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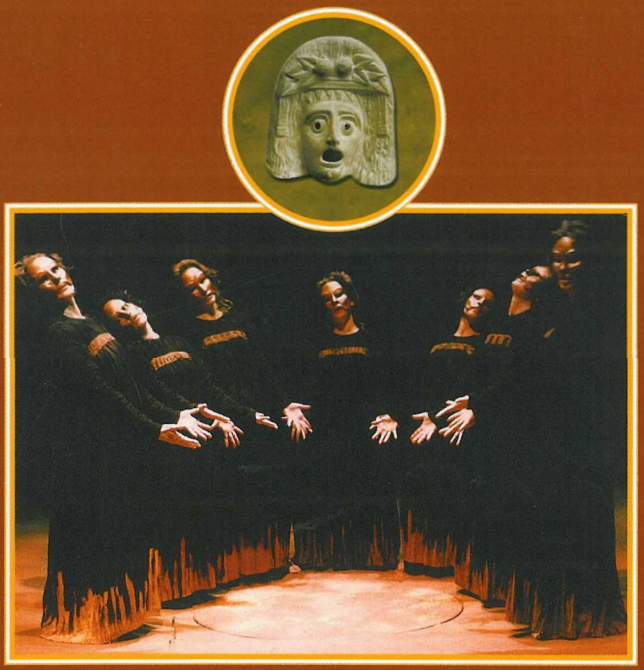

EURIPIDES: SUPPLIANT WOMEN

Ian C. Storey

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Euripides' *Suppliant Women* is an unfairly neglected master work by the most controversial of the three great tragedians of Ancient Greece. It dramatises the story of one of the proudest moments in Athenian mythical history: the intervention of Theseus in support of international law to force the burial of the Argives who were killed during their attack on Thebes. But Euripides adds new characters to the story and presents the myth in a different and sometimes ambiguous light. A sense of uncertainty and undercutting pervades this play, which dramatises the sufferings of the innocent in war and then at the end foretells more war. As well as presenting a scene-by-scene analysis, this book will discuss the date and background of the play, whether people and events from contemporary Athens can be glimpsed in the drama; the problems of staging, and finally the story in later tradition.

Ian C. Storey is Professor of Ancient History and Classics at Trent University, Ontario, Canada.

Cover illustration: Photograph by set and costume designer John Wilson, from the production of Euripides' *Suppliant Women,* directed by Rush Rehm for Stanford Lively Arts and the Department of Drama, 1993.

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For Toph & Hallie & Jonah

Preface

I first read Euripides' *Suppliant Women* nearly forty years ago with my teacher, Desmond Conacher, to whom first thanks as always are owed. I was at once captivated by this drama, by its modern and gritty feel, by the way ancient myth and contemporary Athens were juxtaposed, by the uneasy feeling that nothing should be taken at face value. The play has lived in the back of my mind for decades, been included from time to time in courses on drama and theatre, and has occasionally attracted a similar enthusiasm from colleagues and students.

I say 'occasionally', because the play has languished unfairly among the critics, in comparison to popular favourites such as *Medea* or *Bacchae* or (more recently) *Trojan Women*. This is perhaps because it lacks a powerful female protagonist such as Elektra or Medea or Kreousa, or because Euripides is not subjecting the gods to the intense scrutiny of the lens of drama ('if gods do something shameful, they are not gods' – fr. 292.7), or because, even though the play is about war and the sufferings in war, it does not wrench at the heart in the way that *Trojan Women* or *Iphigeneia at Aulis* do. The fact that the Seven were engaged in a war without divine sanction does something to mitigate the anguish, real as it is, of the Argive mothers. Yet I have always placed *Suppliant Women* high on my list of Euripidean tragedies, and it is reassuring to witness a revival in its fortunes, first through the indispensable commentaries of Collard and Morwood, but especially through the advent of performance criticism. *Suppliant Women* possesses a number of striking features for actors and director to explore: an extended series of visible events before a word is spoken, an involved

sub-chorus of boys, the scene where the bodies are returned which could have as many as fifty people in the orchestra, and above all the suicide of Euadne, completely unexpected and without parallel in the ancient theatre. The play deserves a higher profile and more consistent inclusion in courses on ancient drama.

In the text, I have cited secondary works by author + short title (in italics for a book or monograph, and without italics for an article). The commentaries by Collard (1975) and Morwood (2007), as well as the Loeb volume by Kovacs, are cited by the author's last name only. I have used Hellenised spellings for most Greek names (e.g. 'k' for kappa, and endings in '-os'), except for names such as Plato and Homer which have irrevocably entered English usage in those forms. I have found that this helps students new to ancient drama to assign (for example) Kratinos and Plautus to their proper culture. Aeschylus wrote a play with the same title, which I have throughout referred to as *Suppliants*.

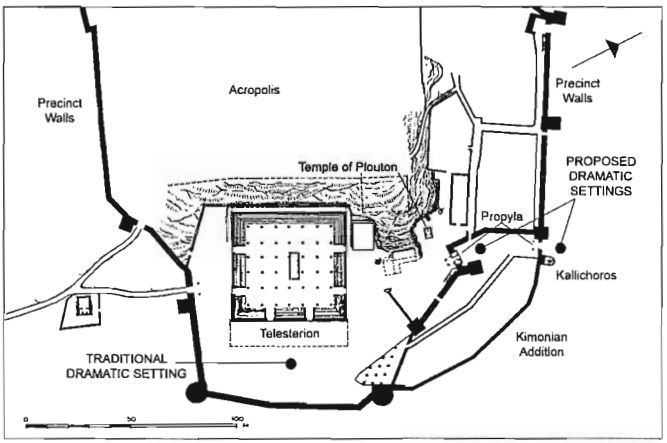
I would thank first my colleague and friend, C.W. ('Toph') Marshall, who was instrumental in getting me involved in the series of Duckworth Companions – hence the dedication to him and his family. Then I must thank Tom Harrison, the series editor, and the crew at Duckworth, especially Deborah Blake, for much patience and unfailing support and encouragement. James Morwood kindly provided an advance copy of his Aris & Phillips edition of the play and his paper on 'Demagogues', Chris Collard several items from his selected papers (Collard, *Tragedy*), and both afforded me much welcome hospitality in Oxford. I appreciate also the time and careful attention that Chris Collard and my student, Michael Rowley, put into reading the manuscript for me. Margaret Dickin was good enough to send the relevant pages from her doctoral dissertation on the messenger in Greek tragedy. I owe a great debt of thanks to Rush Rehm, not only for nobly advancing the cause of the play, but for sending me a wealth of material concerning his 1993 production. I apologise for keeping it so long. I must thank also Christiaan Caspers (Leiden), who provided a great deal of information about the Dutch production in 2006, and George

Kovacs who saw that production at Epidauros and provided a mini-review. Finally I would thank my colleagues at Trent University (Hugh Elton, Rodney Fitzsimons, Jon Strang, Ian Begg) for helping me with the topography of Eleusis and for demonstrating the value of having archaeologists within the Department. I especially thank Rodney Fitzsimons for providing the map of Central Greece and the plan of the precinct at Eleusis.

The studies of Chong-Gossard and Kavoulaki came to my attention only as this volume went to press.

I.C.S.

1. Map of Central Greece



2. The Precinct at Eleusis (late fifth century)

1

Prelude to a Play

The story before Euripides

In the funeral speech attributed to Lysias (2) in the early fourth century, the author lists the illustrious deeds of the Athenians in both myth and history. Between the story of Athens' defence against the Amazons' invasion (4-6) and that of her protection of the children of Herakles (11-16), he provides what has become the story of Theseus' aid to Adrastos and the Argives (7-10), as dramatised in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*:

> Adrastos [king of Argos] and Polyneikes [son of Oedipus] led an expedition against Thebes and were defeated in battle. When the Thebans would not allow them to bury the dead, the Athenians considered that if the dead had acted unjustly, they had paid the greatest penalty in their deaths, and moreover that the gods below were not receiving their due, while the gods above were being offended by the defilement of their shrines. So they first sent heralds and asked the Thebans to allow the recovery of the bodies ... but when they were unable to achieve this, they launched an expedition against Thebes, although no animosity existed between them and the Thebans ... and considering the fortunes of war to be common to all men, they made many enemies of the Thebans, but with Justice on their side they went to war and prevailed. Their success did not tempt them to greater heights and they sought no vengeance upon the Thebans, but merely demonstrated to them their own moral superiority as opposed to their impiety. They took the prize for which they came, that is

> the bodies of the dead, and buried them at Eleusis. This is how they behaved in the matter of the Seven who died at Thebes.

It is interesting to note that all three mythical incidents cited by Lysias were the subjects of tragedies composed by Euripides in the 420s. In *Children of Herakles* (*c.* 430) the Athenians go to war to defend refugees fleeing the threat of death, in *Suppliant Women* to respond with pity to those who suffer and to protect the common laws of Greece and of the gods, and in *Erechtheus* (422?) to defend themselves against a hostile invader (Eumolpos and the Thracians).[1] Further, in *Herakles*, early in the 410s, we get yet another reason for armed Athenian intervention: to protect the innocent in another's territory (1160).

The story is connected to one of the most popular cycles of myth, the events at Thebes, which fell loosely into three parts: (1) the tale of King Laios and his ill-starred son, Oedipus, (2) the hostility between Oedipus and his sons culminating with the unsuccessful attack on Thebes by the Seven captains from Argos, led by Oedipus' son Polyneikes, and (3) the subsequent capture of Thebes by the sons of the Seven a generation later. Each was the subject of a lost epic poem: the first in the *Oidipodeia* ('story of Oedipus'), the second in the *Thebaid* ('Theban story'), and the last in the *Epigonoi* ('the Next Generation').[2] These poems, traditionally dated to the sixth century, provided the basic story-line and characters, with which the spectators would be familiar and from which the playwrights would create their versions.

But there is nothing in the remains of the early epics that suggests an Athenian presence in the story. In fact the appeal to Athens and the response of Theseus is very likely the creation of the Athenian dramatists of the fifth century. We can detect at this time a clear development of the plot concerning the dead bodies of the Seven. First in Pindar (*Olympian* 6.15-16, *Nemean* 9.22-4 – late 470s) we hear that Adrastos spoke their eulogy over their pyres at Thebes, where there is nothing that suggests either a denial of burial or any involvement of Athens. Then in

Aeschylus' lost tragedy, *Men of Eleusis* (late 460s?) Athens and Theseus enter the story.[3] Here the motif of the forbidden burial may first occur, along with Adrastos' appeal to Theseus, and the latter's support of the Argives' request. Plutarch (*Theseus* 29) records that in this play Theseus persuaded the Thebans to yield the bodies, without resorting to force; the bodies were then buried at Eleusis in Attica. Then in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (late 420s) persuasion will not suffice and Theseus must resort to war to retrieve the bodies and grant them burial.

Drama gave the Athenian playwrights the opportunity to re-invent the traditional myths, to add Athenian themes and characters to existing stories, to create for themselves a picture of Athens as the greatest and noblest city in Greece, a sanctuary for the oppressed, a place where pity was practised and where justice could be achieved, a home for heroes of other myths. In drama Athens enters another city's myth in the trial and acquittal of Orestes at Athens (Aeschylus' *Eumenides*), the granting of refuge to Herakles by Theseus (Euripides' *Herakles*), and the re-location of Iphigeneia to Brauron near Athens (Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*). To the story of the Seven against Thebes the Athenian dramatists added three elements: the denial of burial to all the Argive leaders (and not to Polyneikes alone), the appeal to and intervention by Theseus and the Athenians, and the funerals of the leaders at Eleusis, rather than at Thebes or Argos.

Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis*

Plutarch (*Theseus* 29) gives the crucial evidence for the earlier dramatic version of the story, Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis*:

> Theseus also assisted Adrastos in the recovery of those who fell at Thebes, not by defeating the Thebans in battle, as Euripides depicted in a tragedy, but by winning them over with words and by making a truce with them. This is what most writers record at any rate. Philochoros says that this was the first truce ever made for the recovery of

> the dead, although it is recorded in the stories about Herakles that he was the first to give back the bodies of the dead to his enemies. The graves of the common soldiers can be seen at Eleutherai, and those of the leaders near Eleusis – Theseus did this as a favour to Adrastos. Euripides' *Suppliant Women* is thus contradicted by Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis*, in which Theseus is shown as saying this.

We have very little of *Men of Eleusis*: the title's inclusion in a catalogue of Aeschylus' play-titles, Plutarch's comparison of the two dramatic versions, and two brief fragments, 'the matter was urgent, the corpse was already decaying' (269), and 'I shall serve in attendance' (270). The first clearly refers to the condition of the dead, perhaps in a messenger report, and the second may be spoken by Theseus, predicting a service similar to that which he performs for the dead at 758-68.

Zuntz (*Political Plays* 22) greatly regretted the loss of *Men of Eleusis*, since we could have seen more clearly Euripides in action, playing against the work of his earlier rival. The plural title implies that the chorus was not, as in our play, a chorus of suppliant Argive women, but as in Euripides' *Children of Herakles*, a local Athenian group entertaining a request from a foreigner in difficulty. It is possible, however, that Adrastos came with a chorus of boys. A vase from the mid-fifth century may show a scene from Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis*, the Spina volute *kratêr* (*LIMC* 3.1, 805 nr. 3), interpreted by Simon as Adrastos, surrounded by the ghosts of the Seven, appealing to Theseus, backed by Athena, with the boys in armour on a lower panel.[4]

As Athenian drama developed in the fifth century, tragedians began to respond not only to the established myths as expressed in epic and choral poetry, but also to earlier dramatic versions. Such intertextuality was a particular feature of Euripides' drama, often responding to the influential tragedies of Aeschylus. As Aeschylus died in 456, one may wonder how later audiences could be expected to appreciate such allusions

– after all in light of war, plague, abbreviated life-spans, how many spectators in, say, 422 could have been present at a production of Aeschylus some four decades earlier? The answer is that some time before 426/5 revivals of Aeschylus could be entered in the dramatic competitions, and *Suppliant Women* may well have been inspired by a recent revival of the production that included *Men of Eleusis*.

A crucial question is whether the Athenians' use of force is Euripides' own contribution to the tradition. Herodotos (9.27) puts this story in the mouth of an Athenian speaking in 479:

> when the Argive dead lay unburied after their attack on Thebes with Polyneikes, we took the field against the Thebans, recovered the bodies, and laid them to rest in our territory at Eleusis.

For those who date the publication of Herodotos' *Histories* to the third quarter of the fifth century (i.e. before the production of *Suppliant Women*), it might seem that Euripides was already familiar with this version of the story. But more recently scholars have seen Herodotos' work as published either in parts (in which case Book 9 would be the latest) or as a whole in the 410s. On a late date the source of Herodotos' account could be Euripides' play, which he anachronistically refers back to a contentious debate between an Athenian and a Tegean in 479. This debate, set in the lead-up to the battle of Plataia, features the contesting claims of glory by Peloponnesians and Athenians over events in the past. The Athenian calls attention to their defence of the children of Herakles, their burial of the Argive dead, and their repulsion of the invasion of the Amazons, all familiar features in the fourth-century oratorical tradition and all themes of Euripides' plays of the 420s.[5]

Thebes, Argos, and Athens

Three cities dominate the extant dramas of the Athenians: Thebes, Argos, and especially Troy. Of the thirty-three plays

that have come down to us ascribed to the three great tragic poets, twenty-six are set at or have to do with Thebes, Argos, or Troy. There may be a circular explanation at work here. Once the tales of these three cities became established at the core of Greek myth – we can see this as early as Hesiod *Works and Days* 161-5 (early seventh century), where the age before the present is that of the heroes who died at Troy and Thebes of the seven gates – plays that dramatised the events of these cities would make their way into the foreground and attract the attention of those who compiled the earliest anthologies. Not all that many plays are set at Athens. After all, tragedies can end in disaster, and unhappy endings involving Athenians behaving poorly could not be expected to go over all that well with the local audience. Of the canonical thirty-three plays only *Eumenides* has a setting within the city of Athens. Three dramas with strong Athenian characters and themes are set, not at Athens, but in the Attic periphery, *Children of Herakles* (Marathon), *Suppliant Women* (Eleusis), and *Oedipus at Kolonos*, set within the shadows of the city itself.

Thebes for much of the fifth century, and certainly for the years of the War (431-404) was a hostile power and open enemy. In fact the War begins in 431 when the Thebans attack the city of Plataia, a state closely allied with Athens for decades. Zeitlin ('Thebes') has argued that Thebes in tragedy is the 'anti-Athens', a city that represents the opposite values to Athens. It is the city where a man might kill his father and sleep with his mother, where a king might be torn apart by his relatives, where a usurper might seize power and threaten the innocent family of a hero, where a father's curse might work itself out in spectacular fashion on his sons. It is true that Thebes was an especially rich source of highly tragic stories, but that does not mean that the Athenian spectator would sit there with an air of superiority, thinking 'this would never happen here at Athens'. Part of the effect of Greek tragedy is to arouse pity and fear, and Athenians especially prided themselves on their expression of pity, and there are places where Theban characters are meant to be dramatic heroes first and Thebans second.[6] Such is the

case in Aeschylus' *Seven*, where the spectators must sympathise with Eteokles for the play to be at all effective, and certainly so in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, where when the full truth is revealed, the chorus apply his situation generally to all of humanity ('alas for the generations of men' – 1186-8).

Argos in Greek tragedy is the ambiguous city, capable of being both friend and foe to Athens and of being the host for a tragic story. Bad things happen at Argos, most notably the story of the House of Atreus, but Argos is capable of being 'redeemed', in two plays, at least, by the actions of Athenians (*Eumenides*, *Suppliant Women*). But there is always a hint of disaster surrounding Argos, that it is an imperfect state with good intentions on occasions, but capable often of falling from grace.[7] In Aeschylus' *Suppliants* the Argive king, Pelasgos, behaves with honour, indeed in the manner that democratic Athens would approve, but he will lose the battle against the Egyptians and this will lead to further complications in the succeeding play or plays. In *Children of Herakles* it is Eurystheus of Argos who has sent the army to pursue and destroy the family of that dead hero, and here their aggression and desire for vengeance must be checked by Athens. At the end, however, Eurystheus turns out not to be the monster that the refugees describe and goes to his death honourably, promising his protection for Athens when the descendants of Herakles (the Spartans and their allies) will forget their gratitude and come against Athens. In Euripides' *Elektra* and *Orestes* the setting of Orestes' revenge is again Argos, but the endings are uneasy with Orestes in one play driven into permanent exile (*Elektra* 1250) and in the other remaining as king in the city which has just convicted him for murder (*Orestes* 1660-6). In *Oresteia* Aeschylus moves the story from its traditional setting at Mycenae or Sparta to Argos, showing us a city that has witnessed a series of tragic events (Thyestes' designs on his brother Atreus' wife and throne, Atreus' horrifying murder of Thyestes' children, the sacrifice of Iphigeneia by her father, Klytaimestra's murder of her husband, Orestes' murder of his mother and so forth). When all is resolved in the third play and Orestes swears the friendship

and support of Argos to Athens 'for all the long length of time' (763), the reason for the change to an Argive setting becomes clear – in 462, four years before the play was produced, Athens and Argos had made a crucial alliance. *Eumenides* must be viewed against that background, as Aeschylus appears to be providing a mythical and divine approval for the recent alliance.

Eleusis

Adrastos was a *hêrôs* honoured with a cult at Kolonos, in a shrine that housed cults of Oedipus, Pirithoos, and Theseus as well. Two foreign kings (Oedipus, Adrastos) with unfortunate histories were thus honoured in the area to the north-west of Athens, and both would have passed through Eleusis on their way to Kolonos. It is not surprising that an important centre such as Eleusis might claim some part in the myth that brought both of these past their city. Eleusis was the last part of Attica to fall under Athenian hegemony, this dated traditionally to the first half of the sixth century, and was the site of the immensely important cult of Demeter and her daughter, Persephone (often called Kore, the 'Maiden'). This was a mystery cult into which its followers were initiated in a ceremony whose details are secret even now, which promised 'salvation' for its initiates in the next life. The story is dramatically told in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (*c.* 600): the abduction of the Maiden by her uncle Hades to become his bride, the despair and wanderings of Demeter, her arrival at Eleusis and the establishment of her rites of initiation and salvation in the next life. Aeschylus, himself born at Eleusis, was likely the first poet to bring this city, and through her Athens, into the myth of the Seven against Thebes.

It has been suggested that the cult of Demeter and her daughter was associated in the contemporary political life of Athens with peace and good relations between states.[8] Thus the play opens before the precinct of two goddesses intimately associated with fertility, new life, and peace. Theirs is a recurring cycle of life to death and back to life. Seed goes into the

earth to emerge as new crops, Demeter's daughter descends to the Underworld, but returns for several months of the year to a life in the light above the earth. This rhythm is exploited and distorted in the course of our drama. Some see in the shrouded and weeping figure of Adrastos an allusion to the mourning mother, Demeter. A more chilling allusion is that of Euadne who appears in her wedding dress, recalls her marriage to Kapaneus, and leaps to join him in a 'marriage to Death'. But for Euadne, unlike Kore, there will be no return from death. As she hurls herself to her doom, her mourning parent, Iphis, watches helplessly, again recalling the image of the despairing Demeter. Theseus imagines a stereotypical tyrant as removing youthful opponents 'like grain in a springtime meadow' (448-9), while Theseus himself is described by the messenger as 'snapping heads and reaping helmets with his club' (717), an unpleasant sort of harvest indeed. Aithra has arrived at Eleusis to celebrate a fertility ritual preparatory to the autumn sowing, but the same actor will return at the end as Athena, a goddess who promises more war, not peace or the harmony of the cycle of life. The rhythm that Athena foretells and approves is that children will grow up and avenge their fathers.

Aithra tells us at 28-9 that she has come to Eleusis 'to sacrifice on behalf of the ploughed earth'. This must refer to the Proerosia, a minor festival celebrated on the fifth day of Pyanepsion (September/October).[9] There is some evidence that the Athenians had been attempting to raise the profile of this festival in the 430s or 420s and thus to reinforce Eleusis as a Panhellenic sanctuary and to enhance their assumed role as the leading state of Greece. An inscription (*IG* i^3 78) records how Athenian allies were compelled and their friends invited to contribute an offering of the first fruits to the shrine of the goddesses. Goff ('Aithra' 73) concludes that the myth (*Suda*: s.v. *eiresiônê*), in which Athens saved all of Greece from famine by instituting this sacrifice, 'presents a redemptive Athens with the rest of the world in its debt'. The implications for our play are obvious: the world comes to Athens for resolution and for justice.[10]

The play begins at Eleusis, but moves rapidly into the political

and military field, and by the end Eleusis, with its two goddesses, seems to have been forgotten. Our attention is drawn to the *skênê*-building which represents the precinct at Eleusis (2), and during the action no one enters or exits by the *skênê*-doors, in part to recognise the solemnity and importance of that setting. For the spectators this ever-present backdrop will remind them of a cult of new life, of sacred rituals, of the rhythms of the earth, of peace and prosperity. But at line 938 Theseus promises a separate memorial for Kapaneus, whose lightning-struck body is to be a place of reverence, and by line 980 the chorus call attention to this new building. It is possible that this structure is only to be imagined, but if something is raised behind or becomes visible beside the *skênê*-building, the spectators will be seeing a memorial to war dominating a shrine of peace.

A further contrast is between the cult of Demeter with its emphasis on fertility and future prosperity and the disturbing presence of the Argives in black mourning dress and singing songs of lamentation. The women themselves admit at 63-4 that they 'have come to the fire-receiving altars of the goddesses not to worship but driven by necessity to pray and beseech'. Theseus comments at line 97 that their hair and dress 'are not fit for a festival'. Adrastos confirms that they come to Eleusis 'not to worship at the mysteries of Demeter, but so that we may bury our dead' (173-4). We should not underestimate the possibility for sacrilege here and divine displeasure. Andokides 1.110 records that it was an offence in law to lay an olive-branch (a sign of supplication) at the Eleusinion during the celebration of the Mysteries. Thus there is an immanent sense of impropriety here, in the same way that a wedding or a funeral today would be considered a sacred ceremony with which the outside world should not interfere.

The political background

What we call the 'Peloponnesian War' broke out between Athens and her allies and the Spartans with their supporters in the spring of 431. Thereafter there was open war until the Peace of

Nikias in 421, apart from a year of truce in 423/2. An uneasy period ensued in which Athenians and Spartans did not confront each other openly, until the Athenian expedition against Sicily in 415 eventually prompted Sparta to re-open hostilities. The date of *Suppliant Women* is the most uncertain of the plays of Euripides (see below); any date between 424 and 416 can be defended on some grounds. It may have been produced during a period of active fighting (424, 423, or 421), or during the truce-year of 422, or during the uneasy hostilities of the early 410s. We need to consider how a play about three sorts of military endeavour (the unjustified war, the 'just war', and the war of revenge) fits into the contemporary background of the war with Sparta. 'What is clear is that Euripides hated war and particularly aggressive war' (Webster *Tragedies* 28-9), and certainly the campaign undertaken by Adrastos and the Seven is presented in a most unfavourable light, but then the expedition launched by Theseus seems to be justified by the principles of *nomos*. Then this is followed by the abject sadness on the part of the chorus and Adrastos' apparently enlightened realisation of the utter foolishness of war (734-51), but then again by Athena's approval of the campaign of revenge by the sons of the Seven. All this needs to be set against the background of a war either in progress or contemplated.

On the political front, Perikles, the great Athenian leader, had died of the plague in 429. For over thirty years he had been a major player in Athenian politics, elected year after year as one of the ten generals (*stratêgoi*), who ran the affairs of Athens. For the last decade of his life he was virtually ruler of Athens. His detractors alleged that he resembled the sixth-century Athenian tyrant Peisistratos (Plutarch *Perikles* 7.1) and his associates were called 'the new Peisistratids' by the comic poets (Plutarch *Perikles* 16.1). So when in *Suppliant Women* we meet Theseus, king of Athens but presiding over a democratic regime (349-58, 403-8), we may wonder whether Theseus could recall or even stand for Perikles. In that case his over-reaction to the Herald's inquiry, 'who is the *tyrannos* of this land?', may have a point that the ancient audience would have appreciated. When

Adrastos delivers his funeral oration over the bodies of the Seven at 857-917, the spectators may see a further connection with Perikles, who had delivered the *epitaphios logos* that we know best, that pronounced over those who had died in the hostilities of 431. But since the *epitaphios logos* dates back at least three decades and presumably had been delivered on many occasions, it is dangerous to connect Adrastos' speech to the one speech that we know anything about. Though if Perikles' speech over the dead of 431 had become a legend in his own time, then perhaps we may want to see overtones of Perikles' eulogy of the dead as carrying over to that by Adrastos.

However, tragedy is dramatic entertainment first and political 'allegory' a distant second, and we should not ransack these dramas trying to find one-to-one equations between tragic characters and contemporary politicians. Morwood (170-1) records a variety of attempts to relate the figure of Theseus to Perikles, to Alkibiades (a young up-and-coming political figure, raised in the house of Perikles), and to Nikias, and as a counterweight against Kleon (see below). While there may be hints of Perikles about Theseus in the play, he remains an integral dramatic character and not a cover for a real politician. In any case Theseus in our play is young and a new king (580), while Perikles had been in power for thirty years and in his sixties when he died.

The 420s also saw the rise of the new politicians whom we call the 'demagogues'. The comic poets, together with Thucydides and Aristotle, consistently present a hostile picture of these leaders, especially Kleon, the first to achieve any political prominence. If we were to believe Aristophanes and the other ancient sources, they were vulgar and unprincipled men, of lower-class backgrounds, tradesmen from the market-place, who employed the tactics of flamboyant oratory and personal intimidation in their political career, who championed the war because it would hide their own wrong-doings or because they could profit from it. The truth is likely very different, that these were the *nouveaux riches*, those who had made their money rather than inherited it, who represented a new force in Athe-

nian politics, whose bold and aggressive style attracted attention, some of it unfavourable, who were in all likelihood competent stewards of the public purse and Athenian patriots at heart. We see hints of these men and of public attitudes toward them, first at 234-7:

> they enjoy wars and increase them without just cause, one so that he might command an army, another that by taking power into his hands he may behave outrageously, yet another for the sake of personal gain with no regard if the people will suffer anything untoward.

and again in the Herald's condemnation of democracy at 412-16:

> [at Thebes] there is no one who will inflate the city with his words and twist her this way and that for the sake of personal gain, pleasant and bringing much gratification on the surface, but then becomes a source of harm, and with new schemes hides his former wrong-doings and sidesteps justice.

This gives a special point to the messenger's declaration at 726-30 that Theseus is the sort of man to elect as general, who will oppose the wills of a fickle people rather than cater to them, as the demagogues were wont to do.

The date of the play

Canonically we learn and teach a sequence of the three great tragedians: first Aeschylus, then Sophokles, and then Euripides, but in reality they did not follow one another but overlapped: Sophokles (career: 468-406) and Euripides (career: 455-407), in fact, for nearly fifty years. Euripides' début is traditionally set in 455 (conveniently, perhaps too conveniently, one year after the death of Aeschylus) and his death in 407, allegedly while visiting the court of the King of Macedon, although the veracity of that whole story has been recently called

into question.[11] We have eighteen extant plays of his, assuming that *Rhesos* cannot be by him: sixteen tragedies, one satyr-play (*Cyclops*), and *Alkestis*, perhaps best described as 'pro-satyric'.[12] In addition we have allusions to, fragments from, and titles of dozens of lost plays, yielding a total of around ninety plays in all.

Of the eighteen surviving plays of Euripides we have secure dates for nine, derived from the hypotheses that accompany the plays or from comments by ancient scholars:

438 *Alkestis*
431 *Medea*
428 *Hippolytos*
415 *Trojan Women*
412 *Helen*
409 *Phoenician Women*
408 *Orestes*
after 407 *Bacchae*
after 407 *Iphigeneia at Aulis*

The remaining plays can be dated with some confidence to within one or two years using a number of techniques: allusions to or parodies of Euripides' play by another poet in comedy, possible allusions to external events or people (inferences fraught with difficulty), but principally on the basis of Euripides' increasing use of 'resolution' in the iambic trimeter, the principal metre of Greek tragedy.[13] Briefly put, resolution is the replacement of a 'normal' disyllabic foot in the iambic trimeter, either — — (spondee) or ∪ — (iamb), with a trisyllabic foot (∪ ∪ — [anapaest] or ∪ ∪ ∪ [tribrach] or — ∪ ∪ [dactyl]). In the earlier plays of Euripides resolution occurs in about 6% of the iambic lines; by the time of *Orestes* in 408, it occurs about half the time. Plotting the plays that we can date on a graph yields a rough curve, on which we can set the figures for the plays for which we do not have dates.[14] There are some irregularities, but on the whole this produces a result that other factors may assist and which is very likely not very far off.

