THEBAN LEGEND IN GREEK TRAGEDY

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By

PETER JOHN GRIFFITHS, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Peter John Griffiths, B.A. (Leicester University)

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This thesis examines those Greek tragedies dealing with the legend of the house of Laius and attempts to discover the adaptability of the hero to religious, social and political themes and also to delineate the persistent (and peculiar) images of each play.

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T.A.P.A. for American Philological Association, Transactions and Proceedings.

Peter Griffiths.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to examine briefly the successive treatments of Theban legend in the works of the major Athenian dramatists of the fifth century B.C., Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, in order to discover the adaptability of these stories to religious, social and political themes and in order to explore the use of imagery, whether recurrent in several dramas or peculiar to one. In approaching the texts some limiting of material, arrangement of subject matter and critical assumptions have been made which require explanation and definition in advance.

The emphasis throughout is placed almost exclusively on the legends of the house of Laius. Plays treating both the peripheral stories of such heroes as Amphitryo and Alcmena, Amphion and Zethus, Heracles and Amphiaraus, whose lives and exploits are only distantly connected with the house of Laius, and also the myths of Dionysus at Thebes, are cited simply in footnotes to give an indication of the frequency of Theban legend in Athenian drama in spite of the continuing political enmity between the two cities. Attention, then, is focussed on the poets' approach to, and use of, this closely-connected group of stories about the house of Laius.

From such legends and myths as these, Attic tragedy of this period almost entirely adapted its subjects. Historical subjects are

generally avoided[1] and pure fiction hardly known until after Euripides[2]. These stories formed a body of material, however, that for the Greeks corresponded at one end of the spectrum to history (as Herodotus shows by starting his History of the Persian wars with the stories of Europa, Io and the Trojan wars) and at the other to religion (for example, the cult myth of Dionysus), with a kind of mystic philosophy (such as the Orphics and Pythagoreans developed) somewhere between. They thus held a far more significant place in the Greek mind than even a combination of these three ways of thinking about life do for a modern, for they mirrored the whole realm of human existence in a more natural, more immediate manner than their intellectual counterparts today. Besides, an important segment of them had been moulded into formal intensity in the cycle of epic which, though dealing principally with the legends surrounding the Trojan and Theban wars, included a tremendous compendium of myth, legend and folk-tale. Homer's two epics, the Iliad and Odyssey -- the whole cycle of epic poems was often attributed to him -- were but the greatest of these, yet had such a profound effect on the subjects, outlook and approach of tragedy that Aeschylus could claim his plays were 'slices of Homer's banquet'[3]. Attic tragedy probably owed both its heroic and tragic world-view and also often the form and significance of the stories themselves to Homer and the epic cycle.

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[1] Only two plays by Phrynichus (first victory 511 B.C.) -- the Capture of Miletus (? cf. Herodotus, 6, 21) and the Phoenissae [Aristophanes, Wasps, 220 with scholiast, cf. A. Nauck, Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta (Leipzig, 1856), pp. 559-60] -- and the extant Persians of Aeschylus are known to have dealt with topical subjects.

[2] Agathon's Antheus is the only known example but Aristotle hints that in his day fictional treatment of myth had gained considerable ground (Poetics 1451 b 19-22).

[3] Athenaeus, 8, 347 e.

These poems, however, do not establish a fixed version of any myth -- no such thing existed. Each retelling of the story might vary emphasis and content according to its artistic purpose. Thus the mainly lyric, satiric and choric poetry of the seventh and sixth centuries shows wide variation in and addition to the repertoire of myth. The content of this is difficult to judge since only part of the poetry of both periods has survived, and that often in fragmentary form. Attic drama reveals a similar trend of variation and of innovation in treating myth, and the plays on Theban legend, though based on episodes from the Oedipodeia, the Thebaid and the Epigoni (and other sources to a lesser extent), display both the developments of later poets (and material not used by the epics) and considerable independence of invention by the playwrights themselves. The first task of this study has been to define for each play such variation or choice, and so put Aristotle's remark on this point into perspective (Poetics 1453B23): τοὺς μὲν οὖν παρειλημμένους μύθους λύειν οὐκ ἔστιν [4]. Together with a brief résumé of each play's action, that inevitably involves some interpretation, this consequently forms a basis for discussion of the dramatists' intentions concerning the other aspects to be treated.

The poets' selection of variants and the invention of new details are symptoms partly of the radically new approach to the stories that is demanded by their dramatization and partly of the changed circumstances and outlook of the men themselves. The dramatic effects

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[4] Cf. R. Lattimore, Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy, (London, Athlone Press, 1964), pp. 1-6, dealing specifically with Theban legend.

achieved by the dramatists are not discussed separately, nor is an overall interpretation attempted, except insofar as an adequate appreciation of both is required in order to treat those aspects that are considered. The approach to these aspects, however, relies on some basic critical assumptions which bear on the general character of Greek tragedy. The use of myth as subject matter is only one of many circumstances that mark off Greek drama and its mode of communication from its modern counterpart.

Attic tragedies were written for performance by two or three actors and a chorus in competition at the Greater Dionysia in the theatre dedicated to the god. Although plays (especially Aeschylus') were often repeated both at this major annual festival and at the rural Dionysia by touring companies in December (the approximate equivalent of the month Poseideon)[5] performance of them was limited to a few occasions in a year (and for any one play probably only one performance was assured). This was specifically at a religious festival for the whole city and such a condition of performance distinguishes these plays from modern drama. It probably also points to their origins in the actual cult of Dionysus. By the time that Aeschylus wrote the Seven a considerable evolution had taken place, for the play has little obvious reference to Dionysiac cult, and the same applies to most of the corpus of Greek tragedy (the Bacchae of Euripides being the exception that proves the rule). Investigation of Dionysiac myth and cult, however, has led to some possible connections that may help to illuminate

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[5]For detailed discussion of these points see A. Pickard-Cambridge, The Dramatic Festivals of Athens (Oxford, Clarendon, 1953), pp. 40-126.

some of the deeper religious themes that recur in the treatment of Theban legend.

Dionysus was a god of the people and is thus virtually ignored by Homer, though he was probably aware of the nature of the god's worship[6]. "His domain is, in Plutarch's words, the whole of the ὑγρὰ φύσις -- not only the liquid fire in the grape, but the sap thrusting in a young tree, the blood pounding in the veins of a young animal, all the mysterious and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature".[7] His worship as a mystery god appealed especially to women, who formed a band, the Thiasos, to celebrate his ecstatic rites under the leadership of a young male priest. Such a god must necessarily have clashed with the Greek sense of moderation and self-control and his origin was correctly considered to be barbarian (Phrygia or Thrace). The chief myths about him tell of resistance to his religion in various parts of Greece (e.g., Pentheus at Thebes, Lycurgus and Orpheus). These may well be a folk-memory of the actual arrival of his cult in Greece[8] but are also very likely to be aetiological myths to explain his peculiar cult-worship. In it the women of the thiasos (the Bacchants) become frenzied by wild singing and dancing to cult instruments (tympanum and pipes) and imagine themselves possessed by the god (enthusiasmos).

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[6] Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, The Greeks and Their Gods (Boston, Beacon, 1955) pp. 160-165.

[7] Euripides Bacchae, ed. E. R. Dodds (2nd ed., Oxford, 1960), p. xii, quoting Plutarch, Isis and Osiris, 35, 365A.

[8] Cf. Guthrie, pp. 172ff.

Then, seeing the god incarnate as some wild animal, they seize the beast, tear it alive (sparagmos) and devour it.[9] This type of ritual was not that associated with the tragic festivals of Athens, but was possibly retained at the "more archaic Dionysia" (Thucydides, 2, 15) held at the sanctuary of Dionysus in the Marshes in the spring. The implication of the act was a taking of the god, present in his bestial incarnation, into the worshipper.[10] The state of frenzy in which the transformation of victim to god and worshipper to god appeared to occur had much in common with the state of creativity in artistic work, and so Aristophanes calls Aeschylus Βακχεῖον ἄνακτα (Frogs, 1259).

The sufferings of the god may have been the first subject of drama,[11] but such plays occur infrequently in the titles of tragedy.[12] There is, however, more than just this analogy for believing that Dionysiac cult-worship was the origin of tragedy and therefore the fundamental pattern of tragic action in a general sense[13]. Aristotle

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[9]Cf. Euripides, Bacchae, passim. There, the god's opponent, Pentheus, is first maddened by Dionysus and then falls victim to the Maenads.

[10]Dodds, pp. xvii-xx: -- human victims may have originally been slain.

[11]Cf. Dodds, p. xxviii; rejected by Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy (Oxford, Clarendon, 1927), pp. 206ff, and A. Lesky, Greek Tragedy, trans. H. A. Frankfort (London, Benn, 1965), p. 43.

[12]Dodds, ibid.

[13]G. Murray's theory that tragedy's form preserved that of the spring ritual of Dionysus or the Year Daimon, in J. E. Harrison, Themis (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1927), Appendix to Chapter VIII, is untenable in detail, principally because of the absence of any Greek cult parallels, cf. Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, pp. 185-206.

(Poetics, 1449a11) claims that tragedy began from "those who used to lead off the dithyramb"[14] and again (Poetics 1449a19 ff.) that it developed by a process of enlarging and solemnifying the satyr play (ἐκ σατυρικοῦ). While the latter seems a possible case of Aristotelian or pre-Aristotelian conjecture[15], the former, though hazardous, may contain more truth[16]. At any rate, if both views represent ideas prior to Aristotle, they point to possible origins in some song or mime performance closely connected with Dionysus. Other aspects of tragedy tend to confirm that this is not mere aetiology.

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[14]For the translation of the verb in ἐξαρχόντων τὸν διθύραμβον see G. F. Else, Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 157 ff.

[15]Cf. Else, pp. 172 ff. and Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, pp. 124-131.

[16]Else suggests a possible (non-Dionysiac) origin for tragedy in The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy, Martin Classical Lectures XX (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965). The influence of Homer and Solon on Thespis and the early tragedians brought about a synthesis of the heroic and tragic outlook with individual consciousness which found dramatic expression in the hero. A chorus influenced by the Dorian dithyramb, was introduced to act as a sounding board for the hero's suffering. This culminated with Aeschylus' introduction of the second actor (Aristotle, Poetics 1449a16). As D. W. Lucas remarks (Classical Review, New Series XVII, 1967, pp. 70-2), Aristotle had far more sources and oral traditions than remain today (cf. Poetics, 1449a36-8) and such a secular origin seems odd when drama in Greece is only found in religious contexts. Dorian claims made Arion inventor of tragedy, of verse for satyrs and of the dithyramb (Suidas, s.v. Arion and Aristotle, quoted by Proclus, ap. Photius, Bibliotheca, cod. 239, p. 320; cf. his backing of Dorian claims to tragedy and comedy, Poetics 1448a30 ff., cf. Else, ad loc.), a further connection with Dionysus.

which heroic stories of suffering entered the sphere of Dionysiac worship,[21] and this inclusion of heroic stories was probably influenced by the special interest in epic at the time.[22] The Theban legends of Oedipus and his family, besides being the subject of three epic poems, concern the remarkable sufferings of several heroes. They may well have been early incorporated into the sphere of Dionysiac cult-plays by the close connection of Thebes and Dionysus.[23] Thus both reasons and methods can be deduced for the introduction of legends of the house of Laius into Greek tragedy.

There is a further theme, often quite pronounced in the plays on Theban legend, that links the religious aspect of the plays with the cult of Dionysus and this is the part played by fertility cult. Dionysus' cult was closely connected with fertility since he was the god of "the whole wet element" of nature and this is underlined by his early attraction of the satyrs as his worshippers. Their appearance -- half-man, half-god (or horse) -- suited their lascivious character and also their fertility functions, just as the costumes used to represent them on the Attic stage included horses' tails and ears.[24]

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[21] Lesky, pp. 43 f.

[22] E.g. Pisistratus' recension of Homer and cf. Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, pp. 196 ff.

[23] "By the fifth century Thebes was regarded as the centre of the Dionysiac cult in Greece", Guthrie, p. 166.

[24] Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, pp. 149 ff.

The tradition which makes Pratinas introduce the satyr play (from his native Phlius in the Peloponnese? Suidas, s.v.)[17] hints at such cult-worship in the Peloponnese in connection with Dionysus, whose foremost votaries the satyrs were. The name of tragedy itself ("goat-song") may hint at satyrs. But this is too debatable to cite as evidence.[18] The use of the mask is especially connected with the worship of Dionysus[19] and the actors' costume, sleeved tunic and high boots (cothurni) similarly suggests the god.[20] The case, then, for a Dionysiac origin for tragedy is circumstantial but strong, and for a cult-story of suffering as the basic archetype possible. The heroic myth of suffering, however, takes pride of place in extant tragedy and insight into the way this evolution took place is given by a passage in Herodotus (5, 67). The historian tells that the τραγικοὶ χόροι of Adrastus, which told of his πάθη, presumably those resulting from the disastrous expedition against Thebes, were transferred by Cleisthenes, the tyrant of Sicyon (ruled c. 600-570), to Dionysus, exchanging the hated Argive hero for a popular god. The actual stories sung by these choruses could hardly have been changed to Dionysiac myths or Herodotus' description of them becomes untenable. This illustrates one way in

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[17] Suidas' remark that he was the first to compose these plays is probably to be understood as meaning he gave literary form to them. A similar misunderstanding is his remark (quoted above) that Arion first wrote dithyrambs, especially in the light of Peloponnesian claims to priority.

