part later in the play. In contrast, here in the *teichoskopia* we find the naive and innocent virgin Antigone, with her childish interest in the battle-scene below. This portrayal means that her later behaviour and situation are seen more clearly through the *peripeteia* in her circumstances and presentation.⁷¹⁰ Of course, the scene's strong intertextual interest is compounded by the inversion between Antigone as sexually and morally innocent and her forerunner, the Iliadic Helen, in the Homeric scene which Euripides consciously recalls here. For all that Homer presents her sympathetically, the distinction between Helen as sexually provocative adulteress and Antigone as completely unversed in male society is a stark one; the one beholds a war of which she is the central cause, and the other will eventually fall victim to a battle for which she had no responsibility. As Helen informs Priam, so Antigone relies on the Paidagogus for explanation and direction. Later, of course, she will herself become the leader and guide, for her blind and aged father Oedipus. The *teichoskopia* scene thus prepares for the manner in which the play demonstrates the disruption by war of gender roles, a theme already present, if given less emphasis, in the epic precedent.⁷¹¹

We now turn to the internal problems of the scene. Much has been made of these by Dihle, who insists on certain linguistic and stylistic features as pointing to post-classical authorship. His linguistic objections are to, in order of their appearance in the text, transitive *ἐπαντέλλων* in 105; hapax *λευκολόφας* in 119; 'odd' use of *ὁμόγαμος* in 137; intransitive *περᾶι* in 145; the meaning of *ἀμφέπει* in 149; *λῆπᾶρόζωνος* in relation to a

⁷¹⁰ In Burgess' defence, she does concede to this point of the powerfulness of the reversal (see 108); perhaps her argument requires a little more emphasis, as well as reference to gender as a broader and central dramatic theme.

⁷¹¹ This was discussed at some length in ch.4 above; on the connections with Homer, cf. ch.1.1 above.

man in 175; intransitive ἰθύνει in 178; and the construction/use of χρῆμα in the context of 198. All of these points have been answered by Mastronarde and Burgess and the reader may be referred to their arguments.⁷¹² Mastronarde's close linguistic analysis reveals that there are more characteristically Euripidean features in the scene than there are allegedly anomalous ones, which, taking into account also the general variety of tragic style as well as of late Euripides, suggests that there is no adequate justification in complete excision of the scene. However, some difficulties undoubtedly remain, and may well be ascribed to interpolations. Dihle rightly objects to the Paidagogus' repeated observation that he is well-informed regarding the Argive army, having been to offer a truce to Polynices (95-8, 141-4).⁷¹³ It would seem reasonable to excise, as several editors have done, all of 141-4, rather than merely the one line which is reiterated verbatim (143=97),⁷¹⁴ since Antigone's question at 141 seems superfluous when she has earlier learnt of the Paidagogus' acquaintance with the Argives; and 142 and 144 are awkward without 143. The elimination of these lines is more logical than that of the earlier passage at 95ff, since there the Paidagogus' statement prepares us for the role he assumes throughout the episode.

Dihle has several other objections. He views the allusion to Hecate as daughter of Leto (110) as a late syncretism. But Dihle himself concedes that Artemis as identified with Hecate is already found in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (676).⁷¹⁵ Burgess also notes that inscriptional evidence suggests that Artemis was identified with Hecate as early as 450.⁷¹⁶ So the featuring of Hecate forms no firm evidence for later authorship. Dihle also insists, at great length, that the reference at 138 to an Aetolian combatant as μεῖζοβάρβαρος and to the 'strangeness' of his weapons is indicative of the passage's later date. He sees the questionable nature of the Aetolians' Hellenicity here as correspondent with the views of a much later audience – certainly not before the third or second centuries.⁷¹⁷ But Thucydides alludes to the unusual military characteristics and half-primitive culture of the Aetolians;⁷¹⁸ in the third book he also indicates that the Athenians had encountered the

⁷¹² Cf. Mastronarde's nn. ad locc. and Burgess 108ff. (On χρῆμα in 198, Burgess comments that corruption may be present; but it may well be a colloquial feature, and colloquialisms in Eur. have been well charted).