Except for *Suppliant Women*. Of all the undated plays this

remains the greatest puzzle. It has been dated as early as 425 and as late as 416, with considerable implications for its relation to events in the outside world. The principal questions are: (1) does the play with its theme of the 'just war' fit better against a background of active war (425 to 423, 421) or against one of truce (422, 420 and after)? (2) in late 424 after a defeat by the Thebans at Delion the Athenians suffered the ignominy of having their war dead lie unburied for several days. Does this indicate a date for *Suppliant Women* of 423, in the immediate aftermath of Delion?; and (3) as the play ends with the king Adrastos swearing a public oath of Argive support for Athens, and since in the real world a four-way alliance involving Athens and Argos (as well as Mantineia and Elis) was signed in 420 and renewed in 416, do we place the play after the establishment of that accord, or in the lead-up to the establishment of that alliance? Or is there any connection at all? Finally, the metrical resolution rate of iambic trimeters is about 17%, but the two fixed points are rather distant: *Hippolytos* (428) with 6%, and *Trojan Women* (415) with 27%.

Relating *Suppliant Women* to a time of war or of uneasy peace must be a matter of personal judgement. The play does raise the question of when it is right to go to war, and this might fit better in a time when there was no active war on. On this reasoning 423/2, the year of truce, might be the optimal date, but if we were given trustworthy evidence that the play belonged to wartime (424 or 423), no one would be overly concerned on this point. A date of 421 would mean a performance just before the signing of the Peace of Nikias, and we can see in Aristophanes' *Peace* how a dramatist can exploit an impending event. But in view of the disturbing ending, in which more war is forecast, and in this case a war of vengeance, it would seem somewhat inappropriate to place the play in 421.

The connection to the battle of Delion in the autumn of 424 is a more difficult matter. Thucydides (4.89-101) gives the details of the Athenian incursion into Boiotia, their military occupation of a temple of Apollo, the actual encounter at Delion in which the Athenians came off worst, the Theban refusal to

allow collection of the dead until the Athenians abandoned their sacrilegious occupation of the temple, and the eventual resolution. For some it is no coincidence that *Suppliant Women* depicts Thebans refusing to allow burial of enemy dead, and thus the play is confidently dated to the City Dionysia of 423.[15] However, Euripides would have presented his request for a chorus in September of 424 and had presumably by that time decided on a play about Athens and the burial of the Seven, and as the battle of Delion was not fought until November of 424, it seems rather late to have inspired Euripides for a production in March 423. It is more likely, that if Delion were in any sense the inspiration for *Suppliant Women*, 422 should be preferred as the earliest possible date. But is Delion a necessary prelude for the play? Zuntz (*Political Plays* 4) astutely pointed out that when Aeschylus wrote his *Men of Eleusis* perhaps some fifty years earlier, there was no external event to 'inspire' that drama.

The details of the four-way treaty involving Argos, Athens, Elis, and Mantineia (Thucydides 5.32-48, especially 47) reveal an entente that bound each side equally, not the very one-sided oath that Adrastos must swear, which placed Argos in a subjugated position to Athens while committing the Athenians not at all. The oath of Adrastos,

> that the Argives shall never lead an armed force against this land, that if others do so they shall place their forces in their way, and that if they abandon this oath and come [against Athens], may their return to Argos be a fateful one (1193-5)

is nothing like the treaty negotiated in 420, and we must wonder if there is any relationship at all between the two. Argos had signed a thirty-year treaty with Sparta in 451 and thus was a non-combatant during the first phase of the Peloponnesian War (431-421). But as the end of the thirty years drew closer, there would be considerable interest in whom Argos would support thereafter. Contemporary comedy makes it clear that the Argives were suspected of playing both sides in the late 420s

and could not be counted upon as a potential ally. Aristophanes' *Knights* 465-7 (424) is in the first place an attack on Kleon:

> You don't fool me with what you're up to with Argos. His pretence is that he is making friends for us of the Argives, but in reality he is having private dealings with the Spartans.

but it does imply that Athens was exploring a relationship with Argos in the mid-420s. This is confirmed at *Peace* 475-6 (421):

> These Argives haven't been pulling for some time now; they just laugh at those who are working hard, while drawing their grain allowances from both sides,

while Pherekrates (fr. 22 of *Deserters*, during the 420s), adds:

> these god-damned [Argives] are playing both sides on us, just sitting in the middle.

This, to my mind, suits the impression of the Argives that we have in the play, who have to be driven by a divine command to adopt a reliable and subsidiary relationship to Athens. They have the potential to be useful and proper allies, but they are not Athenians and their aging king has much to learn from the ideal and idealistic young monarch of the Athenians. The formal relationship between Adrastos and Theseus is, I suspect, the product of the wishful thinking of the mid-420s rather than the actual treaty of 420.[16]

Finally the metrical evidence places the play (with a resolution of 17%) close to *Andromache* (16%) and *Hecuba* (20%), tragedies which are generally agreed to belong to the middle of the 420s. This technique cannot pinpoint a production to a given year, but it does suggest that we should be looking to the mid-420s rather than to the early 410s. My own preference is for 424, accepting as coincidence that some months later a similar, but not identical, issue of non-burial happened between

the Athenians and the Thebans. My second choice would be 422, and if so, we might consider whether it was produced along with Euripides' *Erechtheus*, commonly dated to 422 on the basis of Plutarch *Nikias* 4, which records that during the year of truce (423/2) Athenian spectators were delighted by a choral ode from that play which began 'Let my spear lie, for spiders to spin their web on' (fr. 369). Although most critics object that Euripides would have been unlikely to produce two plays on similar themes in the same year, it is still worth considering the possibility.[17] Two plays with related themes would imply a third, but no obvious candidate suggests itself. *Children of Herakles*, a play about Athens' welcome of foreign refugees, is clearly earlier, very likely in 430, for both metrical reasons (resolution of 7%) and the external consideration of Eurystheus' promise to protect Athens from a full-scale invasion by the Peloponnesians, a promise which the major Spartan invasion of 430 would have rendered null and void. Possibly *Aigeus* (a play about the father of Theseus) would be a candidate if we seek three plays with Athenian settings and characters, but I would suggest *Antiope* as the third play. It was set at Eleutherai on the border between Attica and Boiotia, had a chorus of Athenian old men, and like *Suppliant Women* showed a Theban king behaving badly and coming to grief.[18] *Antiope* is usually dated to *c.* 410 on the basis of the scholion to *Frogs* 53, which lists *Antiope* among Euripidean productions shortly before 405, but the metrical evidence suggests rather a date in the late 420s and if *Antiope* is a scholiast's error for *Antigone*, then *Antiope* could be considered as a companion piece to *Erechtheus* and *Suppliant Women* in 422 BC.

2

Adrastos' Supplication (1-364)

Supplication drama

The act of supplication was one of major importance in Greek culture and one that lent itself naturally to depiction in poetry and drama. Homer's great poem, the *Iliad*, begins and ends with arresting scenes of supplication: first the appeal by Thetis, divine mother of Achilles, to Zeus on behalf of her son recently dishonoured by the Greek leaders (*Iliad* 1.493-530), and then the heart-wrenching scene in the tent of Achilles where the aged Priam appeals to Achilles, his son's killer, to return Hektor's body for burial (*Iliad* 24.468-551). Homer's other poem, the *Odyssey*, contains what may be considered the template for a scene of supplication, when Odysseus arrives in the palace of Alcinous and Arete on Phaeacia and appeals for hospitality and transport home (*Odyssey* 7.143-66). In its purest form, supplication involved a formal ritual: the arrival of the suppliants, their distress often communicated by dress or body language, adoption of an inferior attitude to the supplicated (often kneeling), physical contact (touching the chin or knees, and in Priam's case clasping the bloody hands of Achilles), words of appeal, then release and withdrawal, and finally the response of the person supplicated. In a 'face' or 'shame' culture like that of the ancient Greeks, there was powerful drama to be had from the subordination of a proud person to another in a position of control, especially the visual display of this body language.

Suppliant Women, as its title would suggest, is one such drama and belongs to a sub-genre of Greek tragedy known as

'suppliant's plays'. Of the thirty extant tragedies, five fall into this category: Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (late 460s – the flight of the daughters of Danaos to Argos and their appeal for sanctuary), *Eumenides* (458 – the matricide Orestes takes refuge from the pursuing Furies at Athens); Euripides' *Children of Herakles* (*c.* 430 – the persecuted family of Herakles appeals to Athens for protection), and *Suppliant Women*; and Sophokles' *Oedipus at Kolonos* (written in 407/6 – the accursed Oedipus seeks refuge in the grove of the Eumenides near Athens). Certain other plays contain crucial and powerful scenes of entreaty and supplication, which allow the larger action to unfold. Most memorable of these are Medea's appeal to Aigeus in *Medea* for sanctuary in Athens (663-758), the Nurse's repeated inquiries of Phaidra as to what is bothering her (*Hippolytos* 288-361), and the powerful scene in *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (1097-1274), where Klytaimestra implores Agamemnon not to kill their daughter.[1]

A supplication play is not like a courtroom drama which rises to the climax of the jury rendering its decision, but in most cases (*Eumenides* being the exception) the request is granted reasonably early in the drama, with the subsequent scenes fleshing out the consequences of that request being granted. *Suppliant Women* for the most part follows that pattern, although Euripides has some surprises in store along the way: Theseus' initial refusal to grant the request, a testy antagonist from Thebes, and an uneasy resolution that may be no resolution at all.

The suppliants, dressed in mourning and bearing branches of supplications, have surrounded Aithra, mother of Theseus, at the hearth that lies in the centre of the orchestra with these branches and prevent her from moving from that central spot. This in turn will dictate much of the action in the first scene, as the other characters must move toward that focus in order to gain the dramatic attention. At lines 42ff. they use the formal verb of supplication, *hiketeuein*, and, although the text of 44-5 is uncertain, they do make the request to recover the bodies of their children. The participle *propiptousa* ('falling in front of') at line 63 suggests that they fall to the ground before Aithra at this

point. Later Theseus is told that these women have come 'with suppliant [*hikesiois*] branches' (102), and asks why they are here 'with suppliant [*hikesiai*] hand' (108). Adrastos begins his appeal with the same technical word, 'I am here as a suppliant [*hiketês*] of you and your city' (114).

Theseus arrives soon after to find a formal ritual of supplication in progress. But he fears also that something is amiss, as he hears 'the lamentations, the beating of breasts, and the mourning for the dead, coming from these shrines' (87-9), and comments ominously about the inappropriateness of their dress and their presence at a festival (95-7). There will be an uneasiness about this scene of supplication, an uneasiness that would not have been present when the children of Herakles sought refuge at the temple of Zeus or when Andromache opens her play at the protecting altar of Thetis. This play depends for much of its effect on a sense of uneasiness and uncertainty of where things stand. *Suppliant Women* does not operate in a world of blacks and whites, but in many shades of grey.

The opening scene (1-87)

Ancient plays did not enjoy the advantages of advance publicity, playbills, teasers etc. that would give the necessary background and much of the plot away. The *proagôn* would allow the poet to show off his actors and chorus, but how much of the plot-line or treatment of the theme could be made available? We are all too familiar today with trailers, and now internet websites, that give away so much of the plot that the actual experience of the movie is spoiled. Word-of-mouth might spread some news of what the playwright was doing, but on the whole an Athenian audience arrived with little to go on and would need to be informed of locale, characters, plot in the prologue. If only the titles of an imminent production were known, *Hiketides* ('Suppliant Women') would not be very revealing nor would it narrow down the plot of the drama all that much, since the other surviving *Hiketides* is about an entirely different group of suppliants.

Examine the opening lines of just about any Greek play, tragic or comic, and one will see how the necessary information is imparted.[2] In our play the first two lines reveal the setting: 'Demeter, guardian of this land of Eleusis', then follows an allusion to Theseus and Athens (3-4), and finally the identification of the speaker, Aithra, mother of Theseus, and (unusually) 'wife of Aigeus, by the oracles of Apollo' (7). This would intrigue the spectators somewhat, since Aithra was not usually Aigeus' wife, but a 'one-night-stand' in Troizen, who normally remained at Troizen, where Theseus was born and grew up, and who took little part in the myths of his maturity. The phrase 'by the oracles of Apollo' will cause the spectators some concern later, when at lines 220-1 Theseus disapproves of Adrastos, 'yoked to the oracles of Apollo', for giving his daughters in marriage to foreigners. Aithra then proceeds to identify the women (8-16), their mission (16-19), Adrastos (20-3), and the request that they have made of her.

But the scene will also point us in the direction that the plot will take later in the scene. Aithra is a mother; she prays for the goddesses' blessing on 'my son Theseus' (3), stresses her parenthood again at lines 23 and 27, and especially reveals her pity (an important word for Greek drama) for 'these aged mothers who have lost their children' (35). The chorus for their part at 54-70 remind Aithra that she has been a wife and mother herself and that her *euteknia* ('having good children') may solve their *dystychia* ('misfortune'), if her son should recover the bodies of their sons.

Theseus and Adrastos (88-285)

One unusual feature of the opening scene is the absence of any serious threat or opposition to the suppliants. In *Children of Herakles*, and *Eumenides*, the suppliants (the family of Herakles, Orestes) are threatened by their enemies (a villainous Argive herald, the Furies), a threat which is thwarted by the arrival of an Athenian leader (Theseus' sons, Athena). An antagonist, the Theban herald, will arrive in the second scene,

who is moderately hostile to Adrastos, but whose major concern is the possibility that Theseus will intervene at Thebes. This is not a drama in which the suppliants face any real danger or external threat, or one in which Athens must defend a suppliant on her own territory. Rather this drama will compel Theseus and Athens to intervene with force in another's territory, defending the Panhellenic *nomos* that the dead deserve burial.

Indeed the opposition within this first scene is between the suppliants and their potential saviour. We meet the two principal characters in the drama here, and both disappoint in their initial appearance. In a scene which begins with the question-and-answer stichomythia and continues with a pair of formal speeches, Adrastos does not come off well, and one of the disputed issues of this play will be whether his contact with Theseus has altered his outlook and made him someone who by the end understands what it is to be a king and a hero. He accepts his responsibility for the disastrous expedition against Thebes (116), admits that he was swayed by the young men's clamour for war (160), and kneels abjectly before Theseus, 'a grey-haired man who was once a prosperous king' (166).

Theseus begins brusquely at 110-12, comments sarcastically on the expedition of the Seven ('you did not pass through Greece in silence' – 117), and criticises Adrastos' disregard for the will of the gods (159). His refusal to help Adrastos and the suppliants is frankly disappointing, beginning on a note of simplistic philosophy:

> someone said once that mortals receive more bad things than good, but I hold the opposite view, that mortals have more good than ill. (196-9)

He moves on to what is almost a schoolboy's recitation of the Greek sophistic myth of human development, praising the deity that gave humanity reason and language, agriculture, housing, seafaring, and divination. Conacher (*Sophists* 94) finds this part of Theseus' speech 'curious', not just in its lack of any real relevance to Adrastos' situation, but in the absence of the usual

emphasis on law within the context of the community as the culminating expression of human society. In the well-known myth of evolution at Plato *Protagoras* 320-322, humans develop materially through their use of *technê* ('crafts'), but lacking the virtues of respect for others (*aidôs*) and justice (*dikê*) they cannot form political communities until Zeus imparts these virtues to them.

Theseus ends his account of human development with the smug observation, 'when a god has provided us with such necessities of life, are we not spoiled if this does not satisfy us?' (214-15). This he applies directly to Adrastos ('in your lack of wisdom you plainly reveal yourself as one of that company' – 221), both for the unwise marriages that he has made for his daughters (220-8) and for the expedition that he has led against Thebes (229-37), an expedition which Adrastos has admitted was opposed by omens from the gods (155-60). After a short lesson on the political make-up of a Greek city (238-45), Theseus concludes with a less than polite dismissal:

> And I am to become *your* ally? What acceptable reason could I give to my citizens? Go, farewell. If you have yourself not planned things well, why should your misfortune affect us? (247-9)

We note with admiration the restraint and mildness of Adrastos' response:

> I did not choose you as a judge of my misfortunes, or as my chastiser and punisher, if I am found to have acted badly, but so that I might gain a favour. But if you are not willing, I must abide with your decision. (253-7)[3]

Theseus has not behaved well in this speech, nor in his earlier questioning of Adrastos. It is not clear why he thinks that Adrastos has made a mistake in marrying his daughters to Polyneikes and Tydeus. Is it the fact that they are foreigners? This could be inferred from his comments later at 220-1, 'you

gave your daughters to foreigners'. Or is it the fact of the divine command that displeases Theseus? Also at 220-1 he will describe Adrastos as 'yoked to the oracles of Apollo', and adopting the reading of *dontôn* ('giving') for *zôntôn* ('living') in 221, we hear him declaring, 'you gave your daughters in marriage to foreigners, as if the gods were giving them'. But Aithra has told us that her marriage to Aigeus was sanctioned by the oracles of Apollo (7). Or is it that these bridegrooms were unworthy of royal daughters? Theseus will go on to suggest that Adrastos has 'sullied his splendid family with mud', by mixing (which a wise man should not do) 'unhealthy bodies with healthy ones', the actual words being 'unjust' and 'just' (*adikos/dikaios*). Tydeus has fled his homeland because of the shedding of kindred blood, while Polyneikes has been cursed by his father to shed his brother's blood.[4]

In Athenian political myth Theseus was responsible for the unification of the whole of Attica under Athens (e.g. Thucydides 2.14) and also for the establishment of democracy. In drama he appears often as the personification of the Athenian ideal, as in Sophokles' *Oedipus at Kolonos*, Euripides' *Suppliant Women* and *Herakles*, and through the person of his son in *Children of Herakles*. Spectators will expect him to live up to that ideal (champion of suppliants, crusader for what is just, undertaker of a righteous mission). While refusal of supplication was possible, both personal empathy and dramatic necessity require that Theseus grant the Argives' request. That he appears initially not to do so will make us wonder what sort of Theseus this is and what will happen to bring the plot-line back to its proper course. Of course, Theseus will change his mind – otherwise the play grinds to a halt – but the question is how and under what circumstances.

We find in this scene also one of the major and repeated motifs of the play: the interplay between young and old. Adrastos is an elder king, old enough to have two marriageable daughters, and clearly at least a generation older than the Seven. At 166 he describes himself as 'a grey-haired man', and describes how he was led astray by the 'clamour of young [*neoi*]

men' (160). Theseus will agree at 232ff., 'you were seduced by young men [*neoi*] who enjoy being honoured and who by pursuing unjust wars destroy their fellow-citizens'.[5] Theseus is a young man (*neanias* – 190, 580), who here needs the advice of a parent to set him on the right path. The older Adrastos had the counsel of the gods to rely on, but he ignored their prohibition of the war and has 'destroyed his fellow-citizens'. The ancient Greek for 'revolution' was *neôterizein* ('to do new[er] things') and Euripides plays on this negative sense of *neos* ('new', therefore 'ominous') twice in nine lines (91, 99). Euripides will be showing us in Theseus here the exception to the stereotype about *neoi*, how a truly heroic young ruler should behave.

There is an interesting crux at 250-1, where the chorus responds to Theseus' rejection of Adrastos' appeal. The text as received reads 'he made a mistake, but this is characteristic of young men (*neois*) and you should forgive him'. This would suggest that Adrastos is himself also a *neos*, clearly at odds with line 166. Some would solve the problem by deleting 166, although the implication of line 160 ('I was seduced by young men') is that Adrastos is not himself a *neos*, and he is old enough to have marriageable daughters. Others have chosen to emend the text here, altering *hêmarten* ('he made a mistake') to *hêmarton* ('they made a mistake') and *tôid'* ('him') to *tônde* ('them').

Dramatically Euripides is playing with his audience, suggesting at first that this supplication may not be granted. Supplication was a formal process, a ritualised mode of behaviour that affected both petitioner and benefactor, but it was not incumbent upon the latter to grant the supplication.[6] This is where the potential for drama lies – Pelasgos in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* admits that he is in a difficult position:

> I do not know what to do, and fear grips my mind, whether to act or not to act and take what fate may send. (376-7)

Athena in *Eumenides* does not grant Orestes' supplication for asylum immediately, since the Furies are too important to pass over and the threat they pose to her city too great to ignore

(470-9). By omitting any foreign threat until after Theseus has made his decision, Euripides makes the issue of granting the request the dramatic focus of this scene, as well as what this will say about the characters involved. Those who remembered Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis* or Euripides' *Children of Herakles* (or even his *Medea*) would expect Athens' leader to live up to his city's image of protector of those in distress who have asked for assistance. In *Medea* Aigeus grants Medea her request, done formally in the usual manner of a supplication-scene, but once Medea reveals her plan to slay her children, the chorus undermines that image by asking how Athens can grant sanctuary to a child-killer (846-9). *Suppliant Women* does much the same thing in a larger way, since the expedition of Adrastos was seen as an unjust and aggressive war and its leaders as stereotypes of arrogant and lawless behaviour. Theseus and Athens are being asked to grant the supplication on behalf of those who, in the spectators' eyes, were not worthy of sympathy and compassion. Certainly those who remembered the dramatic presentation of the Seven as monsters in Aeschylus' *Seven* or in Sophokles' *Antigone* would appreciate the significance of Theseus' disapproval.

Theseus and Aithra (286-364)

Then all changes, and the *leitmotif* of parent and child takes over. This is a play about parents and their children. It opens with a mother invoking a blessing for her son, mothers are on stage mourning their sons lost in battle, we see also on stage the children of those lost sons, the play is set before the precinct of the Mother and Daughter, Adrastos has begun the whole trouble by marrying his daughters off to two violent foreigners, Iphis will watch his own child hurl herself on the pyre of her husband, and the play will end with an emphasis on the sons who will avenge their fathers.

This is why Euripides has made Theseus' mother part of his life at Athens, so that she may first chastise and then advise her son to grant Adrastos' request. She occupies the central

dramatic focus of the theatre, and there is no doubt as to who is in control in this scene. In a sense Theseus has been in the wrong dramatic space, talking to the wrong dramatic character. He has moved away from the central area, has questioned and listened to Adrastos at the back, and thus made his decision and formulated his response in reaction to Adrastos' behaviour and that of the army which he had commanded. He would have been better advised to remain with his mother in the centre and given his attention to the plight of the mothers whom she is championing. Pity, rather than self-righteous condemnation, is his proper response.

Aithra's reply takes a number of directions to sway her son's mind. From the very start her oneness with the women is stressed: she is *geraia* ('aged') as they are (42), she too has given birth to a son (*etekes kai su kouron* – 55) as they have (*hous etekon* – 58), and unlike her son she feels pity (one of Aristotle's tragic emotions) and also community with these poor women. Aithra's persuasion is cleverly devised and begins with an appeal to the gods, the point that Theseus had emphasised in his rejection of Adrastos and the Argives. She urges her son not to be 'tripped up' (302) by dishonouring them, the same verb (*sphallein*) that Adrastos has used of his own behaviour (156). Then Aithra moves to considerations of the city and it is here that we get the stress on the laws which preserve the community:

> for this is what holds the cities of men together, when one properly observes the laws [*nomous*]. (312-13)

She advises her son that it is a source of honour to act against those who forbid the burial of the dead, since to do this is 'to confound the laws (*nomima*) of all Greece', an expression that she has used earlier of the Thebans, 'dishonouring the laws of the gods' (19). But just as Antigone, who defends her burial of her brother in part as obeying the 'unwritten and reliable laws [*nomima*]', also has a personal motive (the compulsion of the family), so here Aithra appeals to Theseus' personal motives and finally to his civic position and responsibility. We notice

that of his labours she chooses his conquest of a fierce boar, 'a trivial labour (*phaulon ponon*)', ignoring his defeat of human foes such as Skiron and Sinis, and makes the very Greek appeal to 'honour' or 'face' (314-19):

> someone *will* say (*erei*) that, when it was possible for you to have won a crown of glory for the city, you held back in fear through physical cowardice, and that while you may have fought against a wild boar, when faced with hostile helmets and tips of spears, you were found to be a coward, at a time when you should have completed the labour (*ekponêsai*).

Aithra concludes at 324-5 with an appeal to Athens' self-image as a city that gets involved and becomes stronger through labours (*ponois*) as opposed to 'inactive cities that work in secret [and] have only secret and cautious looks on their faces'. Theseus will make the same point with the herald at 576-7, 'a city that labours much (*ponousa polla*) will prosper much'. The late fifth century saw a vigorous debate at Athens about the nature of 'involvement' – the Greek is *polypragmosynê*, which for its supporters means 'getting involved', but for its detractors 'meddling in the affairs of others'.[7] Perikles' funeral oration (Thucydides 2.35-46) contains two famous statements praising Athens' policy of action rather than passiveness, the first condemning the inactive man (*apragmôn*):

> we do not say that a man who takes no interest in the affairs of the city (*apragmôn*) is just minding his own business; we say that such a man is useless. (2.39)

and the second describing the success of such a policy:

> for our spirit of daring has led us across every sea and into every land, and everywhere we have left permanent memorials of the good we have done to our friends and the ruin we have inflicted on our enemies. (2.41)

Whether or not Perikles said these exact words in 431/0 is not the point, but they do reflect the driving spirit in Athens at the time, as revealed by Thucydides in describing the enthusiasm for war, both in 431 (2.13) and again when the expedition to Sicily was being proposed (6.22). Adrastos had just touched on this in his formal appeal, 'only your city could undertake this labour (*ponon*)' at 188-9, but here Aithra firmly connects Theseus to the city of which he is supposed to be the shepherd (191).

Aithra concludes by steering her argument back to the justice of the cause ('you are setting out with justice' – 328). *Dikê* ('Justice') is an important concept in Greek drama. It dominates Aeschylus' influential *Oresteia*, underlies Antigone's defence of the burial of her brother, and in Euripides' *Elektra* brilliantly overturns the theme of *Oresteia* by showing that Orestes, by following the 'unwise commands of a god', has not acted 'justly' in killing his mother (1244). Aithra's final theme, 'for the god turns all things upside down' (331) is one that Adrastos had used to conclude his appeal, the mutability of human fortunes, 'in the affairs of men nothing remains prosperous through to the end' (269-70), and it will be picked up again by Adrastos at 741-4.

Theseus' first response is to justify his earlier words to Adrastos, but Aithra has been careful in her appeal not to mention him or his ill-starred expedition. Rather she has turned his attention to the mothers, with whom Theseus has admitted he feels some compassion (288). Theseus must make his decision on the basis of justice, his own and his city's honour, and (later) on the aggressive challenge in the herald's words, not on the basis of supporting Adrastos and the expedition of the Seven in any way. An important 'but' at 337 reveals his change of mind. He has not changed his mind about Adrastos and the expedition of the Seven, and repeats the crucial word 'tripped up' (*sphallein* – 336) that Adrastos has used earlier (156). But the appeal to his personal honour has worked, and Euripides cleverly extends his exploits to cover his desire to be 'a punisher of the wicked' (or 'of evil') at 341. He has listened to

his mother's offhand reference to 'someone will say' at 314 and in his reply expands this to include the familiar division of 'friends' and 'enemies' (343-5):

> what will those who hate me say (*erousin*) about me, when she who bore me and who fears for me is the first to bid me undertake this labour (*ponon*)?

We notice that his first remarks say nothing about the city and its reputation, though Aithra was careful to lead with that point (315), nor does he mention the laws of the gods or 'of all Greece', although he will make this argument later to the Theban herald at 563. His next comments introduce another favourite theme in tragedy: force as opposed to persuasion. This too was a dominant theme in *Oresteia*, as Klytaimestra first persuades her husband to walk the carpet of blood before she murders him, and also in *Hecuba*, where words are used to justify evil actions, and in *Philoktetes* where at 102-3 the options of persuasion and force are rejected by Odysseus in favour of deceit. Those who remembered *Men of Eleusis* will have seen the triumph of words; here Euripides leaves us in doubt, although the example of *Children of Herakles* will be hanging over our play, for in that earlier play Athens has gone to war to protect suppliants from an aggressive foe.

Then, like the Argive king in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* 365-9 and 516-19,[8] Theseus must consult his city, a city which he describes as something very like a democracy:

> I made the people to rule, when I freed this city and gave them equal votes. (353)

Critics have puzzled over his remark:

> And I think that the whole city will agree with me on this; they *will* agree if this is what I want. But by adding my explanation I would have a better disposed people. (349-51)

Theseus will be described later as the ideal general for a city to elect (726-30), and he may just be saying that as the 'good leader' (Adrastos has called him 'the shepherd of his people' – 191) the city will follow their charismatic young general in his wishes. But a more cynical view is that 'the *demos* will do as I say', misled by his youth and charisma or in fear of his power. Both approaches clearly have a connection to contemporary politics, for on the first model, as we have seen, Theseus could become Perikles, and on the second model Theseus becomes one of the dishonest new politicians of the 420s, perhaps a demagogue of the same sort as Kleon, whom both comedy and Thucydides despised, or the charismatic and totally unprincipled Alkibiades.[9] But we need to remember that this is dramatic entertainment and that to identify characters in that drama with real figures of contemporary politics is a dangerous undertaking, one open to considerable disbelief.

Readers will have noticed one word running repeatedly through the first scene, *ponos*: 'toil' or 'struggle' or 'labour'. Adrastos explains why he has assigned this *ponon* to Athens, and not some city in the Peloponnese, because 'only your city could undertake this *ponon*'. Theseus begins his reply to Adrastos by recalling a debate he once had on the nature of human life, in which 'I laboured' (*pones*). Aithra will make the matter personal by mentioning his 'trivial labour' against the fierce boar, which others will belittle, accusing him of cowardice when faced with completing a labour (*ekponêsai*) against armed men. Cities flourish through labours, she argues at 323. Theseus himself will admit that he personally cannot refuse a labour (342) and in almost identical words to those of Adrastos at 189 he sees his mother bidding him 'undertake this labour' (345).