[18] Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, pp. 149-166. Lesky, pp. 28 ff, argues for this interpretation and would connect it with Aristotle's remarks on origins.

[19] Cf. Lesky, pp. 28-9. The satyrs were masked, and shrine offerings frequently included satyr masks.

[20] Cf. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, Dramatic Festivals, p. 213.

The festival at which tragedy was played was, in effect, a ceremony to promote the prosperity and fertility of Attica, just as the Rural Dionysia, more primitive than its sophisticated counterpart, preserved the phallic procession and obscene language of fertility ritual (Aristophanes, Acharnians 247 ff.).[25] Mime of some kind seems also likely to be part of the Eleusinian Mysteries, being accompanied by ritual music, singing and dancing.[26] Hints of such ritual significance, though by no means necessarily intended as an actual ritual act, still seem to persist in a number of plays and perhaps reveal the (largely subconscious) influence of the origins of tragedy and its circumstances of performance on the minds of the dramatists.

These elements of religous meaning, then, may be exploited by the tragedians with or without intention but more important is the effort to discern the actual religious meaning designed by the writers. That such a meaning is intended by the dramatist is an assumption of a particular kind of artistic approach and this needs some justification. The Greek dramatist, however, was not only writing for a religious festival but also had a more defined function in society than a modern. Aristophanes puts these words on the lips of Aeschylus

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[25] Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, pp. 237 ff, for the ritual obscenities of the Eleusinian procession (Herodotus, 5, 82).

[26] Cf. the discussion of G. Mylonas, Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries (Princeton, 1961), pp. 261-72.

and Euripides:

ΑΙΣ. ἀπόκρινάί μοι, τίνος οὕνεκα χρὴ θαυμάζειν ἄνδρα ποιητήν;
ΕΥ. δεξιότητος καὶ νουθεσίας, ὅτι βελτίους τε ποιοῦμεν
τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν. (Frogs, 1008-10)

and:

τοῖς μὲν γὰρ παισὶν ἔστι διδάσκαλος ὅστις φράζει, τοῖσιν δ' ἡβῶσι ποιηταί.
πάνυ δὴ δεῖ χρηστὰ λέγειν ἡμᾶς. (Frogs, 1054-6).

While Aristophanes cannot be treated as an accurate reporter of the actual opinions of the poets, his literary criticism here is more than superficial and calculated to amuse. The contrast underlying the contest of poets is between their differing notions of the good citizen and of the poetry required to inculcate this ideal.[27] There is naturally much comic banter with little critical significance, but the concept of poet as teacher seems to echo a common sentiment of the time. Similarly, Plato affirms that many felt Homer to be the educator of all Greece (Republic 606e).[28] The finale of the Frogs even suggests a connection between this didactic function of tragedy and the fertility ritual which formed its context. Dionysus chooses Aeschylus, and Ploutos (Wealth) and the chorus of Eleusinian initiates hymn the poet's intelligence that made tragedy noble and true and through it will save Athens (1482 ff). Tragedy in its noblest and truest form is seen

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[27] The Frogs of Aristophanes, ed. B. B. Rogers (London, Bell, 1919), ad locc.

[28] See also W. Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, trans. G. Highet (New York, Oxford University Press, 1965) vol. I, 35-56.

as both an aid to prosperity and, more practically, as sound teaching to the same end. Aristotle (Poetics 1450b5 ff.) echoes this teaching aspect of tragedy when (on the subject of "thought" or "intent") he claims that the older poets made their characters speak "politically", that is, according to the demands of action in a city,[29] in contrast to the moderns who concentrated on rhetoric. Plato's strictures on the poets assume their teaching function and it is this that makes "lying" in art a serious matter. His ideal art appears to be exemplified by his dialogues which have a ultimate didactic purpose while possessing immediate literary appeal. The Greek dramatist, then, was working in an atmosphere which demanded this educative element in tragedy and therefore it is right to expect it in the plays.

The habitual use of myth implies a world-view in which man and gods are closely related and therefore favours the treatment of religious and social themes. Tragedy, however, was not so restricted that plays had to be written with the religious aspect of their myth in the forefront. Rather, the plays are didactic in a broad way, and were written "politically" (in Aristotle's sense) on themes of importance for the city at large. For this reason, it is hard to break down themes into the categories religious, social and political since these aspects were much more organically integrated in the life of the Polis, and often have implications in all three spheres.

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[29] "According to the combined arts of politics and ethics" (cf. Nicomachean Ethics I, 1, 1094b10 and Else, Poetics, ad loc.).

The concept of the poet as teacher has the corollary that any play will necessarily treat myth from the viewpoint of the fifth century. This leads to an ambivalent treatment of the places and events of the myth, and contemporary is often unified with antique, just as Homer's world is part reminiscence of an otherwise forgotten Mycenean Age and his contemporary Dark Age. In dealing with the political aspects of plays this is a crucial area and often critics use the term "anachronism" to denote this attitude. Since the concept of history was only just developing, it is unlikely that an Athenian audience reacted unfavourably to such historical fusion. Aeschylus' Eumenides illustrates the fusion of heroic legend, a struggle of gods and the atmosphere of the Athenian Areopagus as a law-court, and how this creation can be utilized to promulgate political propaganda on proper balance within the city.[30]

The Eumenides also gives examples of further, more particular, references to political affairs in Athens (754 ff. on the Argive alliance of 461 B.C.). Certainly, there is no lack of interpretation of the plays on Theban legend that attempts to find such implications. While Aeschylus' plays occasionally show clear instances of particular political references, Sophocles, whose successful political career is well-known, has fewer such comments on personalities and policies in the Theban plays. Euripides in his Trojan Women seems to derive much of the tragic intensity of the play from the historical archetype of its situation -- the capture and destruction of Melos by the Athenians in

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[30] On these points cf. B. M. W. Knox, Oedipus at Thebes (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 61 ff.

416 B.C. The cruel slaughter of the male population and enslavement of the rest was given special prominence by Thucydides (5, 84 ff.). Euripides universalizes the event by depicting the aftermath of the Trojan War, not as an example of the triumph of power politics as Thucydides does but as a microcosm of the horrors of war, which brutalizes conqueror and conquered alike.[31] Plays and politics, then, are closely related but to assume direct (and therefore unartistic and unGreek) analogy to political events in a play is wrong.

The final aspect studied in the plays on Theban legend is the imagery. The poetry of Greek tragedy has often been neglected in comparison to exegesis of the other elements of communication, but it has equal power to express the poet's themes and ideas. R. Goheen has made a seminal review of the imagery in Sophocles' Antigone[32] and his terms and approaches provide a working basis, but not a complete scheme, for discussion of imagery. Like Goheen's, this study focuses primarily on dominant images in the plays because there is less danger of misconstruing the real metaphorical significance of a number of similar tropes than that of one self-contained expression. These image patterns function with greater or lesser significance in one part of or throughout each play and help develop insight into plot,

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[31] Cf. G. M. A. Grube, The Drama of Euripides (London, Methuen, 1941), pp. 280 ff.

[32] The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone (Princeton, 1951).

character and meaning.[33] The work of art is an organism and all its parts must cohere for it to function with maximum effect. Imagery is not the least of tragedy's means of communication.

A definition of what is included in the concept of imagery is certainly difficult, but is best summed up as metaphor and its related forms. In Goheen's study imagery is defined as follows:

> Within our province are any use of concrete, sensuous terms which are not simply descriptive but which are so used as to communicate emotional attitudes or intellectual perceptions indirectly, either by a transfer of meaning or by analogy. Thus we are including what rhetoricians distinguished as metaphor proper, synecdoche, metonymy, personification and "the enlivening of lifeless things". It seems also proper to include the exemplification of a general observation by concrete analogy in any case where the expression is both concrete and suggestive.[34]

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[33] Goheen, pp. 3 ff. A greater role is played by imagery in some Aeschylean tragedies: "The issues, the themes, the motives that make for conflict, for drama, find their most complete expression not in the chorus' declarations of fact but in their statements in symbol, symbol which in syntax, in the circumstances of language, becomes image. Imagery in the Aeschylean plays does not then simply illuminate or even illustrate drama. In its recall of past events, in its anticipation of future events, in its definition -- not description -- of present conflicts it actually creates drama. In this sense imagery is dramatic imagery". Barbara L. Hughes, Dramatic Imagery in Aeschylus (unpublished dissertation, Bryn Mawr, 1955), p. iv.

[34] P. 105.

The last category is illustrated by the opening of the first stasimon of the Antigone: "Wonders are many and none more awesome than man" (332). These phrases are concrete but when illustrated by successive examples become suggestive of the ambiguities that every human action implies in the play. One further category might well be added, since it is significant throughout the Theban plays, and this is the concretization of imagistic ideas, such as those relating to blindness in Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, which receive final statement in the form of the blind Oedipus. This category is an extension of imagery and interacts with it so that in it the image finds concrete statement which is in turn an image through connotation. These image patterns are explored primarily for their contributions to each drama, but, like the other aspects studied, are also correlated from play to play to distinguish and define recurrent tropes that each dramatist applies both to situation and hero in Theban legend.

Thus several of the most important modes of expression open to the poets are examined in this study to illuminate the basic pattern or patterns of Theban legend and to trace the individual differences of vision and communication that successive treatments adopt. Myth, plot, religious, social and political aspects and finally imagistic expression are all scrutinized in an effort to define both the continued significance and development of the stories and also their particular meanings in the course of several treatments at different times and for different artistic ends by the three very individual masters of the Attic theatre. To detect and define the adaptability of the hero and his implications for the historical moment at which each

play was created is the central object of the symbolic approach, while to characterize the peculiar and persistent imagery of the plays is that of the linguistic approach.

II

AESCHYLUS AND THEBAN LEGEND

1. Aeschylus and Tragedy; The Eleusinians

The seven earliest complete Greek tragedies extant are by Aeschylus and among them is the first known treatment of Theban legend, the Seven against Thebes.[1] Of the poet's life little is known. He was born at Eleusis in Attica of aristocratic parents. Ancient scholars probably calculated his birth-date 524 B.C. from the year of his first victory with his plays, 484 B.C. His valour in the battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) is recorded in his epitaph and this date places him in the period of Athens' dynamic development internally towards radical democracy and externally towards the hegemony of Greece. The close bond between Aeschylus and the city in his plays illustrates the spirit of optimism and patriotism that must have been inspired by, and resulted in, Athens' rise to power.

Aeschylus probably shaped tragedy in a radical manner. Aristotle (Poetics 1449a15ff.) says that Aeschylus added the second actor, reduced the part of the chorus and made dialogue pre-eminent. These were the first large steps towards drama as the conflict of

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[1] Possibly Aeschylus' own title, cf. Aristophanes, Frogs, 1021. Hereafter in this study simply the Seven.

individuals rather than as concentration on one man's dilemma highlighted by the reactions of the chorus. Most of Aeschylus' plays, especially the Persians and the Seven, show evidence of the second, cruder technique. Although three plays were given by each poet, the trilogy connected in subject matter may have been developed especially by Aeschylus.[2] At least, to judge from the Oresteia, he uses this form to express deep religious and political conflicts and their resolutions. His work indicates his position as teacher of the city and shaper of tragedy and these aspects are investigated in the Seven.

Of Aeschylus' other treatments of Theban legend, little is known except that a further trilogy contained another treatment of the Theban war. Its actual plays are disputed. Perhaps they formed an Adrastus trilogy, starting with the Nemea. This may have told the story of the founding of the Nemean Games. The expedition of the Argives against Thebes halted at Nemea and were shown to water by Hypsipyle. While she was gone, her charge Archemorus was killed by a snake and the games instituted in his memory.[3] The next play, the Argives,[4] perhaps contained the lamentation of the Argive women over the fallen. The Eleusinians dealt with the recovery

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[2]The Persians (472 B.C.) was put on with the Phineus and the Glaucus Potnieus, unconnected stories, while the Seven competed against a Lycurgus trilogy by Polyphrasmon (Argument to Aeschylus' Seven).

[3]Scholiast to Pindar, Nemean Odes and cf. Rose, Oxford Classical Dictionary (Oxford, Clarendon, 1947), s.v. Adrastus. References to the play in H.J. Mette, Die Fragmente der Tragoedien des Aischylos (Berlin, Akademie, 1959), pp.92-3.

[4]Mette, pp.93-4.

and burial of the Seven by Theseus at Eleusis.[5] No performance date is known for this trilogy, while its sources are the cyclic epic, the Thebaid, and other local stories from Nemea and Attica. The significant alteration of the epic to include the intervention of Theseus and the heroes' burial at Eleusis[6] has led to the reasonable assumption that this play, like the Suppliants and the Eumenides, reflects a favourable outlook on close Athenian-Argive relations.[7]

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[5]Plutarch, Theseus, 29 and fragments in Mette, pp. 94-5. Another interpretation of the fragments makes the trilogy consist of the Eleusinians, the Argives and the Epigoni, see Aeschylus, trans. H.W. Smyth(London, Heinemann, 1927), II, 378, 383-5, 396-7. The reconciliation brought about by Theseus in the Eleusinians suggests a final, not a first, play. The Epigoni, which must have dealt with the successful expedition of the sons of the Seven, is treated as a separate play in Mette, pp.23-4.