⁷¹³ Dihle 60-1. It is interesting to note in passing that the truce embassy as process of recognition also bears on the intertextual relationship with Homer, since Odysseus is so recognised in the Iliadic *teichoskopia* (cf. 3. 204ff.).

⁷¹⁴ Exact repetition of a line within a play usually points to either deliberate or accidental interpolation, although Mastronarde on 143 cautions against absolute rigidity on this score.

⁷¹⁵ Dihle 61-2.

⁷¹⁶ See Burgess 109 n.21.

⁷¹⁷ Dihle 66.

⁷¹⁸ Cf. e.g. 3.94. In book 1 Thuc. introduces the Aetolians as carrying around armour in their daily life and living off plunder (cf. 1.5-6).

Epirot peoples in a war sufficiently recently to justify their especial interest in them in the late fifth century. So in a contemporary context the application of an epithet such as *μειξοβάρβροπος* to the Aetolian warrior would scarcely be as jarring as Dihle implies.

Dihle also queries a perceived strained effect in the text, especially in 105, 120, 137, 145, 146, 148, 161, 171/3. Of these eight examples, Burgess defends all but 105 and 161; interestingly enough, Mastronarde sees nothing strained in either 105 or 161. And as Mastronarde notes, scholarly perception of straining and awkwardness is generally highly subjective⁷¹⁹ and cannot (in isolation, at least) constitute serious grounds for suspicion of a text. The same applies to Dihle's view of apparent dramatic inconsistency in the episode, especially in the 'abrupt' switch in Antigone's attention from her brother Polynices (158ff) to Amphiaraus at 170-1.⁷²⁰ There is no real inconsistency or jarring effect here; Antigone has already spoken nine lines (161-9) in passionate recognition of her brother – more, quite naturally, than is offered for any other warrior. There is enough here to evoke pathos in her evident love for a brother soon to die; enough to foreshadow, perhaps, her later spirited insistence on his burial. Nothing more is needed; and the focus shifts quite fluidly to the next warrior. Thus a bias in opinion cannot hold water; far more persuasive is hard evidence of linguistic and metrical anomalies which, when taken together, are the most cogent proof of spuriousness. Here, there are no substantial metrical difficulties, and other points for objection can generally be fairly easily resolved. The *teichoskopia* thus appears to have been very much a part of Euripides' play.

⁷¹⁹ Mastronarde 170.

⁷²⁰ Dihle 61.

Appendix C: lines 1104-40

This portion of the first messenger speech which begins at 1090 has long been viewed as suspect. The suspicion has hinged largely on internal oddities and perceived inconsistencies between the episode's 'catalogue' of Argive warriors and the *teichoskopia*. The general consensus in the twentieth century was that heavy interpolation within the passage necessitated complete excision: thus Friedrich, Fraenkel, Mueller-Goldingen, and Dihle. Of late twentieth-century critics Mastronarde (1978) has offered a persuasive albeit still cautious argument for the retention of the lines. General objections to the scene focus on several points: a) Fraenkel, for instance, comments on the apparent inconsistency of the catalogue's insertion following Euripides' 'criticism' of Aeschylus at 751-2, where Eteocles comments that the battle's imminence means that there is no time to name the individual defender at each of the seven gates. Euripides would therefore not, according to Fraenkel, have then returned to make a 'caricature' of *Septem*'s shield scene in 1104-40.⁷²¹ Yet there is no need to exaggerate the significance of Eteocles' comment. To be sure, an observation regarding the inappropriateness of the description at exactly the point where Aeschylus *did* insert such an episode is difficult to regard as approval of that dramatist. More pressingly, however, Eteocles' comment implies Euripides' intention to work within an artistic structure that was different from Aeschylus' and thus indicates a degree of literary self-consciousness in this reminder to the audience of his own originality. In any case – and this point is more cogent – the question of 751-2 is irrelevant to 1104-40, since the earlier passage notes the constraints of time *before* the battle takes place, and the messenger speech is delivered afterwards.⁷²²