But the great hero of Labours (*ponoi*) is Herakles, and in the late sixth and fifth centuries the Athenians were creating in Theseus their own counterpart to Herakles, who was essentially a hero of the Dorian Greeks. If Herakles has both a human and a divine father (Amphitryon/Zeus), then so too will Theseus (Aigeus/Poseidon). If Herakles had labours to perform and slew villains and monsters, then so too does Theseus on his journey

from Troizen to Athens. If Herakles brings back the girdle of the queen of the Amazons as his tenth labour, then Theseus brings back the queen herself as his bride. In the second century AD Aelius Aristeides wrote that 'Theseus and Herakles wore the same outfits and with the same zeal they tamed the earth', but earlier Isokrates had pointed out, however, that Herakles was compelled to do his labours by Eurystheus, while Theseus acted as a free agent.[10] Theseus' admission at 342, 'It is not possible for me to say no to (*apaudan*) labours', is very much like Herakles' avowal at *Alkestis* 487, 'But it is not possible for me to reject (*apeipein*) labours'. At line 113 Adrastos greets Theseus with the epithet, *kallinikos*, one usually applied to Herakles; at 714-17 Theseus will wade through the Theban army swinging the club which he wrested from the victim of one of his labours – the club was one of the canonical attributes of Herakles. The friendship between Theseus and Herakles was a major part of the legend of each – Herakles having rescued Theseus from Hades and Theseus granting refuge to Herakles at the end of Euripides' *Herakles*. There is considerable irony in that Herakles is associated with the Argolid, from where Adrastos and the women have come, the irony being that his tripod is being used to record an Argive oath of allegiance to Theseus and Athens. He is also associated with Thebes, his birth-place, the city which has behaved badly in the matter of the burial of the dead. In both instances, then, Athens will come off the superior.

The scene ends with some dramatic staging. The women, who have trapped Aithra at the central hearth with branches of supplication, drop these branches at Theseus' urging (359), and thus free Aithra from her confinement at that central location. This area would have dominated the ancient theatre, and when a character leaves that space, it is a significant moment – as when Andromache leaves her place of refuge (425) to spare the life of her child, only to discover that Menelaos has no intention of keeping his promise, or when the chorus of Danaids leave their sanctuary at Aeschylus' *Suppliants* 506ff. And significantly and visually the two characters clasp hands, as Theseus announces, 'as I lead her [his mother] to the house of Aigeus,

taking her dear hand in mind' (360-1). This play dramatises the dismembered relationship of parents and children, but here in a moment of harmony a parent and child come together and bring the first scene of the play to a close.

3

Confrontation with Thebes (365-777)

The chorus of Argive mothers is on stage for the whole of the drama, but they do not have any great choral odes that invoke the world of myth (as the Danaids recall their ancestress, Io, at *Suppliants* 524-99) or plumb the depths of the meaning of the universe (as in the controversial second stasimon in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, 863-910). Their songs are brief and always in their character as suppliant mothers. In fact in the sixteen lines at 365-80, they appeal to Argos and then to Athens (365-80) that they may obtain burial for their children, and in that time the spectators must imagine that Theseus and his retinue have returned the dozen or so miles to Athens, convened a meeting of the Athenian *ekklêsia*, pleaded and won the case for military action against Thebes, mustered the troops, and returned to Eleusis. The women conclude by recalling Athens' self-image:

> For you respect justice [*Dikê*], and you pay less honour to Injustice, and you always defend every unfortunate person. (379-80)

They wonder whether Athens will grant their supplication, undertake a pious labour, and 'make a treaty of friendship with me' (376) – literally 'cut [make a sacrifice] friendly things towards me'. They are thinking about their present situation, but such a treaty will in fact be mandated by Athena at the end, 'cut the throats of three sheep and inscribe the oath on the hollow bowl of the tripod' (1201-2).

The second movement of the play falls into two scenes, both of which have to do with Athens' confrontation of Thebes. The first begins with the re-entry of Theseus and Adrastos, along with a herald whom Theseus is about to dispatch to Thebes. But this silent figure never gets an opportunity to do his job and vanishes after a brief moment in the foreground. One might suspect that he would return as the obligatory messenger, but Euripides will employ a very different person to carry the news from Thebes. At 386 Theseus' use of the phrase *semnos tyrannos* points the way for the first part of the interchange with the herald from Thebes – 'tell this to that proud monarch of the Thebans'. Plutarch tells us that in *Men of Eleusis* Theseus relied on persuasion rather than threat of force to gain burial for the dead, and Theseus leads with that possibility, 'Theseus asks you as a favour to bury the dead' (385), pointing out that Athens is a close neighbour (*syngeitôn*) and that granting this request will earn Thebes the friendship of Athens. But he allows for the alternative ('but if they are not willing'), that Thebes should prepare for a 'riot [*kômos*] of shield-bearers', an intriguing phrase since *kômos* is the Greek word that generated 'comedy'. The messenger is to make it clear that Athens is ready to undertake a labour (*ponon* – 394) to retrieve the dead.

But the Athenian messenger never departs for Thebes. Instead Theseus sees a herald from Thebes approaching and instructs his man to wait, 'if he might relieve you of your labour (*ponos*) by anticipating my plans' (397). In plays of supplication or rescue, we need an external threat, such as the Egyptian herald in *Suppliants* or the villainous Menelaos and Hermione in *Andromache*, but here the threat is not so much to Adrastos and the mothers and boys as to Theseus and the Athenians. At 467-71 he will demand that Adrastos be either refused entry to Attica or, if already present, driven quickly from the land, but that is as far as the physical threat goes. He will spend more time warning Athens not to intervene. Nor is he a villain of the same sort as the herald in *Children of Herakles* ('Why this fuss and bother? You must return to Argos where justice awaits you, death by stoning', 59-60). Theseus calls the herald a 'clever

speaker and ready to talk on any subject' (426) and comments wryly 'you are not the silent type, are you?' (567). The herald does like the sound of his own voice, but so too does Theseus, and part of the problem of this scene is ascertaining the dramatic intention of Euripides toward this character and how he might be taken by the audience. Does he mean to be offensive and pick a fight with Theseus? Or do his opening words, 'who is the *tyrannos* of this land?' merely mean 'take me to your leader'?[1] Is it Theseus who picks the quarrel by reacting badly to the word, *tyrannos*, a loaded word in the political discourse of the late fifth century?[2] Democracy is something that Theseus is proud of (349-53), but is he as ready to leap to its defence as he is to parade his philosophical outlook on life as a commentary on Adrastos' mistakes?

Much attention focuses on the first *agôn*, the discourse on monarchy versus democracy (399-466). Does it have anything to do with the larger plot of the tragedy, or is it an example of Euripides' (and the Athenians') fondness for political debate, especially one that will make their democracy come off better? Who 'wins' the debate? Or does anyone, since the arguments of neither side are countered? At the end the herald will shrug his shoulders and comment, 'you have your opinion on the matter, I have mine' (465-6). The *agôn* in Euripides is often not resolved, nor do the events that follow necessarily depend on the resolution of the *agôn*.[3] Is the herald just a straw man, whose arguments in favour of monarchy and against democracy would be rejected out of hand by the Athenian spectators, or does he have a point that some in the theatre would support to some extent? Does Theseus come out of this debate in any better a light than he does out of that with Adrastos, where his initial rejection of the suppliants needs the counter-influence of his mother? Both sides recognise that they are playing a game, the herald consciously comparing the exchange to a game of *pessoi*, a board game rather resembling draughts (409). Theseus will use the technical terms *agôn* ('contest') and *hamilla* ('struggle' – 427-8), which show a conscious and almost meta-theatrical realisation of the roles they are playing. The herald will conclude in like terms at 465.

Is this merely a digression, playing variations on sophistic themes that were in the air during the 420s, or does it have any larger relevance? We could argue that it displays a marked difference in the characters of the two antagonists, one that will set Theseus off as the noble defender of democracy and prefigure his military victory over the Thebans in the next episode. But the herald is not the threatening villain of other Euripidean plays, and he will make some valid points, both in his attack on democracy and in his call for peace against an unnecessary war. The exchange is full of familiar political vocabulary: Theseus' rejection of 'rule by one man' (405), the 'free city', the rule of the *dêmos*, yearly terms of elected officers, rich and poor on equal (*isos*) terms. Later Theseus will appeal to 'common laws' (430-1) that are written down and afford equal justice (*dikên isên*), and the ability of any citizen, rich or poor, to present a good proposal to the city (438-9).

The herald, by contrast, repeats Theseus' phrase 'by one man' (*henos par' andros*) but alters *dêmos* to *ochlos* ('mob'), *penês* ('poor') to its cognate *ponêros* ('base'), and identifies the 'better sort' (*ameinones*) with the wealthy. At lines 412-18 he describes how an unprincipled politician 'may flatter the city for his own private gain', a passage that reminds one of Aristophanes' description of the demagogues pulling the wool over the eyes of the Athenian people (*Acharnians* 633-40). With more than a little condescension he wonders how a poor farmer (*gaponos*), even if he were not an ignorant man (*amathês*), could possibly spare the time from work to attend to matters of state. His parting shot neatly combines two themes: the *ponêros* man 'who was nothing before' becoming prominent (and thereby annoying the traditionally rich), and his use of oratory to entrance the *dêmos*.

Neither side really confronts the arguments of the other. Theseus does not answer the herald's attack on democracy in his reply, preferring to concentrate on the negative aspects of one-man rule (429-56). He calls the herald 'clever' (*kompsos*), a word with a negative connotation ('too clever by half') and a 'side-worker of words' (*parergatês* – willing to discuss any topic).

As mentioned above, his reply is full of the buzz-words of the Athenian democracy: 'common laws', 'written laws', 'equality', 'justice for all', and an allusion to the clarion call of the *ekklêsia* (438-9), 'who wishes to speak?' (*tis agoreuein bouletai*). Theseus makes sure that the herald is aware of the twin foundations of the Athenian democracy: *isonomia* and *parrhêsia*, but then descends to a stereotype of tyranny, that is as valid as the herald's rejection of democracy as 'mob rule'. A tyrant lives in fear of a rival and will, therefore, eliminate possible opposition by removing the young 'as one cuts down the grain in the meadow in springtime' (448-9),[4] an image eminently suited to the Eleusinian setting of the play and to Theseus' later mowing down of the Theban ranks. Theseus invokes another stereotype of the tyrant, who seduces young girls at his pleasure. This may well be a variation on the story familiar from Thucydides 6.56 of the assassination of Hipparchos, brother of Hippias the tyrant, because Hipparchos had dishonoured the sister of Harmodios. The theme of the tyrant as ravager of maidens is part of the attack on tyranny at Herodotos 3.80 and 5.92.

Is it significant that the herald's criticisms of democracy are not answered by Theseus or that Theseus himself resorts to what is virtually a parody of a tyrant? Those who would interpret the play optimistically (see Chapter 6) as an 'encomium of Athens' tend to see the herald as a man of straw, whom the spectators would love to hate and whom the shining young democrat will easily walk over. Those who would stress the shades of ambiguity in the play will point out that the herald scores some valid points, that Theseus has gone out of his way to pick a fight over the herald's innocuous use of *tyrannos*, that both sides employ exaggerated stereotypes, that the herald's stress on the value of not getting involved in an unjust war (476-510) is precisely what Theseus has said earlier to Adrastos, and finally that Theseus behaves to the herald with the same unpleasant dogmatism that he had previously employed with Adrastos. The use of *hamilla* ('contest') at both 195 and 428 could lead one to conclude that both exchanges are but a game to the young Theseus.

The herald shrugs off this preliminary skirmish and turns to the formal message he is to deliver: the Athenians are to reject Adrastos as a suppliant and to take no action in the matter of the dead bodies at Thebes. His first point is that this is none of Athens' business, as she 'has no connection with the city of Argos' (472), and getting involved will mean only 'heavy weather' for Athens and for her allies (475). The allusion to 'allies' is interesting, since nowhere in the story is there any indication that Athens is assisted in her mission by any other forces. 'Allies' could make the Athenians think of their own times, since the war was being fought 'between Athens and her allies and the Peloponnesians and their allies' (Thucydides 2.1). The herald reminds one of the Spartan envoys to Athens just before the outbreak of war in 431 (Thucydides 1.139), where the envoys said only that 'Sparta wants peace and peace is possible'. This is precisely what the herald will say in rather more poetic terms at 487-91:

> How much better peace is for mortals than war, for Peace is the most beloved by the Muses, and hostile to the Furies; Peace takes pleasure in fair children and rejoices in wealth.[5]

Aristophanes will make the same claim in two memorable choral songs from plays of the 420s, at *Acharnians* 978-99 and *Peace* 1127-58. The herald's lines at 481-5 ring with an uncanny echo through the events of Euripides' own time:

> When war comes up before a vote by the people, no one thinks about his own death, but refers that misfortune to someone else. If death stood visible at the casting of the vote, Greece would not be dying of spear-madness.

Thucydides twice gives us a detailed picture of such a vote for war in his own time (1.145, 6.26).

The herald moves on to a point that Theseus had himself used in his rejection of Adrastos, that the Seven were guilty of

launching an aggressive war, one of which the gods disapproved, and that their punishment (the lightning-bolt against Kapaneus, the swallowing of Amphiaraos and his chariot within the earth) was the result of such divine displeasure. But we have seen Theseus move on from that earlier position, that by supporting the suppliants' request, he is not identifying himself with the ill-fated expedition, but supporting the universal laws of the Greeks. The herald errs also in appealing to *hêsychia* ('inaction') and *promêthia* ('discretion'), since Aithra has convinced Theseus that inaction will lead only to accusations of personal cowardice and the loss of glory for Athens, an argument which Theseus has accepted readily. Aithra has rejected *hêsychia* at lines 324-5, 'inactive cities that work in secret have only secret and cautious looks on their faces'. Thucydides 1.70 has an envoy from Corinth to Sparta argue how inaction is foreign to the Athenian character and how their success owes much to action rather than to caution:

> for they are great innovators (*neôteropoioi*), quick to formulate plans and to put into practice whatever they decide ... in all this they toil with labours (*ponoi*) and dangers all the days of their lives ... and they consider an uninvolved and peaceful life (*hêsychian apragmona*) to be as much of a misfortune as active labour (*ascholian epiponon*).

The Theban herald, it seems, knows neither the other city at all well, nor its king.[6]

At 513 Adrastos attempts to confront the herald and answer his ultimatum, but not for the first time in this play is relegated to a back seat. All that he can utter is 'you most evil man ...', before he is cut off, not too politely, by Theseus with the statement that this message is meant for Athens, not Argos. Theseus' command *eche stoma* is in fact colloquial speech and can be rendered in English as 'shut up'. The proud and eloquent speaker of tradition ('the honey-tongued speech of Adrastos' – Tyrtaios 12.7-8, in the seventh century) is reduced in this play to abject misery, the humiliation of the suppliant position, long

periods of silence, and at times little notice from anyone else on the scene.

Theseus now answers the points that the herald has made. In an *agôn* the second speaker usually has the stronger arguments and the sympathy of the spectators, and although Euripidean *agônes* may not settle anything or even declare a victor, this exchange will be dramatically satisfying as the young king utters a defiant 'no' to the demands of Thebes. We do not know whether in *Men of Eleusis* Theseus made his persuasive appeal on stage to a Theban envoy (or even the new king, Kreon), or whether it was reported in an eloquent messenger-speech, or in a combination of both. But Euripides is driving events towards the outbreak of war, rather than to the success of persuasion. Theseus begins by responding to Thebes' ultimatum, 'I did not know that Kreon was strong enough to force Athens to do this' (519-20), but quickly moves to the crucial point that support for the burial of the dead does not make him or Athens an ally of the Seven, 'I did not come with these men to the land of Thebes' (523), but rather he is preserving the custom of all Greeks. 'Justice', 'law', and 'piety' run through Theseus' reply, and in so doing, he reveals the pettiness of the Thebans' refusal of burial – 'Justice has run its course, now let the dead be buried' (530-1), 'do you think that you are striking at Argos?' (537), 'are you afraid of the dead?' (543). One last attempt at persuasion ('let us who wish to behave with piety bury the dead', 559) is followed by the alternative, 'I will go and bury them by force', and thus the ground is laid for the next scene. Here the debate degenerates into an exchange in stichomythia, in this instance running only to about fifteen lines and shot with angry responses, colloquial expressions, and even a sarcastic jibe at 567, 'you are not the silent type'. The familiar words, *ponoi* ('labours') and *hybris* ('violence'), recur, as does a shot from the herald about Athenian 'meddling', the well-known *polla prattein*, neatly turned by Theseus to *ponousa polla poll' eudaimonei* ('by labouring greatly, she prospers greatly', 577), precisely what the Corinthian herald says of Athens at Thucydides 1.70. The herald's last word to Theseus

(580) restates a key theme for the play, 'you are a *neanias*' ('young man'), and in the drama we have seen the folly of young men, both in war and in politics, but this *neanias* will be the exception. While the first part of the scene may have settled nothing, the second half moves the drama along on the new course that Euripides is creating. Theseus declares at 581-4 that words are accomplishing nothing, whereas in Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis* words and persuasion accomplished everything.

Theseus prepares the expedition for departure at 584-97. At 593 he makes much of being 'a new leader with a new spear', the Greek for 'new' being *kainos*, which often carries overtones of 'strange', 'unexpected', 'new-fangled'. This description operates neatly on three levels: Theseus is leading a *new* expedition, Theseus is a *new* sort of leader (see the messenger's comments at 726-30), and Euripides is creating a *new* version of the story. He closes, however, on an unsettling note, claiming first the aid of 'the gods who respect Justice' (594-5), but adds that 'excellence means nothing for mortals, unless it has a favouring god on side' (596-7). In view of the repeated theme in the play that no person (or state) can be successful forever, this gives us pause to think.

The chorus at this point, like all good choruses waiting for the outcome of events happening off stage, sing about their predicament and about the success or failure of the mission. Parallels include the song at *Oedipus at Kolonos* 1044-95, where the chorus-members imagine themselves present at the confrontation between Theseus and Kreon, the defiant ode at *Children of Herakles* 744-85, and especially the prayer to Zeus by the daughters of Danaos at *Suppliants* 524-99. This chorus seems to be divided between two groups: one fearful about the success of the expedition ('how pale fear settles beneath my heart' – 599) and a more confident group ('this confidence surrounds me, that some fate may destroy the man exultant in good fortune' – 608-9). They close with an important word for Greek drama, *hybris* ('violence'), something often punished by the gods, when they ask Zeus to bring back for burial the 'bulwark of your city', that has been 'violated' by the enemy (*hybristhen*).

The messenger-scene

Messenger-speeches were an expected convention of the Greek dramatic experience. At one point in his dramas Euripides comes dangerously close to self-parody, when he has Elektra exclaim, while awaiting the news of Aigisthos' fate, 'it is not the case; we are lost. For where are the messengers?' (*Elektra* 759). The messenger duly appears on the next line, and his speech begins. Both chorus-members and spectators will be expecting someone to return with the news; the practice in other plays varies – a member of the Athenian army in *Children of Herakles*, Theseus himself in *Oedipus at Kolonos* (though not in a proper messenger-speech), Danaos in *Suppliants*. De Jong (*Narrative*) has argued that Euripidean messengers are not faceless and interchangeable figures in the drama; rather each has his own story and relationship to the action. We might have expected the nameless herald whom Theseus almost sends to Thebes in the earlier scene, but Euripides has chosen a prisoner-of-war from the earlier expedition of the Seven, and not just any member of the soldiery, but a servant of Kapaneus, supposedly the blackest villain of the lot, whom Zeus has destroyed with his thunder-bolt. We should remember that he is reporting to Argives, Adrastos and the chorus (and the boys, if they are visible at this point), not to Athenians, although the larger audience for his words is the theatrical Athenian audience.

The poet is always careful to establish that what the messenger brings is a *logos*, that is an account that can be believed and can be attested by its speaker. Thus he begins by describing the 'bright light of day, a reliable witness' (650) and his position as a 'spectator on a high tower', *theatês* being also the word for spectator at the theatre. He will have been thus a spectator for the visual event that he is describing in vivid words for the spectators in the theatre. Later as the Theban army yields and flees to the city, he will dance and clap his hands (719-20), perhaps another meta-theatrical allusion, this time to the behaviour of a *choreutês* ('chorus-member'). This character, it seems, is playing a number of meta-theatrical roles: spectator,

messenger, dancer. He reports that Theseus made one last try for persuasion, having his herald emphasise the lack of desire for slaughter and the need to preserve the Panhellenic law (669-72). But unlike the previous scene, where the Theban herald will talk at the drop of any hat, the result was merely silence ('Kreon sat in his armour in silence' – 673). The herald uses the significant term *agôn* at 665, that used before by Theseus at 427 and the herald at 467. The former *agôn* was a war of words, held in the realm of persuasion, but this will be an *agôn* of deeds.

If we compare this battle-scene with that narrated in *Children of Herakles* (799-866), we notice one major difference. In the earlier play the Athenian victory becomes very much a light-and-dark or good-and-evil encounter. In our play the *agôn* is a fight over dead bodies (665); in *Children of Herakles* it is to preserve women and children from certain death. Herakles' aged squire, Iolaos, becomes miraculously young again, and two stars, identified by the messenger as the deified Herakles and his celestial bride Hebe, appear amongst the Athenian forces. The newly rejuvenated Iolaos captures the wicked enemy king single-handedly. There may be some difficulties at first and men do fall, but little description is given of the actual horror of the fighting. In *Suppliant Women* we get much more of the unpleasantness of battle, especially in the grim description of the chariot charge at the start:

> the streams of red blood shed as some men fell, as others, their chariots smashed, were forcefully hurled headlong to the ground, breathing their last in the wreckage of their chariots. (690-3)

The Thebans do not yield easily, 'for the army of soldiers sown from the dragon's teeth was a powerful adversary' (703-4), and in fact turned back the Athenian left wing.[7] It was, in the messenger's words, a 'contest (*agôn*) evenly matched' (706).

As we might expect, it is the heroic young Athenian king who tips the balance in the Athenians' favour. No marvellous transformation of an old hero, no intervention of a divine presence,

but solid human action prevails. If the battle in *Children of Herakles* is 'romantic', the battle in *Suppliant Women* is 'realistic'. Theseus employs not spear nor sword, but 'the Epidaurian weapon', a club which he had taken from Periphetes, the bandit of Epidauros, and 'harvests helmeted heads with his club' (714-17). Two details intrigue the careful listener: the use of a club, which should recall Herakles' famous weapon, one of the repeated features of that hero in art, and we have seen that there may be a subtle theme in the play of Theseus as the new Herakles; and the image of the harvester, suitable for the backdrop of the precinct of the Mother, whose primal gift to humanity was the ear of grain. Theseus will halt his advance before the gates of Thebes, where the bodies that are the object of the *agôn* lie unburied, and will not cross the line into an offensive campaign, 'for he said that he came not to sack a city, but to ask for the dead bodies back' (725). The verb 'to sack' (*perthein*) is the same as that used by Kapaneus in his threat at 496-9 and a cognate of that used by Athena to the boys at 1214 and 1223.

At line 707 the messenger uses the term *stratêgos* ('general') of Theseus, and in the military context of his speech this makes sense on one level – it is the military actions of Theseus that win the day for the Athenians. But the messenger at 726-30 extends the term to cover its political usage at Athens, for the ten *stratêgoi* were the annually elected political leaders of Athens, and their areas of expertise were far more than purely military:

> this is the sort of man to elect as general [*stratêgos*], who is brave in dangerous situations and who hates an arrogant people [*laos*], who in their prosperity were trying to reach the top of the ladder and in so trying lost the happiness that could have been theirs.

Theseus has become more than hereditary monarch (*basileus*), though he is just that, legitimate son of the previous king – another reason why Euripides has made Aithra Aigeus' wife and queen-mother in residence at Athens. Theseus may be first

of all a king, but a king who has raised the people into power (*monarchia* – 352). The term *basileus* is virtually absent from this play, found only at line 444, Euripides preferring the more heroic term *anax* (as at 113, 164, 656 etc.). Again contemporary Athens looms over the drama, both in the election of a general such as Theseus and in the actions of an arrogant people that ruined their prosperity by venturing to climb too high. Whether Euripides has in mind the original decision to go to war in 431, the rejection of the Spartan overtures in 425 (Thucydides 4.41), the manoeuvrings that followed the Argive alliance of 421/0, the passage is a poignant commentary on the tragedy of Athenian politics in the last third of the century.

Adrastos has been strangely quiet during this scene. In the previous scene his attempt to confront the herald is brusquely halted by Theseus at 513. Theseus has ordered him to stay behind and 'not to mix your fate with mine' (589). In fact his role in the first half of the drama has been vastly different from the figure of earlier epic and tragedy. We have seen him lying in abject misery before the doors of the temple, lowering himself to plead to a younger king, his supplication rejected, virtually invisible in the scene with the herald from Thebes, left behind as someone else goes to remedy the problem he has created, and now ignored by the messenger who had served in his armed force. In fact that messenger blames Adrastos directly for the failure of that earlier expedition:

> [The army is] safe and fares as I wish Adrastos had fared with the Argives whom he led from the Inachos in war against the city of Thebes. (644-6)

It seems almost as if Adrastos is not present to hear this speech, but there is no hint that he has left the scene. The messenger on his arrival addresses only the women (634), either not seeing Adrastos (perhaps in an obscure position) or ignoring him altogether. Adrastos and Argos are certainly eclipsed in this play in favour of the young king and the city that gets itself involved on the side of Justice.

Adrastos' speech is an instance of the Greek tragic principle of *arti manthanô* ('I know now', 'I have learned too late' – *Alkestis* 940). Human fortunes change, those who are now successful cannot count on such a state for ever (549-57, 728-30). The Thebans should not trust in their victory so much as to ignore the unwritten laws of the Greeks. Such will be the tone of Adrastos' reply, not a celebration of victory or of relief for the burial of the dead, but an exposition on wisdom (*phronein*). Argos had trusted in her strength, especially that of her young men. And then he lets slip a new and shocking piece of information, that Eteokles had proposed moderate terms for an agreement, but that Argos in its arrogant pride (*hybris*) rejected these;

> But when Eteokles was proposing a settlement, asking only moderate terms, we were not willing to accept, and so we were destroyed. And likewise when the misguided people of Thebes, successful in their turn, behaved arrogantly, like a poor man with new-found wealth, they were destroyed in turn. (739-44)

This is a new addition to the story, for the standard account is either that Eteokles was unwilling to yield power to his brother according to their agreement (as in *Phoenician Women* [69-80] and *Oedipus at Kolonos* [1291-1307]) or that Polyneikes is a naked aggressor bent on a grab for power (as in *Antigone* [198-202]).[8] Again I suspect that contemporary events loom over the story, since we know from Thucydides 4.41 that the Spartans made frequent overtures to recover the captives from Pylos in 425, but that the Athenians constantly held out for more. Adrastos' final words express very neatly the different dramatic approaches taken by Aeschylus in *Men of Eleusis* and Euripides in this play (748-9):

> Cities, you have the power to avoid disasters through words, but you bring matters to an end, not through words, but by killing.

First Argos, and then Thebes, was ruined by arrogance and over-confidence, by not realising that prosperity is fleeting and that human 'wisdom' is only an illusion. Are we to extrapolate that Athens is subject to these same rules? Certainly Aeschylus saw this possibility, when in *Persians* he has the ghost of Dareios warn that 'Zeus is a punisher of over-proud thoughts, a severe assessor' (827). He may on one level be speaking to his son and other Persians, but the ethical thought is very Greek, and should have rung warning bells with its audience in 472. In view of the messenger's description of an arrogant people who have thrown away their prosperity (728-30), we may wonder if Athens were the unspoken third city.

Tragic messengers usually say their piece and vanish, often with a nice tag to round off their oration. But this messenger remains for an exchange in stichomythia from 750-77. There is more information to be divulged and the next scene must be set up. There is the neat, but unnecessary, detail of how this prisoner-of-war has escaped, but more important is the information about the burial of the rank-and-file on the Athenian side of the mountains, at Eleutherai. This had been a Boiotian village, which had become part of Attica in the sixth century, and the cult title of Dionysos Eleuthereus is said to reflect his first arrival in Attica at that village (hence the procession from Eleutherai to Athens as a preliminary to the City Dionysia). It was also the setting of Euripides' lost *Antiope*, a play which included the punishment and overthrow of an impious king of Thebes, and which I have conjectured was produced with *Suppliant Women*.

No servant or slave was detailed to remove and prepare the bodies of the leaders for burial. Theseus himself performed that task, and although a line is lost at 763, in which Theseus would have been mentioned explicitly, the *autos* ('himself') of 765 and the third person singular of 766 can be none other than he. Again Adrastos says the wrong thing and is immediately corrected by the messenger:

ADRASTOS: That was a terrible [*deinon*] burden and one that carried shame.
MESSENGER: How are the misfortunes of others a shameful thing?

Adrastos' attempt to share the fate of his generals is similarly rebuffed by the messenger:

ADRASTOS: How I wish I could have died with them.
MESSENGER: Your tears accomplish nothing and only cause these women to weep.

How does Adrastos leave at this point? With the messenger, through the distant *eisodos* (Kovacs 91)? Or as Morwood proposes, through a different *eisodos*? The latter might seem more appropriate in light of the messenger's virtual ignoring of Adrastos at the start and his rebukes at the end. To have them leave together might indicate some rapport between them. Perhaps we should imagine the messenger leaving by the local *eisodos*, to carry his news to the city.

Collard has observed that episodes in tragedy often end with a moral maxim. Aithra closed her opening speech with an observation about women who are wise working through their menfolk (40-1), and here Adrastos picks up a sentiment that is as old as Homer (*Iliad* 9.401-9), that life is the one thing humans cannot get back:

human life, this is the only thing that mortals can spend and not recover; there are ways and means for material things. (775-7)

This scene essentially completes the main plot of the drama: the intervention of Athens and the recovery of the bodies. It has shown us a quite different Theseus from the voluble and impatient young ruler, who has reacted too quickly and too dogmatically to the supplication of Adrastos and the mothers. We see him defend democracy in a scene which in part explains the

ancient assessment ('this play is an encomium of Athens'), but at the same time we do notice that the herald's criticisms of democracy are never answered directly by Theseus, and that both sides have resorted to stereotypical presentations of the flaws in the other's argument – democracy is 'mob rule', a king or tyrant is governed by insatiable appetites from which no one is safe. In the ultimatum about intervention the herald does employ some of the arguments and the moral ground that Theseus had employed earlier to reject Athens' involvement, but Theseus has moved on from this initial position, and thus one is not surprised to see this earnest young hero, champion of his state, move to intervene in defence of the laws of the Greeks and the cause of Justice, carefully distancing himself from Adrastos and the earlier expedition, which the gods themselves had opposed.

Those who stress the shades of ambiguity in the play will observe that the scene with the herald is not conclusive in its *agôn*, but then the *agôn* in Euripides does not always settle an issue or determine a plot-line as it does in comedy. Spectators who knew or had seen Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis* will watch as the persuasion by words fails before the force of arms. Euripides will make this point firmly by the moralising words of Adrastos at 734-49, and by adding a new twist to the story, that Eteokles had made a genuine and reasonable attempt at resolving the matter (739-40). The battle in this play is not the romantic sweeping of the enemy from the field and the single-handed capture of the enemy leader that we hear about in *Children of Herakles*, but a realistic account in which men die on both sides. And there is more to come. If this were solely a play about Athens, its young and heroic leader, and her intervention to support a just cause, then we should expect the drama to end soon. But several controversial scenes remain, the mourning of the dead, the funeral oration, and the dramatic scene with Euadne and her father. There may be glory in this scene, but there are more than a few disturbing notes, and we are not allowed to forget that the gods punish *hybris* and that no one (or no city) can count on success without end.