[6]According to Asclepiades, Pindar, Olympian Odes, 6, 15, is a quotation from the Thebaid:

ἑπτὰ δ' ἔπειτα τελεσθέντων νεκύων ἐνὶ Θήβῃ.

see Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica, trans. H.G. Evelyn-White (London, Heinemann, 1920), p.486.

[7]Cf. especially Suppliants 625-709, and Eumenides, 754ff.

It has been further conjectured that the portrayal of the Thebans as amenable to Theseus' persuasion was an attempt to realign Sparta's allies and that the cult of Theseus' bones was an important theme in the play following the command of the Delphic oracle in 476 B.C. These suggestions are based on conjectural dating by circular arguments and remain doubtful.[8] Other plays on Theban stories are known only in outline from fragments and references.[9]

2. The Seven: Trilogy, Myth and Action

The first extant Greek tragedy dealing with Theban legend is Aeschylus' Seven. It is the final play of a trilogy that told the story of the house of Laius and its eventual destruction. A satyr play, the Sphinx, followed and probably referred back to the events that fell between the first and second plays, the Laius and Oedipus. Although only one significant fragment of the first two tragedies—three lines from the Oedipus — has survived and the action and meaning of the trilogy as a whole must consequently be reconstructed from the Seven and external sources, the trilogy seems to have a

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[8] For further discussion, A.J. Podlecki, The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1966), pp. 150ff.

[9] Cf. Smyth, p. 375, Alcmena; Lloyd-Jones in Smyth, pp. 541-556 Theorioe or Isthmiastae (a satyr play in which Dionysus appears without much reference to the story); Smyth, pp. 404ff. and Lloyd-Jones, pp. 586-90, Heracleidae; five plays about Dionysus, variously reduced to a tetralogy or trilogy: pp. 568-71, Semele or Hydrophoroe; Nurses; pp. 435-7, Xantriae; pp.385-6, Bacchae and p.443 Pentheus. Mette treats Bacchae(p.18) and Nurses (pp.156-7) separately from the the Dionysus trilogy (pp.132-9). The Lycourgeia trilogy, Smyth, p.377,—Edonians (pp.398-401), Bassarides (pp.386-8), Neanisci (p428) and Lycurgus (satyric, p.420)— contains stories of Thracian Dionysus.

shaping effect on Theban legend in Greek tragedy. Many of its themes and images continually recur in the treatments of these stories by the later Attic dramatists. If the whole trilogy were extant, this influence might be even more marked.

The trilogy was based on the story of the cyclic epics, the Oedipodeia and the Thebaid. The first play, the Laius, contained Apollo's oracle to Laius, thrice repeated, that he must die without offspring to save the city (Seven, 746ff.). His disobedience to this divine admonition resulted in his death at the hands of his exposed son, Oedipus, who was unaware of his identity. This event was the climax of the first play. An oracle of Apollo that Oedipus would kill his father already appears in Pindar, Olympian Odes,2,38-40 (476 B.C.), but the threat is a personal one and does not involve the safety of the city, an important innovation by Aeschylus. The Pindar passage does, however, include the important theme of the vengeance of the Fury on Oedipus' sons for their father's parricide.

Oedipus' subsequent conquest of the Sphinx (already legendary [10]) and marriage to his mother Jocasta (cf. Homer, Odyssey, 11,271-80, where, however, she is called Epicaste) probably took place in the interval between the Laius and the next play, the Oedipus. The climaxes of this play must have been the discovery of the parricide and incestuous marriage, the blinding, and the mad curse of Oedipus on his sons (Seven 725, 753ff.). The first

[10] Cf. References in E.L. de Kock, "The Sophoklean Oidipus and its Antecedents", Acta Classica 4, 1961, p.23.

appearance of a curse on Eteocles and Polyneices is in the Thebaid. In one fragment (Athenaeus, 11, 465E), Polyneices puts Cadmus' silver table and Laius' gold cup before Oedipus against his wishes and draws a curse of continual strife over patrimony. The scholiast on Sophocles, Oedipus Coloneus, 1375 has another version from the same source, in which Oedipus pronounces a curse of fraternal mutual slaughter in retaliation for being sent a dishonourable portion from his sons' sacrifice. The inverse proportion of the intensity of the curses to their provocation is noticeable,[11] and the scholiast complains that the second curse is petty and ignoble. The stress on Oedipus' madness (Seven, 724, 780) and the involvement of both sons in the curse suggest that Aeschylus' motivation for it (in doubt because of the corruption in Seven, 785-6) was the sons' neglect of their father, as in the second fragment of the Thebaid.[12] This implies that Oedipus was isolated as accursed and polluted, a fact that does not exonerate the brothers from blame. This would be a typically Aeschylean complex of guilt and innocence.

Before the start of the final play, Oedipus must have died and the paucity of reference to this event suggests that it took place at the end of the Oedipus. The central events of the Seven are Eteocles' defence of Thebes and duel with his brother, which were familiar from the Thebaid.[14] But Aeschylus' play is almost

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[11] C. Robert, Oidipus (Berlin, Weidmann, 1915), I, 171.

[12] The division motif (Seven,710f, etc.)is from the first fr.

[13] Cf. the Thebaid, de Kock, p.20.

[14] Implied in the second curse, and Pindar, Ol. Odes, 2,41ff.

entirely invented in its action. For the first time the sons are the offspring of Oedipus' incestuous marriage, which means both a delayed discovery and emphasizes the inherited family curse more than in the epic.[15] Oedipus' curse, though possibly a climax in the preceeding play, is only mentioned once in the first half of the Seven (70), while the brothers' quarrel and duel, though implicit in the expedition of the Argives, are not referred to until 576.[16] The suggestion that this represented two sides of Theban legend would make the first half of the play reflect an internal Mycenean conflict between the Argives and Thebans, in which Eteocles plays the patriotic king, and the second half (after 654) the Labdacid legend with all its implications of fraternal strife.[17] This may be true but makes no allowance for the complexity of Eteocles' character throughout and the subtle implications of the brothers' struggle in the first half, especially the dramatic irony of the central scene where the audience, but not Eteocles, must anticipate the duel. Aeschylus' design, and not his disparate sources, is clearly uppermost in the suppression of this clash. Though the actual details of the Argives' assault, such as Amphiaraus' mysterious death,[18] are borrowed from epic, the motif of seven pairs of attackers

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[15] H.C. Baldry, "The Dramatization of the Theban Legend", Greece and Rome, 2nd. Series, 3, 1956, pp.31f.

[16] Cf. R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Aeschylus, Septem 187-90, 750-757", Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, London, 13, 1966, p.92 Note 10.

[17] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Aischylos Interpretationen (Berlin,1914), pp.88-95.

[18] Pindar, Nemean Odes, 9, 9-28 (476 or 474 B.C.).

and defenders for the seven gates, with Eteocles and Polyneices as the final pair is also essentially dramatic and probably Aeschylus' own device since it rejects Adrastus as leader of the expedition.[19]

If the ending of the play were treated as genuine, which seems most unlikely,[20] further innovations in the legend would be included, for no other reference to a refusal of burial to Polyneices is known prior to Sophocles' Antigone. Nor is any evidence of Antigone's defiance of such an order found.[21] In many respects, then, Aeschylus has not only remoulded the traditions of epic for dramatic effect, as for example, Oedipus' delayed discovery and the seven pairs of champions, but has also drastically altered the details for his own purposes, particularly the parentage of Eteocles and Polyneices, to stress the working of the family curse.

The Seven begins with Eteocles' rallying speech to the Cadmeans. The Argive invaders are about to make their final thrust and all, young and old, must help their country. A scout reports the Argives' oath to destroy Thebes or die. Eteocles prays to the gods and his father's curse to spare the city and then retires. A chorus of panic-stricken Theban women supplicate the gods' images and vividly conjure up the sights and sounds of approaching war. Eteocles returns to rebuke their morale-threatening behaviour and enjoin a practical outlook:

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[19] Pindar, Olympian Odes, 6, 12ff.

[20] H. Lloyd-Jones, "The End of the Seven against Thebes", Classical Quarterly, new series, 9, 1959, pp.80-115 makes out a case for genuineness. His arguments are attacked on philological grounds by E. Fraenkel, "Zum Schluss der Sieben Gegen Theben", Museum Helveticum 21, 1964, pp.58-64 and on others by R.D. Dawe, "The End of Seven against Thebes", Classical Quarterly, N.S., 17, 1967, pp.16-28. The end seems spurious but fifth century tragic idiom.

[21] The Seven are buried at

their prayers to the gods must be tempered with obedience to him and effort from their menfolk, since the gods may or may not help. The chorus is calmed by his outburst and dwells on the miseries of the siege and capture of a city, invoking the gods' help. Eteocles and the scout enter together and the latter reports one by one the chiefs of Argos and their positions at the seven gates of Thebes. In contrast to the boasting and fierceness of the first five attackers Eteocles sketches the virtuous modesty and courage of his appointed defenders. The prophet Amphiaraus alone is an unpresumptuous enemy but his uprightness guarantees he will not attack Thebes. His opponent, however, will be a fighter of valour. The final champion is Polyneices, with a blazon claiming justice for his cause. Eteocles, though horrified at first, accepts the doom of Oedipus' curse despite the chorus' warnings that pollution is inevitable. The chorus, aghast, sings of the curse on the house of Laius and its fulfilment in each generation, steadily more terrible. A messenger arrives and announces that the city is safe and the brothers dead by each other's hand. As their bodies enter, the chorus laments their fate, perhaps accompanied by Antigone and Ismene. In the supposedly interpolated ending, a herald announces that the city's council forbids the burial of Polyneices, Antigone refuses to obey this edict and the chorus divides, some to help Antigone bury her brother and others to accompany Eteocles' corpse to state burial.

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or near Thebes (above, note 6). For the various stories about Antigone see Chapter III.

3. Religious and Social Themes

The trilogy's major theme has already emerged from the study of Aeschylus' innovations in the myth. It is the working of a family curse in successive generations. The full religious implications of Aeschylus' treatment can only be guessed at because of the almost total disappearance of the first two plays. The long second stasimon of the Seven (720-791) seems to sum up the operation of the curse throughout the trilogy, however, and sets Eteocles' (and Polyneices') actions in the wider context of their father's and grandfather's destruction through its functioning. The obvious similarity of motif suggests comparison with the only complete extant trilogy of Aeschylus, the Oresteia. There Aeschylus manifests his interest in the build-up and final resolution of dynamic evolutionary processes of evil in the affairs of men and their cities, together with the interrelationship of divine and human causation in these processes. Both trilogies begin with a divine injunction on a king: a demand on Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia (Agamemnon, 206-18) and Apollo's oracle to Laius not to have offspring (Seven, 745ff.). Agamemnon's decision, set against the background of his father's trangressions against his brother, Thyestes (Agamemnon, 1215ff.) is punished by Clytemnestra's vengeful murder (Agamemnon, 1380ff.), just as Laius' disobedience of Apollo is punished by Oedipus' unwitting parricide. These acts result in dilemmas for the sons. Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother, but the ambiguity of his conduct , at once both righteous

and guilty, cannot be left unchallenged. Pursued by his mother's Furies, he is eventually vindicated by the Olympians in the trial scene of the Eumenides. The Furies, no longer allies of Zeus in their pursuit, are reconciled by Athena to his escaping with his life. Eteocles and Polyneices neglected Oedipus and die partly for their filial impiety (Seven, 785-90). Polyneices is shown as fully deserving his fate because of his attack on his mother city. Eteocles, however, who, like Orestes, makes a decision to breach the laws of kinship and fight his brother, is overcome by the family curse and the wrath of Apollo (800 ff.) and dies in the forbidden fraternal duel. Thus each successive member of both families suffers a direr fate than his parent and while the Olympians release Orestes and his family from this crescendo of human and divine evil, only the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices, the children of incest, bring freedom for Thebes from the wickedness of the Labdacids.

In both trilogies the family curse that provides a central unifying motif is actuated by the Furies who appear on stage in the Eumenides. The nature of these goddesses and of the justice they enforce is there probed in contrast to the Olympians and their higher form of justice. The Furies are chthonic powers, usually the daughters of Earth (Hesiod, Theogony, 184 ff.),[22] and thus older than the Olympians (Eumenides, 150, 779). They especially

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[22]Daughters of Night in the Eumenides (322, 416 and in the Seven, 679, 979?) painting them as monsters to be feared, cf. the horrors born of Night (Theogony, 211 ff.).

protect the rights of kin and pursue the breakers of kinship ties, a function that is ancient in the Oedipus legend (Odyssey,11,271-80 and Pindar, Olympian Odes, 2, 41ff.). They demand blood for blood (Eumenides, 185-197) and insist only on the fact of crime and not its motives (Eumenides,176f.,652-6). In the Eumenides, however, their connection as chthonic powers with both fertility and the souls of the dead [23] is exploited by Aeschylus. Athena persuades them to alter their aspect and become beneficiaries of Athens as inspirers of the fear that will give authority to the Olympians' new state system of legal justice symbolized by the Areopagus (Eumenides,976-995). In the Theban trilogy, however, only their enforcement of family rights and the family curse appears and they are even identified by Eteocles with the curse of Oedipus:

Ἀρά τ' Ἐρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής. (70,cf.785ff.)