b) Objection has also been made to the episode's part in the play as a whole. The additional information regarding the Argives in 1104-40 may be seen as superfluous. But there are many details in messenger speeches in general which contribute to the immediate scene-setting; they need not all have sustained thematic relevance. As for the passage's relevance in the technical sense, it does supply the effect of retardation in delaying the news in the second messenger speech of the fraternal confrontation. This heightens dramatic anticipation and points to the importance of this function of the messenger-speech in general.⁷²³ There is no need to suppose that Euripides, if he wrote the passage,

⁷²¹ Fraenkel 56.

⁷²² As Mastronarde points out in his 1978 article, 111-2.

⁷²³ See on this point de Jong (1991) 117-77.

would have concerned himself with what Mastronarde terms the ‘naturalistic inappropriateness’ of inserting a lengthy descriptive piece at this point in the narrative; indeed, such a device of suspending the ‘action-narrative’ is not unprecedented within the extant corpus.⁷²⁴ This question of the episode’s place within the play leads us to c) The contention that 1104-40 is topographically inconsistent with what we find in the earlier *teichoskopia*. Dihle views the inclusion of the seven gates in 1104-40, which are absent from the *teichoskopia*, as evidence of spuriousness, since he believes that Euripides intended to omit the seven gates in order to distance himself from Aeschylus. This appears to be highly tendentious. Furthermore, the existence of the gates are alluded to at other points outside 1104-40: Eteocles in his earlier exchange with Creon plans a seven-gated defence of the city;⁷²⁵ and the messenger himself reiterates this point at 1093-4, which makes the subsequent catalogue quite natural and appropriate. Finally, Dihle’s insistence on the necessity for exact geographical correspondences between the *teichoskopia* and 1104-40 seems again to be somewhat pedantic, since it is scarcely likely that the audience would notice, much less concern itself with, the finer accuracies of Theban topography. Moreover, what Euripides aims for is a sense of ‘place’ rather than an exact representation of the city’s physical make-up, which is generally no priority in tragedy as a whole.⁷²⁶

d) Critics have also found fault with the narrative sequence of the speech. Fraenkel objects to the use of καὶ πρῶτα μὲν at the beginning of both 1104 and 1141. He sees the repetition as evidence of interpolation, and the occurrence of the phrase in 1104 as the borrowing by an idle interpolator from the genuine 1141.⁷²⁷ However, this objection has been countered by Mastronarde, who argues that the first instance of the phrase (i.e. at 1104) is non-temporal, bearing an enumerative sense in heralding the subsequent descriptions of each of the warriors in turn.⁷²⁸ But it seems that the phrase *is* temporal here – as it is in 1141 as the messenger goes on to describe the progression of the battle. In 1104 the phrase refers to an action (as it does in 1141) which occurs prior to the other actions described, viz. the successive departures of the Theban defenders to their assigned gates. That the phrase is repeated at 1104 and 1141 is not intolerable. Of course, complete excision of 1104-40 does not entail an excessive abruptness in the transition from 1103 to 1141. The trumpet sounding (1102-3) may have served as an appropriate introduction to

⁷²⁴ Cf. Mastronarde 114. He cites the example of *Ion* 1132-66.

⁷²⁵ Cf. 737-41; and 748-50.

⁷²⁶ See further Mastronarde’s appendix, 647-50.

⁷²⁷ Cf. Fraenkel 54.