4

Mourning the Dead (778-1113)

The first part of the play is over. The supplication of the Argive mothers and Adrastos has been successful. The young king of Athens has responded to their appeal, intervened in affairs at Thebes, defeated the enemy largely by his own heroic efforts, and behaved very properly in stopping short of the city of Thebes. The first scenes have turned on the excuse for war – when is it right to go to war? When does one state legitimately get itself involved with the affairs of another? Is there such a thing as a 'just war'?

The second part of the play will deal with the effects of war, with sadness and mourning, with the aftermath and the renewal of war. Adrastos has begun this theme with his closing words after the messenger-speech:

> I shall go now so that I may meet the dead and raise my hand in farewell and let pour the tear-filled songs of Death, addressing those friends, who have left me here alone, poor man, and for whom I weep. (772-5)

Here during the two short strophes by the mothers (778-93), Adrastos has gone off and met the procession of the dead and now with Theseus brings them into the orchestra. There will have been five bodies at the most, since Polyneikes was buried in his native Theban soil and Amphiaraos swallowed up whole by the earth. These two are mentioned in the subsequent funeral oration, but by Theseus, not Adrastos, and as a footnote to the larger eulogies. Later five urns will be handed over to the

boys to carry back to Argos. But the actual number is less significant than the collective total.

Both the chorus and Adrastos express the sentiments common to such *kommoi* and laments: the wish to die (795-7), the address to the dead (802-4), the unworthy death of loved ones (813 – although the expedition of the Seven was undertaken without the will of the gods), and the desire never to have had children (822-3). But at the end of the *kommos* Adrastos expresses a death-wish in language particularly suited to the story: 'may the plain of the earth swallow me up' (829), a clear reference to the fate of Amphiaraos (500-1, 925-7); 'may a whirlwind tear me apart' (830), not as specific a reference, but perhaps recalling the wind and dust that attended the battle (687-8); and 'may a burst of Zeus' fire fall upon my head' (831), again a clear reference to the fate of Kapaneus. The *kommos* ends with a chilling allusion to the traditional myth of Oedipus and his sons, one that ran through Aeschylus' *Seven*:

> you saw marriages that proved bitter, heard the word of Apollo that proved bitter. Leaving the house of Oedipus has come upon us the cause of much lament, a Fury. (832-6)

The crucial choral ode in *Seven* (720-91), wherein the cycle of the curse upon the house of Laios is revealed, ends with the powerful statement, 'and now I tremble lest the swift-footed Fury bring matters to fulfilment' (*Seven* 790-1). The last word in both odes is *Erinys*, 'Fury'.

Theseus begins in an offhand manner. The text of these lines (838ff.) is in poor shape and, as transmitted in the text, might suggest that Theseus is talking to someone other than Adrastos – compare his entry in conversation with the herald at 381ff. – and then spies Adrastos, who will give him better information. But most scholars accept emendations that make Adrastos the sole object of Theseus' inquiries.[1] He asks how was it that these men were so pre-eminent in *eupsychia* ('courage', 'bravery'), a term whose associations are with the physical and the military.

Here we encounter the first of many problems with this scene. Earlier in the play Theseus has contrasted *eupsychia* with *euboulia* ('good sense'):

> ADRASTOS: The shouting of young men confounded me.
> THESEUS: So you preferred *eupsychia* over *euboulia*? (160-1)

There it seems that *eupsychia* is not something to be commended, although elsewhere in Euripides the word generally possesses a more positive sense.[2]

A curious phrase occurs at 842-3, 'speak, since you are the wiser, to the young ones of these citizens, for you are knowledgeable'. Asking Adrastos to speak may allude to his reputation for public speaking, but who are the 'the young ones of these citizens'? The first and most obvious answer is that they are the boys, the sons of the Seven, who would perhaps sit at Adrastos' feet and serve as the audience for his funeral oration. But 'citizens' (*astoi*) is an odd term to use of Argives in a foreign land, unless we understand a missing 'your' in the sense. Some have seen a meta-theatrical reference at work here, on which the 'young ones of these citizens' become young members among the spectators, particularly the war orphans whom the city had honoured at that very festival. Can we have the best of both worlds by having Adrastos address the boys, who would be positioned between him and the spectators, so that the honoured Athenian youth would be in the background and thus included in his address?

Next there is a puzzling couplet (844-5), 'for I saw [or 'they saw', *eidon*] their brave deeds, too great to describe in words, by which they hoped to capture the city'. But Theseus did not witness their exploits. Only Adrastos can claim that knowledge, and for that reason some have moved these lines to follow 859, at the beginning of Adrastos' speech, where the *gar* in 844 allows Adrastos to claim eye-witness status for the *logos* he is about to deliver. If we take *eidon* as 'they saw', then the subject of the verb becomes the 'young ones', the boys, who would have 'seen', at least at second hand, the illustrious deeds of their

fathers.[3] Another solution is to emend *eidon* ('I saw') to *eides* ('you saw'), in which case the lines fit naturally and easily in their present context. But what follows comes close to crossing the line between tragedy and comedy, as Theseus cheekily admits, 'so that I not incur laughter'. He does not want a description of their behaviour in battle, 'since these are empty words for both speaker and listener ... for when a man stands opposite an enemy, he would be barely able to see what he has to' (849-50, 855-6). Here, it has been suggested, Euripides is casting a wry glance at an account in Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis*, where Adrastos would have given a glowing and particularly Aeschylean account of the seven fateful encounters around Thebes.[4]

The speech which Adrastos delivers over the corpses of his comrades (857-919) is one of the most hotly debated features of this play. The Seven against Thebes were the villains of Greek myth, almost monstrous in their cruelty and disregard for human morality. In Aeschylus' *Seven* the messenger delights in reporting the savage nature of the Argive attacker at each gate (369-685). But Adrastos will praise these men as his 'friends' (859) and turn them into exemplars of both civic and personal virtue. Several references have prepared us for the most notorious of the *Seven*, Kapaneus (496-9, 639-40, 831), but contrast the eulogy given by Adrastos (860-71) with the earlier account from the messenger in *Seven*:

> MESSENGER: Kapaneus has been chosen by lot for the Elektran Gate. A giant of a man, taller than the one mentioned before [Tydeus], his boasts are more than human. He hurls his threats at our towers (may Fortune not bring these to pass!). He says that he will take our city, whether the god wills it or not, and not even the wrath of Zeus striking the earth will get in his path. Lightning and thunder-blasts he compares to the warm rays of the noonday sun. He carries an emblem of an unarmed man carrying fire, a blazing torch for weapon in his hands. In golden letters it says, 'I shall burn the city'. Against this

> man send ... but who will stand up against *him*? Who will meet him and never tremble before his boasts? (*Seven* 423-36)

> ADRASTOS: Do you see the man transfixed by the powerful thunder-bolt? That is Kapaneus. His possessions were many, but he took the least notice of his wealth and thought no more of himself than a poor man. He would avoid the sort of man who boasted too much in banquets and scorned mere sufficiency, since he insisted that virtue did not come from food in one's stomach, but that moderation was enough. He was a true friend to his friends, both to their faces and behind their backs, and his friends were few in number. A personality without deceit, a man easy to talk to, he never behaved outrageously to family-members or to his fellow-citizens. (*Suppliant Women* 860-71)

Similarly Eteoklos is changed from a warrior whom 'not even Ares will cast from the tower' (*Seven* 469) to a young man of no great means, who would not allow his character to be yoked and enslaved by prosperity, who hated, not his city, but those who failed her (871-80). Hippomedon is dramatically changed from the huge shouting warrior, 'inspired by Ares ... with murder in his eyes' (*Seven* 497-8), to a man of the country, who rejected the soft life of the city, who desired to 'make his body a thing of useful value to his city' (887). Tydeus, who in Aeschylus is the most fearsome attacker among the Argives ('furious and eager for the fight, he bellows like a dragon at noon-time' – *Seven* 380-1), becomes a pragmatic doer, not a speaker, 'whose character was rich, ambitious, but his pride lay in deeds, not words' (902-8).

So what is the reader or spectator to make of this strange and yet powerful scene? Those who take an optimistic reading of the play (see Chapter 6) will see Adrastos as having learned and profited from his encounter with Theseus about how to view his friends in terms of proper civic values.[5] Learning or education is a repeated theme in this drama. Adrastos has had to learn

that he has been wrong, not just about the marriage of his daughters (though, as we have seen, that presents problems in assessing the oracle of Apollo) but especially about the expedition against Thebes. Theseus in his first speech claims to have acquired a philosophical outlook on life, but must learn a new lesson about pity and involvement with others from his mother. Theseus and the herald from Thebes play a game of words (*agôn*), in which each attempts to convince the other of the rightness of his point of view. Theseus says in so many words that Adrastos is to speak for the edification of 'the young ones of these citizens', and Adrastos will argue at the end of his eulogy that *euandria* ('virtue') is something that can be taught (*didakton*) – 'so teach your children well' (917). Athena will command Theseus at the end of the play 'to hear the words of Athena, what you must do' (1183), and he will reply (1227), 'I will obey your words'. In this play characters argue, listen, and learn from the exchange of words.

So on an optimistic reading, just as Theseus has learned and changed his views and says so in his reply to the herald at 517-63, Adrastos has been changed by his encounter with the younger monarch, a nice reversal of the young/old theme that runs through the play, and his funeral oration will reflect that change.[6] Theseus may have asked for an account of their *eupsychia*, but what Adrastos presents is very much an account of their *euboulia*. Civic values come to the fore in Adrastos' eulogy of his friends: Kapaneus' behaviour to family and citizens (870-1), Eteoklos' hatred for those who ran the city badly (878), Hippomedon's desire to make of himself 'something of value to the city' (887), Parthenopiaos' joy and sorrow at the fortunes of his adopted city (897-8), Tydeus' pride in his deeds (906-7). Where an aspect of a hero might have been the cause for criticism, Adrastos turns it into something positive and of benefit to the city, e.g. the poverty of Eteoklos, Hippomedon the ascetic country-dweller, Parthenopaios the foreigner.

But others have raised their eyebrows more than a little at this transformation of the great villains of Greek myth into good citizens and devoted family men. More than a few take this

speech ironically, a 'satire on the clichés of the speeches over the war dead delivered annually in Athens' (Morwood 209).[7] Theseus' description of Adrastos as 'more wise' (*sophôteros*) at 842 is to be consciously set against his rejection of that virtue in Adrastos at 218-19; Kapaneus 'easy to speak to' is consciously meant to jar with his arrogant boasts in Aeschylus and his *hybris* at 495; the tribute to *euandria* ('being a good male') completely ignores the plight of the grieving women and sets up an uneasy tension between political involvement and the non-involvement (*hêsychia*) that Adrastos will praise at the close of the scene (952).

On this reading Euripides becomes the clever intellectual questioner of traditional attitudes and virtues. In a play that will dramatise the effects of war upon women and children and how cities can be swayed by the desire of young men for war and glory, a great effect can be had by ironically turning the villains of legend into good citizens with exemplary personal lives. These young men whose desire and clamour for war has ruined themselves, their families, and their citizens are ironically presented as champions of the very institutions that they have ruined. Fitton ('*Suppliant Women*' 446) puts the options bluntly:

> we would not normally regard Euripides as a bourgeois pedant or as an incompetent artist, yet this condition seems the penalty for taking this speech at its face value.

Burian ('*Logos* and *Pathos*' 146-9) adopts a view somewhat between these extremes. For him the funeral speech is a genuine attempt by Adrastos to deliver a eulogy of the sort that Athenians were familiar with, but one that ultimately fails because of his short-comings and lack of the same moral clarity as Theseus. He calls this 'a failed attempt at genuine praise' (147), and attributes to Adrastos an inability to discern the ironic contrast between his deeply felt words in the *kommos* and his precepts of instruction for the young. Shaw ('*Ethos*' 12-13) sees the speech as Adrastos' attempt to create an heroic ethos,

but one that is essentially flawed by the innate shortcoming in the character of the Argives.

We should be wary of finding in Euripides a dark and pessimistic view of his native city. Critics often regard him as displaying the spirit of an anti-war, anti-establishment protestor of the 1960s or 1970s in North America, as anything but, in Fitton's phrase, a 'bourgeois pedant'. But a careful reading of Euripides should warn us not to look at an ancient artist through modern eyes or with modern attitudes. As unconventional as it may seem and as uncomfortable as it may be for modern intellectual tastes, Euripides is an Athenian patriot, or at least lets that attitude come through in his plays. That is not to say that he cannot or will not question established attitudes, but for him Athens is a good place and its values good ones. This play contains frequent comments about the good aspects of the city: the preserving nature of the middle class (244), the equality established by Theseus in his state (353-4), the benefits to a *polis* of equal laws and free speech (429-41), the ideal general (726-30). Athens is not a pure and unspotted paradise – it possesses the selfish rich and the envious poor, young men whose clamour for war can drag her into perilous schemes, and an 'arrogant people' who aim too high and destroy their prosperity. But Euripides is not an anti-establishment nihilist, but a patriotic Athenian, and the ideals imputed by Adrastos to the Seven are not out of line with the other sentiments in the play. This is a play with tensions and ironic sub-texts. While these heroes are admirable figures with personal and civic virtues, they are also the young men whose clamour spurred Adrastos on to an unjust war, and we are meant to see in Theseus the young leader with equally admirable qualities, who does not conform with the typical stereotype of youth, who has been well taught and learned well. It is no accident that he is an Athenian.

I would suggest another way of looking at this speech. Fitton and Rehm object strongly to the discrepancy between Kapaneus, 'a man easy to talk to' (869), and the arrogant boaster of *Seven* 425-31, and cite the earlier description from our play (494-9):[8]

> You will be aiding attackers who have died, collecting and burying those whom their own arrogance has destroyed. It was not right, then, that Kapaneus' body was incinerated by the thunder-bolt, the man who laid his ladders against the gate and swore that he would take the city, whether the god was willing or not?

But this is the only expression in our play of his arrogance, and Fitton misses the point that, like the passage from *Seven*, it is put in the mouth of a Theban messenger. 'The tradition of Capeneus is quite clear', he writes, but this is the tradition of the victors, who notoriously 'write the history books'. Rather than 'deliberate bathos', Euripides is observing with his usual acuity that victors write the myths and legends, and poses in both this scene and in that to come the question: what would the Argives have had to say about these 'ancient monsters'? That he employs the device, familiar to the Athenian spectators, of their own *epitaphios logos* to this end is a brilliant piece of theatre. He does not deny that Kapaneus was struck by a blast of lightning or that he and the other youthful leaders were engaged in an aggressive expedition, but there are two sides to every story. Read in this light, the funeral speech of Adrastos can be seen as typical of Euripides' questioning of established tradition, while maintaining at the same time a positive expression of civic values that Athenian spectators could take at face value.

Theseus adds his brief comments about the other two members of the Seven, Amphiaraos and Polyneikes, whose bodies have not been brought back, the latter buried in his own native soil and the former already taken into the earth during the battle. The Theban herald had earlier considered the swallowing up of Amphiaraos evidence of the gods' displeasure and the punishment of *hybris* (500-1), but Theseus corrects this notion by calling this the gods' own eulogy (927). Again if there is a discontinuity between the mythical tradition and the funereal eulogy, it is the former that Euripides is calling into question. Even in *Seven* the Theban messenger attests to the reverence

of Amphiaraos and reports his last words, 'I hope for an honourable fate' (589). That the sanctuary of Amphiaraos became a respected oracular shrine shows that his hope was fulfilled.

For Polyneikes, Euripides adds a new element to the myth, making him a guest-friend (*xenos*) of Theseus before he left Thebes. This contrasts nicely and pointedly with Adrastos' guest-friendship with Polyneikes, which ended in disaster for all concerned. The young Theseus, as it turns out, will have been a better guest-friend for Polyneikes than the older Adrastos. Both here and in an earlier passage (149-51) Polyneikes' exile is his own choice (*hekousios*, *authairetos*) after he has been wronged by his brother – this is not the self-willed traitor of *Antigone*, who has attacked his own city for selfish ends. In his turn, then, Theseus has similarly recast a hostile account of two of the Seven and made each more positive and sympathetic. Again I argue that it is the established tradition that in Euripides' eyes is suspect.

A short *stichomythia* follows (932-47), with a final gnomic comment from Adrastos (948-54). We should observe that, while the other bodies will be cremated on a single pyre, the remains of Kapaneus will be buried separately as one struck by lightning and thus 'sacred' (*hieron*) to the gods, further confirmation that the dismissive attitude of the herald is not the correct one. The 'grave that I shall build right by the temple' (938) will present a problem of staging that will be dealt with in Chapter 7. When Adrastos assumes that the mothers should take hold of their sons' bodies, this is forbidden by Theseus (941-4):

> ADRASTOS: Poor miserable mothers, come close to your sons.
> THESEUS: Adrastos, what you say is hardly fitting.
> ADRASTOS: What do you mean, that mothers should not clasp their children?
> THESEUS: To see them so disfigured would kill them.

Earlier Adrastos has been told rather brusquely by the messenger that his tears and lamentations will only cause the mothers

grief (770). Here he is told that for the mothers to hold the bodies of their sons will only cause irreparable sorrow and harm. Adrastos does say that, when the bodies have been cremated, the mothers can then hold the urns (948-9), but in a subsequent scene it will be the boys who receive the ashes. As often in Greek tragedy, the scene closes with an expression of a general sentiment. Adrastos addresses both the spectators and the whole of humanity in words that raise some discomfort:

> O wretched mortals, why do you take spears and kill one another? Stop this, and rather cease from labours (*ponoi*) and watch over your towns, living in peace and quiet with one another. The span of life is small, and we should pass along it as easily as we can and without labours.

How does this praise of the quiet life square with the assertion by Theseus that labours (*ponoi*) are not to be avoided (342) and that many toils mean much prosperity (577)? For all his reputed brilliance as a speaker, Adrastos has an uncanny knack in this play of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

On this note the orchestra empties of all but the chorus of mothers. Euripides writes some moving and powerful, yet simple, lyrics for these mothers:

> no longer blessed with children, no longer blessed with sons, I have no share in good fortune among the Argive women who have borne sons ... we seven unhappy mothers gave birth to seven sons, the most glorious among the men of Argos ... all that I have left are tears; in my home are sad reminders of my son, locks of hair for mourning, a head without a garland, libations for the dead, and songs ... the sort of songs that golden-haired Apollo does not accept. My weeping will wake me at dawn and I shall drench with my tears the folds of my robes upon my breast.

So far this play has been reasonably predictable in its presentation: dilemma, confrontation, resolution, aftermath. It

follows a pattern that we can trace in *Children of Herakles*, *Andromache*, or *Herakles*. The spectators might be forgiven for thinking that at 980 lines so far, they might be getting a chorus of lament, followed by the return of Adrastos and the boys with the ashes, a formal mourning, and a farewell pronounced by Theseus, foretelling harmony and amity between Athens and Argos. What they are not prepared for is the scene that follows, of which Rehm (*Tragic Theatre* 129) writes, 'nothing like [this] ever took place in fifth-century tragedy before or after *Supplices*, and it would be hard to find a more theatrically daring moment in the history of the stage'.

The chorus finish their lyrics and switch to ten lines of anapaests (980-9). Their first words, *kai mên*, call attention to something new, the resting-place of Kapaneus and funeral gifts placed for all the dead. But it is the presence of a figure above the playing-area that arrests their attention:

> and I see Euadne, the noble wife of the man struck down by lightning [Kapaneus], the child that lord Iphis fathered. Why has she taken this path and now stands on the high cliff that hangs above these halls? (984-9)

All the references to Kapaneus earlier in the play now become clear, the traditional dismissal by the herald (496-9), the messenger who served in his army (639-40), the 'arrogant people' who climb too high on the ladder (726-30), Adrastos' wish to be struck down by lightning (831), Adrastos' eulogy at 860-71, the building of a separate tomb for him (935-6). In Aeschylus Tydeus was the first and most terrible of the Seven, but in *Suppliant Women* Kapaneus is the chief of these 'ancient monsters'. When we watch a loving wife willing to die rather than be separated from him, it drives the final nail in the coffin of the traditional picture.

Critics, especially Seaford and Rehm, have explored well the link in tragedy between marriage and death.[9] In one sense a wedding was the 'death' of a woman's first life, that in her father's (or *kyrios*') home, before her removal to her new life in

her husband's home. Antigone goes to her death surrounded by perverted motifs of bridal imagery:

> my husband is to be Acheron (*Antigone* 816) ... no tears shed for me, without friends, without a bridal song I am escorted along the road prepared for me (*Antigone* 876-8) ... tomb, bridal chamber, hollowed prison-home. (*Antigone* 891)

Alkestis, the wife who had died for her husband, returns led by Herakles (acting as *kyrios*?) and veiled as a bride for her husband to receive back into his house. This play has resounded with marital and bridal imagery, and at the end, death is reversed and the marriage is renewed. Iphigeneia is summoned to Aulis on the pretext of marriage to Achilles, but sacrifice will be her lot (*Iphigeneia at Aulis* 905-6), and some have suggested that Polyxena, sacrificed at the grave of Achilles in *Hecuba*, will have worn wedding garb. *Women of Trachis* ends with both a future wedding (Hyllos and Iole) and the immolation of Herakles. This play is set before the precinct of the Mother and Daughter, whose abduction to the Underworld was the most notable 'marriage to Death' in ancient myth. At 1022 Euadne sings 'I shall come to the marriage-chamber of Persephone'. Demeter sought her lost daughter with torches (*pyrphoron* – 260) and the ceremonies at Eleusis were conducted by the light of torches, but for Euadne the torches of Eleusis become the torches that escorted her at her wedding to Kapaneus (993). The daughter of Demeter came back from the Underworld, but for Euadne there will be no re-ascent.

The term used for the 'hollowed resting-place' of Kapaneus (*thalamas*) will certainly suggest *thalamos* ('marriage chamber' – 980), in fact picked up at 1022. Euadne imagines that the sun and the moon have escorted her on her wedding procession, that the horses that draw their celestial chariots have also drawn the car to her new home. In a bold display of words she sings how the 'city of Argos has towered high her happiness with songs', in sharp contrast to the songs of grief that are all the

chorus had left at 975-6. For her reunion with her husband in death will mean an end to her troubles and the 'labours of life' (*ponous*). Adrastos' words at 954 ('to pass through life without *ponoi*') return here with a bitter ring. There are more than a few echoes of Antigone in her song, especially the desire for death, to 'lie with one's *philos* in death' (1006-8 ~ *Antigone* 73) and her refusal to 'betray' her husband (1024) – *prodousa*, a word of immense significance in Sophokles' play.

By the distant *eisodos* enters another unexpected character, identified by the chorus as Euadne's aged father, Iphis, who is also father of Eteoklos (1037), one of the Seven whose body has been retrieved from Thebes. He has come, interestingly enough, to receive 'newer tidings', the same word (*neos*) used for 'young' and for 'unfortunate' earlier in the drama. The gap between the bravado of youth and the caution of age is thus emphasised visually by their separation on stage. This is vintage Euripides: to ask the question whether Kapaneus had a family, to make his wife the sister of another of the Seven, and to make the father of both unfortunate siblings appear to witness the death of his other child.

At 1054 the reader learns, what the spectator has already seen, that Euadne is not dressed in mourning for her husband but 'has decked her body in finery', and we recall Theseus' earlier comment that the garments of the mothers 'are not appropriate for a festival' (97). If the emendation in 1055, *stolmos* ('raiment') for *stolos* ('equipment'), is correct, the term is one favoured by Euripides to denote robes or attributes of mourning, hence a powerful opposition of *stolmos* and *kleinos* ('glorious'). While it is not bluntly stated in the text that she is wearing the robes of a bride, in view of tragedy's common juxtaposition of marriage and funeral, what else should she be wearing?

The exchange between Euadne and her father takes the play in another direction. She claims her attire has a 'glorious' purpose (1055), takes for herself the title *kallinikos* (1059), proclaims her victory (*nikê*) over all other women (1060-1), and wants all Argives to know her triumph (1067). Iphis assumes

that her victory will lie in the realm of women's interests, 'in the works of Athena or in prudence of thought'. But she will claim a victory in *aretê* ('virtue'), and like Adrastos will place something ahead of *euboulia*, in his case *eupsychia*, in hers *aretê*. She will claim the excellence of a male who acts. The epithet *kallinikos* ('fair victory') is one often given to Herakles and in this play is applied to Theseus (113). Here a woman claims this title for an act of self-destruction. Herakles and Theseus dispatched monsters and threats to the civilised world, but Euadne will slay only herself, and without point. Her father attempts to forbid her at 1068, but the physical separation in the staging means that he can have as little effect on her as his earlier attempts to confine her after her husband's death (1040-3). Her leap into fire can be seen as a parallel in part to the manner of her husband's death, who was hurled down from a ladder on the walls of Thebes by the incinerating blast of Zeus' lightning-bolt. She will not be separated from him in death, she will share the same funeral-pyre, and die in the same fashion, falling from on high into fire. She leaps to her death with the last word on her lips, 'husband'.

In contrast to the reckless action of his daughter, all that Iphis can do is take the woman's role and lament passively. The staging has prevented him from taking any physical action in preventing her death, and he turns to the daughters of Argos to express his grief. The chorus pick up their earlier sentiment at 835-6 that the Fury on the house of Oedipus has 'come to us' and now include Iphis in that fate, 'Alas, you too, old man, now share in the fate of Oedipus, you and my wretched city' (1077-9). Iphis takes up the theme of young and old, wondering why mortals cannot be twice young and twice old and thus correct their mistakes when the second time of youth came along. At 786-93 the chorus lamented the fact that they married and had children ('what need did I have of children?'), and Iphis takes up this same theme, 'I have been destroyed by this desire' (1088). He speaks with unwitting irony when he claims of daughters, 'nothing is sweeter to an old man than a daughter – sons have stouter spirits [*psychai*], but are less given to sweet endear-

ments' (1102-3), irony in that his daughter has behaved not with tenderness, but with the stout spirit of a son.

As Rehm (*Marriage* 111) remarks, 'if the scene had been omitted by a befuddled Byzantine commentator, not even the most enterprising scholar would have noticed a lacuna, for no one even mentions Evadne before her entrance'. For those who read the play on an optimistic interpretation, this scene continues the reclamation of Kapaneus, and by extension the other members of the Seven, for it displays a loving father willing to cross land and sea to bring back the body of his son, and a wife whose devotion to her husband cannot allow her to live without him. If Euripides is out to tear down the established myth of the Seven as monsters, then this scene on such a reading is guaranteed to do just that. Those who take an ironic and less affirmative approach will concentrate on the tragic loss implicit in this scene, as Euadne goes to her death, not for any ethical principle (as does Antigone) or for any national cause (so Iphigeneia) or to save her family (like the maiden in *Children of Herakles*). An ironic interpretation will note also the masculine posture and claims of Euadne, the feminine and passive response of Iphis – things are sadly out of joint in the world of this play, a woman breaking from the confined space of the house into the open public space and claiming *kleos* and *aretê*, an old man possessed by tears and lamentation and perhaps taking the role of Demeter despondent over the loss of her daughter, the young dying before the old. As with so much else about this play, a clear-cut and confident answer is not easy to give. We may admire in some fashion the wife who loves her husband to the point of dying on his funeral pyre, be taken aback by the same woman claiming a victory in terms that suit a male (but then this is nothing new for tragedy), and at the same sigh deeply over the waste that the ill-advised war has continued to inflict.

5

Aftermath (1114-1234)

Although the scene with Euadne and Iphis may be the dramatic highpoint of the play, the main plot resumes as if it had never happened. Adrastos shows no awareness that his fellow-citizen Iphis has even been present, Euadne's mother in the chorus will have watched her daughter leap to her death, and if one (or more) of the boys is a son of Kapaneus, his mother will have killed herself just before he returns with the urn of ashes. Yet Iphis' closing words have an uncanny and meta-theatrical ring to them: those who are old and would prolong their lives should just get out of the way and give place to the young (1109-13). As he leaves alone by the distant *eisodos*, immediately, with no intervening song by the chorus, from the other *eisodos* come indeed the young, the sons of the Seven, a perfect visual symbol of the passage from one generation to another. They carry the ashes of their fathers, 'a burden that grief makes not easy to carry' (1125). At 798-836 we have watched and heard the *kommos* between Adrastos and the chorus at the first sight of the bodies returning from Thebes; here the boys and the chorus continue the lament over the urns containing the ashes of the dead. Since the actor who has played Iphis, probably the Adrastos-actor, must change his costume and re-enter by the opposite *eisodos*, it is likely that Theseus and Adrastos enter later at 1164, leaving the orchestra initially to the two choruses and the ashes of the dead.

Boys and mothers mourn for the dead in traditional fashion, the sons lamenting their orphaned state and a house empty of their fathers, the mothers calling attention to the waste of their labour (*ponos*) over children, the pains of child-birth, the sleep-

less nights, and the close embrace of children now dead. But has their mourning decreased in intensity from their earlier passion? Look especially at their opening song (42-86): falling to their knees (43), shedding tears (47), gashing their flesh (50, 75), uttering wails of lamentation (71), beating the breast (72), culminating with an almost ecstatic litany of grief (79-85). But by 1114-64 their passion seems to be spent; they have no strength to stand (1116-17), and display an overall feeling of acceptance and regret. Most of all, they will never hold the bodies of the dead, for, unless the boys hand over the urns at 1160 and take them back almost immediately (see 1166), the mothers do not realise their crucial request. Solon's laws restricting the intensity of mourning at Athens are well-known (Plutarch *Solon* 21.4) as is Perikles' instruction to the women of Athens not to indulge in grief too much or call attention to themselves (Thucydides 2.44-5). Is there a sense, then, that the wild unrestrained words by the mothers earlier in the play are now tempered by their association with Athens, or that Theseus' injunction against their touching the bodies (942) is intended to demonstrate a proper Athenian restraint in the matter of mourning? Learning is a repeated theme in the play. Could this be one more instance where foreigners have learned by coming to Athens?[1]

At 1142ff. a new theme emerges, one that will take us through to the end of the drama. The arrangement of the text is in some dispute, but in each of the strophes at 1138-51 it does seem that the boys and the mothers each sing twice. At 1142-4 the boys raise the prospect of vengeance for their fathers, 'father, do you hear the laments of your children? Will I bear my shield and avenge your slaughter?', to which the mothers seem to give their assent, 'May that happen, child'. 'Slaughter' (*phonos*) is a strong word and shows how strong feelings will galvanise another generation of young men, hungry for war, into yet another conflict. The boys continue at 1145-6, 'then may vengeance for our fathers come, if the god is willing', the exact words (*theou thelontos*) that Kapaneus uses as he assaults the walls of Thebes both at *Seven* 427 and earlier in this play (499).