This function of the Furies is the trilogy's unifying theme.[24]

The working of the Furies in each generation is depicted as a madness that results in crime (Seven,724, 756f., 781,786). This mad delusion ("atê") is the typical mode of operation of the Furies and in the Eumenides they sing a maddening spell to bind their victim's soul (307-396, cf. Iliad,19, 86ff.). In this way they put into effect both the curse on the house of Laius and Oedipus' curse on his sons, the central action of the Seven. The magical power of curses is not recognised by Homer in the main action

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[23] W.K.C. Guthrie, The Greeks and Their Gods (Boston, Beacon, 1955),p.218.

[24] F. Solmsen,"The Erinys in Aischylos' Septem",T.A.P.A.,68,1937,p.199.

of either epic unless it receives the sanction of the gods. In Aeschylus however its potency is integrated into the revenge justice of the Furies and its operation seen as in some way just retribution for the violation of the rights for which they stand.[25] Thus its operation is triggered by Laius' disobedience to Apollo's oracle, Oedipus' parricide and his sons' neglect of him. Oedipus himself utters a curse, the power of which Eteocles hints at early in the Seven (70). The irony of the central scene in the Seven (373-653) is that both curses and the Fury who executes them work in accord with Eteocles' free will to bring him to deadly fraternal combat with Polyneices,[26] the final mad rivalry in the family brought to boil by Oedipus' curse (699-716). This is the Fury's death blow to the house of Laius (886-7, 1060-3) and also vengeance for Apollo (800-2). There may be a hint that Fury and Olympian work together, but if so the idea is not fully delineated in the Seven.[27] The Fury, then, is the executor of both family curse and kinship justice and appears wholly in a destructive and punitive aspect in the Theban trilogy.

The action of the family curse is seen by Aeschylus in a complex manner. It is not purely the intervention of the divine in human affairs. Lesky considers Aeschylus to have a new concept here in that "the effect of the curse consists in a crime renewed from generation to generation".[28] While the power of the curse is active

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[25] L.A. Post, From Homer to Menander (Berkeley, Univ. of Calif., 1951), p.58.

[26] Solmsen, pp.201-3.

[27] B. Otis, "The Unity of the Seven against Thebes", Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies, 3, 1960 pp.153-174.

[28] "Decision and Responsibility in the Tragedies of Aeschylus",

in the events of the Seven, the freewill and decision of Eteocles does not therefore disappear. Similarly, Orestes progresses from acknowledgement of Apollo's oracular command to acceptance and personal desire to fulfil it during the Kommos of the Choephoroe (434ff.). Agamemnon follows the same course (Agamemnon, 206-18). All their actions are a "union of coercion and personal readiness".[29] Thus the spectacle of the Seven is not merely that of a δαίμων συλλήπτωρ (cf. Agamemnon 1507-8) casting its spell over Eteocles, as the chorus suggests by its allusions to madness (686-8), but also that of a hero coming to desire his terrible fate— a fraternal duel— although it is an offence against religious sensibility. The doom of the accursed Labdacids is sealed by both the divine activity of the Fury and Apollo and human activity — a repeated crime— in each generation.

The family and its curse involve and imperil the city of Thebes from the outset and there is constant tension between family and city, probably a major theme in the trilogy as it is in the Seven. Laius disobeys an oracle which seems to answer an inquiry after measures for the city's safety.[30] His motive for disobedience is to be dynastic: he wishes the city's safety to be compatible with the continuance of

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Journal of Hellenic Studies, 86, 1966 p.84.

[29]Lesky, p.82, cf. also his discussion in Greek Tragedy, trans. H.A. Frankfort(London, Benn, 1965), pp.63ff.

[30]R.P. Winnington-Ingram, p.93, n.20.

of his line. Laius, for all his desire to save his city, endangers it, but tries to make amends by exposing Oedipus. Oedipus unwittingly kills his father but rescues the city from the Sphinx. There is strife within the family leading to pollution of the city from his parricide and incest. His sons in turn are alienated from him and through his curse from one another. The city itself becomes the object of their feud and its safety is jeopardized by Polyneices' irreligious attack on his mother city. Eteocles, however, wants the city's and his own safety to be consonant (Seven, 3).[31] Throughout the first half of the Seven Eteocles identifies himself with the city like a hereditary king on the Homeric pattern and this identification of the city and its ruling family is further heightened by the omission of the names Thebes and Thebans, which become the city of the Cadmeans(e.g. 9, 47) or of Cadmus (74, 120) and the Cadmeans (1, 39). Even if the reason for this was Thebes' disgrace in the Persian wars for Medizing,[32] Aeschylus utilizes this contingency to evoke an epic convention, central to his theme, and its air of timelessness. Finally Eteocles succumbs to family rivalry, aware that this is the fulfilment of Oedipus' curse.[33] The brothers divide their mother earth and receive only enough for a grave.

The close involvement of the city in the family strife

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[31] J.H. Finley, Pindar and Aeschylus (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1955) p.239.

[32] Cf. Herodotus, 7, 132; 9, 16; 9, 40ff.; 9, 86.

[33] Cf. L.A.Post, p.71.

provoked by the curse seems to have a moral for Aeschylus' Athens: family and state are so closely interwoven that strife in one produces a similar reaction in the other. This reflects the continuing struggle between the ancient institution, the family, and its rival of more recent growth in Attica, the city. Before Solon, every Athenian had been a member of a tribe, of which there were four, of a phratry, a third of a tribe, and of a genos ("family"), one thirtieth of a phratry (Aristotle, Athenian Constitution, fr. 3). Membership in all three groups was hereditary in the male line. The genos itself was a group of families who believed themselves descended from a single god or hero to whom they could trace their descent unbroken.[34] In Athens of the earliest period these were the main political groupings, while the social strata of the city consisted of nobles, farmers and craftsmen (Aristotle, ibid.).

These kinship units had legal and religious aspects too. Every phratry and genos was allowed to make its own statutes, subject to the laws of the state. Although the genos itself never had any state legal function to perform, the phratry had some part in homicide law.[35] Both units worshipped special gods: Zeus Phratrios, Athena Phratria, Apollo Patroos, wtih a special festival, tha Apatouria.[36] The cults of these gods were centred on the west

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[34] C. Hignett, A History of the Athenian Constitution (Oxford, Clarendon, 1952), p.63.

[35] Ps.-Demosthenes, xliii, 57.

[36] Hignett, pp.56f.

side of the Agora. The first archaic temple to Apollo on this site was built in the mid-sixth century, probably only predated in this area by the first Council House.[37] After destruction in the Persian wars, it was rebuilt in the second quarter of the fourth century in close conjunction with a joint sanctuary of Zeus Phratrios and Athena Phratria (Pausanias, I,3,4)[38] and a visit to these sanctuaries was one of the enrolment ceremonies for the phratries (Demosthenes, lvii,67). Nearby were the Temple of the Mother of the gods (Pausanias,I,3,5),[39] the Pisistratid Altar of the Twelve Gods and the Altar of the Eponymous Heroes.[40] The last named is of special interest since the heroes are those who gave their names to the ten tribes instituted by Cleisthenes in his democratic reforms and the Altar may therefore represent an attempt to oust the religious as well as the political influence of the phratries.[41]

The genos itself also had religious importance in all periods and this is attested by the fact that the priesthoods of certain cults were hereditary in them. Among these were the priestess of Athena Polias, the goddess to whom the Panathenaic festival

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[37] H.A. Thompson,"Buildings on the West Side of the Agora", Hesperia,6,1937,pp.77-115.

[38] Ibid.,pp.84-90, 104-7.

[39] Ibid.,pp.135-40.

[40] Thucydides,6,54; Pausanias,I,5,1-5, cf. H.A. Thompson, The Athenian Agora (2nd. Ed., Athens, American School of Classical Studies, 60ff., 21ff.

[41] Herodotus, 5,66 and 69.

was dedicated (Aeschines,2,147) and especially the priests of the Eleusinian mysteries, which were in the hands of the Eumolpidae and Kerykes ([Aristotle],39,2). The religious and legal functions of both genos and phratry were clearly very strong and ancient. If, as seems probable,[42] the genos had only aristocratic Eupatrid members, it was an association from mutual self-interest to maintain the power and wealth of the landed gentry through their monopoly of political and religious functions.[43]

This was the position in Solon's era, but the development of Athenian democracy was the progressive erosion of the governing power of the aristocratic organizations (including the genos) and their chief members, the Eupatrids. Solon's reforms were destructive of the power of the Areopagus, an exclusively Eupatrid council whether it consisted of the heads of every genos or of a small collection of families.[44] He opened the Assembly to all free men, exclusive of property holding ([Aristotle],7,3), and the archonship to the Pentacosiomedimni and perhaps the Hippeis, both property classes and not kin groups (Plutarch, Aristeides 1,2; [Aristotle],7,3),[45] while he forced the archons to account for their financial and general business to the Assembly before joining the Areopagus (Aris-

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[42] Rejecting [Aristotle], fr.3 with Hignett,pp.65ff.

[43] Hignett,p.67.

[44] Ibid.,p.83.

[45] Ibid.,pp.101ff. for the possibility of the election of the Hippeis to the archonship.

totle, Politics, 1274a15-17, 1281b32-4). To galvanize the Assembly's authority, Solon set up the Council of four hundred men, elected by lot from the four Attic tribes, from the class of the Zeugitae and above (/Aristotle/,7,1ff.). The Council prepared the Assembly's business (Plutarch, Solon,19,1), thus making its transactions effective.[46] Thus the aristocratic Areopagus lost the initiative in government, but may have recovered some of this after the Persian wars (/Aristotle/, 23,1; Aristotle, Politics, 1304a20-1).[47]

Cleisthenes' democratic reforms after the expulsion of the tyrant Hippias in 510 B.C. were more directly concerned with breaking the grip of the genos and phratry. He substituted membership of a deme (a particular territorial division) for that of a genos as the criterion of citizenship, which allowed an influx of new voters into the state.[48] This was accompanied by a complete reorganization of the constitution (Herodotus,5,69). The importance of the reforms was that: "the substitution of the deme for the clan meant in effect the transition from a principle of kinship to that of locality. . . . Athens after the reforms of Cleisthenes was no longer a 'federation of kinships'."[49] Although this view has been

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[46]The authenticity of many of these measures has been challenged by Hignett,pp.86-107.

[47]On the view that Solon's reforms , and later Cleisthenes' reforms, had left the Areopagus with the wide powers that Ephialtes removed in 462B.C. see Hignett,pp.145ff. This would strengthen the argument for a clash between the interests of the genos as represented by the aristocratic Areopagus, and the city at the time of the Theban trilogy.

[48]Hignett,p.136.

[49]E.M. Walker in Cambridge Ancient History (Cambridge,1926),4144f.

challenged by Hignett,[50] it is corroborated by the use of deme names and Aristotle's acceptance of it in Politics,1319.[51] It suggests that the nascent democracy had to shake off the cramping influence of the genos and such a process was unlikely to have been effected by one set of legislation. Besides removing the constitutional function of the genos, Cleisthenes may also have enacted a law compelling phratries (the aggregate of the citizen body) to admit to membership people other than those in a genos, thus combatting discrimination.[52] After his reforms, the genos is little heard of as an institution except in its religious functions, but its members, the Eupatrids, feature as the leaders of Athenian politics. Cleisthenes himself was an Alcmaeonid and his nephew, Megacles (the uncle of Pericles, Herodotus,6,131), became leader of the genos after his retirement (Aristotle,22;5). Themistocles, a rival, despite a foreign mother, was a member of the Lycomidae (Plutarch, Themistocles,1,4),[53] while this man's later adversaries included Miltiades, the chief of the Philaids, and Aristeides, related to the Kerykes as his political alignment with their policies confirms.[54] Cimon, if not himself of ancient noble lineage, was allied with the

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[50] Hignett,pp.138ff.

[51] Though people of good family still used patronymics, the deme name takes over in all official and public affairs, see K. von Fritz and E. Kapp, Aristotle's Constitution of Athens (New York, Hafner, 1950),pp.144-5.

[52] Hignett,pp.61ff. and Note C,pp.390f.

[53] Hignett,p.183 defends Themistocles' nobility.

[54] Ibid.,p.184.

the Eupatrids through his wife and half-sister.[55]

After 487 B.C., the state office that allowed the Eupatrid domination of Athenian politics was the generalship, which Cimon held consecutively from 477 to 461.[56] The reason for this was apparently the nature of this function, since "the gifts of political leaders ship and military capacity which it required were in any case only to be found among the rich landowners."[57] Thus the aristocracy, organized in the genos system, were in control of Athenian policy until Cimon's ostracism in 461 B.C. His policy of largesses ([Aristotle 7, 27, 3) and cleruchies (e.g., Scyros in 475 B.C.) suggests appeasement of the people. Eventually, the popular leaders, Ephialtes and Pericles (both nobles),[58] overthrew him and again removed the powers of the Areopagus (461 B.C., [Aristotle 7, 25, 1 ff.). This hints at a long agitation against the Eupatrid government of Athens with its genos system.[59] Aeschylus' Oresteia, produced in 458 B.C., depicts the Areopagus not as the instrument of aristocratic government but as a murder court, which was its ancient legal function in fulfilment of the justice of the genos. The trilogy, then, seems to preach a lesson of toleration to both sides in the struggle for political power. The Theban trilogy, however, predates this conflict over the Areopagus, but the stress on the strife both

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[55] Ibid., p. 191.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., pp. 191-2.