⁷²⁸ Cf. Mastronarde’s n. on 1104.

the battle proper at 1141ff. But since the καὶ πρῶτα μὲν is acceptable in both instances, this objection cannot warrant wholesale deletion of the episode.⁷²⁹ Finally, we come to e) internal stylistic and linguistic objections. The passage is, to be sure, difficult and in many places unsatisfactory. Mastronarde, for instance, notes the unimaginative repetition of words or phrases, including the fivefold appearance of ἔχων in 1107-20 and the double use of ἐν μέσῳ σάκει in 1107 and 1114.⁷³⁰ There is also a certain straining for effect and a generally disappointing style in the episode, although we ought again to bear in mind that such considerations are to a significant extent subjective. What is the most cogent evidence for the deletion of some of the lines at least is the technical difficulty and stylistic peculiarity of certain passages within the episode.

1116-1119

Queries may begin with 1116-8; the preceding eight lines are generally unproblematic.⁷³¹ 1116-8, describing the ‘all-seeing’ Argos with his manifold eyes as emblazoned on Hippomedon’s shield, are both grammatically and stylistically troublesome. The participles βλέποντα and κρύπτοντα in 1117 must be read as qualifying ὄμματα in 1116 rather than as masculine singulars in agreement with πανόπτην in 1115. If they were masculine singular one would need to emend βλέποντα, although κρύπτοντα can be used intransitively.⁷³² Further, the word order is more natural if the two participles are taken in agreement with ὄμματα, especially given the τὰ μὲν...τὰ δὲ construction in 1116-7. This suggests the picture of some eyes closing and some opening on the body of Argos, in concert with the setting and rising stars that form the blazon’s background.⁷³³ Grammatical questions aside, the picture is odd, although an ‘all-seeing’ Argos was not unheard of in Euripides’ time.⁷³⁴ The alternating and closing of the eyes does not appear to be found in contemporary or near-contemporary iconography; Mastronarde, however, does not think this an insuperable obstacle.⁷³⁵ 1118 is strange too in its parenthetical quality; more so than in its alleged inconsistency with 1139-40.⁷³⁶ Mastronarde notes that the specific ‘justification’ of knowledge on the part of the messenger at 1118 does not jar with the more general

⁷²⁹ See for further discussion Mastronarde (1978) 112-5.

⁷³⁰ Cf. Mastronarde (1994) 456.

⁷³¹ See however Mastronarde’s nn. on ὑβρισμέν’ in 1112 and the construction στικτοῖς...ὄμμασιν in 1115. Neither point is to be held up as meriting excision or alteration of either line.

⁷³² See Mastronarde (1978) 119-20.

⁷³³ There is nothing odd in the combination of rising or setting stars; this continual nocturnal process is naturally implied in the prepositions σὺν and μέτα in 1116 and 1117, as pointed out by Mastronarde 120-1: and stars all have different rising and setting times.

⁷³⁴ Cf. e.g. Aesch. *Suppl.* 304.

⁷³⁵ See Mastronarde (1994) 463-4.

⁷³⁶ Thus Pearson and Powell.

explanation at 1139-40.⁷³⁷ That may be so; but it is the generally peculiar and difficult nature of 1116-7 which does suggest that excision is really the best option. And as 1118 does not add anything important to the passage, and more importantly cannot be retained if the previous couplet is eliminated, the deletion of all three lines appears to be both reasonable and appropriate. This does make the description of Hippomedon relatively short (three lines) compared with those of the other Argives (five and a half lines for Parthenopaeus; four for Tydeus; six for Capaneus; five for Polynices; but only four for Adrastus (with the deletion of 1136) and three and a half for Amphiaraus). But this is preferable to retaining the unsatisfactory 1116-7 (and by association 1118); and in the context of the catalogue the abruptness of the transition from 1115 (after which a full stop must be marked) to 1119 and Tydeus would not be intolerably jarring.