To any spectator who knows their *Oresteia*, a call for 'justice' (*dika*) is an ambiguous one, an action that leads to reaction, blood for blood:

> Justice is exacting and shouts loudly for what is owed. For blood-stroke one must pay blood-stroke. 'The doer shall suffer' – that is what the age-old maxim says. (*Libation Bearers* 310-14)

This time the mothers seem to recognise that enough war is enough, that 'this evil is not yet asleep. I have had enough of lament, enough of pain' (1146-8), as the boys with martial gestures vow war on Thebes when they grow up:[2]

> the gleaming river Asopos will one day welcome me, general over the bronze-clad Danaans. (1149-50)

One of the ceremonies before the plays began at the City Dionysia was the presentation of armour to war orphans when they came of age, and Rehm (*Tragic Theatre* 129) has pointed out the uneasy resonance between the young sons of the Seven and these Athenian war orphans. Young men in uniform can be a source of pride and provide an upswing of feeling to the play, but some spectators will see only the futility of yet more destruction, another instance of the double-edged theme that operates throughout this drama. The young men honoured in the theatre are now warriors, while the boys in the play have yet to grow up. The *kommos* closes with only grief and pain, and the mothers' last words to their sons, 'my child, you are gone, and never again shall I look upon you, the beloved delight of a loving mother' (1162-3). Their last word, appropriately enough, is 'mother'.

The metre switches back to the more prosaic iambics at 1165, as Theseus and Adrastos enter. In his role as democratic leader Theseus formally proclaims that 'I and the city bestow these [bodies] upon them' (1168). He goes on to ask that Adrastos and the children remember and show a fitting gratitude (*charis*) for

what Athens has done for them, 'honour this city' (1172). Just as Theseus represents his city, Adrastos and the women and boys become the city of Argos (1165 – 'Adrastos and you women of the race of Argos'). So too Adrastos replies at 1176 in political terms, 'the land of Argos', 'in need of benefactors', 'to do well to you people in return', and answers Theseus' last question with a neat reply:

> THESEUS What other service is there that I may perform for you?
> ADRASTOS: Fare well, for that is what you and your city deserve.
> THESEUS: That shall be, and may you also have the same good fortune. (1180-2)

This polite leave-taking contrasts noticeably with the tone of rude confrontation and lack of sympathy that marked their first exchange at 110ff. The two leaders and their two cities have come to an understanding and an accommodation.

The verb at 1175 *steichete* ('go') is the same as that used at 258, where Adrastos and the women make to leave after the initial rejection of their supplication by Theseus. The spectators may well feel with 'fare well' (*'chaire'*) in 1181 that the play has come to an appropriate end. But for a second time Adrastos and the chorus will be halted in their tracks by an unexpected intervention. On the first occasion it was Aithra, who broke a woman's silence to instruct and intercede with her son, Theseus. Here the group is suddenly addressed by the city's patron goddess Athena, whose appearance, whether on the roof or in the orchestra (see Chapter 7), takes everyone by surprise.[3]

The goddess has words for three groups of people: Adrastos (through Theseus), Theseus himself, and the chorus of boys. At 1168 Theseus has made a present (*doroumetha*) of the bones of the dead to the Argives, but Athena explicitly corrects this generous impulse and demands a *quid pro quo* arrangement ('in so doing to benefit your interests' – 1184). Theseus is to exact an oath from Adrastos on behalf of the Argives (1191-4):

> This shall be the oath: that never will the Argives launch a hostile armed force against this land, and that if others do so, they will place their armed strength in their way. If they break this oath and come against this city, pray that the land of the Argives be horribly destroyed.

A treaty sworn between Argos and Athens brings to mind, first the oath of friendship sworn by Orestes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and then the actual historical treaty made between Argos and Athens in 420. After the verdict acquitting him of the murder of his mother, Orestes makes the following proclamation to Athena and her citizens (*Eumenides* 762-74):

> I leave now for my home and I swear to this land and your people for all the fullness of time to come, that no leader of my country shall ever come here leading well-armed spearmen. For I myself, though I be then in my grave, shall confound with misfortunes those who trespass upon these my oaths, making their journeys difficult and their paths ill-omened, and so they will repent of their labour (*ponos*). But if they behave rightly and always honour this city of Athena with allied spear, I shall be well-minded to them.

This oath is not forced upon Orestes by Athena, but is spontaneously offered by him after his acquittal, although Apollo has previously suggested that Orestes and his city will be a useful and grateful ally for Athena's people (669-73). Orestes' oath seems restricted to Argive misconduct ('those who trespass upon these present oaths'), while that prescribed by Athena commits Argos to a wider campaign of blocking any attempt to attack Athens from the Peloponnese. Orestes keeps the oath personal by visualising himself as a guardian *hêrôs* presiding over the terms of this treaty. Adrastos' oath speaks only of an unspecified destruction for Argos.

The manoeuvres leading up to the treaty between Athens, Argos, Mantinaia and Elis in the summer of 420 are described

at Thucydides 5.25-47. It is clear from the events following the signing of the 'Peace of Nikias' in 421 that the situation was more an absence of war than an actual peace, and that all sides were scrambling to make new alliances that would consolidate their own positions. Argos had already made a treaty with Corinth and was negotiating with Sparta before the four-way pact was reached. This is a very different form of treaty from the oath that Adrastos must swear. The pact of 420 was a two-way affair (Thucydides 5.47), placing the Athenians with their allies and the other three cities on the same basis – they were not to take up arms against the Athenians and allies, and the same applied to the Athenians. The Athenians are to aid the other cities in case of an enemy invasion, just as they are to aid the Athenians in the same situation. No hostile army shall be allowed to pass through *any* of the states involved in the pact, and *all* sides are to swear to and approve the treaty. The dramatic treaty is one imposed by the Athenians (or rather their patronal deity), and binds the Argives to a non-aggression pact against Athens and requires them to block any external moves against Athens. Since the oath that binds Adrastos has little resemblance to the actual treaty of 420, there is no compelling need to date *Suppliant Women* at that time. More probable is an earlier date that would reflect suggestions in the air about negotiating with Argos, although Thucydides 5.25-47 implies that Argos waited until after the Peace of Nikias before advancing its own cause. It is probably a safer conclusion that lines 1191-5 are more literary than historical, referring first to the oath taken by Orestes when Athens and Athena have accepted him as a suppliant and acquitted him of murder, and second to whatever rapprochement was reached at the end of *Men of Eleusis*, in which it is likely that Adrastos left Eleusis with a formal expression of gratitude and friendship to Athens, and what we have in our play may well be a twist on what was in that scene.

Athena's second directive is aimed at Theseus and lays down the details of a sacrifice to accompany the Argive oath (1196-212). Theseus is to take a tripod left in his house by Herakles

following the first destruction of Troy. Three sheep are to be sacrificed over this tripod and the terms of the oath inscribed inside the bowl. The tripod is then to be entrusted to the god at Delphi 'as a memorial of the oath and as a witness to Greece' (1204). The knife used in the sacrifice will be buried in the earth near the pyres of the dead at Eleusis:

> for if they ever come against this city, display the knife to them and it will set fear amongst them and give them an ill journey home. (1208-9)

The place by the Isthmian cross-roads, where the bodies were burned, is to become a *temenos* ('sacred precinct') to the god. It may be more than a little ironic that this knife is to be 'hidden' in the earth near Eleusis, the site associated with sowing and rebirth from the soil.

Finally Athena addresses the sons of the Seven. One of the epic poems of the Theban Cycle, the *Epigonoi*, told how the sons, when they grew to manhood, attacked and sacked the city of Thebes. In fact Euripides cheekily hints at that tradition at the end of Athena's address, 'called "the Epigonoi" ("the next generation") throughout Greece you will make yourselves the subjects of song to future ages' (1224-5). She picks up phrases from the boys' earlier vow to avenge their fathers: *tou phthimenou patros ekdikastan/ paterôn thanontôn ekdikazontes,* 'avenger of my dead father' (1151)/ 'avenging your dead fathers' (1215); *chalkeois en hoplois Danaïdan/ chalkoplêthê Danaïdôn straton,* 'in the bronze armour of the Greeks' (1150)/ 'the bronze-clad army of the Greeks' (1220); *stratêlatan* (1150)/ *stratêlatês* (1216), 'army-leader', in both cases of a boy. In particular the boys are to 'avenge their fathers' slaughter' (*phonon* – 1144, 1215), strong and telling terms for the dramatic context. When Adrastos decries the habit of mortals to engage in war instead of peace, the word he uses at 950 is 'slaughter' (*phonos*). The army is to be led by Aigialeus (1216-17), son of Adrastos the unsuccessful leader of the first expedition. Not for the first time in this play is Adrastos relegated to the back

benches.[4] At 1217 Aigialeus described by the key adjective, *neos*, will be both a 'new' leader and a 'young' leader, since the *epigonoi* are not to delay past the first shadow of their beards (1219) before launching the expedition against Thebes. The boys are compared to 'the offspring of lions' (1223), an image famous from *Agamemnon*, both the young cub that grew up and destroyed Troy (717-36) and the 'savage lion which leaped over the tower [of Troy] and drank its fill of royal blood' (827-8).[5] The oracle of Apollo to Adrastos (140) instructed him to marry his daughters to a boar and a lion. The boys, it appears, belong to this realm of violence and animal imagery, and will grow to emulate their fathers. Finally this expedition will, unlike the earlier one, have divine support ('such an army will you launch, with a god to help' – 1226).

Theseus disappoints many modern critics by his eagerness to accede to every syllable of Athena's request, and for the second time in this play the intervention of a female character compels him to change his mind, and in both cases the words of that female character lead to war:

> Lady Athena, I shall obey your words. You correct me so that I do not make a mistake. I shall indeed bind this man with oaths. Only keep me on the proper path, for as long as you favour the city we shall dwell in safety forever.

Some have seen a note of irony here, comparing the reaction of Orestes to Apollo's epiphany at *Orestes* 1666-9:

> Apollo god of prophecy, in your divine utterances then you were no false prophet, but entirely correct. And yet this fear kept coming over me that I only thought I was hearing your voice, when hearing in fact the voice of a fiend.

As with so much else about this play, much would depend on direction and delivery, but one might well think that Athens was faring well enough with its ideal young ruler and its *dêmos eumenesteros* (351).

The chorus address Adrastos, 'let us go', and this time they are allowed to leave. But through which *eisodos* do the characters leave? We might expect that the appropriate end for the play would be the departure of Adrastos, the boys, and the mothers by the distant *eisodos*, and of Theseus and any retinue by the local one. But it would seem that in order to 'give the oath' required by Athena to 'this man and his city', they should be going with him, that is to Athens. This is how Kovacs and Morwood imagine the action in their stage directions. Even though the Argives may finally 'go' (*steichein*) this time, they must go home by way of Athens, a neat visual symbol of how Athens has assumed control over an Argive myth. A similar thing happens at the end of *Herakles*, when Theseus takes the despondent Herakles under his wing to Athens.

Critics differ widely on the purpose of Athena's appearance. Her arrival is not necessary for the plot, since Theseus and Adrastos have come to an understanding based on *charis*, a particularly important concept in Greek ethical thought, and one that will be entrusted to human memory to preserve. The business of the tripod and the buried knife adds little to the plot-line, and the boys have already expressed their desire to grow up and exact a revenge for their fathers on Thebes (1142-51). This is not a divine intervention to restore a plot (*Orestes*) or to rescue characters (as in *Ion* or *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*). We shall have to look elsewhere for the reason for Athena's epiphany.

An optimistic reading of the play will see Athens' patron goddess, dressed presumably in her characteristic armour, giving divine sanction to Athens' assumption of the superior role in her relation with Argos. She demands an oath from Adrastos to provide a protection from future Argive infidelity, and in her telling phrase 'with the god' encourages the sons of the Seven to take their vengeance upon Thebes and thus preserve the continuity of the established literary tradition. A more negative reading, in tune with modern sensibilities, will stress that Theseus and Adrastos have already worked out a satisfactory rapport. When *charis* operates, there should be no need for

formal words to codify what is felt between members of the heroic ethos. But Athena commands that this rapport be guaranteed by an oath, one that is rather one-sided, and that safeguards be put in place to counter future Argive aggression – the possibility that Argos might need protection against Athens is never considered. Finally the encouragement of more war in a play that has depicted most movingly the effects of war on families and cities certainly could seem out of place. Do we nod approvingly when Athena tells the boys that they 'will grow up and sack the city of Thebes' (1214), seeing the established tradition fulfilled, or do we shake our heads in sadness and agree with the chorus of suffering mothers that 'this evil is not yet asleep' (1146)? A more moderate reading of the scene regards Athena as the voice of prediction that Thebes *will* fall to the Epigonoi. Thus there is no moral or value judgement being made, just the statement of the future fact and the divine approval. Burian sees in Athena's emphasis on *logoi* (1183) the acknowledgement that simple sentiments and memory are not enough, that her command 'to get that in writing' does not undermine Theseus' emphasis on *charis* but rather preserves one of the basic attributes of human civilisation, based on 'intelligence, and then the tongue the conveyor of words (*logôn*)' ('*Logos* and *Pathos*' 203-4). Shaw ('Theseus') observes that Euripides seems to be creating two universes in this drama: that of Athens, geared to the protection of the city ('civilised, beneficent, developing' – 17) and that of Argos, motivated by the desire for fame and glory, realised by aggressive warfare, and doomed to the cycle of action and suffering.

We may observe one final contrast between the opening and close of the play. It opens before the precinct of the Mother and Daughter at Eleusis, and I have noted various aspects of that myth which play within our story: parent and lost child, Euadne and her marriage to Death, Theseus' reaping a harvest of dead enemy soldiers, Iphis in search of his lost daughter, the hiding of a knife beneath the earth near Eleusis. But perhaps more important are the associations of the cult at Eleusis with peace. The play opens at a shrine devoted to female deities who

promise the renewal and rhythm of life – the associations with peace are obvious. At the other end of the play the actor who had played Aithra, the queen-mother performing a sacrifice of new life at the temple, now plays Athena, the other major goddess in the life of Athens. This deity has no mother or child, is 'wholly on the side of the father' (*Eumenides* 738), is dressed in martial panoply, and is associated with war. One might think that having Athens' patron goddess appear at the end would provide support for the optimistic reading of the play, but Athena is not always a positive and attractive deity in Greek tragedy. In *Trojan Women* her wounded pride has led her to abandon her beloved Greeks and work with Poseidon (the other national god of Athens) on their destruction. Indeed Poseidon will comment at line 68, 'why do you hate and love to extremes?' In *Ajax* she has driven the hero mad and made him think that he was killing his enemies, when he is in fact slaughtering sheep and cattle. In a cavalier and uncaring fashion she invites Odysseus to look upon his enemy in disgrace, commenting that 'is it not the sweetest laughter to laugh at one's enemies?' (*Ajax* 79). She sees only the power of the gods (*Ajax* 118-20), but it is the human Odysseus who can feel pity and understand the human situation (*Ajax* 121-6). Thus we should not assume that whenever Athena appears, she will be sympathetically received or that she in some fashion 'speaks' for the playwright. The play moves on from the despair and grief following the defeat at Thebes, and even after the successful intervention of Theseus and the Athenians, Adrastos is still moved to ask, 'O wretched mortals, why do you take up arms and slaughter one another?' The goddesses associated with peace are replaced by a goddess foretelling and approving more war.

A final theme of the play is that no one or no state can count on unbroken success. This is itself a variant of the very common Greek sentiment, 'call no man happy until he is dead', and in the play this point is made on several occasions: the poor should look to the rich and the rich to the poor (176-9), the god turns fortune on its ear (331), human life is full of reverses (550-2), the arrogant people (*laos*) that attempted to climb too high and

fell (726-30), *hybris* has destroyed the people (*laos*) of Thebes (741-4). A divine law seems to be in operation: the gods will punish those who abuse or take their good fortune for granted. Theseus' last words to Athena are, 'only keep me on the proper path, for as long as you favour the city we shall dwell in safety forever' (1229-31), attempting to find for Athens a way out of this law of human fortune. At the beginning of the play Aithra has asked Demeter, a deity associated with peace and fertility, that Theseus and the city of Athens be prosperous (*eudaimonein*). At the end Theseus asks the same of Athena, a deity associated with war. The question is whether the god that we have seen appear above or in the orchestra is one in whom we have any confidence to grant that prosperity.

A larger issue concerns the feeling that we take away from the play. Tragedy, unlike comedy, often ends with open or unresolved endings, with the sense that there is more to be said and that not all questions have been answered. For example, Medea flies off in the chariot of the sun with the bodies of her children whom she has killed, but what sort of life will she (can she) have at Athens and, in the words of the chorus, how can Athens welcome a child-murdering mother (846-50)? Taplin argued that the chorus' closing lines,

> let us go, Adrastos, and let us swear the oath to this man and his city, for the toils they have performed for us deserve our reverence

are the closest we get to a closed or resolved ending in Euripides, but with Dunn I am not so sure that all questions are answered or that the universe has unfolded in a satisfactory manner.[6]

6

Reading *Suppliant Women*

Modern scholarship has developed a stereotypical picture of Euripides: the rebel, the iconoclast, the clever and groundbreaking dramatist who would take on the established mores of both predecessors and contemporaries, unafraid of challenging, even offending, the sensibilities and preconceptions of his audiences. This sometimes leads the critic into circular reasoning: this is a play by Euripides, Euripides wrote plays with an edge or a dark side, therefore this play or this scene must have a dark aspect to it. We can see this in his treatment of Athens. In the prologue of *Trojan Women* (415) we see the national gods of Athens, Poseidon and then Athena, in an unfavourable light, preparing a disastrous end for an aggressive Greek expedition overseas. It is not a long step to seeing the play as Euripides' disapproving commentary on the Sicilian expedition currently in preparation (see Thucydides 6.22). But in that play Athens is portrayed as one of the few places that the captive women might wish to go to, if they are fated to be slaves:

> may we go to the famed, the blessed land of Theseus ... and second place for me after the holy and sacred land of Theseus would be ... (208-9, 219-20)

There is no hostility here to his city in and of itself. It is still a place where the unfortunate may be received.

Similarly in *Ion* we see a woman and a chorus who actually believe the myths of Athenian autochthony, that Kreousa's grandfather sprang from the very earth and was guarded by snakes (265-82, 999-1000). Xouthos and Ion, however, agree

solemnly that 'the ground does not produce children' (542), and in the course of the drama Athenian ethnic purity will lead to the attempted murder of an innocent youth (719-20, 1058-60, 1291-305). But at the end the Ionian Greeks, who include Athenians, will be able to boast of an ancestry from Kreousa and a god (Apollo), while Dorians and Achaians will have to make do with the human Xouthos as their forebear. There is no hint here of animosity to the city. There may well be an ironic contrast in operation: the good and mythical Athens in *Trojan Women* as opposed to Athens the fifth-century aggressor, or Athens with the divine ancestry against Athens the chauvinistic proponent of autochthony and ethnic purity. But on the whole in Euripides, Athens, especially the Athens of idealised legend and democratic propaganda, is a good thing.

So when the herald in *Suppliant Women* makes comments about the shortcomings of democracy, the danger of an ill-informed and short-sighted people, and the threats of self-motivated demagogues, we can acknowledge that these criticisms do apply to Athens in the 420s, but that does not mean that all the political allusions in the play should be viewed in a critical and ironic light.[1] When Theseus talks proudly of his role in making the people sovereign (352-3) or of his ability to get the people on his side (354-5), we do not need to look for a cynical reading of these claims, only to take them at face value.

So too with the gods in Euripides. When gods appear at the beginning or the end of his dramas, they often appear in what seems to us to be an unfavourable light, often prompting comments from mortals on stage. This happens with Aphrodite and Artemis in *Hippolytos* ('gods should be wiser than mortals' – 120), with Dionysos in *Bacchae* ('gods should not be like mortals in their angers' – 1348), and with Athena in *Trojan Women* ('why do you love and hate to extremes?' – 68). One of Euripides' favourite dramatic techniques is to exploit the discrepancy between gods as they should be and gods as they are, or between gods as they are and the higher standard that humans imagine for them. Euripides' tragedies can thus become tragedies of knowledge, first for the characters on stage and then for the

spectators in the *theatron*. But not every deity that walks onto or hovers above the orchestra must be viewed in this sort of negative light. Apollo opens *Alkestis* in a confrontation between the young Olympian god of light and the ancient black-clad Thanatos, and one will look hard and in vain for a hint of irony or a questioning about the gods. Thetis pronounces the final words on the action of *Andromache*, and for the most part she is there to console Peleus and assure a happy ending for both him and Andromache. Athena in *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* appears as an entirely benevolent goddess, intent on bringing 'what must be' (*to chreon*) to pass. In fact when she reveals at 1442-5,

> the Orestes whom you seek to catch and kill, Poseidon as a favour to me has made him able to sail across a waveless sea,

she is essentially undoing her hostility to seafaring Greeks in the prologue of *Trojan Women*. So when we witness the epiphany of Athena in *Suppliant Women*, do we compare her with her counterpart in *Trojan Women*, who 'pushes her hates and loves to extremes' (68) or that in *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*?

Critics of Euripides' *Suppliant Women* seem to be placed along a continuum that ranges from an optimistic, patriotic reading of the play, often taking literally the comment by an ancient observer, 'the play is a praise of Athens',[2] to a dark and heavily ironic reading, in which 'Euripides says one thing, but means another' (Greenwood *Aspects* 92) or that Theseus 'chose badly' when he intervened on behalf of the Argive suppliants (Mendelsohn *Gender* 223). Other critics take a position in the middle, accepting the possibility of irony in some areas, but not regarding every aspect as steeped in an aggressive cynicism: Burian ('*Logos* and *Pathos*') on the failure of Argos to live up to the Athenian ideal, Conacher (*Euripidean Drama*) on the critical depiction of the gods, Shaw ('*Ethos*') on the difference in national character between Argos and Athens. Discussion of the play tends to hang on a number of crucial questions: (1) what

sort of person (ruler) is Theseus in the play?, (2) does Adrastos learn anything in the play?, (3) how are we to take the funeral oration by Adrastos?, (4) what is the point of the scene with Euadne?, (5) what is the overall tone of the play?

Theseus

To begin with Theseus, he is in Greek drama the 'representative of the spirit of the idealised democratic Athens as a whole' (Mills *Theseus* 100), but in a sense this just moves the discussion from whether Theseus is a positive and sympathetic character to whether Euripides was sympathetic to or critical of the Athenian democracy. We are prepared for his entrance, since Aithra has sent a messenger to fetch him (36-7) and the chorus do refer to her *euteknia* ('having good offspring') at line 66. But his first scene is not what we expect, as he rejects outright the appeal of Adrastos, based on a rigorous and generally unsympathetic interrogation of the latter's previous actions. There could be good dramatic reasons at work here – the tradition in plays such as *Suppliants*, *Children of Herakles*, and (later) *Oedipus at Kolonos* has the local king easily and without question grant refuge to the suppliant, and it makes good drama for this stereotype not to be followed. The spectators are invited to wonder: is this our Theseus? Is this the representative of Athens? Mastronarde ('Rationalist') takes a more straightforward and less political view of Theseus, classifying him along with Teiresias (*Bacchae*) and Iokaste (*Phoenician Women*) as an example of what he calls the 'optimistic rationalist'.

But this leads us to inquire why and how he changes his mind, and when the obvious answer is given 'because his mother asks him to', this leads to a variety of critical opinions, depending in part on whether the critic wants a sympathetic reading of the play. More hostile critics will fasten on his mother's calculated appeal to his personal self-image 'I cannot refuse *ponoi*' (342) and to the image that his city projects, Smith finding an 'unsettling air of reality when it comes about by the chance of Theseus' mother finding the right words to embarrass

him' ('Expressive Form' 159). A more sympathetic view will stress the theme of youth and education in this play. Theseus must learn what it is to be a good king, that *logoi* are not enough, that he must feel and respect the suppliants' pain, and that respect for the laws and for justice is the mark of an ordered state and individual personality. In an abrupt and visual move he has turned from his mother and the women at the centre of the action and conversed with Adrastos at a less prominent location. Now he turns back to his mother and the two occupy centre stage.

That Theseus is a young king is emphasised by Adrastos (*neanias* – 190) and again by the Herald (580), and both Theseus and Adrastos stress that heroes are to be examples of virtue for the young in their moral education (842-3, 909-17). Much is made in the opening scene of the mistakes and folly of young men that lead to disaster (160, 250), and there may even be a hint in Theseus' opening words to Adrastos 'I once contended with others, debating the following topic' (195-6), of the enthusiasm of young men's arguments. But his mother will show him that his glib and over-confident philosophy, described perhaps too harshly by Fitton ('*Suppliant Women*' 430) as 'cold, sarcastic, punctilious, and superstitious', will not operate in the real world of human pain and emotions. He has spent the first scene contending with Adrastos, almost as if it were another of these youthful debates, and having put him away convincingly, is prepared to rest on his laurels. But in this second scene we witness how 'a good hero becomes a great man' (Morwood 6). In the scene with the Herald he shows how well he has mastered these lessons, for when the Herald uses similar arguments for non-involvement that he himself had used earlier, Theseus has moved past these to the defence of the laws that make civilisation possible. Shaw ('*Ethos*' 6) writes well that Theseus begins the play as a typical young person with an over-confident regard for *logos*, but develops into a whole person by integrating the qualities of both young and old. In that way he can criticise the youthful folly of his contemporaries and Adrastos' mistake in preferring *eupsychia* to *euboulia* (161), but at the same time he

can regard *eupsychia*, not as something undesirable, but as a quality that has its own time and place, when he asks Adrastos to praise, not the actions of the Seven, but the personal qualities that made them the men they were. We have seen the young Theseus learn and grow up in the first episode of the play.

We should, I think, take his political role as he means it, that he is both king and democrat, as part of the tradition at Athens that the city had been a democracy since the time of Theseus. When he asserts at 349-53

> and I want the whole city to agree to this, and it will since it is my wish; but if I add an explanation (*logos*), I would have the *dêmos* better disposed. For I put the *dêmos* in control by freeing the city and providing equal votes,

he is not boasting of his power nor belittling the city. Nor does he mean as Greenwood (*Aspects* 123) suggests, 'I reduced the *dêmos* to submission to one man's rule when I (nominally) set this land free and made its people equal'. Collard (*Supplices* 199) cites the strong ancient tradition for the attribution of *dêmokratia* to Theseus, while Mills (*Theseus* 103) stresses the difference between Demophon, a *tyrannos* at *Children of Herakles* 113, and the Theseus of our play – 'it is rather unlikely that Euripides' portrayal of Theseus is intended as an ironic comment on contemporary politics'. Certainly Theseus' response to the Herald shows no irony or condescension, 'it is not ruled by one man, it is a free city, and the people rule' (404-5). It is the same sentiment as that uttered by the messenger at *Persians* 240, 'they [the Athenians] are called the slaves and subjects of no man'.

Adrastos

Adrastos is rather eclipsed in this play. He was an Athenian *hêrôs*, possessed a shrine and cult at Kolonos, had a reputation for eloquence, was connected to several other myths of the tragic stage (*Eriphyle*, *Alkmaion*, *Hypsipyle*, *Nemea*), and will

have had a major role in *Men of Eleusis*. But in Euripides' play he occupies a lesser dramatic focus at the start, back-stage, in a prone position, muffled and weeping. Several critics have commented on the weak aspect of his position, Mendelsohn (*Gender* 149-51) even calling him 'feminised Adrastos' and finding parallels between him and Demeter of the Homeric Hymn.[3] He comes off the worse in his exchange with Theseus, admitting that 'the murky riddles of Apollo came over me' (138), that he went against the advice of his *mantis* (158), and preferred *eupsychia* ('bravery') to *euboulia* ('good sense' – 161). At 166 he admits to the ignominy of an older king falling to his knees before Theseus. He speaks first in the scene with Theseus (163-92), by whom his pleas are soundly rejected. To his credit he does emerge with some dignity when he responds to Theseus' somewhat pompous remarks:

> Lord Theseus, I did not choose you to be the judge and jury of my troubles, or to chastise and punish me for any wrong-doings I may be found to have committed, but so that I might get something of benefit. But if you are not willing in this matter, I must acquiesce in your decision. What else *can* I do? (253-62)

Thereafter he is silent in the first scene, as a woman (Aithra) takes over, accompanied by a significant visual shift from centre back to centre stage, and at the end will follow Theseus through the local *eisodos* 'as proof of my words to the assembly' (355). His has been the third and least successful position in the opening scene.

One of the lessons that Theseus has learned in the preceding scene is that he may champion the cause of the suppliants and show pity for their plight, without approving of or associating himself with the expedition of the Seven. As he tells Adrastos perhaps too forcefully (514-17),

> Quiet, Adrastos, hold your tongue. Do not put your words ahead of mine, for this herald has not come to you, but to me. Therefore, it is I who must reply.

As in the previous scene, Adrastos takes a back seat for the rest of the action, and at the end is again directed by Theseus, 'I order you to remain here, and not to mix your fortune with mine' (589-91).

Adrastos takes no part in the divided chorus of apprehension (598-633), and in the messenger-scene again might as well have been invisible. When the messenger makes his report to the women (634), he includes a pejorative reference to the failure of the first expedition at 644-6:

> He [Theseus] is safe and fares as I wish Adrastos had done with the men of Argos that he led against the city of Thebes.

Adrastos must be present to hear this, since there is no hint that he has left the playing-area or that he has returned after an absence. Only when the messenger has finished, does Adrastos have anything to say and it is this speech (734-51) that allows us to consider whether he has learned anything or has changed his attitude. He recognises the recurring theme of the play, that one should not trust too much to current good fortune, for prosperity will lead to over-confidence and to the retaliation of the gods for *hybris*. Here he admits and we learn for the first time that Eteokles had proposed a settlement with reasonable demands, 'which we were unwilling to accept and so were destroyed' (739-41). But this eminently reasonable observation is marred by his reaction to the news that Theseus has washed the bodies of the dead himself, 'a strange (*deinon*) burden and one that carries shame' (767) – the messenger quickly takes him to task, 'why are others' misfortunes something shameful for men?' (768). We have noted earlier how the messenger stonily rejects his expression of a death-wish at 770-1, 'your tears accomplish nothing and only bring pain to these women'.