[58] Ibid., p. 194.

[59] Ibid., p. 195.

within the house of Laius and between it and the city of Thebes seems to point to the dangers involved for the state and family alike in family strife and so reflects the continuing political conflict within the genos system for the leadership of Athens. Such dissension is destructive for both genos and city.

This opposition between family and city in the trilogy is carried deep within the texture of the Seven by the exploitation of the theme of gêrotrophia, the obligation to care for parents in old age.[60] This theme, in its strict sense, must have been the basis for Oedipus' curse, a climax in the Oedipus, and thus led causally to the brothers' fatal duel in the Seven. The obligation to care for a parent in old age arose from the tie of kinship (Isaeus, De Cleon. Her., 1, 39) and neglect of this duty led to disenfranchisement under a law of Solon (Diogenes Laertius, Solon, 1, 55). Oedipus complains that his tendance of his children in their youth is not repaid by them and curses them for this:

τέκνοισιν δ' ἀρᾶς (codd. ἀρᾶς)
ἐφῆκεν ἐπικότους τροφᾶς
αἰαῖ πικρογλώσσους ἀρᾶς (Seven, 785-7.)

Despite the difficulty of the text, ἀραιᾶς "scanty" seems the better reading since this will refer to Oedipus' neglect in his old age,[61] as Sophocles in the Oedipus Coloneus stresses later, when

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[60] This account follows H. D. Cameron, "The Debt to Earth in the Seven Against Thebes", T.A.P.A., 95, 1964, pp. 1-8.

[61] Cf. T. G. Tucker, The Seven Against Thebes of Aeschylus (Cambridge, 1908), ad loc.

treating the curses.[62] Even if the reading ἀρατίας be accepted, a reference to the forbidden food of the Thebaid,[63] the situation is still one in which Oedipus feels his sons to have failed in their duty of gêrotrophia. This, then, is the cause of the family quarrel in both the Oedipus and the Seven and probably was in the Laius also, since Oedipus' parricide must be considered as the worst imaginable inversion of gêrotrophia.

The concept of gêrotrophia is frequently developed as a metaphor in application to a warrior who dies for his country. This act is seen as a citizen's repayment of his nurture and rearing to his mother land, as Lysias says:

ὥσπερ χρὴ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἀποθνήσκειν, τῇ μὲν πατρίδι τὰ τροφεῖα ἀποδόντες

(II, 70, cf. Isocrates, Arch., 6, 108). So Parthenopaeus, a metic at Argos, fights against Thebes ἐκτίνων καλὰς τροφάς (Seven, 548), and if Megareus the Theban dies in battle, he will repay his city for its nurture: θανὼν τροφεῖα πληρώσει χθονί (Seven, 477). This theme is not limited to these occasional mentions in the play, but receives great prominence from the start, especially in Eteocles' address to the Thebans. He reminds them of their patriotic duty to Mother Earth (16-20), who:

ἐθρέψατ' οἰκητῆρας ἀσπιδηφόρους

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[62] Cf. R. C. Jebb, The Plays and Fragments of Sophocles, Oedipus Coloneus (Cambridge, 1900), ad 1377 for the repetition of "trophos" and cognates in Oedipus' remarks about his sons. Other, more extreme, conjectures on the passage above are Robert, I, 264: ἀρχαίας τρόφας and Wilamowitz ἀρχαίας τρόφας.

[63] Cf. supra.

πιστοὺς ὅπως γένοισθε πρὸς χρέος τόδε.(Seven,19-20).

Here there are a number of interesting ambiguities that highlight the theme. The last part may be read as meaning:"to be faithful warriors in this hour of need", following Smyth's version.[64] This simply expresses a hope that the Thebans will be patriotic soldiers, but the underlying imagery suggested by the stress on πιστοὺς (proleptic) and χρέος is one of trusted debtors-- Tucker's innkeeping metaphor with a special application[65]-- who will pay off the score for their upbringing to Mother Earth by gêrotrophia.

The Thebans, then, have a special relationship with the soil of Thebes and their defence of the city is seen in terms of human kinship. Though this is stressed in other ways, as by the Homeric equation of people and place, city and citizens,[66] a legendary pattern for the action of the play hints constantly at the significance and outcome of the story unfolding on stage. This pattern is the story of the Sparti, the Sown Men, who sprang from the teeth of the dragon, which Cadmus slew. The Sown Men, once sprung from the earth, fought with one another until only five were left. These became, with Cadmus, the first citizens of Thebes.[67] The warrior seed of Theban earth is often mentioned in the play-- Melanippus and

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[64] I,325.

[65] Tucker, Ad. Loc.

[66] The use of 'Cadmeans' and 'city of Cadmus' stresses the Cadmeia, the name of the acropolis at Thebes (Pausanias,9,5,2) and the word 'polis' is ambiguous, refering both to place and people; cf. Iliad,14, 144 and 152; and 16,69.

[67] Pausanias,9,12,2.

Megareus (412-4, 474) are examples-- and Eteocles in the thematically important prologue pictures all the Theban defenders as growing grain, which must recall their ancestors:

ὑμᾶς δὲ χρὴ νῦν, καὶ τὸν ἐλλείποντ' ἔτι
ἥβης ἀκμαίας καὶ τὸν ἔξηβον χρόνῳ,
βλαστημὸν ἀλδαίνοντα σώματος πολύν,
ὥραν τ' ἔχονθ' ἕκαστον ὥστε συμπρεπές. (10-14)

ἀκμαίας suggests "in full bloom" (cf. ἀκμάζω Thucydides,2,19), βλαστημὸν ἀλδαίνοντα "growing a shoot" (cf. βλάστος, Herodotus,6,37 and ἀλδήσκω, Iliad,23,599) and ὥραν τ' ἔχονθ' "being ripe in season" (Plato, Republic,475a). The Thebans fulfil their duty to the soil of Thebes in a literal as well as metaphorical sense.

The same symbolism of growth from earth is applied to the house of Oedipus and the family is depicted as a root:

πατροκτόνον Οἰδιπόδαν,
ὅστε ματρὸς ἀγνὰν
σπείρας ἄρουραν, ἵν' ἐτράφη,
ῥίζαν αἱματόεσσαν
ἔτλα. (752-7)

Just as Cadmus sowed the dragon's teeth in Mother Earth and the crop of brothers, descendants too of Ares, father of the dragon, fought till death, so Oedipus' sons from the sacred field of his mother, destroyed themselves in fraternal slaughter. ἀλλ' αὐτάδελφον αἷμα δρέψασθαι θέλεις; (718) the chorus asks Eteocles, but his determination remains firm. The brothers prove themselves the true crop of Oedipus and finally pay gêrotrophia to Theban Earth by being buried in

her. While Eteocles fulfils his kinship duty to Earth by his protection, he also breaks the same law of kinship (Δίκη ὁμαιμων, 415) by destroying his brother, whereas Polyneices breaks this law three times in respect to Oedipus, Theban Mother Earth and Eteocles. His Δίκη deceives himinto gaining the only portion of his parent country he deserves-- six feet of earth.

The theme of gêrotrophia, then, helps unify the Seven, and clarify its conflicts. It is both a religious and social theme and also a leading image and these two functions are virtually inseparable. It applies in several ways to both the family of Laius and the defence of Thebes. It is the basic reason for the curse of Oedipus and of his sons'duel and also provides in the story of Cadmus and the Sown Men a mythical correlative for the birth, strife and death of the brothers.[68] The defence of Thebes is seen in terms of duty to Mother Earth and this metaphor is literally true for the Thebans, whose descent from the Sown Men makes them sons of their native soil.

This complex conceit connects very closely with the more overt levels of the clash between city and genos already discussed. The city is seen in terms of the genos[69] and demands similar duties from its members. Eteocles' clash of loyalties between these two institutions results in his destruction and that of his genos , which

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[68]This typically Aeschylean usage (cf. Io in the Suppliants and Prometheus Bound) recalls T.S. Eliot's remarks on Shakespeare's use of the 'objective correlative'. This is a "set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion". In the Seven the symbol connotes the horror of family and city strife; cf. The Sacred Wood (London, Methuen, 1920). [69]Cf. Pindar, Isthmian Odes,

jeopardized the city's safety, deliberately in the case of Laius and Polyneices and accidentally in Oedipus' case. The close interconnection between city and genos and the possibility of their mutual destructiveness is further emphasized by the conflict symbolized in the contrasted attitudes to gêrotrophia of the Thebans and the house of Oedipus.

There is a further religious implication in the association of the Thebans with Mother Earth and of patriotic death with harvest and return to earth. It conjures up the atmosphere of the many popular cults in Greece belonging to the chthonian, rather than the Olympian, gods. It is the character of these deities that "they are dwellers in the earth, and the earth does two services for men. By its fertility it provides them with the means of life, and it takes them into its bosom when they die. The chthonioi accordingly have two primary functions: they ensure the fertility of the land and they preside over, or have some function or other connected with, the realm of the souls of the dead."[70] Both the stressed kinship of the Thebans with their native soil (unlike the Olympians, the chthonian cult was always attached to a particular locality in a protective capacity)[71] and also the idea that a patriotic death pays back Mother Earth for her nurture (477) hint at these associations.

1,30 of Iolaus' relation with (the historical) Herodotus of Thebes:
δημόσιος ἐὼν Σπαρτῶν γένει.

[70]Guthrie,p.218.

[71]Ibid.,p.219:"One natural result of the earthly nature of these spirits is that most of them were firmly attached to the soil of the locality."

Further chthonic implications are developed to image forth other planes of action in the Seven. While early in the play the Olympian gods who protect Thebes are constantly invoked (15, 69, 91ff.),[72] the Argive attackers are characterized, particularly in the central scene, as chthonian gods engaged in hybristic warfare against the Theban pantheon.. This application of the popular myth of the struggle between the older and younger gods [73] suggests the horror of the Argives' attack and their eventual defeat-- a kind of imagery.

Tydeus, the first Argive champion, is connected with the chthonians by three descriptions: μεσημβρινᾶς κλαγγαίσιν ὡς δράκων βοᾷ(381), κατασκίους λόφους(384) and especially:

φλέγονθ' ὑπ' ἄστρων οὐρανὸν τετυγμένον·
λαμπρὰ δὲ πανσέληνος ἐν μέσῳ σάκει,
πρέσβιστον ἄστρων, νυκτὸς ὀφθαλμός, πρέπει(388-90;cf.400)

Snakes are a mark of chthonic deities [74] and darkness is the time for all chthonian rites as opposed to Olympians' daylight sacrifices [75] (cf. the Argives' oath-sacrifice in 42ff. that has some chthonic associations, particularly the black shield and invocation of Enyo).[76]

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[72]The chorus call on Ares, Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis and Hera-- seven without Zeus.

[73]Cf. e.g., Hesiod, Theogony,627ff. and the Titanomachy, the first of the Epic Cycle, Evelyn-White,pp.481-3. Aeschylus dramatizes the results of the conflict for Prometheus and Zeus in the Prometheia trilogy,where the Titans are depicted as hybristic, Prometheus Bound,204ff.

[74]Guthrie,p.228. [75]Ibid.,p.222.

[76]Enyo is one of the Graiae, sisters of the Gorgons (Hesiod, Theogony,272ff.). The bull is normally an Olympian sacrifice, but Ares is connected with war-magic,and with the chthonians-- dog sacrifices at Sparta (Pausanias,3,14,9), father of Cadmus' dragon; cf.Oxford Classical Dict.,s.v.

The most suggestive, though not completely verifiable, explanation of Tydeus' shield device is that its night and moon invoke Hecate, the goddess of magic, of all things female and of the three ways.[77] The moon is an eye, instrument of knowledge, that will find out the violator of Justice for the Fury and teach him knowledge of the Fury's power. In this way Tydeus is truly the "summoner of the Fury" as Amphiaraus calls him (574). All the threats to the house of Laius--women, crossroads and Fury-- are summed up in these chthonic associations, and these several links illustrate the dual function of these deities in the play. They characterize both the Argives' hybris and the real enemies of the house of Laius. There is a further contrast also between the identification of the Thebans as the sons of earth and the Argives as hybristic chthonians battling with the Olympians. The chthonic protectors of Thebes and their protected fight a just war for their native soil. Thus Tydeus is opposed by Melanippus, a descendant of the Sown Men (412-3), whose very name contains the chthonic associations of "black" and fertility, because the horse is frequently a fertility symbol.[78]

The next four Argive champions are similarly depicted with chthonian colouring. Capaneus is called γίγας ὃς ἄλλος (424), and his boast that his fire is greater than Zeus' may recall such chthonians as Prometheus, who stole fire from Zeus (Hesiod, Works and

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[77] Helen H. Bacon, "The Shield of Eteocles", Arion, III, no.3, pp.32ff. for Hecate, cf. Rose, Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v., "an ancient chthonian goddess".

[78] Pegasus, the horse from the Gorgon's head (Hesiod, Theogony, 281ff.), started the spring Hippocrene with his hoof (Pausanias, 9, 31, 3).