1120-1122

The next difficulty lies in 1120-2.⁷³⁸ Complete excision of the lines is unacceptable if the episode is to be retained, for that would leave no space for the treatment of Tydeus. He is an important member of the attacking army, as we saw in the earlier *teichoskopia* (cf. 131ff); and he appears early on in the later narrative of the battle itself (1144ff). The initial caveat here is the danger of assuming too close a correspondence, as some earlier scholars have done, between the representation of Tydeus here and that of Capaneus in *Septem*, which is clearly the key influence on this passage. In Aeschylus Capaneus bears a shield showing a man holding a torch; on the shield is the slogan ‘πρήσω πόλιν’ (cf. 432-4). But in *Phoinissai* the torch is actual rather than merely depicted on the shield, and the shield itself is not described, save for the fact that Tydeus carries on it, presumably attached in some way, the pelt of a lion (λέοντος δέρος ἔχων ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος, 1120). The fact of the shield itself as bearing no particular interest is not intolerably problematic, since although the shields are the special focus of this catalogue as they are in *Septem*, there are other details in the passage which are not specifically related to them (1105, 1110, 1128).⁷³⁹ The point here is the ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος (1120) vs. ἐπ’ ἀσπίδι, said of Polynices’ shield at 1124.⁷⁴⁰ The distinction⁷⁴¹ may imply the difference between what is hanging from or over the shield, i.e. some type of covering, such

⁷³⁷ Cf. Mastronarde on 1118.

⁷³⁸ See Mastronarde on 1119 for refutation of Dihle’s tedious objections to the positioning of the Homoloid gate, where Tydeus stands.

⁷³⁹ As pointed out by Mastronarde (1978) 122.

⁷⁴⁰ Mastronarde (1994) prints ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος in 1120 followed by ἐπ’ ἀσπίδι in 1124, although both Craik and Kovacs print ἐπ’ ἀσπίδι in both lines.

⁷⁴¹ Although Mastronarde also notes on 1120-2 that some authors do use ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος rather than ἐπ’ ἀσπίδι to describe shield-emblems.

as a lion skin; and what is actually depicted as an image on the shield itself, or a blazon.⁷⁴² So Tydeus bears, presumably in his left hand (or over his left arm/shoulder), the shield with the pelt covering it, and in his right (δεξιῷ δέ, 1121) the torch, with the intention of burning the city, ὡς πρήσων πόλιν (1122). Tydeus is thus identified metaphorically with Prometheus⁷⁴³ in a clever play on the figure emblazoned on Capaneus' shield in *Septem*. The intertextual interest here is an important point in favour of retaining the three lines; as – more importantly – the passage is logically and grammatically tolerable, it can reasonably be accommodated in the whole.

1123-1140

Minor objections to 1126-7 and 1133 can fairly easily be discounted.⁷⁴⁴ The main problem in the remaining lines is in 1135-6. Mastronarde brackets 1136 on account of its tautologous effect following 1135. Indeed, 1136 does not add any interest or significance to the presentation of Adrastus; and its deletion is more appropriate than that of 1135, since, as Mastronarde notes, the language in 1135 bears more colour and interest.⁷⁴⁵ Further, there is the difficulty of the plural βραχίουσιν ['arms'] in 1136. Pearson sees nothing odd in the plural here, commenting that the plural is frequently used in place of the singular in relation to body parts.⁷⁴⁶ But it *is* odd,⁷⁴⁷ especially with the adjective λαιοῖσιν ['left'] also in the plural, although obviously it has to be in qualification of the plural noun. Emendation of βραχίουσιν to βραχίονι would be satisfactory were it not for the fact that similar emendation of the adjective would result in a metrical disruption, so the adjective prevents emendation of the noun to the singular. The general weakness of 1136 suggests that deletion is the easiest option;⁷⁴⁸ indeed, the passage would lose nothing if the line were to be excised. Ἀργεῖον αὔχημ' in 1137 can perfectly easily follow on from γραφῇι at the end of 1135. These lines work satisfactorily and the elimination of 1136 solves the problem.⁷⁴⁹ Finally, we turn to 1139-40, which we discussed briefly above. Friedrich sees these lines as based upon 95-8, where the Paidagogus in the *teichoskopia* explains the reason for his foreknowledge regarding

⁷⁴² Mastronarde (1978) 122 n.71 comments that there is no indicator at 1120 that what we have here is specifically an *image*, and that while the attachment of a pelt or something similar to a shield does feature in Greek vase painting, an artistic representation, such as a painting, of a pelt upon a shield does not.