Some think that he has learned something – Zuntz (*Political Plays* 24) speaks of his 'humane wisdom', Collard (*Supplices* 31) of his possessing as 'clear and correct a vision as Theseus' – but for others he is the same Adrastos. Shaw, in particular, draws

a sharp line between Argive and Athenian characters, 'harmonious' for Athens and Theseus, 'disharmonious' for Adrastos and the Argives.[4] In his view Adrastos is 'no helpless sufferer'; he has brought this tragedy on himself and his city, and needs to be reminded that his laments are causing pain to others. He does have his good and dramatic moments: his dignified reply to Theseus (253-62), his insight over the futility of war (734-51), and the funeral oration (857-917). It seems that it is in the one-on-one exchanges that he falters. But at the end of the play it is hard to see Adrastos as anything but sympathetic, when he responds to Theseus' dismissal with the acknowledgement of what Athens has done for Argos (1176-9). Much would depend on how the actor playing Adrastos interpreted his role and whether he always walked one step behind Theseus.

The funeral oration

It is on the funeral oration that interpretation of the play will largely depend. If it is seen as essentially cynical and satirical either of the *epitaphios logos* as practised at Athens or of national propaganda generally, then the ironic readings of Greenwood and Fitton will be strengthened. If we consider that Adrastos is looking at the world through newly opened eyes and puts the ordered welfare of his city first, then this funeral oration becomes a statement of new values for an heroic world.[5] Even if we regard the funeral speech as Euripides' wry response to something in Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis* (see 846-8), likely an account of the heroic, but ultimately fatal, deeds of each of the Seven, then an ironic tone may be present, but the essence of the speech remains a positive presentation of civic values.

How much significance are we to read into Theseus' request for an account of their *eupsychia*? At line 161 he has contrasted *eupsychia* unfavourably with *euboulia*, in a manner that might remind one of the famous opposition of Amphion (the cultural life) and Zethos (the physical life) in *Antiope*. Thus when he asks Adrastos 'how these men were by nature superior to other mortals in *eupsychia*?', is this a subtle but significant hint that,

as Greenwood would put it, Euripides is saying one thing but meaning another? But generally, as we have seen, *eupsychia* is a positive term in Euripides, rather than something to be condemned – particularly good examples may be found at *Children of Herakles* 569 of the behaviour of the maiden or *Helen* 962, that a warrior may shed tears in times of trouble, 'but I would not choose that over *eupsychia*'. It is more likely here that the spectators would take the word in its normal positive connotation – Theseus is asking what was it in their natures that made them such formidable warriors. It comes as something of a surprise when Adrastos concentrates on their civic virtues instead.

Having forestalled an account of their behaviour before battle (as at *Seven* 39-68) or of their conduct during the conflict, Adrastos does not adopt the other possible sort of eulogy, of their lineage and family background, for he wants to show how their exemplary personal character was applied to the state. Critics have been quick to seize upon the discrepancy between the picture of the Seven as monsters, as in *Seven* and the *parodos* of *Antigone*, in particular the portrait of Kapaneus as 'having no more pride than a poor man' (863), as a true friend to his friends (867), as possessing a character that 'was not false', and as one easy to speak with, as behaving with moderation to family and fellow-citizens. This, to some, is an intolerable reversal of the truth for we all know that Kapaneus was an arrogant and outrageous type, who threatened to 'sack the city, god willing or not'. But as I have noted above, the only person who presents the accepted tradition in this play is the herald from Thebes, a figure from the other (and victorious) side. But what would the other side have to say? That is precisely what Adrastos presents in his funeral speech.

There are some hints of ambiguity and some shades of grey in this scene, but it is not a case of Euripides saying one thing and expecting his audience (or a part of it) to draw the opposite meaning. That these good men, loving family-men and useful citizens, have died for a bad cause makes for a deep colour of tragedy, and re-emphasises the theme of the folly of youth.

Adrastos is speaking to a young ruler, who is the exception to the rule of the destructive passion of youth, and he has been asked to speak to 'the young of these citizens', who can be either the sons of the Seven or the youth among the spectators or both. Several characters admit that Kapaneus was slain by the lightning-bolt of Zeus (the messenger at 640, Adrastos at 860, Theseus at 934, the chorus at 984-5), but only the Herald has added the theme of *hybris*. If the point of the funeral oration is to re-write the history books about the Seven, the detail of his death at Zeus' hand still remains, another instance of the uncertainty and ambiguity that runs through this play. But we should not, I think, invest the funeral oration with a deep irony, that Euripides means it not to be taken seriously or that he is attacking the tradition of the *epitaphios logos* in general.

The death of Euadne

The scene with Euadne is on one level a brilliant piece of theatre, carrying with it in visual form the themes of the play: parent and child, male and female, Demeter and Athena, the community and the individual. Just as in a modern movie or play, spectators react well and enthusiastically to the unexpected, in Euripides' play nothing prepares us for the appearance of Euadne above the playing-area. But do we sympathise with Euadne, admire her quest for *aretê*, enrol her on the list compiled by the Roman poets of 'good' women who died for love, or do we shake our heads in sadness at the waste of a life, and realise how the folly of Adrastos and the Seven has reached deep into the life of a family? Mills (*Theseus* 126) certainly takes the latter approach, describing Euadne's 'foolish and tragic sacrifice', and commenting on how she 'perverts terms such as *sophia* and *aretê*'. Burian ('*Logos* and *Pathos*') is less critical, but still regards her as 'consumed by the ideal of heroic fame'.

I think it safest to see this scene as continuing Euripides' challenge to and rehabilitation of the accepted myth of the Seven. Adrastos has shown how these men were good patriots and servants of their city, and in this scene we move from the

community to the individual family. Not only is the appearance and suicide of Euadne a brilliant *coup de théâtre* but the concept also is breathtaking, that Kapaneus, the alleged monster of myth, not only had a family, but a wife who loved him to the point of dying on his funeral pyre. Her quest for *aretê* (1063), her claim to be *kallinikos* (1059) are not necessarily something that an ancient audience would condemn as an unwarranted gender confusion, but rather consider an appropriate attitude for the wife of Kapaneus. Mendelsohn (*Gender* 205) refers to her 'outlandish claim', Smith ('Expressive Form' 165) to the 'destructive glow of heroism', but I find Collard ('Funeral Oration') closer to the mark, when he stresses the heroism of Kapaneus and the devotion of Euadne to her dead husband. In a sense the scene with Euadne and her father continues the presentation of the Seven as decent individuals in their personal lives. Adrastos has given us the picture of these men in their role as citizens, Euadne and Iphis as members of a family.

The play as a whole

In *Suppliant Women* we are never allowed to stand securely on any firm ground. Euripides is constantly making his spectators and readers think, and think again. But I do not believe that we should invest the play with a deep and cynical irony, that everything said or done at one point is gainsaid at another. The play is, as the author of the hypothesis recognised, 'an encomium of Athens', and Euripides depicts a city that dares to be great, that 'by labouring greatly prospers greatly' (577), in which the people rule. Athenians act out of pity – even the obdurate Theseus of the first scene of the play feels some stirrings at the sight of the mothers (288) – and out of respect for the common law of the Greeks. Their leader is both the ideal monarch and the ideal popular leader, and we have seen him mature into that role in the course of the drama. In a play about parents and children, it is appropriately his mother who completes his education, and I do not find much that is cynical or calculating in her appeal. Theseus has learned from her and

displays this new mental and moral understanding in the scene with the herald. He admits that neither he nor his city has ever shrunk from a *ponos*, a word of considerable significance in the play. We recall the great hero who performed *ponoi*, Herakles, but also remember the comment of Isokrates (*Encomium of Helen* 24-5) that, while Herakles did his labours at the command of Eurystheus, Theseus performed his as a free agent. 'Herakles' values are no longer in Thebes; they dwell in Attica, in the figure of his *alter ego* Theseus' (Morwood 13). An earlier *ponos* of Theseus was to slay a wild boar (317), but a more noble and revealing *ponos* will be to wash the dead bodies with his own hands (765-6), a noble gesture that Adrastos seems unable to understand.

But this basically positive presentation of Athens and Theseus is tinged with shadows of doubt throughout the drama, and this subtle undercutting is how Euripides is operating in his presentation of the story of the Seven. Theseus is not the usual paragon of Athenian virtue – compare his son Demophon in *Children of Herakles* – but has had to grow into that role. Both the herald and the messenger strike some right notes in their critique of democracy. The 420s did see the rise of the demagogues and discontent on the conduct of the democracy, the next decade would witness the ill-conceived and equally ill-fated expedition to Sicily, fuelled by aggressive leaders and a misguided people. The messenger's words at 726-30 possess an ugly resonance with the benefit of hindsight.

Individual words and phrases also give pause for thought. Aithra has been recast as the legitimate wife of Aigeus, now resident at Athens with her son, all this 'by the prophecies of Apollo' (7). But Theseus will criticise Adrastos for the marriages he made for his daughters, 'yoked by the pronouncements of Apollo' (220). Theseus draws the telling admission out of Adrastos that he 'chose *eupsychia* over *euboulia*', but later asks for an account of the *eupsychia* of each of the dead. In front of the precinct of Demeter, 'where the fruitful grain (*stachys*) first showed its shoots above the earth' (31), we see mothers who wish only to bury their dead beneath the earth (17), we hear of

tyrants who put the 'tall poppy' syndrome into practice by 'plucking the flower of youth as one lops off the grain (*stachyn*) in a meadow in spring-time' (448-9) and of Theseus in battle 'snapping necks like stalks and harvesting helmeted heads' (716-17). At the end of the play a knife will be hidden in the ground near Eleusis to ward off any future treachery by the Argives. Adrastos tells of Apollo's oracle that he should 'marry his daughters to a boar and a lion' (140), whom he likens to two violent men fighting outside his door, marriages that Theseus will criticise at 219-28. But at the end of the play Athena will plunge us back into that violent world by likening the sons of the Seven to 'the offspring of lions' (1223), not the happiest of images. This sort of subtle word-play begins to undermine the purely positive and optimistic reading that one might take at first glance.

Larger visual images carry this uncertainty in the same direction. Theseus makes a wrong visual turn at the start by attending to Adrastos in the background, rather than to the women and his mother at the centre of the *orchêstra*. Aithra steps outside a woman's usually reserved role to counsel her son for the best, and we approve. Later the same actor will play Athena, the warrior goddess, who again advises Theseus to change his plans, and this time we are not so sure, especially as that actor will have played a third woman (Euadne), who probably stood where Athena now stands, who leaped to her death, claiming the same sort of martial and masculine glory that Athena now displays for all to see. Adrastos is reduced to an inferior role in the drama, at first lying prostrate and muffled behind the central focus, while Aithra holds the centre of attention. He will follow Theseus' bidding throughout and even be halted in mid-sentence by Theseus' command to be silent (513). He and the other Argives entered at the beginning through the distant *eisodos*, but at the end they return to Argos first by way of Athens, through the local *eisodos*.

Gamble finds in the play a 'sustained and deliberate ambivalence', Fitton a constant theme of ambiguity in which 'ideals are dispensed with'. Greenwood sees the play as fundamentally

ironic, in which the whole point is that any war is ruinous, even the 'just war', while Mendelsohn states frankly that Theseus 'chose badly' in championing the cause of the Argives.[6] There is a sense among critics and recent producers of the play that events are out of control by the end, that the dogs of war are again to be unleashed. I would not go as far as these negative and ironic readings of *Suppliant Women*. Critics such as Mills or Shaw or Smith steer more closely to a middle course. Smith regards the drama as one of action, Theseus and the Athenians performing properly, and then of qualification, the results of war on the Argives. Mills wonders whether Euripides could have expected his spectators to move from an heroic to an ironic mode, while Shaw stresses the healthy character and conduct of the Athenians as opposed to the Argives who seem to operate on sine-waves of extremes. If there is an intentional irony in this play, it is more likely to reside in the depiction of the gods, a favourite target of Euripides, for much of the uneasy feeling that we take away from this play comes out of the epiphany of Athena and Theseus' eager (too eager?) acquiescence. Perhaps Euripides' own comic clone puts it best at *Frogs* 954-7:

> [I taught them] ... to perceive, to look, to apprehend, to dodge artfully, to be subtle, to suspect the worse, to consider all possibilities.

He certainly succeeded in *Suppliant Women*.

7

Staging *Suppliant Women*

We sometimes imagine that Greek tragedy was performed like grand opera, where nothing much happens physically before us, where speeches are declaimed as set pieces, where events move at a slow and solemn pace, and where a sense of earnest soberness prevails. Michael Ewans attributes this style 'more to neo-classicism than to the real ethos of Greek tragedy'.[1] There *are* set pieces of speaking in our play: the debate between Theseus and the herald from Thebes, a good messenger speech, the funeral oration of Adrastos, the formal laments over the dead. But 'drama' is 'action', and we should not assume that the ancient playwrights or their audiences would have been satisfied with such a neo-classical approach. Things were meant to happen visually before the spectators, and *Suppliant Women* does not disappoint.

Three actors

We generally accept that the ancient tragic poet had only three actors (all male) at his disposal, but even allowing for the three actors, three-way scenes are rare and usually unsatisfying until the late fifth century. For instance at *Antigone* 531-81 (443-8) Ismene joins the confrontation between Kreon and Antigone. But that scene is really a pair of dialogues, first between Ismene and Antigone (536-60) and then between Ismene and Kreon (561-76). *Suppliant Women* tends to follow this pattern. In the first scene we get a short exchange between Theseus and his mother (87-109), a longer discussion between Theseus and Adrastos (with Aithra silent) at 110-270, and finally the inter-

vention of Theseus' mother (with Adrastos silent) at 286-364. In the scene with the herald from Thebes, Adrastos' attempt at 513 to turn this into a three-way scene is halted abruptly by Theseus' command, 'shut up, Adrastos'. Similarly at the end, Theseus and Adrastos have been taking a formal leave of each other at 1160-82, but with the advent of Athena Adrastos falls silent during the final exchange. It is not until the last decade of the fifth century in plays such as *Orestes* or *Oedipus at Kolonos* that we get scenes with a genuine three-way interaction.

How were the roles divided among the three actors, and which parts were played by the *prôtagônistês*, who would be competing for the prize of 'best actor'? Theseus certainly has the largest single role in the play, nearly 330 lines, and can be assigned to the *prôtagônistês* with some confidence. Collard (*Supplices* 20-1) assigned him also the role of Euadne on the grounds that her brilliant monody (990-1030) should be performed by the *prôtagônistês*, but compare *Agamemnon*, where the demanding and brilliant role of Kassandra in fact belongs to the *tritagônistês*, or *Orestes*, where the messenger-song by the Trojan eunuch cannot be performed by the *prôtagônistês*, who plays Orestes in the same scene. Dickin has recently argued that, when a messenger quotes the words of another character, then the actor who played that other character will likely be playing the messenger's part also (in our play just over 100 lines).[2] Thus, since the messenger quotes Theseus' rallying-cry at 711-12, we should assign the messenger's speech to the *prôtagônistês*. That would bring his total to around 430 lines, a respectable leading-role.

As none of the recurring characters in the play appears in the scene between Iphis and Euadne (980-1113), theoretically any pairing of actors could have been used to play this father and daughter. I would assign the part of Euadne to the actor who played both Aithra and Athena, the *tritagônistês* as I shall argue below. Iphis could be played by either the Theseus-actor or Adrastos-actor; I would prefer the latter, as both are elderly men from Argos, in a bad situation emotionally, and neither accomplishes what he came to Eleusis to do. This pair of roles

(the recurring part of Adrastos + Iphis) I would assign to the *deuteragônistês* and these two parts would come to nearly 250 lines.[3] Dickin would switch the role of Euadne to the Adrastos-actor, so that he will be ready to re-enter with Theseus at 1114, but if we delay that re-entry until 1164, there is no need for a quick change.

The *tritagônistês* will have played four roles: Aithra, the Theban herald (as Adrastos and Theseus are also on stage in his scene, there can be no doubt here), Euadne, and Athena. There is considerable interplay between these roles. Both Aithra and Athena cause Theseus to change his mind. That actor would be playing the feminine triad of the old woman (Aithra), the wife and mother (Euadne), and the maiden (Athena). Euadne and Athena appear in the same place, the roof of the *skênê*-building. These four parts would add up to just over 250 lines.

Actor 1: Theseus, Messenger	430 lines
Actor 2: Adrastos, Iphis	250 lines
Actor 3: Aithra, Herald, Euadne, Athena	260 lines

The opening tableau

When Aithra begins to speak at the start of *Suppliant Women*, the spectators have already been treated to an arresting visual spectacle: Aithra at the altar preparing to make a sacrifice, a band of women who enter and surround her, and a male figure (Adrastos) entering with a chorus of boys and then lying face down before the *skênê*-doors. In a modern theatre with a curtain or lights, a director might be tempted to begin the play with this complicated and impressive tableau *in situ* for his audience. The opening speech of Aithra (1-41) and her subsequent exchange with her son (87-109) would tell us all that we needed to know. But in the ancient Greek theatre this was not the situation. There were no lights to be dimmed and then raised, no curtain to be raised or drawn aside. The spectators will have seen four separate actions take place: (1) the entry of Aithra

(with attendants?) to perform the sacrifice of the Proerosia at the altar before the precinct; (2) the sudden entry of the mothers, who surround her with suppliant branches and prevent her from leaving the altar; (3) the arrival of Adrastos and the boys, who take up a position before the *skênê*-doors; and (4) the despatch by Aithra of a messenger to her son, Theseus.[4] These constitute far more than the simple entry of a character or characters, coming into the orchestra to begin the play.

Earlier critics were bothered by this elaborate opening. Grube speculated that there 'may have been a convention, understood by the audience, that they "saw" nothing until someone began to speak'. Norwood argued that the text as we have it was an amalgam of a genuine play by Euripides and a version by a later tragic poet (Moschion?), since our text would require a curtain to hide the preparation of the tableau. It does not seem to have occurred to Norwood that the spectators might watch these preliminaries unfold. Taplin developed the convention of the 'cancelled opening', by which 'the playwright might make it clear that the first entry did not take place within the play, and should be erased so to speak'.[5] But these all depend too greatly on the neo-classical model for Greek Tragedy and on the assumption that a play did not formally 'begin' until words were uttered. But I would argue that the spectators are meant to see action (*drama*) before someone began to speak, and that much of the prologue is given over to explaining what they have just seen happen before their eyes. Not just in this play are there places, where a considerable amount can happen before anyone says a word, and where the silent action is germane to the drama itself.[6]

The playing space

The theatre at Athens in the fifth century was not the impressive structure that the remains today reveal to the tourist. We see a nicely paved floor; elegant curved rows of seating; aisles and cross-ways dividing the *theatron* into neat geometrical wedges; elaborate thrones in the front row for the priests; the

stone foundations of a *skênê*-building that probably rose to two or even three stories, but in the time of Euripides there was more likely a beaten earth floor for the orchestra, which may not have been nicely round; benches angled around the playing-area; open spaces on either side for the *eisodoi*; a *skênê*-building probably of wood with a set of double doors in the middle and a roof that could be used for characters appearing above. In the centre of the orchestra was the *thymelê* ('hearth' or 'fire-pit'). It is sometimes thought that here was set the formal altar of Dionysos, a working altar used for sacrifices to purify the theatre and the gathering,[7] but this working altar was more probably located next to the temple of Dionysos below the theatre, and that the *thymelê* in the orchestra marked that most crucial of dramatic spaces, the centre of the playing area. This can become a tomb (as in *Libation-Bearers* or *Helen*), a statue (as in *Eumenides*), an altar of refuge (as in *Andromache*, *Children of Herakles*), or a hearth (as in our play).

This has consequences for the staging of the opening scene, for Aithra is confined to that prominent centre of the playing-area, and when Theseus turns away from her at line 110 to interact with Adrastos, he is turning his back on the central focal area, and will need to be called back to that area at line 286. Visually he has made a wrong turn at line 110, just as he is wrong to reject Adrastos' request so adamantly. He will be called back logically and visually by his mother in the second half of the opening scene, and when he takes her hand at line 361, he symbolises a unity and harmony that is so lacking elsewhere in this play, which turns on disharmony and disjunction. Touch is a powerful visual metaphor in this drama (see below) and the first episode will conclude with Theseus clasping his mother's arm and leading her out of that central space where she has been confined.

A hotly debated issue of the fifth-century theatre is the presence or absence of a raised stage before the *skênê*-doors. This stems partly from the assumptions that the chorus and the actors were separate groups of performers, each requiring 'their space', and that the actors needed a dramatically significant

area where the 'real' business of the play could be conducted. There are some places in comedy where a character entering the orchestra is asked to 'come up' (*Wasps* 1341-4, *Knights* 148-9), and some references in later literature to people declaiming 'from the *skênê*', where, it is argued, the reference is not to the backdrop of a stage building, but to a raised platform from which speeches were delivered. But such a raised stage would not help much in a theatre in which the great majority of the spectators are looking down at the playing area, nor do the extant dramas of the fifth century display a marked division of space between chorus and actors. The chorus can rush to the *skênê* doors at the sound of Agamemnon's death cry, Dionysos in *Frogs* can run from the *skênê* to implore his priest in the front row for assistance, Orestes in *Eumenides* can be besieged by the chorus of Furies at the centre of the orchestra. Recent studies by critics with theatrical expertise have shown that the focus of a Greek tragedy lies in the centre of the orchestra, not in a separate area just before the *skênê*-doors.

Collard argued for such a raised stage in *Suppliant Women*, where he located both Aithra surrounded by the chorus and Adrastos with the boys. The altar in the centre of the orchestra he regarded as a 'working altar', part of the rites of Dionysos and thus not available for staging. But Rehm and others have pointed out that such a staging could require as many as thirty people on this small part of the playing-area and that the dramatic focus demands that the hearths be in the middle of the orchestra.[8] Scully, who also argues strongly for such a stage, imagines that the bodies of the dead leaders were placed dramatically on that stage, but again the centre front of the orchestra would be the more prominent position. Thus at the start of the play the dramatically important area will be the central altar where Aithra is surrounded by the chorus of women. Scully ('Orchestra and Stage' 71) suggests also that a striking visual effect would have been created if Aithra (and any attendants) were costumed in the white dress appropriate for a festival and then surrounded by a circle of women in black ('in robes not suitable for a festival' – line 97). Behind

them, between the *thymelê* and the *skênê*-doors, Adrastos and the boys will take up a recumbent position, reinforcing their less prominent role.

The setting at Eleusis

One reads often in the critical literature the confident statement: 'the *Suppliants* of Euripides is set in front of the temple of Demeter at Eleusis',[9] that is the Telesterion in which the Mysteries were celebrated in the month of Boedromion (August/September). Since Aithra reveals at line 32 that she is bound 'at the sacred hearths of the two goddesses, Kore and Demeter', commentators usually imagine the setting as a pair of altars or hearths in front of the Telesterion, and art historians routinely include such a pair of altars in their site-plans.[10]

But I would argue that the *skênê* represents the outer gates of the precinct itself (see Figure 2 on p. 10). The actual words used of the structure in the background are always plural: *naous* (2), *anaktorôn* (88), *oikous* (938), *melathrôn* (982), and *domôn* (988). One could argue that this is just tragedy's fondness for the poetic plural, but it may also suggest a complex of buildings, rather than simply the Telesterion. When *naoi* (the plural of 'temple building') is used in Euripides, it tends to mean 'group of sacred buildings' rather than just one structure. At line 30 Aithra says that the Argive women have journeyed to this *sêkon* ('precinct'); at line 104 Theseus asks the identity of this man 'mourning at the gates (*pylais*)'. 'Gates' (*pylai*) in Euripides usually denotes a substantial entity, and the most natural way to take *pylai* is as the gates of the sanctuary, rather than as an entrance to the Telesterion. If one looks at the restored plan of the Periklean Telesterion, there is no main entrance on the south-east side, but rather two smaller doors and a porch (*prostoon*), which may be later than the Periklean period.[11] We want the *skênê*-doors to represent a major entrance, and that, I suggest, is best achieved by imagining the backdrop to be the gates of the sanctuary and the setting of the play to be the forecourt in front of these gates.

At 392 Theseus refers to this army 'here marshalled at the ready by holy Kallichoros' and at 619 the mothers wish that they could 'leave Kallichoros, the water of the goddess' to witness the battle on the plains at Thebes. The well of Kallichoros was an integral part of the story of Demeter (Kallimachos fr. 611, Pausanias 1.38.6) and is located outside the sanctuary, close to the Greater Propylaea (see Figure 2). Thus, as Clinton ('Sacrifice' 72) argues, they pray not to leave the sanctuary of the goddesses, but the area around that sanctuary. The most telling arguments raised by Clinton and Evans are first that there is no evidence for any altars or hearths inside the sanctuary at any point during its history and that what evidence there is indicates that these lay outside the sanctuary, and second that only the initiated (*mystai*) would be allowed inside the sanctuary in the first place. Pausanias, for instance, in his commentary on Eleusis (1.37.3-39.3), says nothing about what lies inside the sanctuary, because as a non-initiate he was not allowed to enter or to describe it (1.38.6). If the play is in fact set before the Telesterion, then the spectators would be viewing a setting that the uninitiated among them would be forbidden to see, and the inviolability of that sanctuary would have been breached by the arrival of the chorus of mothers, Adrastos and the boys, a Theban herald, an Argive messenger, Euadne and finally Iphis.

Aithra has come to celebrate the festival of the Proerosia 'on behalf of the ploughed earth' (29). A sacred ploughing is surely more likely to be held outside the restricted sanctuary of Demeter, where I should imagine the hearths (or twin altars) of the goddesses to be located. Euadne leaps to her death from a cliff 'above the halls' (*domoi*). She is most likely standing on the roof of the *skênê*-building (see below), which on the traditional interpretation will have to serve as the Telesterion (below) and the cliff (above). In actual fact there is a hill above the Telesterion (see Figure 2), but it is hardly the sort from which one would leap to their death. There is a sheer cliff-face at Eleusis, but this is located behind the main gates to the sanctuary, which is what I suggest the *skênê*-doors represent.

Finally the *skênê*-doors are never used for entries or exits in

the course of the drama. Is this not best explained if they represent the gates of the sanctuary through which only the initiated may pass?

The *eisodoi*

There were three principal ways by which characters might make their entrance onto the playing space: the two *eisodoi* and the double doors of the *skênê*-building. I exclude entries on the roof or on the *mêchanê*, since characters rarely use those means to enter the actual playing area.[12] If one goes to the grand theatre at Epidauros, one will see *eisodoi* closed in to make an elaborate passage that could even be covered, but at Athens in the fifth century characters just walked on through the open space on either side of the orchestra. This allows for the convention that a character or the chorus can announce the imminent arrival of a character already visible, such as the herald at 395-8 or Iphis at 1031-3, both introduced by the words *kai mên*, which call attention to something or someone new.

By the time of fourth-century comedy the *eisodoi* had acquired distinct identities, that to the spectators' right ('stage left') leading to a local setting, that to their left ('stage right') to a more distant location. This convention works well also for fifth-century tragedy, as in *Suppliant Women*, where the local *eisodos* will lead to Athens or Eleusis, and the distant one to Argos or Thebes. Thus in the silent action at the start, Aithra will enter from the local *eisodos*, coming from Athens, while the Argive chorus, with Adrastos and the boys, will rush in through the distant *eisodos*.

Modern readers of a Greek drama can sometimes forget that the text they are reading was staged visually, with the majority of the spectators looking down upon the playing area. Thus tableaux and movements from one side to another, especially those which involve characters entering through one entrance and leaving by another, would have had an effective dramatic and thematic significance. Witness the opening scene of *Antigone*, where two women enter through the *skênê*-doors but

only one (Ismene) returns to the protected space behind those doors, while Antigone visually steps across the line between male and female by exiting on her own through the distant *eisodos*. Or consider the opening scene of *Alkestis*, where Apollo (who has entered through the *skênê*-doors) and Death (entering through the distant *eisodos*) exchange places, as Death takes possession of the house that Apollo has been guarding until the start of the play. The table below gives the various entries and exits for the play.

'local' = stage-left (spectators' right)
'distant' = stage-right (spectators' left)

Entries	*Exits*
Aithra (local) before Chorus, Adrastos, boys (distant) before Theseus (local) 87	
	Theseus, Adrastos, Aithra (local) 364
Theseus, Adrastos (local) 381 Theban herald (distant) 398	
	Theban herald (distant) 584 Theseus (distant) 597
Messenger (distant) 633	
	Messenger, Adrastos (distant) 777[13]
Adrastos (distant) 793 Theseus (distant) 837[14]	
	Adrastos, Theseus, boys (local) 954
Euadne (roof) 980 Iphis (distant) 1030	
	Iphis (distant) 1112
Boys (local) 1112 Theseus, Adrastos (local) 1164[15] Athena (roof or local) 1182	
	Exeunt omnes (local) 1234

Thus in the first movement of the play (1-364) Adrastos enters from the distant *eisodos*, but leaves with Theseus for Athens at the close of the scene, demonstrating his subservient role to the Athenian king. In the next scene the reverse happens as Theseus and Adrastos re-enter at 381 from the local *eisodos*, but as Theseus carries the war to Thebes, he crosses the orchestra and leaves (without Adrastos) at 597 by the distant *eisodos*. Adrastos escorts the bodies back by the distant *eisodos* at 793, and these will be carried off through the local *eisodos* for cremation at Eleusis. At 1113 Iphis insists that the old should just die and get out of the way of the young. The force of his statement is visually emphasised by his departure back to Argos through the distant *eisodos*, just as the boys re-enter simultaneously by the local *eisodos* with the ashes of their fathers. The entire drama is framed by the striking entry of the Argives (mothers, Adrastos, boys) through the distant entry at the start and their final entry, not back to Argos, but on to Athens through the local *eisodos*, displaying visually how Argives must follow the lead of Athenians or how Athens has taken over what was an Argive story.

One entrance is never used in the drama, that through the *skênê*-doors. We may compare plays where these doors assume a crucial importance, such as *Agamemnon* where Klytaimestra 'is the watchdog of these gates',[16] or *Libation-Bearers* where the plotters must find a way to penetrate these gates, or *Alkestis* where the doors stand open to an essentially empty house. In *Suppliant Women* these doors are effectively blocked at the beginning by Adrastos and the boys, and as the action progresses away from the sacrifice for fertility and good harvest in the direction of external confrontation and war, these doors have little to do with the play. Scully ('Orchestra and Staging' 71) suggests that Aithra makes her initial entry from the *skênê*-doors, but as that would be the only movement through those doors in the entire drama, she more probably enters by the local *eisodos*.