Days,47ff.), and Hyperion, father of Sun,Moon and Dawn (Hesiod, Theogony,134 and 371ff.), and also the torches used in chthonic rites.[79] His Theban counterpart is protected by Artemis and other gods (450). Eteoclus is the least characterized of the attackers, but his boast that not even Ares could repulse him (469f.) suggests the battle of the gods and giants. He is matched with another descendant of the Sown Men (474-9). The next Argive, Hippomedon, bears another "horse"-name, associating him with the chthonians and fertility. Further, he is himself a giant: σχῆμα καὶ μέγας τύπος (488) and has as a shield device the Titan, Typhon, belching fire[80] with snakes forming the shield's retaining rim (493ff.). Indeed, his divine opponents Pallas and Zeus combat his chthonian character, the one imagistically as a bird against a snake (503),[81] the other by using his traditional weapon against the Titans-- the thunder-bolt (512f., cf. Hesiod, Theogony,687ff. and 853ff.). Parthenopaeus, attacking at the gate of Amphion, a chthonic protector of Thebes,[82] has the eyes of the Gorgon, a dweller in the nether world (Odyssey,11,635). His shield shows the Sphinx, a relative of many earth-born monsters.[83] His femininity, stressed by these female monsters, again hints at the dangers of the female and the chthonic for Eteocles.[84]

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[79]Cf. the Mysteries of Demeter, Lactantius, Divinae Institutiones, epitome,23.

[80]While Aeschylus calls him an 'earth-born power'(522), Hesiod, Theogony,820ff. makes him son of Tartarus by Gaea but not a Titan. His battle with Zeus and his hundred snake heads give him Titanic qualities.

[81]Cf. her constant attribute, the owl, and ability to metamorphosize as a bird (Homer, Odyssey,3,371-2).

[82]Pausanias,9,17,4f. describes a fertility rite at his tomb.

[83]Sister of Geryon (Hesiod, Theogony,270ff.) or of the Gorgons.

[84]Bacon, p.33.

From Amphiaraus a clearer threat by chthonic analogy comes to Eteocles. The moral goodness of this attacker is only part of his significance. His prophecy of his own heroization and mystic burial in the soil of Thebes conjures up the same connotations of protection for Thebes that Eteocles himself has employed to turn the omen against the preceding Argives. After rebuking Tydens and Adrastus for their folly, Amphiaraus dwells on Polyneices' impiety with rhetorical questions, ending :

μητρὸς τε πηγὴν τίς καταβέσει δίκη; (584)

Here the compression suggests levels of interpretation. The editors make μητρός a defining genitive meaning Thebes personified: "the mother's fount",[85] cf. πατρίς τε γαῖα (585), while πηγὴν signifies the fertility of Thebes, just as a river gives life to the fields. But the combined expression may also hint at the literal referent of the image for Polyneices -- Jocasta -- again warning of the fatal consequences of family strife. καταβέσει suggests "quenching" by fire such as that associated with the Argives by their chthonic description.[86] Such a quenching is against Nature's way (δίκη) and cannot take place. Thebes will not be extinguished and neither will that destructive feminine power working against the generations of the house of Laius.

Further, Amphiaraus prophesies his own death at Thebes and its

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[85] Smyth, I, 371 quoting Tucker, ad loc.

[86] This word normally applies to fire being quenched but in Aeschylean metaphor seems to be reversed and imply the use of fire, cf. Liddell, Scott, Jones, A Greek-English Lexicon (9th edition, Oxford, Clarendon, 1939), s.v., especially Agamemnon, 88.

consequences:

ἔχωγε μὲν δὴ τήνδε πιαν῵ χθόνα,
μάντις κεκευθὼς πολεμίας ὑπὸ χθονός (587-8),

and the messenger elaborates the chthonic combination of fertility and prophecy:

βαθεῖαν ἅλοκα διὰ φρενὸς καρπούμενος
ἐξ ἧς τὰ κενὰ βλαστάνει βουλεύματα (593-4).

These lines refer to Amphiaraus' oracle at Thebes,[87] and stress the chthonian hero's influence on fertility. Amphiaraus is in a right relationship with Theban earth. The threat in these lines is to Eteocles. While Amphiaraus knows and accepts his fate, Eteocles develops the menace of the image without consciousness of its application to himself:

ἐν παντὶ πράγει δ' ἐσθ' ὁμιλίας κακῆς
κάκιον οὐδέν, καρπὸς οὐ κομιστέος·
ἅτης ἄρουρα θάνατον ἐκκαρπίζεται (599-601).

Amphiaraus is the good man among evil partners, his harvest is death, but one which will prove him a true son of Mother Earth and bring him back to her as enrichment. This sets up a paradigm for Laius' house, who also owe a debt to Theban soil, and for Eteocles, who is fated to pay his debt with death and burial also. Though a good man, he is forced πικρόκαρπον ἀνδροκτασίαν τελεῖν (693) and desires αὐτάδελφον αἷμα δεύσασθαι (718). He sees Amphiaraus' fate with clarity but fails to foresee the similar dilemma and choice that face him. He

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[87] Herodotus, 1, 46&49; Pindar has a similar story: Olympian Odes, 6, 13ff.

is challenged by Polyneices' station at the seventh gate, his shield device claiming a just cause and his threats and boasts of a duel (645ff.). Polyneices' invocation of his native gods following his vaunts of conquest over their land confirms Amphiaraus' strictures on his wickedness but puts both brothers on the same plane by stripping Eteocles of his patriotic identification with Thebes. Both appeal with equal justice to the city gods as individuals, though as leaders Polyneices' appeal cannot be just. Polyneices' hybris is clear (634ff.), but his wish to return from exile is legitimate. His patroness, Justice, the daughter of Zeus (662), in other respects incongruous, symbolizes this legal claim. Eteocles, however,(like a man at law), denies all justice to his brother (664-73) and thinks a fraternal duel completely justifiable. He thus becomes ὀργὴν ὅμοιος (678) with Polyneices and both are filled with destructive madness (654, 686-7, 692) sent by the Fury, the daughter of Earth (699: μελάναιγις Ἐρινύς),[88] whom the chorus then hymn (720-91). The battle of gods, then, takes a significant turn: Amphiaraus' chthonic associations are propitious for Thebes, while Polyneices threatens with his Olympian device and Eteocles surrenders to the real enemy of his house-- the chthonic Fury-- who finally reconciles them to Mother Earth (1010). The chthonic implications of the play characterize the proper relations of the Thebans with Mother Earth contrasted with the hybristic monstrosity of the Argive attackers, thus assuring the safety of Thebes and the self-destruction of the Argives. The Olympians and the

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[88] See note 22 supra.

city gods literally prevail in the struggle for Thebes and metaphorically against the chthonic Titans as the chorus' address suggests (822ff.). Apollo has a special role in the mutual slaughter that ends the house of Laius (800ff.), since his was the oracle that did not lose its edge (844). The house of Laius has a more complex relationship with Mother Earth, both claiming its protection and yet rejecting its claims. All three generations engage in impious rivalry over the city. The executor of the curse on the House and of Oedipus' curse on his sons is the Fury, the real chthonic power with whom both sons are allied-- a terrible destructive force-- and their house is vanquished from within by this agent of Δίκη δμαίμων.

Late in the play a theme appears in connection with the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices that hints at further chthonic associations for the house of Laius. Oedipus had three cult centres, one at Eteonus in Boeotia in the sanctuary of Demeter,[89] one at Colonus in Attica,[90] and one at Sparta with the Furies of Laius,[91] and these firmly establish him as a chthonic hero, probably in Aeschylus' time. His sons too, according to Pausanias (9,18,3), received joint rites as heroes just outside Thebes in the second century A.D. and the tale (Pausanias admits to not having seen the wonder) that the flames of their

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[89] Scholiast on Sophocles, Oedipus Coloneus,91.

[90] Pausanias,1,30,4.

[91] Herodotus,4,149. On this last one authority says:"we are not inclined to impute this to folk-lore or ancestral tradition, but to the Panhellenic influence of the epic on the minds of the Delphic priesthood" who gave the oracle to set up the cult, L. R. Farnell, Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 333. For full discussion of all three centres, see C. Robert, pp. 1-47.

sacrifices used to divide in two "suggests an epic source".[92] These three members of Laius' house all received chthonic cult worship at the time of the play, then, with all that this implies. The theme of wealth that when grown to excess destroys its possessor is applied to Oedipus and his sons (769-71) and the latter fulfil Oedipus' curse διὰ χερί ποτε λαχεῖν/κτήματα (789-90), giving earth murder-blood to drink (734). But this sacrifice to earth hallows the spot and the brothers find and bestow fathomless wealth on earth:

ὑπὸ δὲ σώματι γᾶς
πλοῦτος ἄβυσσος ἔσται. (947-8).[93]

This hints at gain for the family and for Thebes in the form of chthonic cult (both prove themselves "Polyneices"--"men of much strife"-- will they also become "Eteocles"-- "men of true fame"? cf. 831-3). Thus the earth "contributes her own time-honoured magic to help along the 'happy ending', the restoration of balance and the cleansing which we expect at the end of the play and the trilogy."[94] The theme of burial predominates at the end of the play and the choral dirge is a kind of binding song on the Fury (834ff.) which lays Eteocles and Polyneices to rest on a note of awe at the horror at their deeds. Its emotion may resemble the atmosphere of hero-worship. Even if Aeschylus and his

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[92] Farnell, p.332.

[93] Following T.G. Rosenmeyer, "Seven against Thebes: The Tragedy of War", Arion I, no.1, 1962, p.76, γᾶς is taken with σώματι. Even if taken with πλοῦτος it may be a possessive, rather than a defining, genitive, suggesting that earth is enriched by the brothers' blood.

[94] Rosenmeyer, ibid.

audience did not know of the cults dedicated to Oedipus and his family elsewhere in Greece, they musthave been aware of the heroön of the Seven at Eleusis-- Aeschylus was a native-- that Pausanias saw (1,39,2), since excavations have revealed that it was formed in the Geometric Age.[95] Aeschylus' Eleusinians may well have concluded an Adrastus trilogy with the aetiology of this burial,[96] and integrated its chthonic significance with the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter, which probably retained traits of both the fertility and after-life functions of chthonic cult.[97] Although the end of the Seven has the brothers buried at Thebes, their hero-worship suggests that an aura of fertility cult is intended to resolve the conflicts in both family and city, just as the Eumenides concludes the Oresteia with prayers for prosperity-- both reflections of the fertility ritual at which they were performed.

The dominant motif in the Seven appears to be the theme of knowledge, and though this is rather the essence of the personal tragedies in the house of Laius, it is important for its recurrence in later plays on Theban legend.[98] There is constant ambiguity in the

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[95] G.E. Mylonas, Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961), p.62.

[96] Above, section 1.

[97] Cf. Guthrie, p.283,n.2.

[98] This account follows Bacon's article.

play centering on what is and what seems to be threatening Thebes. In the opening scenes Eteocles deals competently with the Argive threat but fears a danger within the city that he feels is the chorus' noise (192-4). The same images of noise and animals are used by Eteocles to describe the Argives outside and the chorus within, hinting that the real problem is deciding who is a true enemy and outsider, just as Oedipus-- a stranger and outsider-- killed his father and in turn his sons fought with him over his patrimony. The shields all carry threatening devices, except Amphiaraus'-- he wishes to be, not seem (591f.). Eteocles makes plain that these threaten their bearers not Thebes. Polyneices' shield disguises his desires, as Amphiaraus points out (580ff.), but also helps unmask Eteocles' will-- the passion of those who are φίλοι (cf. the stress on relationship in the kommos: 932f., 940, 971) breaks out and sweeps the house to destruction. Eteocles at the turning point of the play makes a decision to know the meaning of Polyneices' device:

ταχ' εἰσόμεθα τοὐπίσημ' ὅποι τελεῖ,
εἴ νιν κατάξει χρυσότευκτα γράμματα
ἐπ' ἀσπίδος φλύοντα σὺν φοίτῳ φρενῶν (659-61).

Both achieve knowledge of the power of the Fury :

ΧΟ. ἰὼ Μοῖρα βαρυδότειρα μογερά,
ποτνιά τ' Οἰδίπου σκιά·
μέλαιν' Ἐρινύς, ἢ μεγασθενής τις εἶ.
ΑΝ. σὺ τοί νιν οἶσθα διαπερῶν,
ΙΣ. σὺ δ' οὐδὲν ὕστερος μαθών (986-90).

Even the just division of their patrimony is a kind of knowledge and is performed by Ares, twofold ancestor of the Thebans-- through his daughter, Harmonia, and through the Sparti-- yet also the ξένος . . . χάλυβος Σκυθᾶν ἄποικος (727-8, cf. 941-2), and by Justice too, who though the blood-relative of the Thebans (415) has nothing to do with Polyneices' birth and rearing (662-71). Eteocles may have even shown himself his brother's equal on stage by receiving his weapons one by one and so becoming a counterpart of the ἀνδρὰ τευχηρὸν (644) on Polyneices' shield.[99] Thus both brothers come to knowledge in death of the working of their family curse and of their true relationship with their kin. Both they and their father, Oedipus, share strife, mothers human and divine and finally full knowledge of these things in a common grave of their Mother Earth.