⁷⁴³ See further Mastronarde 123.

⁷⁴⁴ See Mastronarde 124-5.

⁷⁴⁵ Mastronarde (1994 ad locc.) notes the use of ἔχων in 1136 as opposed to the 'lively and figurative' ἐκπληρῶν in 1135.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. Pearson ad loc.

⁷⁴⁷ See Mastronarde (1978) 126 n.91 on the singular/plural use in relation to body parts. The use here in βραχίουσιν is clearly anomalous.

⁷⁴⁸ This was originally suggested by Murray (1913) and is followed by Mastronarde (1994) ad loc.

⁷⁴⁹ Despite Fraenkel 53 n.5.

the Argive army.⁷⁵⁰ But there is nothing linguistically or metrically wrong with 1139-40, and as Mastronarde comments, the offering of a reason for an alleged interpolation is scarcely sufficient grounds for assuming that interpolation is present. Furthermore, if Euripides did write 1104-40, it is not unfeasible that he himself should have been influenced by 95-8 in the case of 1139-40.⁷⁵¹

The lines which warrant excision are therefore few: 1116, 1117, 1118, and 1136 must go. Objections to the remaining lines can be answered with sufficient persuasiveness to merit the retention of those passages in the text. Overall, the catalogue is not stylistically appealing, but we have insufficient hard evidence to merit the conclusion that it is definitely not by Euripides. We cannot be completely certain that it *is* the work of Euripides. However, the fact that only four lines out of a total of thirty-seven are intractably problematic suggests that the passage can with some reservations (and excisions) be retained. Moreover, despite certain inadequacies of expression, the passage does also reveal a sustained and sophisticated exploitation of the ‘shield scene’ in *Septem*.⁷⁵² This is not uncharacteristic of Euripides’ use of his intertexts, Aeschylean and non-Aeschylean, in the play at large. But that is not sufficient justification for certainty regarding his authorship of 1104-40. More persuasive, perhaps, is the complementation by 1104-40 of the authentic *teichoskopia*; the chief focus of the later passage on the armoury of the Argive warriors, as described by the messenger who had actually been present on the battle-field, balances and supplements the more distant, impressionistic scene as beheld from the palace roof, with Antigone taking in the more general appearance and demeanour of the soldiers. Both sections are heavily reliant on a highly visual representation and add colour and intensity to the dramatic action. They also appear ingeniously to separate elements from the Aeschylean ‘shield-scene’ (viz. the shields themselves and general representations of the warriors) and use them at very different points in the dramatic action: the *teichoskopia* takes place before the battle, building up to and delaying the assault and fraternal confrontation; and 1104-40 coming afterwards, yet also building up to and delaying the news of the brothers’ clash. For these reasons one would like to believe 1104-40 to be the work of Euripides. In conclusion, this study tentatively accepts the place of (the majority of) the passage in the text. However, it would be injudicious to assume with complete certainty that the passage is authentic; the possibility that a later

⁷⁵⁰ The passage in the *teichoskopia* is to be retained in the text; see above Appendix B.

⁷⁵¹ Mastronarde (1978) 127.

⁷⁵² We discussed this in ch.1.2 above.

interpolator, intimately *au fait* with the work of Aeschylus as well as that of Euripides, may have produced on a far smaller scale a clever piece highly imitative of the great dramatists, cannot be wholly dismissed.

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Abbreviations:

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BICS = Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies
CJ = Classical Journal
CP = Classical Philology
CQ = Classical Quarterly
CR = Classical Review
G&R = Greece and Rome
GRBS = Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
HSCP = Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
JHS = Journal of Hellenic Studies
Mnem. = Mnemosyne
PCPS = Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society
TAPA = Transactions of the American Philological Association
YCS = Yale Classical Studies

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