On the roof

It is nothing unusual for part of the dramatic action to be played on the roof of the *skênê*-building. It is now generally agreed that the *skênê* was first constructed and used around 460 – some have suggested that Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was the first use of the *skênê*. If so, Aeschylus has made devastatingly good use of it, by placing his very scene on the roof (the watchman looking for the beacon that will announce the fall of Troy) and by making the *skênê*-doors such a dominant theatrical device. This part of the playing area came later to be called the *theologeion* ('god-speak'), although humans can appear here as well as gods: the watchman in *Agamemnon*, Orestes and his crew in *Orestes*, Antigone and her servant in *Phoenician Women*. It is sometimes unclear whether a deity who appears above is standing on the roof or attached to the *mêchanê*, but an arrival on the *mêchanê* is usually described with reference to movement through the air, as at *Andromache* 1225-30 or *Elektra* 1230.

At 980-9, the *kai mên ... eisorô* of the opening line directs the spectators' attention to something new, in this case the burial chamber of Kapaneus and the appearance of his widow, Euadne, above. Her elevated position is made clear at 987-9, 'why does she stand on a lofty rock, which rises above these halls, walking along this path?' and is confirmed by her later statements at 1016, 1045, and 1069. Four possibilities have been suggested for her actual position in the theatre: (1) on the roof, (2) on the roof but attached to the *mêchanê*, (3) on a structure built for the occasion, that is to separate the *skênê*-building (usually viewed as the temple of Demeter) from the 'lofty rock' on which Euadne stands, and (4) on the eastern wall above the *theatron* beside the Odeion of Perikles.[17] Of these I would argue for (1), that Euadne is on the roof of the *skênê*-building, which is meant to represent the cliff that hangs over the sacred precinct at Eleusis (see Figure 2). If I am right that the *skênê*-doors are those of the precinct and not the Telesterion, then the roof (*theologeion*) does not represent the top of that temple – indeed a suicide from the roof of the sacred temple

could well be seen as blasphemous – but the high ground ('acropolis' on Figure 2). The *skênê*-building thus represents the whole of the precinct: the *skênê*-doors the gates to the sanctuary, and the roof the acropolis above the temple.

Finally there is the pyre (1002-3, 1009-10, 1058, 1065) onto which Euadne will throw herself at 1071. It does not have to have been visible to the spectators; all that is needed is some smoke behind the *skênê*. Some sort of soft landing could have been constructed behind the *skênê*-building, or possibly behind the wall of the *theatron* if Rush's bold solution is preferred. The *ekkyklêma* will have been in place behind the double doors. It was itself a raised platform and mattresses or whatever could have been placed on top to cushion the actor's fall. Mastronarde ('The Gods' 281) thinks the 'stunt' would have been safer if Euadne had been attached to the *mêchanê* and would thus be lowered down after her leap, but spectators would have heard the noise of the equipment and seen the figure rise, thus spoiling the surprise of her appearance.

The other possible use of the *theologeion* is for the appearance of the goddess Athena. Collard (*Supplices* 15) found it 'aesthetically unacceptable' for Athena to occupy the same place that had just witnessed a human suicide, and for that reason placed Euadne on a special tower above the *skênê* erected just for this occasion, so that Athena could occupy the roof of the *skênê*-building. But the text does not give any hint of her position – compare such epiphanies as those of Iris and Madness at *Herakles* 817 ('what an apparition I see above the house') or the Dioskouroi at *Elektra* 1233-6,

> but there above the very tops of the house come some spirits or some of the gods on high. For this is not the road for mortals to walk,

where their elevated position is made very clear. We might consider the possibility that Athena arrived on foot and delivered her instructions from a prominent position in the orchestra. Certainly in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* she will have appeared

in the orchestra to hear Orestes' appeal, conduct his trial, and negotiate with the Furies. If *Eumenides* does to any degree influence either the writing or the reception of *Suppliant Women*, then this might be a useful parallel. More compelling might be the fact that Aithra and Athena were played by the same actor and in that case Theseus is twice halted and re-directed by the appearance of a female character in the orchestra. She could have entered by the local *eisodos*, that leading to Athens, and it would be a nice visual touch if Athena led the way to Athens, with Theseus and then Adrastos and the Argives following.

There are three other epiphanies of Athena in the extant plays of Euripides: in the prologue of *Trojan Women* (48-97), in the closing scenes of *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* (1435-91) and in *Ion* (1549-623). Only in the last can we be certain that she appears above the *skênê*-building:

> look, above the incense-receiving temple, what god displays a countenance to rival the sun? (*Ion* 1549-50)

In *Trojan Women* Athena and Poseidon could meet either in the orchestra or on the roof of the *skênê*-building. The latter is perhaps more probable since Hecuba is lying in the orchestra 'before the doors' (37) and an elevated position would emphasise the power of the gods over mortals. In *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* she enters, as here, unannounced and restores the action to 'what must be' (1486). It is a natural assumption that she is above the temple of the Taurians. Thus in *Suppliant Women* she may well have walked into the orchestra and delivered her instructions from a dominant position, or she may have appeared without warning on the roof to direct matters from that superior vantage point. On the whole I favour placing Athena above the playing area. That would allow her visually to dominate the mortals to whom she is dictating instructions.

Conclusions

We tend to read an ancient text, rarely seeing it performed, but when we do, the phrase 'comes alive' is often our reaction. For *Suppliant Women* the critic needs to consider the central focus of the action, clearly the central point of the orchestra (*thymelê*), which will represent the hearths before the precinct at Eleusis. In the first movement the centre of attention will have Aithra surrounded by the women of Argos until, in a telling gesture, they lower their suppliant branches and free her to move (359-64). In the third movement the focus will be on the five bodies, placed not upstage on the non-existent raised platform, but around, or better in front of, that central point. Adrastos will in all likelihood make his stirring funeral oration from this central place – remember that at Thucydides 2.34 Perikles 'came forward from the tomb and went up to a high place so that as many as possible could hear him'. In the final scene that central attention will be given to the boys holding the urns with the ashes of the dead, and if the mothers surround them as they did Aithra in the earlier scene, we have an eerie echo of that earlier tableau here at the end.

A second set of actions will depend on the comings and goings of the characters through the *eisodoi*. Movements in this play seem to be either restricted or directed. Aithra is immobile at the central altar, Adrastos is taken by Theseus to Athens, the herald is summarily dismissed by Theseus, the bodies are escorted off stage at 954, and it would be a good dramatic gesture to have Athena at the end first halting the departure for Argos and then pointing or leading the way to Athens. And through all this the *skênê*-doors remain firmly closed, neither admitting anyone nor allowing of any entry.

There is also a vertical element to the staging. The play is set before the precinct of Demeter and her daughter, the maiden who went down to a marriage with Death. In the scene with Euadne we shall meet a wife who leaps down to a marriage with death, though unlike Persephone there will be no return. Her husband, Kapaneus, is the Argive leader who was struck down from the ladder on which he was attempting to mount the walls

of Thebes. The messenger has secured a watching-place on a tower from which he can look down upon the battle beneath him. At the end the upper playing area may be used again, this time for a goddess to look down on the humans below and re-order events to her liking. People kneel down, lie down, leap down, look down in this play, and the staging needs to emphasise that vertical dimension.

The director can also consider the theme of touching. There is no indication that either Adrastos or the women have supplicated Aithra by touching her hand or her knees. Adrastos does at 165 adopt this formal supplicating position, by throwing his arms around Theseus' knees, but the only certain human contact in the play comes at 359-64 when Theseus takes his mother by the hand and leads her back to their home. Later we are told that Theseus washed and prepared the bodies of the dead himself (762-8). The women are prevented by Theseus from touching their sons' bodies, because it will cause them too much pain (941-6). Iphis cannot seize his daughter's hand to prevent her suicide (1069) and complains bitterly as he leaves (1107), 'what help will it be to me to touch the bones of my child?' The text does not immediately make it clear whether these belong to his son Eteoklos, whose corpse he has come to fetch (1035-7), or to his daughter.[18] The boys enter carrying the ashes of their fathers (1123-6) and imagine themselves kissing their fathers lovingly on the cheek (1152-3). We can well imagine Theseus and Adrastos shaking hands or clasping arms at 1181. The women at 815-17 sing that they wish only 'to throw our hands out in an embrace and hold our children in our arms'. Iphis has come to collect the body of his son (1036-8) and take it back to Argos, but both will be robbed of their chance to touch and hold the bodies of the dead. Only the boys, it seems, get to hold the bones of the dead, unless for a brief moment at 1159 the women get their way, 'come, let us clasp the ashes of our sons to our breasts'. But as by 1166 the boys clearly have the urns in their possession, it is probably more likely that the women's appeal is not granted, and that they never realise their greatest wish, to hold the bodies of their dead children.

8

Postludes

Suppliant Women did not leave the same mark on later art and literature as did tragedies such as *Medea* or *Orestes*, or even Euripides' lost *Andromeda* of 412. Tragic poets did not queue up to write their versions of the story of Athens' intervention at Thebes, nor do we possess any vase or wall paintings inspired by scenes from the play. There is no evidence that a later tragic poet was inspired by *Suppliant Women* to write a new version of the story of Theseus and the suppliants from Argos, in the way that Euripides had responded intertextually to Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis*. An Apollodoros did write an *Hiketides* ('Suppliant Women') sometime around 380 (*Suda* a 3406), but there is no way of knowing whether the choral title refers to the mothers from Argos, the daughters of Danaos, or any other group of women in supplication. Two later tragedies, Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (*c.* 409) and Sophokles' *Oedipus at Kolonos* (written 407/6), may have themes and characters in common with *Suppliant Women*, but there is no strong evidence that *Suppliant Women* was in the forefront of either author's creative imagination.

Politics and oratory

One area where the theme of *Suppliant Women* did grow deep roots was in the realm of political propaganda, where Euripides' dramatic invention became part of accepted history. Athens through its idealistic democratic king incurs the eternal gratitude of one major Greek city (Argos) and shows herself far superior to another, her long-time rival, Thebes. Athens and Theseus do the right thing, in standing up for the Panhellenic

custom and 'the ancient law of the gods' (563) and, what is more, Athens alone has the physical capacity to enforce their will. This could be, and was, turned to good use especially by the orators of the fourth century in putting Athens in a favourable light. Aeschylus was the first to create the story of Athens' involvement in the burial of the Seven, in his version accomplishing this by the power of his words, and then Euripides has altered this confrontation to make Theseus fight to retrieve the bodies. Both versions are known to and employed by the orators.

We have four instances in the orators of the fourth century of Athens' intervention in the matter of the Seven as part of her illustrious past, but the earliest such reference may be in the speech put in the mouth of an Athenian envoy in 479 before the battle of Plataia (Herodotos 9.27). The earliest of the orators is Lysias, whose *Funeral Oration* (2.7-10) relates the incident with appropriate praises of Athens. It seems to be a combination of the story in *Men of Eleusis* and that in *Suppliant Women*, since we read that 'first they sent heralds ... and when they failed to obtain this, they marched against them'. Now this could be an elaboration of the Athenian herald's proclamation at 668-72, but Lysias implies that the Athenian army had not yet marched out against Thebes. In both *Suppliant Women* and Lysias we find the detail about not 'seek[ing] a heavier punishment for the Thebans' (723-5) and common to both is the burial of the dead at Eleusis. The story is told to put the Athenians in the best light possible, with special attention given to their respect for Justice and the will of the gods (cf. Theseus' proclamation at 594-7).

Isokrates gives two differing versions in his *Panegyrikos* (54-9) and in his *Panathenaikos* (168-74). In the first, composed about 380, he brings together the stories of Adrastos and the Seven and the flight of the children of Herakles to prove that both situations show an Athens both powerful enough to act 'in a matter of universal concern' and to protect the interests of the weak. He gives the familiar account of Adrastos asking for Athenian aid to prevent 'ancient custom and the law of old from being ignored', although the actual presence of Adrastos at

Eleusis is not specifically stated. He then continues with the basic plot-line of *Suppliant Women*:

> for the Athenians went to war against the Thebans in the cause of those who had fallen in battle ... taking the field against the Thebans, they compelled them to restore the dead to their kindred for burial.

Strictly speaking, it is Theseus who in the play receives and prepares the dead for burial, and Isokrates does not mention the interment at Eleusis. The natural inference from his narrative is that they were buried either at Thebes or at Argos.

In his *Panathenaikos*, written about 40 years later, Isokrates retells this story with some interesting changes. He admits that his source is the tragic poets and then makes it clear that Adrastos 'came as a suppliant to Athens' and appealed to Theseus to uphold and protect 'ancient custom and age-old law'. Here the narrative diverges considerably from that dramatised in *Suppliant Women*, for Isokrates states that the Athenians sent messengers to Thebes before planning any military action and that the Thebans, after defending their actions against invaders, acceded to that request. This is essentially the story as Aeschylus presented it in *Men of Eleusis*. Isokrates admits that this does not square with his earlier account in *Panegyrikos*, but asks his readers to commend his discretion for this re-telling of the story. Since Athens and Thebes were engaged in common cause at this time against Philip, Isokrates is careful to put the Thebans in a more favourable light, but still makes the point that the Thebans responded more to the Athenians than to considerations of divine ordinances and that 'our city would not have been in a position to settle properly any of these questions, had she not stood far above the others both in reputation and in power' (12.174).

Finally, Demosthenes 60.8 gives a very brief summary of Athens' virtuous action in this incident:

> In addition to all these and many noble deeds they refused

> to suffer the lawful rites of the departed to be treated with disdain when Kreon forbade the burial of the Seven against Thebes.

Demosthenes does not say whether the Athenians resorted to force of arms or to persuasion in order to achieve their ends. It is clear, then, that a story which had its origin in the dramas of Aeschylus and Euripides rapidly became historical 'fact' and was added to the canon of glorious Athenian exploits.

Finally Xenophon (*Hellenika* 6.5.46-7) similarly has Prokles of Phlieus (in 370) encourage the Athenians to aid the Spartans by citing Athens' proper behaviour in the matters of the burial of the Seven and in their defence of the children of Herakles:

> a noble action indeed is related of your ancestors, when they did not allow the Argives who died at Thebes to lie unburied; but you would prefer a far nobler action if you did not allow the Spartans who still live either to be insulted or to die. And although the other deed was also noble, when you reined in the insolence of Eurystheus and saved the children of Herakles, would it not surely be an even nobler one if you saved from death, not merely their ancestors, but their whole state as well?

Again the context is an oratorical one, encouraging the Athenians to live up to their reputation in myth. But in all these passages from the historians and orators, only at Isokrates' *Panathenaikos* is the source given as tragedy, and in that instance the story owes more to *Men of Eleusis* than to *Suppliant Women.*

Euadne's posterity

The one character from *Suppliant Women* who is remembered is Euadne. The Roman poets of the Augustan and Silver Ages of Latin Literature create a canon of women who died because of love and, as the tradition develops, her death becomes not an

example of *furor* ('madness') but of *fides* ('loyalty'). The earliest instance is Vergil *Aeneid* 6.440-76 (20s BC), where Aeneas and the Sibyl pass by the *Lugentes Campi* ('the fields of mourning'),

> here hidden paths hide those whom a harsh love has consumed with bitter wasting, and a grove of myrtle-trees surrounds them; even in death their pain does not leave them. In this place he saw Phaedra and Procris, and Eriphyle showing the wounds that her cruel son had inflicted, and Euadne and Pasiphaë. (442-7)

Vergil is stressing not the glory of these women or their loyalty to a husband, but the bitter pain and death that an unhappy love has caused. In a brilliant inspiration Vergil includes Dido here, who at the end of the scene returns to her first and only real husband. Propertius, writing at roughly the same time, makes Euadne's action that of a faithful wife, as at 1.15.21-2:

> Euadne found her own funeral on the unhappy pyre of her husband, the pride of Argive faithfulness (*fides*),

one of a series of women of myth who grieved at the departure of their lover, in marked contrast to Cynthia's lack of concern for Propertius. At 3.13.23-4 Propertius contrasts the moral decadence of Roman women with the Eastern practice of suttee ('the disgrace is not to have died' – 3.13.20):

> but here [Rome] is a race of disloyal wives, here there is no woman like loyal Euadne or dutiful Penelope.

Ovid (43 BC-AD 17) likewise sets up a contrast between treacherous wives of myth (Helen, Klytaimestra, Eriphyle) and women of virtue, Penelope (again 'dutiful', *pia*), Laodamia, Alkestis, and Euadne, the last three referred to indirectly ('wife of ...', 'daughter of ...'):

> 'Welcome me, Capaneus. Our ashes shall mingle together',

> shouted the daughter of Iphis, as she jumped down on the middle of his pyre. (*Ars Amatoria* 3.21-2)

In the last poem of his *Tristia* (5.14) Ovid praises the love and devotion of his wife, placing her in the familiar company of Penelope, Laodamia, Alkestis, Euadne, and in addition Andromache – again only Penelope is named directly, the others by periphrases:

> you can see how they sing of the wife of Admetus, of Hector's wife, and the daughter of Iphis who dared to go onto a blazing funeral pyre. (*Tristia* 15.37-8)

Finally in a longer and more poignant poem to his wife (*Ex Ponto* 3.1), Ovid calls her attention to women of myth whose examples she might follow: Alkestis (to redeem him by her death), Penelope (to ward off other lovers), Laodamia (to follow her husband in death), and Euadne:

> the daughter of Iphis would be your example if you wanted to hurl your body bravely on a blazing pyre. (*Ex Ponto* 3.1.111-12)

Similarly the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, if it is a genuine document from the early imperial period, refers to the fortitude of Andromache and Euadne as they witness their husbands' deaths:

> such was Euadne's attitude when Capaneus breathed his last, struck by the fiery lightning-blast. (321-2)

The elder Seneca (early first century AD) includes Euadne in a list of 'good' women (not named) with a very neat turn of phrase:

> another crazed with love for husband hurled herself onto a burning pyre; would she not be said to have burned with him, as she burned *for* him in life? (*Controversiae* 2.5.8)

The Romans then created a canon of 'good women', whose conduct displayed loyalty to the marriage vow and ranked their own life second to that of their husband. The regular members of this group would be Penelope, Laodamia, Alkestis and Euadne, with Andromache added occasionally. Apart from the first all are known heroines of Greek tragedy. Behind this list might lie two passages in comedy, first the charge made against Euripides at *Thesmophoriazousai* 547-50:

> WOMAN: He creates Melanippes and Phaidras, but never a Penelope, because she is known as a good woman [*sôphrôn*].
> UNCLE: I know why, because you wouldn't be able to name one Penelope among women today, but a multitude of Phaidras.

and the other a pointed comment by Euboulos, a poet of Middle Comedy (fr. 115):

> If Medea was a bad women, Penelope at least was a very good thing. If someone says that Clytemnestra was bad, immediately I put forward Alkestis as a good one. Perhaps someone will slander Phaidra, but by Zeus there's another good woman – but who? Who? O dear me, my good women have all run out and I have many more bad ones to mention.

The later prose tradition

Some later prose writers record with little embellishment the narrative of the burial of the Seven. Diodoros of Sicily (first century BC) gives a brief account of the incident (4.65.9), omitting many of the details peculiar to the dramatic versions:

> When the Thebans did not allow the burial of the dead, Adrastos left the bodies unburied and returned to Argos. When the dead bodies of the fallen lay unburied beneath

> the citadel of Thebes and no one dared to bury them, the Athenians, who surpassed all others in virtue, buried those who had fallen beneath the citadel.

Pausanias in the second century AD (1.39.2) describes the graves of the Seven at Eleusis:

> A little bit below the well is the shrine of Metaneira and next to it the graves of the Seven against Thebes. Kreon, who was in power at Thebes as regent for Leodamas the son of Eteokles, did not allow their kin to take up and bury them. Adrastos went as a suppliant to Theseus and a battle took place between the Athenians and the Boiotians, in which Theseus was victorious. He took the bodies to Eleusis and buried them there. The Thebans insist that they gave the bodies up for burial voluntarily and did not engage in battle.

Both of the dramatic traditions are thus reflected in this account. Apollodoros (*c.* 200 AD) in his encyclopaedia gives a straightforward account with some divergence from the familiar story-line (3.78-9):

> Kreon, who had succeeded to the kingship of Thebes, cast the Argive dead out unburied, set up and guards and proclaimed that no one was to bury the bodies ... Adrastos went to Athens and took refuge at the Altar of Mercy, and in a formal supplication requested them to bury the bodies. The Athenians under the leadership of Theseus launched an expedition, took Thebes, and gave the bodies to their families to bury. Kapaneus was being cremated on a pyre, when his wife Euadne, daughter of Iphis, hurled herself onto the pyre and was consumed with him.

There is a hint of *Antigone* here (setting up guards) and the account sends Adrastos to Athens rather than Eleusis and has the Athenians capture Thebes – cf. Theseus' refusal at 723-5.

Around the same time Aelian refers to the dramatic treatment of Euadne as an example of virtuous behaviour (*sôphrosynê*): 'the poets honour the daughter of Iphis, and theatres are full of those who sing the praises of this heroine, who surpassed all others in virtue by honouring her husband above her own life' (*History of Animals* 6.25).

One final description of Euadne is that of Philostratos (third century AD), who claims to be describing a painting in Naples of Euadne at the funeral of her husband (*Imagines* 2.30.1-2):

> The picture of the pyre and the victims sacrificed upon it and the corpse, stretched out on the pyre, which seems too large for that of a man, and the woman taking such a great leap into the flames, means the following, my boy. Relatives are burying Kapaneus in Argos, the man who died at Thebes by Zeus' hand, when he had already climbed the walls. You have heard the poets' story how, when he uttered a boast against Zeus, he was struck by a thunderbolt and was dead before he reached the ground, at the same time when the rest of the leaders fell beneath the citadel of Thebes. Now when the Athenian victory enabled the burial of the dead, Kapaneus lies with the same honours as those of Tydeus and Hippomedon and the rest, but in this one point he was honoured above all the captains and kings. His wife, Euadne, has resolved to die with him, not by drawing a sword across her throat or by hanging herself from a noose, the ways of death that women choose to honour their husbands, but she hurls herself into the fire, on the grounds that it cannot possess her husband until it takes her as well. That is the funeral-offering made to Kapaneus; and his wife, like those who dress their victims with wreaths and gold so that these may go to the sacrifice splendid and pleasing to the gods, so she adorns herself and with no pitiful look in her eyes, jumps into the flames, calling, I think, her husband's name; for she looks as if she were calling out. And to me she appears as if she would even submit her head to the thunderbolt on behalf of Kapaneus.

There is some debate whether Philostratos is describing a real art gallery or creating an imaginary one out of his readings of ancient writers,[1] but the suicide of Euadne is precisely the sort of dramatic and emotional scene that an ancient artist would have relished. In the late epic (fourth century AD) by Quintus of Smyrna, *After Homer*, book 10 recounts the death of Paris and the suicide of Oinone on his funeral pyre (10.411-89). Euadne's death-leap in *Suppliant Women* is clearly his model, as he himself admits at the end:

> Herdsmen stood about amazed, just as long ago a crowd of Argives watched in awe as Euadne clasped the limbs of Kapaneus, her husband, brought low by the cruel lightning-bolt of Zeus. (10.479-82)

Statius and his influence

The final ancient version of this story is that found in the twelfth book of Statius' epic poem, *Thebaid* (late first century AD), and it is this which affected the later tradition most strongly. Statius belongs to the epic tradition rather than to that influenced by drama, and depends more on the earlier epics, *Thebaid* (sixth century) and the later *Thebaid* by Antimachos (fifth/fourth century), but in his representation of the mission of the Argive women to Athens he will have been working with the tradition established by Euripides. Statius would have an immense influence on mediaeval and Renaissance literature – Dante would remove him from the limbo of the classical poets and assign him to Purgatory (*Canto* 21) as one of the saved.[2] In his twelfth book Statius presents a new and impressive version of the aftermath of the expedition of the Seven: women of Argos begin a journey toward Thebes, not Athens; these are not the mothers of the Seven, but their wives. Argia, the wife of Polyneikes, makes her way to where he lies unburied, and with Antigone washes her husband's body and cremates him on the same pyre as his brother; the other wives make their way to Athens to the Altar of Clementia ('Mercy'),

where Euadne pleads their case before Theseus. Theseus marshals the Athenian forces 'to defend the laws of the nations and the compacts of heaven' (12.642). A truly epic encounter ensues, in which Theseus slays Kreon; and finally the bodies are buried at Thebes. In this version also Euadne kills herself on her husband's pyre:

> with what a leap bold Euadne threw herself out on the pyre of her beloved and sought the thunderbolt in his great chest. (12.800-2)

This is bold and original stuff. By replacing the grieving mothers with wives who match their husband's reputations, just as Euadne in Euripides' play seeks a man's glory and his *eupsychia*, Statius has taken the story in a new direction. By having Theseus slay Kreon in the climactic scene (12.752-81), the poet not only pays homage to his conscious model, Vergil's *Aeneid*, where in the last lines Aeneas and Turnus meet and all is decided, but ends on a note of optimism foreign to tragedy:

> Theseus is a man of steel, an instrument of divine justice and human clemency through whom the world is purified and improved.[3]

This sort of finality and certainty is not the rule in tragedy, where open endings rather than closed ones prevail.

This was the story that passed into the Middle Ages. It first appears in Boccaccio, in his mixture of epic and romance, *The Theseid of the Marriage of Emilia*. The tale is really about a pair of Thebans captured by Theseus during his expedition to recover the dead bodies and less about the Seven themselves, but in the second book women from Argos come to Theseus and beg his help to bury their dead.[4] As in Statius the women take up their suppliant position at the temple of *clemezza* ('mercy'), and Euadne, widow of Kapaneus, speaks for the women (2.28). But these are not just the wives or the mothers, but everyone present 'in the throng was mother or wife or sister or daughter

of a king'. As in Euripides the contrast between their mourning garb and the festival is stressed ('you are the only ones weeping on a public holiday' – 2.28). Differences in the narrative include the fact that Kreon is a usurping outsider, who has taken advantage of the internal disruption at Thebes to seize power;[5] that the lack of burial has prevented the souls of the dead from entering the underworld (2.31, 47), a detail not present in either *Antigone* or *Suppliant Women*; that the women, not Theseus, prepare the bodies of their dead for cremation (2.78-83); and that Theseus hands Thebes over to the women who burn the city in revenge (2.81). Some intriguing similarities with *Suppliant Women* are: the initial overture to Kreon by a herald (2.51 ~ 668-72); Theseus' use of a mace to cut down his opponents (2.56 ~ 714-18); and the battle evenly balanced on both sides (2.57-8 ~ 694-706).

This is essentially the plot as it is found in Statius, and we know that Boccaccio had a text of *Thebaid* in his library and, like so many others in the fourteenth century, was considerably influenced by that poet. Elsewhere in his *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum* ('On What Happened to Famous Men') he summarises Theseus' actions at Thebes:

> Then he crushed Thebes in an admirable act of bravery and when Creon was exulting in his new power and banning funeral rites for the Argive leaders because his son Mnesteus had been killed in the battle, Theseus laid him low along with a frightful slaughter of his forces.

The detail of Creon being laid low by Theseus again confirms *Thebaid* 12 as the source (see 12.777-8).

Boccaccio's *Teseida* in turn was the inspiration for *The Knight's Tale*, the first of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. This reproduces in a shorter form Boccaccio's story of the two Thebans captured by Theseus, taken to Athens, and their ill-starred love for the younger sister of Theseus' bride. On his return with his bride and her sister, Theseus is greeted by women in black who have been waiting a fortnight at the temple

of Clemency to appeal for his aid in burying their husbands. As in Statius their cause is pleaded by the wife of Kapaneus, not named. Theseus replies in good chivalric fashion, leads his army immediately to Thebes, kills Kreon and takes the city. Although they are the wives and not the mothers of the Seven, Chaucer emphasises their lamentation, their black dress, and the contrast with their former state, all themes which can be found in Euripides' play, although *Suppliant Women* would have been inaccessible to him (*The Knight's Tale* 897-906):

> Where that ther kneled in the heighe way
> a compagnie of ladyes, tweye and tweye,
> each after oother clad in clothes blake;
> but swich a cry and swich a wo they make
> that in this world nys creature lyvynge
> that herde swich another waymentynge;
> and of this cry they nolde nevere stenten
> til they the reynes of his brydel henten.
> 'What folk been ye, that at myn hom-comynge
> perturben so my feste with criygne?'

But as Morwood observes (24), 'great poets shake hands across the centuries'.

Chaucer's tale would in its turn be the inspiration for the Jacobean drama, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, attributed to Fletcher and Shakespeare and dated to 1613 or 1614. That Shakespeare is indeed a co-author of the play is now generally accepted, and the first act, which contains the appeal to Theseus (I.i) and his recovery of the bodies (I.iv), is assigned to his hand. Theseus and his bride Hippolyta, accompanied by her sister Emilia, have returned to Athens for their wedding day, and are greeted in the opening scene by 'three queens whose sovereigns fell before the wrath of cruel Creon'. The first speaker Theseus recognises as the wife of Kapaneus, whose wedding he in fact attended; the dead husbands of the other two women are not named, since presumably only the name of Kapaneus had survived from the classical tradition. We observe

immediately that in both Chaucer and Shakespeare the Seven have ceased to be the monsters of myth and have become good kings and noble warriors, whose cause earns respect from Theseus and not condemnation:

> QUEEN 1: But our lords lie blistering fore the visitating sun, and were good kings, when living.
> THESEUS: It is true. (I.i.144-7)

As in Euripides they 'come unseasonably' (I.i.168) to a festival, in this case Theseus' wedding, and as in *Suppliant Women*, a woman close to Theseus will make a formal appeal to him (I.1.185-98) to respect the rights of suppliants. Finally in I.v the women mourn their dead in a song, which also echoes across the centuries:

> QUEENS: Urns and odors, bring away / vapors, sighs, darken the days, / our dole more deadly looks than dying/ balms and gums and heavy cheers / sacred vials filled with tears / and clamors through the wild air flying: / come all sad and solemn shows, / that are quick-eyed pleasure's foes. / We convent naught else but woes. / We convent naught else but woes.
> QUEEN 3: This funeral pyre brings you to your household's grave – / joy seize on you again, peace sleep with him.
> QUEEN 2: And this to yours.
> QUEEN 1: Yours the way. Heavens lend / a thousand differing ways to one sure end.
> QUEEN 3: This world's a city full of straying streets / and death's the market-place where each one meets.

We may compare the sheer despair of the mothers with Adrastos, as the dead are carried into the orchestra (794-836), and the joint lamentation by boys and mothers at 1113-64. A principal difference from the usual account is that Theseus commands the women to find and prepare their husbands' bodies for burial (I.iv.6-8).