4. Political Themes

The religious and social implications of the trilogy and its final play are complex and woven deeply into the texture of the action, but a further aspect of the play that is suggested by analogy with the Eumenides must be explored. As the solution of the Oresteia is given in and by the Areopagus-- an arena of political action at the time of writing-- and is partly secured by promises of an eternal pact with Argos for the Athenians, an overt link with contemporary politics, so too similar implications have been sought in the Seven.

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[99] Bacon, pp. 34ff. developing a suggestion of Schadewaldt.

L.A. Post attempts to show[100] that Aeschylus' defeat by Sophocles in the tragic competition of the previous year[101] was a politically biassed decision by Cimon's board of generals against the poet of their rival, Pericles. This predisposed Aeschylus to add an element of propaganda to the Theban trilogy written for the next year. Pericles was Aeschylus' choregus for the Persians in 472 B.C. and a member of the Alcmaeonid family which had been under a curse for several generations.[102] This curse was actually used by Spartan propaganda just before the Peloponnesian war in an attempt to undermine Pericles' authority,[103] and possibly he was suspect in 467 because of an association with Themistocles, recently exiled for Medism and then conniving at invasion with the Persians.[104] Since Post considers that the play: "emphasizes the moral that a man under a curse may by unusual ability and utmost devotion save his city from destruction even though the curse falls upon him personally",[105] he concludes that Eteocles is modelled on Pericles and that the play is political propaganda. But several points make this implausible. Eteocles

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[100] "The Seven against Thebes as Propaganda for Pericles", Classical Weekly, 44, 1950, pp.49-52; cf. his book, From Homer to Menander, p.73.

[101] Plutarch, Cimon, 8,7-8.

[102] Herodotus, 5,71.

[103] Thucydides, 1,127.

[104] Plutarch, Themistocles, 23. F. Stoessl, "Aeschylus as a Political Thinker", American Journal of Philology, 73, 1952, pp.130-33 suggests identifying Polyneices with Themistocles, but the justice claimed by Polyneices is too strongly refuted by Amphiaraus to support a political clash between right and right that is required for this interpretation.

[105] Classical Weekly, p.49.

does not sacrifice himself for the city's safety but is rather overwhelmed by the fury and his own animalistic desire to fight his brother. The idea of "Opfertod" is refuted both by the chorus' remarks that he need not fight his brother to save the city (679f., 716) and also by the view of the chorus and sisters at the end of the play that both brothers are πολυνεικεῖς/ὄλοντ' ἀσεβεῖ διανοίᾳ(832f.,cf. 881ff., 957ff.).[106] The moral that a man under a curse can yet save his city is not drawn by Aeschylus, nor does it fit the trilogy as a whole, since the house of Laius must extinguish itself before the city is freed from dynastic and familial strife.[107] Even the historical basis of the suggestion is shaky. Pericles appears first in politics in 463 as a minor prosecutor of Cimon and seems to be making his debut.[108] He need only have been eighteen when choregus for the Persians.[109] Even with Themistocles gone and Cimon on campaign, it seems unlikely that Pericles was prominent in 467 when five years later he is the least of several democrats attacking Cimon.

For one character in the play there seems to be a more definite political prototype. Plutarch (Aristeides,3,4-5) tells the story that the audience all turned and stared at Aristeides when these

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[106] See A. Podlecki,"The Character of Eteocles in Aeschylus' Septem", T.A.P.A.,XCV,1964,pp.295-9.

[107] Cf. A.C. Schlesinger, Boundaries of Dionysus (Cambridge, Harvard University Press,1963),p.149,n.9.

[108] Plutarch, Cimon,14,4 and especially [Aristotle], Athenian Constitution,27,1.

[109] For most of these arguments, cf. A. Podlecki, Political Background, pp.31ff.

lines were spoken of Amphiaraus:

οὐ γὰρ δοκεῖν ἄριστος, ἀλλ' εἶναι θέλει
βαθεῖαν ἄλοκα διὰ φρενὸς καρπούμενος,
ἐξ ἧς τὰ κεδνὰ βλαστάνει βουλεύματα.

(592-4; Plutarch has δίκαιος in 592.)

They felt that he above all had these qualities. Pindar (Olympian Odes, 6,15ff.) similarly characterizes Amphiaraus as a good prophet and fighter and the sub-title of part of the Thebaid, the Amphiaraou Exelasis, assures his prominence in epic. His dramatic function and cult importance may also suggest that the stress on him was not poltical propaganda. Yet even if Plutarch's story conveys Aeschylus' intention (and Aristeides' character and supposed conviction for bribery [110] fit more convincingly than other proposals), the comment was made in passing and added to the overall effect of the play rather than being an integral key to its interpretation.[111]

One further suggestion must be mentioned to be dismissed. Tucker in his edition of the play[112] claims that:"Aeschylus is indubitably lending his aid to the formation of public opinion in support of the Cimonian policy of fortification." (p.xlv). Plutarch's remark that the spoils of Eurymedon were used by Cimon to build the south wall of the Acropolis[113] does not imply a continuance of Themistocles'

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[110] Plutarch, Aristeides, 26,1-2. If true, the trial might be contemporary with the play.

[111] Cf. Podlecki, Political Background, pp.36-40.

[112] Pp. xlii-xlvi.

[113] Cimon, 13

fortification policy, for it is a mere retaining wall and hardly implies a controversy over its building.[114] Besides, Themistocles' name, not Cimon's, would be associated with the walls, since he faced Spartan opposition to rebuild them (Thucydides,1,89ff.). That the reference to the walls has no political significance is confirmed by the fact that victory comes from the valour of the Theban champions (797ff.) and not solely from the walls' protection.

Apart from these very particular interpretations of the play, which do not bear close examination, there are a number of features which create an Athenian rather than a Theban atmosphere. This reflects a common approach in Aeschylean, and all Greek, tragedy. Archetypal images occur which make the Cadmeia the Athenian acropolis and the Thebans Athenians. Eteocles in the phrase Ἑλλάδος φθόγγον χέουσαν (72-3) hints that Thebes is attacked by barbarians and the chorus remarks on the ἑτεροφώνῳ στρατῷ (170),[115] while their picture of a city sacked and burned by its besiegers (340ff.) has justly been taken as an allusion to the destruction of Athens by the Persians in 480.[116] Aeschylus had already characterized them as hybristic towards the gods (Persians,809-15) and Xerxes' attempt to conquer Greece as presumptuous pride (Persians,821ff.). This must have been a common attitude. In the challenges presented by the first five Argive

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[114] Cf. Podlecki, Political Background, pp.40-1.

[115] J.T. Sheppard,"The Plot of the Septem Contra Thebas", Classical Quarterly, 7, 1913,p.77.

[116] T.G. Tucker, on lines 340ff.

champions to the Olympian and city gods another element appears--barbarism -- and is sustained by the foreign extravagance of the shields with their bells, decoration and devices.[117] The constant repetition of the ship of state image completes the historical parallel by suggesting the Athenians' flight to Salamis by ship and the famous oracle of Themistocles about wooden walls (Herodotus,7,141). Perhaps, too, there is a hint in Polyneices' act of importing a foreign army against his native city of Hippias' attempt to regain his tyranny by means of Persian intervention.[118] Aeschylus, then, weaves into the siege of Thebes an archetypal image from Athenian history and so colours his mythical story and city in contemporary colours.

Besides actual historical reference in the play, there is an interesting clash of political attitudes. Eteocles assumes kingly power over the chorus at the outset and establishes his responsibility for the city with the ship of state image (1ff.). His outlook is essentially military (φυλάσσει 2), pragmatic and somewhat atheistic, since he speaks constantly of the gods or of 'god' (4,21,35) and uses pious formulae (441, 501-3, 514, 550, 562, 614) in a do ut des kind of religion (71-77).[119] His attitude is summed up in his advice

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[117] Sheppard, p.81.

[118] Ibid., approved by Podlecki, Political Background,p.163,n.25; for Hippias and the Persians, see Herodotus,5,96f.

[119] Cf. Podlecki,"The Character of Eteocles",pp.288ff.

to the chorus:

εὔχου τὰ κρείσσω, ξυμμάχους εἶναι θεούς (266)

In contrast, the Theban women elaborately invoke the gods by name and emphasize their reverence, and Eteocles' atheism, by pious echoes of his phrases (179-80 cf. 77; 157, 167-8 cf. 35).

This is part of the psychological conflict between the sexes in the play. The chorus, by their prophetic visions of the present war, of the ferocity of the attackers and of future disaster (100ff., 338ff.) provide a narrative beyond the action. Their concentration on the motif of freedom and slavery, that recalls the Persian wars, (111f., 166ff., 253, 318ff.) universalizes and enlivens the application of the action, while their woman's view of war arouses all its suffering and pathos and agony for those who only suffer its consequences passively.

Eteocles can only see the panic they are spreading and the severe practicalities of the situation. He rebukes them from this position. But later, when he makes his decision to fight his brother, their roles are reversed and the chorus calculate the immediate consequences of his act and advocate moderation, while he feels the gods' compulsion on him and follows his instincts, as his adoption of lyrics shows.[120] In the earlier scenes he displays a male hauteur towards the women which hints at the destructiveness of the sex for his house. He

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[120] Solmsen, pp. 200-1.

becomes a despot who, though rightly concerned for the citizens' morale, cannot admit that the chorus have good intentions (e.g., 208-15). This attitude of pragmatic militarism is climaxed by his militaristic saw:

πειθαρχία γάρ ἐστι τῆς εὐπραξίας
μήτηρ, γυνὴ σωτῆρος· ὧδ' ἔχει λόγος (223-5);

and may have reminded the audience of Pisistratus' rise to power by an armed bodyguard (Aristotle,14,2) and later by force of arms (Aristotle,15,3f.). Certainly, Eteocles ironically contrasts his power with democratic institutions when he puns on the word ψῆφος, the pebble used for voting in the Attic lawcourt, intending by it summary execution by mob-stoning:

κεἰ μή τις ἀρχῆς τῆς ἐμῆς ἀκούεται,
ἀνὴρ γυνή τε χὠ τι τῶν μεταίχιον,
ψῆφος κατ' αὐτῶν ἀληθείᾳ βουλεύσεται
λευστῆρα δήμου δ' οὔ τι μὴ φύγῃ μόρον (196-200).

The formulaic 197 strongly suggests Attic law-terms as do δήμου and φύγῃ, but Eteocles' law is his own and quite the reverse of Athenian democratic and legal processes.[121] His similarity to Athenian tyrants, constitutional[122] yet conventionally pious and militaristic, reveals the complexity of the characterization and also prepares for his reversion to savagery against Polyneices in the second half of

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[121]There is a similar ironical use of Athenian democratic process in one fragment of the satyr play of the trilogy, the Sphinx, where she is called δυσμαρείαν πρύτανιν (Smyth,II,461), cf. Herodotus, 6, 110f. for the daily πρυτανηίη of the generals at Marathon.

[122]Cf. Aristotle,14,3 for Pisistratus' constitutional rule.

the play.

There are interesting constitutional references in the final herald scene of the play, which is probably interpolated. The Council (δήμου προβούλου 1013; Athenian ?) forbid Polyneices' burial. Despite the frequent use of Athenian democratic formulae (δοκοῦντα 1011; ἔδοξε 1031, cf. 1042) the justice of the elders' decision is questionable and provokes the chorus to comment on the fickleness of τὰ δίκαια in states (1076-7) and to help bury Polyneices. Denying a traitor burial within the city was frequent,[123] denying burial altogether was contrary to Greek custom as Antigone remarks in Sophocles' play (Antigone, 450ff.).[124] The Theban council, then, shares Creon's exclusive loyalty to the state above both family and Hellenic custom, and this illustrates once more the clash between city and genos in the trilogy, probably with disastrous results for Antigone implied. This ending to the play leaves the conflict of Justice with Justice and of the institutions unsettled, balancing the audience's sympathies.

5. Imagery

For all the fierce action described in the Seven, a play "infected with Ares" (Aristophanes, Frogs, 1021), there is little movement on stage compared to a Shakespearian war-play. The excited dochmiac rhythms of the chorus suggest that much of the emotional effect was

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[123] Cf. Sophocles, Ajax, 1047ff.

[124] Isocrates says the same when discussing the Seven, Panathenaicus, 163.

conveyed by the dancing and Athenaeus (1,22a) says that Telestes made clear the actions of the play by his dancing.[125] But this is irrecoverable and only the poetry of the play remains to indicate how Aeschylus communicated the atmosphere of war and the other conflicts in the play. Analysis shows that exceedingly intricate development of several images in a vital and virile poetic nexus was a chief mode of expression for the thought and moods of the Seven.

Eteocles opens the play with an image of the ship of state that identifies him as the captain of Thebes:

Κάδμου πολῖται, χρὴ λέγειν τὰ καίρια
ὅστις φυλάσσει πρᾶγος ἐν πρύμνῃ πόλεως
ὄλακα ναυτῶν, βλέφαρα μὴ κοιμῶν ὕπνῳ(1-3).