Thereafter very little influence of this story is seen. The tale of the quarrel between the sons of Oedipus is well known in later art and literature, as is the expedition of the Seven, but the aftermath and the intervention of Athens remain relatively unmentioned.[6] Modern accounts of Theseus tend to revolve around his killing of the Minotaur, his affair with Ariadne, and the story of Phaidra and Hippolytos.[7] *Thesée*, the brief novel by André Gide (1946) ends with an encounter between the young king Theseus and the aged Oedipus, but the subsequent involvement of Theseus and Athens with the affairs of Oedipus' sons is not part of that story. Mary Renault, on the other hand, does include the incident in the second of her two novels about Theseus, *The Bull from the Sea* (1962), but only on one page, with a pointed reference to Theseus and Hippolyta spending an uncomfortable night in the royal bed-chamber at Thebes. There is no role for Adrastos or the women from Argos. Theseus has been shrewdly biding his time until making his move and becoming ruler of Thebes in all but name. This is a mature Theseus, not the young man of *Suppliant Women* consciously set off against the older monarch, Adrastos. Mary Renault's novel does feature an encounter between a young Theseus and an older king, but as part of the earlier episode when the accursed Oedipus arrives at Kolonos. As in Gide's novel, Theseus learns wisdom from the suffering king.

Modern productions

Since 1926 the play has had thirteen documented productions,[8] four of which may be mentioned briefly. In 1966 the National Theatre of Greece performed *Suppliant Women* as part of their on-going mission to re-stage the tragedies and comedies of classical Greece. It was performed in their usual manner, in modern Greek and outdoors on summer evenings at the Theatre at Epidauros, and thereafter at the Dodona Festival in 1967. It was revived for two nights at the Herodes Atticus Theatre beneath the Acropolis in August 1968. The scene with Euadne was staged very differently from how we have imagined it being

done in the fifth century, for Euadne stood on the audience's side of the *skênê*, on a small podium disguised as a rock, and leaped forward into a trap-door in the floor of the playing-area. The pit beneath was bathed in flickering red and orange lights to simulate the funeral pyre of her husband.

Three quite recent productions have all related *Suppliant Women* to modern events, and made Euripides speak not only to Athens in the 420s but to the turmoil in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century world. First as part of the Democracy 2500 celebrations in 1993 Rush Rehm dedicated his production at Stanford University to 'the people of Nicaragua – a people cruelly and systematically denied the chance to build their own democratic society'. An orchestra was constructed in the centre in front of bleachers for the audience, who would look down on the playing space as the Athenians did in the 420s. Behind this was a T-stage where Adrastos and the secondary chorus were placed, also the bodies when these were returned. In part intentionally, a 'man's space' and a 'women's space' were created, although each was transgressed at some point. No *skênê*-building was employed, only a white curtain on which were projected pictures of scenes of war and its aftermath, principally during the choral passages, including from time to time a slide of Athena. This came to life at the end when a film of the actor playing Athena, even to the point of bronze make-up, pronounced the epilogue. As she addressed the boys and ordained their conquest of Thebes, the effect was that of a recruitment film, but with a woman as general. Euadne was perched on an elevated 'rock' to one side of the curtain, and fell forward into a pit illuminated by red light. The theme of the production was to present Theseus as the best sort of leader that a democracy can produce, but even he can be swept up in the fever of war at the end.

In the spring of 2006 *Suppliant Women* under its Dutch title *Smekelingen* was produced in Leiden by the Dutch musical-theatrical group Veen Fabriek and the Greek Theseum Ensemble, and subsequently taken to the Hellenic Festival in Epidauros in July of the same year. Modern rock musicians and interpre-

tive dancers were part of the ensemble on stage, and the production resembled more an avant-garde pop musical than a Greek tragedy. The music was far and away the strongest element in the production, assisted by the fact that the co-director (Paul Koek) was a musician by training, specifically a percussionist. Television screens behind the set added visual images to the action played before them, although it was not always clear what these images were meant to evoke.[9]

Events of the 1990s and 2000s, the intervention by Western nations in the Balkans and the current Dutch mission to Afghanistan, lay behind and beneath the surface of this interpretation. Oral history from the women of Srebrenica had gone into the research for the production, and on one media night those attending were served dinners consisting of military rations packed in self-warming bags, of the type handed out to the Dutch soldiers stationed on the mission to Afghanistan. An English translation of the official trailer for the production reads:[10]

> Euripides glorifies the Athenian democracy and positions Athens as the guardian of what we nowadays call the international rule of law. But he also highlights the dark side. The mechanics of democracy and the consequences of military intervention come up for critical scrutiny.

It was a long production; a frequent comment in the reviews was that two and a half hours was excessive.

The final production, more of an adaptation of *Suppliant Women* than a performance, is Target Margin Theatre's play *As Yet Thou Art Young and Rash*, produced in New York City in January/February 2007, and revived in January 2008. It had a cast of only five: two women playing the mothers, a third playing Aithra, a fourth woman with a long white beard for Adrastos, and then a young male for Theseus. The trailer for the production makes the attitude of this production clear:[11]

> Can we really save the world as it slips into war and

> confusion? Euripides frames burning personal suffering in an urgent civic context: his suppliants struggle to respond to their deep loss as human beings and as citizens; his leaders cloak their plans in the loftiest political rhetoric; his patriotism is passionate and deeply skeptical.

One line caught up the essence of this production, 'you chose the sword instead of reason to settle all disputes' (the words of Adrastos at *Suppliant Women* 750). Spoken with a deliberate pause and emphasis, it brought the drama vividly home from fifth-century Athens to twenty-first century America. The war in Iraq clearly served as the dramatic sub-text, not so much in the words of the play, but in the staging when the bodies are returned after Theseus' victory. Images of soldiers killed in Iraq were projected onto a screen behind the playing-area, letters and anecdotes about the dead were read out, oil lights were lit, reminding one reviewer of the eternal flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The background illustrated brilliantly the setting at Eleusis, with autumn flowers and corn-on-the-cob and a large golden ear of wheat on a green background. The boldest and potentially most dangerous moment came when the funeral pyre was transformed into a campfire to the accompaniment of a mournful, yet moving, rendition of *Home on the Range*.

These latest productions are very much in the spirit of their Euripidean original. Contemporary events and issues often lie beneath the surface of a Greek play, occasionally (as in *Eumenides* and perhaps elsewhere) breaking through. *Suppliant Women* reflects a background of the war with Sparta, the manoeuvrings over Argos in the late 420s, the on-going hostility with Thebes, an internal political debate about democracy and the behaviour of her political leaders, and above all the declaration of the messenger at 726-30 about Theseus:

> this is the sort of man to elect as general, who is brave in dangerous situations and who hates an arrogant people, who in their prosperity were trying to reach the top of the

> ladder and in so trying lost the happiness that could have been theirs.

That modern directors have struck sparks from Euripides' most political play that would land in Nicaragua, in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and in Iraq and ignite the question of whether there is any possibility of an ideal leader or whether it is ever right to go to war shows clearly how modern these ancient plays are and how well they can speak across the centuries to another time and place.

Notes

1. Prelude to a Play

1. In some accounts (Isokrates 4.68, 6.42) the invasion of Eumolpos and that of the Amazons are two separate incidents; Plato (*Menexenos* 239b) makes them the same event. Lykourgos (1.98-101), which is based on Euripides' lost *Erechtheus*, does not mention the Amazons.

2. The meagre fragments are collected at M.L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 39-59.

3. Gastaldi ('Propaganda') dated *Men of Eleusis* to the mid-470s, at the time of the rise of the cult of Theseus, but I prefer a date in the late 460s when Aeschylus was writing other plays (*Suppliants*, *Oresteia*) about Argos and bringing Athens into her stories.

4. E. Simon, 'Polygnotan Painting and the Niobid Painter', *American Journal of Archaeology* 67 (1963) 43-63 [54-7].

5. The case for a lower date for Herodotos is made by C. Fornara, 'Evidence for the Date of Herodotus' Publication', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 91 (1971) 25-34; and M. Munn, *The School of History* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2000) 43-5, 363 n. 78.

6. Mills (*Theseus*) 95-6 and Morwood (21) raise similar objections to Zeitlin's thesis.

7. Shaw (*'Ethos'*) emphasises the shortcomings of the Argive national character as against that of the Athenians.

8. W.D. Furley, *Andokides and the Herms: a Study of Crisis in Fifth-century Athenian Religion*, BICS Supp. 65 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1996) 39.

9. On this festival see Parke ('Festivals') 73-5, and on sacred ploughings see S.G. Cole, *Landscapes, Genders, and Ritual Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 86-91.

10. Other good studies of the Eleusinian setting are: Carrière (*Le Choeur*), Krummen ('Athens and Attica') 203-8, and Morwood 17-20.

11. S. Scullion, 'Euripides and Macedon: the Silence of the *Frogs*', *Classical Quarterly* 53 (2003) 389-400.

12. *Alkestis* was produced in the fourth position of Euripides' production of 438, where we would normally find the satyr-play. But it has

no satyrs and the drama is an appealing mixture of conventional tragedy, satyr-play, and comedy, as well as European folk-lore.

13. It should be remembered that Greek metre does not depend on stressed syllables as in English poetry, but on a pattern of short and long syllables.

14. See Storey and Allan (*Guide*) 135-6 for a chart.

15. Bowie ('Tragic Filters'), for instance, assumes that the events at Delion provided the inspiration for Euripides' play.

16. Zuntz (*Political Plays*) 23-5 traces the political activities of Argos in the 420s.

17. The close likeness in theme between *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* and *Helen* has not deterred critics from placing both in Euripides' production of 412 – see M. Wright, *Euripides' Escape-tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

18. For the fragments of *Antiope* see C. Collard and M. Cropp, *Euripides Fragments, Aegeus – Meleager* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) 170-227.

2. Adrastos' Supplication

1. The technical terms are found at *Medea* 710 (*hikesia* – 'suppliant'), *Hippolytos* 384 (*hiknoumenê* – 'coming as suppliant'), *IA* 1216 (*hiketêria* – 'in supplication').

2. Euripides' *Bacchae* and Menander's *Dyskolos* are particularly good examples.

3. Michelini ('Maze') subjects this scene to a painstaking analysis, finding an ambiguity between the superficial expression of mere words and a more fundamental faith in the principle of *logos*.

4. The matter is complicated by Kovacs' rejection of 222-8 as spurious. Diggle and Morwood retain these lines. I would keep them as befitting the smug young Theseus.

5. Thury ('Study of Words') shows that *neos*-words are especially prevalent in this play.

6. Gould ('*Hiketeia*') assumes that the person petitioned was obligated to grant that request. Against this see Naiden's more recent study (*Ancient Supplication*). On the dramatic presentation of suppliant scenes see the excellent analysis by Rehm ('Staging').

7. In Euripides' *Antiope* (fr. 193) Amphion, who seems to have the better of the debate, argues that 'the man who gets involved (*prassei polla*), when he doesn't have to, is a fool, especially when he could lead a peaceful (*apragmona*) life'.

8. The phrase 'a better disposed people' (*eumenesteros dêmos*), is used at *Suppliants* 488 and here at 351; in both instances the context is the referring of the suppliants' appeal to the people. Just as the Argive king takes Danaos to the assembly at Argos (516-19), here

Theseus takes Adrastos to plead the women's case (354-5) before the Athenian assembly.

9. Michelini ('Theseus') argues precisely for an identification with Alkibiades.

10. Aelius Aristeides 9.32, Isokrates *Helen* 24-5.

3. Confrontation with Thebes

1. Compare the inoffensive question by the messenger at *Oedipus Tyrannos* 924-5: 'can you tell where I might find the house of King [*tyrannos*] Oedipus?'

2. The son in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (422) makes a telling comment: 'It is all "tyranny" and "conspiracy" with you people, whatever the matter, great or small. I haven't heard the word for fifty years and now its more prevalent than salted fish' (488-91).

3. Lloyd (*Agon*): 15 puts it bluntly, 'the agon in Euripides rarely achieves anything'.

4. Herodotos 5.92 tells the story of the advice given by one tyrant, Thrasyboulos of Miletos, to another, Periandros of Corinth to make himself secure by 'lopping off the tallest ears of wheat'.

5. Morwood 183 quotes a striking chorus from Euripides' lost *Kresphontes* (fr. 453) and Bacchylides' *Paian* 4.61-80. Aristophanes will make the same claim in two memorable choral songs from plays of the 420s, at *Acharnians* 978-99 and *Peace* 1127-58.

6. In *Antiope* (fr. 194) Amphion, arguably the sympathetic speaker, contends that 'the quiet man [*hêsychos*] is a secure friend to his friends and the best for his city. Do not praise dangerous ventures, for I admire neither a sailor nor a leader who dares too much'.

7. At line 579 Theseus confidently (perhaps too confidently) asks, 'what courage in War could come from the dragon's brood?' The messenger answers this question fully.

8. The description of Polyneikes in *Seven* is an interesting combination of the violent warrior (577, 631-41) and the wronged prince seeking Justice (642-8).

4. Mourning the Dead

1. See Morwood 207-8.

2. As at *Children of Herakles* 569, 746, 812. Lykos in *Herakles*, while retaining an ostensibly favourable sense of *eupsychia*, makes Herakles' exploits and his use of the bow hardly deserving of that epithet (157, 162).

3. This is how Mendelsohn (*Gender*) 189 understands the passage.

4. Zuntz (*Political Plays*) 24; Fitton ('*Suppliant Women*') 439-40.

5. Most notably Zuntz (*Political Plays*) 12-25; Collard ('Funeral Oration'); and Morwood 209-17.

6. Zuntz (*Political Plays*) 13 – 'his experience has made him a knowing man'.

7. Especially Fitton ('*Suppliant Women*') 437-40; Smith ('Expressive Form') 162-4; and Rehm (*Tragic Theatre*) 128-9.

8. Fitton ('*Suppliant Women*') 437-8; Rehm (*Tragic Theatre*) 129.

9. Rehm (*Marriage to Death*); R. Seaford, 'The Tragic Wedding', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987) 106-30.

5. Aftermath

1. See the discussion by Morwood 241-4.

2. If the Spina vase (see Chapter 1) does illustrate Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis*, then in that play the boys were either costumed or imagined as already in armour.

3. Since today a programme would list the *dramatis personae*, we would be expecting the arrival of Athena.

4. As his father is alive and well and standing before him, Aigialeus cannot be holding an urn of ashes; thus there must then be more than just five boys in the secondary chorus.

5. Also at *Philoktetes* 1436 of the young Neoptolemos and his older companion at Troy.

6. O. Taplin, 'Comedy and the Tragic', in M. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 197; F. Dunn, *Tragedy's End* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 74.

6. Reading *Suppliant Women*

1. Morwood ('Demagogues') is particularly good here.

2. So Zuntz (*Political Plays*), Collard (*Supplices*), Morwood.

3. While gender themes are important in the development of this drama, I feel that Mendelsohn goes too far in his reversal of gender roles, e.g. Adrastos as 'feminised', Euadne as 'hero'.

4. Shaw ('*Ethos*') 18. This, he argues, is not 'due to the disposition of the gods' but to character which 'is determined by conscious choice'.

5. This is how Zuntz (*Political Plays*), Collard (*Supplices*), and Morwood take the oration.

6. Gamble ('*Suppliant Women*') 401; Fitton ('*Suppliant Women*') 448; Greenwood (*Aspects*); Mendelsohn (*Gender*).

7. Staging *Suppliant Women*

1. M. Ewans, *Aischylos: the Oresteia* (London 1995) xv.

2. M. Dickin, *A Vehicle for Performance: Acting the Messenger in Greek Tragedy* (Diss. McMaster University 2005).

3. Collard (*Supplices*) 21 assigns the roles of Adrastos and Iphis to the third actor.

4. Aithra is able to explain to the spectators (8-28) and then to Theseus (87-109) who these women are and what they want, but I am not sure that we need to imagine a scene of mimed conversation between the chorus-leader and Aithra.

5. Grube (*Drama*) 229; Norwood (*Essays*) 168; O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 134-6.

6. Such as the opening of *Ajax*, where I would have Athena on the *skênê*-roof watching Odysseus cautiously follow the trail of Ajax and finally peep within the doors, or that of *Trojan Women*, where Poseidon may take a long farewell to his city and be visible when Hecuba makes her way into the centre of the orchestra.

7. See, for instance, the entry in LSJ (s.v. *thymelê*), 'esp. the *altar* of Dionysus which stood in the orchestra of the theatre'.

8. Scully ('Orchestra and Stage') 75, Collard (*Supplices*) 17, Rehm ('Staging').

9. Parke ('Festivals') 74. Morwood (143) continues this assumption, 'at the back of the stage is the Temple of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis'.

10. E.g. the plan by Travlos (1950), reproduced at Mylonas (*Eleusis*) figure 25 – see also figure 41b.

11. Mylonas (*Eleusis*) 124.

12. In *Peace* Trygaios does swing over on the *mêchanê* and land in the orchestra, then getting off the dung-beetle and assuming a regular role in the drama.

13. Adrastos very probably departs by the distant *eisodos*, since he is going to meet the dead bodies (772), but does the Messenger leave with him? Given the Messenger's hostility to Adrastos at 770, this might seem unlikely. Could the Messenger leave by the local *eisodos* to carry the news to Athens? Kovacs has both leave together by the distant *eisodos*; Morwood (101) has them leave separately, although in his notes suggests that they leave together (197).

14. Kovacs brings Theseus in with Adrastos at 793. But if the Theseus-actor has been playing the Messenger, he would need more than sixteen lines to change back.

15. Kovacs brings Theseus back with the boys at 1112; he does not indicate when Adrastos re-enters.

16. O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) 33.

17. Scully ('Orchestra and Stage') 79, Kovacs 111, and Morwood 219-20 prefer the first interpretation; Mastronarde ('Gods on High') 281 n. 2 and Mendelsohn (*Gender*) 197 the second. Collard (*Supplices*) 15-16 argues for (3), well answered by Rehm (*Marriage*) 203 n. 10. Rehm (*Tragic Theatre*) 130, 159 n. 6 argues the case for the highly unusual location outside the playing-area.

18. It is not immediately clear whether *paidos* should mean 'son's' or 'daughter's' or just 'child's'.

8. Postludes

1. Collard (*Supplices*) 8 gives some of the details of this debate.
2. See D. Vessey, *Statius and The Thebaid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 311. Dante includes Kapaneus as one of those condemned for violence at *Inferno* Canto 14.43-75; his source is clearly *Thebaid* 10-12.
3. Vessey 316.
4. The Seven are named, with Eteoklos replaced by Adrastos (2.11).
5. His rule is *tirannia* at 2.30, and he himself a *tiranno* at 2.61.
6. See J.R. Davidson (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) II 989-92.
7. On this see S. Tidworth, 'Theseus in the Modern World', in A.G. Ward et al. (eds), *The Quest for Theseus* (London: Praeger 1970) 231-56.
8. Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford University (www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk).
9. These observations come courtesy of my colleague, George Kovacs, who saw this production at Epidauros in July 2006. He adds that it was clearly not popular with the local Greek spectators, who were queuing up to leave throughout the performance.
10. Translation of the Dutch original by Christiaan Caspers.
11. Details of the production and selected reviews can be found at www.targetmargin.org.

Guide to Further Reading

As the reader will find a detailed bibliography of the various aspects of Greek drama in I.C. Storey and A. Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), I have chosen not to repeat myself here and to confine my entries to works that bear directly on *Suppliant Women*.

Texts and commentaries

C. Collard, *Euripides Supplices*, 2 vols (Groningen: Boema's Boekhuis, 1975) [the best modern edition of the play; includes introduction, full bibliography, text, and extensive commentary]

C. Collard, *Euripides Supplices* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1984)

J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1981 [Oxford Classical Text – the standard modern text] – cited throughout as 'Diggle'

D. Kovacs, *Euripides*, vol. III (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) [in the familiar format of the Loeb Classical Library; Kovacs is perhaps too eager to excise passages as later interpolations] – cited throughout as 'Kovacs'

J. Morwood, *Euripides: Suppliant Women* (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 2007) [a very welcome entry in the Aris & Phillips series; good introduction, conservative text, and perceptive notes] – cited throughout as 'Morwood'

Translations

J. Davie, 'Suppliant Women', in J. Davie and R. Rutherford, *Euripides: Electra and other plays* (London: Penguin, 2004) [clean and straightforward prose translation; good introduction and stage directions, excellent notes by Rutherford, who in his four volumes with Davie has essentially written a complete commentary on Euripides]

F.W. Jones, 'The Suppliant Women', in D. Grene and R. Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies, Euripides IV* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1958) [Jones' elegant verse translation lives up to the usual high standard of the 'Chicago translations', though perhaps a bit too formal in places]

D. Kovacs, *Euripides*, vol. III (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) [Loeb translations are not noted for their elevated literary quality, but Kovacs does provide an accurate, clear, and useful rendering of the Greek text]

J. Morwood, *Euripides: Suppliant Women* (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 2007) [as with the Loeb, the accompanying translation in an Aris & Phillips text is meant to be sound and accurate – Morwood does not disappoint]

J. Nims, 'Suppliant Women', in D. Slavitt and P. Bovie, *Euripides 2* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988) [quite a creditable verse translation, although too many contractions ('I'll', 'didn't') lower the tragic level; very sensible introduction]

R. Warren and S. Scully, *Euripides: Suppliant Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) [the series, Greek Tragedy in New Translations, pairs a classical scholar (Scully) with a practising poet (Warren); the result is a first-rate verse rendition, that should play very well on stage; excellent introduction and notes]

R. Waterfield, 'Suppliant Women', in R. Waterfield, E. Hall and J. Morwood, *Euripides. Orestes and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) [a mixture of prose (for the episodes) and verse (for the choral odes); excellent introduction and notes]

Major studies of *Suppliant Women*

Full details of the titles mentioned in this section are given in the Bibliography, below.

P. Burian ('*Logos* and *Pathos*') [reads the play neither as patriotic drama nor as ironic satire, but as a 'dialectical presentation', by which the readers are to 'discover the truth for themselves']

D.J. Conacher (*Euripidean Drama*) 93-108 [there is irony in the drama, but it operates on the level of the gods, especially in the 'harsh ending' where Athena is not content with the 'lofty covenant' reached by Adrastos and Theseus]

J.W. Fitton ('*Suppliant Women*') [the play is 'penetrated by a continual ambivalence which seems to reflect a basic cleavage between the real and the ideal']

R.D. Gamble ('*Suppliant Women*') [the tragedy is permeated throughout by a deliberate atmosphere of dissonance and dislocation, unease and uncertainty, equivocalness and opposition]

B. Goff ('Aithra at Athens') [a sensitive and persuasive study of the

implications of the setting at Eleusis, and of the theme of gender in the play]

L.H.G. Greenwood (*Aspects*) 92-120 [the most sceptical and ironic view of the play, 'the satirist and critic is not, after all, on holiday', on both politics and religion Euripides 'says one thing and means another']

D. Mendelsohn (*Gender*) 135-223 [a detailed analysis of gender roles in the drama; a heavily ironic reading of both the character of Theseus and the play's political meaning, culminating in an anti-war conclusion]

S. Mills (*Theseus*) 87-128 [an eminently reasonable study of the play and its themes; establishes an Athenian ideal up to which the Argives cannot live; Mills is especially good on the political background]

R. Rehm (*Tragic Theatre*) 124-32 [shows how Euripides' theme about the costs of war can be heightened by considering the visual aspects of the drama, especially the actual appearance of death and the transition from peace (Demeter) to war (Athena)]

S. Scully ('Orchestra and Stage') [assumes the presence of a raised stage and thus two performing spaces, whose juxtaposition and opposition creates the tension between the themes of the play]

W.D. Smith ('Expressive Form') [the play was not intended to offer satisfaction, but presents 'affirmation first and qualification second'; the positive presentation of Athens and the hope for ideals are real, but not allowed to become concrete]

G. Zuntz (*Political Plays*) 3-25 [a landmark study which rescued the play from much negative press in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries; it can be a legitimate 'encomium of Athens' and still thought-provoking and effective drama']

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Glossary

agôn: 'debate' or 'contest', a formal one-to-one exchange between two characters.

Archidamian War: the first phase (431-421) of the Peloponnesian War, named after the Spartan king, Archidamos.

charis: 'favour' or 'obligation'.

dêmos: 'people'; 'democracy'; *dêmokratia* is the 'rule of the people'.

dikê: 'justice', the major theme in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*-trilogy (458).

drakôn: 'serpent'; in Greek myth Kadmos, the founder of Thebes, had to slay a *drakôn*, sow its teeth in the ground, and kill the warriors ('Spartoi', the 'sown ones') who sprang from that sowing.

eisodos: (plural: *eisodoi*) 'way in', 'entrance'; a passage on each side of the orchestra, through which actors and the chorus would enter the playing area; a later convention, which does work for fifth-century drama, is that 'stage left' led to a local setting, 'stage right' to a distant location (sometimes called *parodoi*).

ekklêsia: 'assembly'; at Athens the meeting of citizens which elected its leaders and decided policy.

ekkyklêma: 'wheel out', a wheeled device which could be rolled out through the central doors of the *skênê*-building, to display interior scenes.

Eleusis: a city to the north-west of Athens (13 miles), where the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone were celebrated; setting of Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis* and Euripides' *Suppliant Women.*

Epigonoi: 'those born after', 'the next generation', the Sons of the Seven, who will grow up and sack the city of Thebes to avenge their fathers; title of a lost sixth-century epic poem.

epitaphios logos: 'speech at the tomb' – at Athens a formal eulogy of those killed in war during a particular year, probably instituted in the 460s; the most famous example is that delivered by Perikles in 431 (Thucydides 2).

hêrôs: 'hero', a human worshipped after his or her death with a cult; their tomb was considered 'sacred ground' and the *hêrôs* a sort of guardian spirit.

hiketeia: 'supplication', a formal ritual by which one person formally

asked a favour of another; suppliants were called *hiketai* (male) or *hiketides* (female); the latter is the Greek title of *Suppliant Women.*

hybris: 'outrage', 'assault' – in Athenian law a *graphê hybreôs* was a prosecution for 'assault'; the term is often used of human flaunting of divine law, thereby inviting the gods' retaliation.

hypothesis: an introduction by an ancient scholar to a Greek drama, usually providing a summary of the plot and often details about the production.

iambic trimeter: the principal metre of Greek drama, used mainly in the episodes and by the actors, called by Aristotle 'the closest to ordinary speech'; consists of three metra, each of the scheme: x — ∪—, where — designates a heavy (long) syllable, ∪ a light (short) syllable, and x can be either heavy or light.

kommos: a formally sung exchange, in responsion between an actor and the chorus, usually expressing sorrow or mourning.

kyrios: 'lord', the male figure, usually father or husband or brother, who stood in a position of authority over a woman.

mêchanê: 'machine', a crane that would allow characters to appear in the air over the *skênê*-building.

monody: literally 'solo song', a passage in a lyric metre, sung by an actor.

Mother and Daughter: Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility, and her daughter, Persephone or Kore ('maiden'); Demeter's gifts to humanity were the growing of crops and the Mysteries, ritual initiation which promised 'salvation' in the next life; her principal site of worship was Eleusis.

nomos, nomima: 'law', 'lawful things'.

orchêstra: 'dancing place', the principal playing-space in a Greek theatre, a flat area at the bottom of the hill on which the spectators sat; in fourth-century theatres this was round, but the shape in fifth-century theatres remains a matter of debate.

parodos: the song performed by the chorus as they enter the orchestra.

Peace of Nikias: a peace treaty signed in 421 between Athens and her allies and Sparta and her supporters, which brought to an end the hostilities of the Archidamian War.

Peloponnesian War: 'the war with Sparta'; broke out formally in 431, temporarily halted with the Peace of Nikias in 421, but resumed in 415 with Athens' expedition to Sicily; ended in 405/4 with the surrender of Athens to the Spartans.

ponos: 'toil', 'labour', usually associated with Herakles, who had to perform twelve Labours for Eurystheus, king of Tiryns.

proagôn: held two days before the City Dionysia, this occasion allowed the tragic poet to display the actors and chorus for the coming production.

Proerosia: a festival celebrated at Eleusis in October, as an offering for the success of the autumn planting.

prôtagônistês, deuteragônistês, tritagônistês: 'first performer', 'second performer', 'third performer', the technical names of the three actors in the ancient Greek theatre; after 449 the *prôtagônistês* competed for the prize for best actor.

satyr-play: the fourth play in a tragic production (three tragedies + satyr-play), featuring a chorus of satyrs (half-human, half-animal followers of Dionysos) and a burlesque of the usual subjects of epic and tragedy.

skênê: 'hut', 'tent'; the building at the back of the orchestra, with a double door opening inward, could be decorated and the roof (later called the *theologeion*) was available as a playing-area.

stichomythia: a formal line-by-line exchange between two speakers in Greek drama.

stratêgos: 'general', one of ten Athenian officials elected annually to run the state.

strophe/antistrophe: 'turn' and 'counter-turn'; pairs of smaller units of a choral ode, which corresponded in metre.

theologeion: 'god speaking place', the roof of the *skênê*-building, where gods and others might appear.

thymelê: 'hearth', 'fire-pit', located in the centre of the orchestra, and could represent an altar, a tomb, or a statue.

tyrannos: 'tyrant', often just synonymous with 'king' or 'ruler', but technically denotes one who has made himself ruler, rather than inherited the position; in late fifth-century Athens could be a term of political attack.

Chronology

Political **Literary**

510: expulsion of the tyrants

507: establishment of democracy

501: re-organisation of the dramatic festival

498: début of Aeschylus

492: first Persian invasion of Greece

490: second Persian invasion (battle of Marathon)

481: third Persian invasion (Battle of Salamis: 480, Battle of Plataia: 479)

475: Kimon retrieves the bones of Theseus from Skyros

468: début of Sophokles

467: Aeschylus' *Seven*

463-459: Aeschylus' *Suppliants*

461: Athenian alliance with Argos, political reforms at Athens, emergence of Perikles

late 460s (?): Aeschylus' *Men of Eleusis* [lost]

459-446: off-and-on war with Sparta

458: Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

455: début of Euripides

443-438: Sophokles' *Antigone*

431: Euripides' *Medea*

431: beginning of Peloponnesian War

c. 430: Euripides' *Children of Herakles*

429: death of Perikles

424: battle of Delion (November)

424 or 422: Euripides' *Suppliant Women*

423/2: year of truce

422: Euripides' *Erechtheus* [lost]

421: Peace of Nikias

420: Athenian alliance with Argos *et al.*

415: Euripides' *Trojan Women*

415-413: Sicilian expedition

411: Revolution of the 400 (oligarchic coup)

c. 409: Euripides' *Phoenician Women*

408: Euripides' *Orestes*

405/4: end of the Peloponnesian War

404: The Thirty Tyrants

401: Sophokles' *Oedipus at Kolonos*

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Παρακαλώ όπως επιστραφεί μέχρι
την τελευταία ημερομηνία που φαίνεται πιο κάτω