Polis and politai are key words in the play and denote the acropolis, the stronghold on a hill-- the Cadmeia at Thebes-- and the people who live round it. The picture of Eteocles high in the stern of the ship seems to recall even the topography of the Greek city (especially Athens and Thebes). Eteocles,then, takes responsibility for the city's safety and assumes sole command, as his repetition of the metaphor (ring construction) at the end of his speech confirms (32-3). The messenger accepts this stance when he employs the same image in reference to the Argives' approach. With his words the metaphor develops a fresh aspect, for the Argive army is envisioned as a storm that batters the

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[125]Cf. Aristotle, Poetics,1447a27ff.:"for they too, through their rhythms incorporated in dance-figures, imitate both characters and experiences and actions"trans. Else. Telestes seems to have played Eteocles in the Seven.

ship of state and threatens to sink her. This development of Eteocles' original idea runs through the play in close connection with the ship of state image as a kind of diptych but is concerned with the characterization of the Argives. The distinction between the two images, however, is impossible to draw with accuracy, though often one or other referent, Eteocles and the ship or the Argives and their storm, is uppermost.

In the first episode Eteocles again couches his advice to the chorus in these terms, begging them not to panic but to act like a good sailor (208-10) and to pray πύργων στέγειν . . . πολέμιον δόρυ (216). This hints at a further transformation of the image: the ship is attacked by another in a sea-battle,[126] and Eteocles in 284 and the Messenger in 595 develop this idea in their use of ἀντηρέτης.[127] Similarly, Parthenopaeus is καλλίπρῳρον (533) and Amphiaraus is the good sailor among a bad crew (602-4). Eteocles is still the pilot of the ship when faced by his brother, according to the Messenger (652), but at this pount the image undergoes an ominous change. The ship becomes Eteocles' genos and no longer Thebes. The gods take control of the situation and Eteocles, foreseeing the destruction they are bringing on his family, surrenders to their guidance:

ἐπεὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα κάρτ' ἐπισπέρχει θεός,

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[126] Cf. T.G. Tucker, ad loc. "The parallel meanings are (1)'withstand the spear'. . . (2)'prove water-tight against the (charging) ship'." The double entendre turns on δόρυ meaning both "ship" and "spear".

[127] Cf. L.J.D. Richardson, ΥΠΗΡΕΤΗΣ, Classical Quarterly, 37, 1943, p.59.

ἴτω κατ' οἶδμα Κωκυτοῦ λαχὼν
Φοίβῳ στυγηθὲν πᾶν τὸ Λαΐου γένος (689-91).

Ironically in his vision, the calm to come is Hell's river that will carry Laius' house to Hades. The chorus see only the present storm that buffets the house and Eteocles acknowledges it:

ΧΟ. ἐπεὶ δαίμων
λήματος ἐν τροπαίᾳ χρονίᾳ μεταλ-
λακτὸς ἴσως ἂν ἔλθοι θελεμωτέρῳ
πνεύματι· νῦν δ' ἔτι ζεῖ.
ΕΤ. ἐξέζεσεν γὰρ Οἰδίπου κατεύγματα (705-9).

The storm within the house that drives it on a course to destruction is the Fury and Oedipus' curses boiling like a storm sea.[128] But Eteocles does not wait for the daimon's rage to lull and leaves for the fraternal duel.

The chorus likens the evils in the house to waves that beat on the stern of the ship of state and their motion represents sin begetting sin in successive generations (758-61). The triple wave of these troubles suggests the error committed long ago that lasts till the third generation and may destroy the city (762-5). This image is further developed in conjunction with the wealth that in Aeschylus often accompanies the beginning of sin. Wealth in the guise of Oedipus' sons is about to be jettisoned from the ship of state, but perhaps not soon enough to save the city (766-71). The news arrives

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[128] ζέω is elsewhere used of boiling water (Iliad,18,349) and of a boiling sea (Herodotus,7,188), cf. Tucker, ad loc.

that the ship of state has survived the storm (795-8), but Apollo has taken command at the seventh gate--ἑβδομαγέτης is a naval term[129]--and the storm of Oedipus' curse has carried his sons away (819). The calm that Eteocles foresaw in Hades (690-1) may encompass the family in death and the chorus lament with gestures like oar-strokes (more choreography) to speed the family's craft to such peace:

ἀλλὰ χόων, ὦ φίλαι, κατ' οὖρον
ἐρέσσετ' ἀμφὶ κρατὶ πόμπιμον χεροῖν
πίτυλον, ὃς αἰὲν δὲ Ἀχέροντ' ἀμείβεται.
τὰν ἄστολον μελάγκροκον θεωρίδα (854-8).

Their ship is contrasted with the gaily-decked mission-ship that the Athenians sent to Delos for the Ionian festival of Apollo mentioned in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (146ff.)[130] The brothers are true adversaries on this ship (ἀντηρέτας 997), but the third wave overwhelmed the house (δίυγρα τειπάλτων πημάτων 990, cf. 758ff.). The image of the ship, then, depicts Eteocles' progress from the captain who steers the ship of state in a storm to a rower in battle[131] and finally to a passenger on the doomed ship of his family drifting in fair weather to foul destruction. But the state, despite the attacks of storm and ship, has survived, while the Furies cast down the house of Laius from the stern (1061-2), and has not capsized in a wave of alien

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[129] 800, cf. Tucker, ad loc.

[130] Cf. the festival Nicias instituted in 426 B.C. For the description of a mission-ship, cf. Plato, Phaedo, 58aff.

[131] Cf. Rosenmeyer, p.60.

men through the efforts of Eteocles:

ΧΟ. ὅδε Καδμείων ἤρεψε πόλιν
μὴ ναυτεραπῆναι μηδ' ἀλλοδαπῷ
κύματι φωτῶν
κατακλυσθῆναι τὰ μάλιστα (1081-4).

Eteocles' personal struggle from ignorance to knowledge of his part in his family's doom is reflected by a change in the application of the ship image, which thus underlines the movement and meaning of the play. The trope itself, common in Greek literature, begins in Homer, where it describes the Trojans' assault on the Greek wall (Iliad,15,381-3), and often appears as an allegory for political situations that suggest tyranny and faction. Archilochus' description of a (Thracian ?) war as a storm cloud (fr.56 Diehl) is extended by Alcaeus in reference to Myrsilus' attempt to establish a tyranny in Mytilene into an image of the ship of state in troubled waters.[132] Pindar too uses this image (not pejoratively, ofcourse) of Hiero of Syracuse (Pythian Odes,1,86-- 470 B.C.-- and 4,274-- 462 B.C.). The image, then, has some political associations with tyranny and expresses man's endeavour to govern in terms of his successful (but hazardous) conquest of the sea. Such a connotation partly applies to Eteocles in his attempt to govern Thebes. More important, however, is the metaphor's application to the situation of faction in the state, which is also present in the earlier writers.

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[132] D. Page, Sappho and Alcaeus, (Oxford, Clarendon, 1955), A6, pp.182-5, where Alceaus' party (or possibly the poet's troubled mind-Page) is the ship, and Z2,pp.185-8, both quoted by Heraclitus, Quaestiones Homericae,5b supplying the historical background.

The ship of state is buffeted by a storm both outside the walls and within. The constant stress on the Argives in terms of a tempest evokes a strong impression of their fearful power and uncontrollable might. The Messenger links both images by saying the Argive army has flecked the plain with foam (60-1), and the chorus develops the picture with an accent on noise (84-8, 114-5, 130-1, 213, 229).[133] Eteocles, however, sees the chorus as a storm within the city and tries to quell their raging (τάσδε διαδρόμους φυγὰς / θεῖναι διερρόθησε κἀμψυχον κλύειν 191-2).[134] The shields scene calls him back to the storm without (449), as the chorus had attempted to do earlier (234, 361-2). While the threatening storm of Argives subsides (758-65, 794), leaving the city's ship safe (1081-4), the house of Oedipus is destroyed by the stranger from over the sea (ὁ πόντιος ξένος 940-1). The real storm was within the house of Laius-- Oedipus' curse-- and its destructive nature was finally recognized by Eteocles as unsuppressable (709). The storm image, then, reveals the dual plane of the war, the Argives without and the course within, and Eteocles' advance to knowledge of the storm which he cannot suppress. His attack on the chorus' storm was a failure to comprehend the real tempest that threatened him.

Eteocles' progress towards awareness of his true position is also portrayed by the animal imagery in the play. The Argives are typified by association with beasts. The messenger reports their

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[133] Even if 79-80 describe the opening of a sluice, as Tucker suggests, ad loc., ὀρεοτύπου (85) may mean "buffetting mountains", i.e. cliffs.

[134] Bacon, p. 30.

sacrifice of a bull into the blood of which they dipped their hands, apparently war-magic by which they probably hoped to gain the bull's strength.[135] They appear to be lions (53), and are connected with chthonic snakes and horses (381, 385, 393, 495, 503, 537, 539). Eteocles sees the chorus also as savage animals, which he must restrain (243-4, 181, 286).[136] The chorus think of themselves as gentler creatures, the dove (292-4) and the foal (328, 454), which are hunted by the Argives (36-8, 121, 247, 322, 351). To them the besiegers are like a towering net (345f.)-- probably of doom. Eteocles shows them that the attackers are themselves the hunted, even Amphiaraus (607-8), but when his brother's challenge is made known, he reveals his own brutal nature (ὠμοδακής...ἵμερος 692). He is a dog refusing to fawn on fate (704), a clear reminiscence of Tydeus' jibe at Amphiaraus (383). He sees that the animality of the Argives does not threaten Thebes, but attempts to suppress a brutality within the city which he fails to recognize as his curse and his own nature, the true source of his danger.

In all the preceding images the noises of war have been powerfully conveyed by the raging of storms and wild beasts. All these are part of the images of seeing and hearing, that illustrate what is really to be feared and what is false threat. The messenger has the important function of reporter of sounds and sights and this often

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[135] Cf. note 76 above.

[136] Bacon, pp.29f. much of the remaining discussion is indebted to her.

receives mention (κατόπτης 41, 369; cf. 36-8, 40-1, 66-9, 651-2). The shields scene concentrates particularly on images of sight, emphasizing the devices of the Argives and perhaps Thebans also. Amphiaraus distinguishes himself from the rest by his lack of a device and jangling equipment and by ordinary speech (βάζω, λέγω and αὐδάω contrasting with βερέμω, βοάω, αὐτῶ and ἐπαλαλάζω). The shields are all Argive shields which were characteristically round (89) and this distinguishing mark, constantly insisted on (489, 496, 549, 590-1, 643), is underlined by the naming of Tydeus' gate after Proetus, co-inventor of the Argive shield (Apollodorus, Bibliotheca,2,2). They are thus all eyes, like Tydeus' moon which is the eye of night (390), and cast a spell by their roundness which threatens the house of Laius with the knowledge that eyes bring. The noisiness of the bells on Tydeus' shield (386), matched by the slogans on the other shields (434, 468), is empty vaunting like their outward display, and Eteocles turns each device against its owner.

A minor sound image which mirrors the movement of Eteocles' war from without to within is that of music. Metaphors drawn from this art characterize the Argive army and its equipment (123, 150, 152, 204, 463) and even the chorus' own stasimon about the Fury (838-9 δόσορνις ἁ/δε ἁυναυλία δορός). The song that eventually rings out in the play is that of the Fury and Oedipus' curses (867-9, 951-2, 1060)-- hardly the chorus of blame that Eteocles expected in the worst circumstances (7-8) but an ironic celebration of his knowledge of the true agent that caused his downfall.

The final reversal of the sight imagery, however, is an

enactment of Eteocles' changed purpose. After Amphiaraus has unveiled the superficiality of the Argives' shields and boasts by his eschewing of a device and vaunts, Eteocles, faced with Polyneices, begins to reveal his brutality and similarity with his brother (678). His exchange with the chorus divides into six sections corresponding to the six pieces of equipment needed for arming. His remarks about the Fury (708-11) suggest she might have been his shield device and his description of himself as τεθηγμένον (715) hints that his spear was given him there. Finally he ends as ἄνδρ' ὁπλίτην (718), a complete counterpart for Polyneices as shown on his shield (ἄνδρα τευχήστην 644), and thus his brother's equal in appearance, in deadly intent and in defiance of the Justice of kindred.[137] Eteocles becomes visibly what he really is, just as he had come to know the Fury as his enemy and intended to learn the meaning of Polyneices' device. Both are equal in their knowledge, once dead (986-990), and it is this ignorance and knowledge that the audible and visible convey in the Seven.

This knowledge, ultimately that of the true family relationship, is also the essential theme of the imagery of Earth as mother and of natural growth with all their implications of fertility and hero-cult. Eteocles is shown, despite his claim of loyalty to Mother Earth, to be a rival for her with his father and brother and eventually shares a just portion in her with his relations.

The relationship of the brothers is further conceived of as

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[137] Bacon, pp. 34ff.

a law-case, in which Ares will decide (414, cf. 942-6). Oedipus' curse that they would divide their possessions with the sword (788-90) instead of by law comes true, since Chalybian steel acts as κτεάνων χρηματοδαίτας / πικρός (729-30, cf. 711, 918)[138] and διαλλακτήρ (909). Moira, kleros and lachos are prominent at the end of the play (731-3, 788-90, 876-8, 850-1, 911, 945) and were used in the Greek laws of inheritance, although their simplicity prevents their being technical terms.[139] The brothers' clash over portions of the inheritance, vividly presented in the shields scene by Polyneices' blazon of Justice and Eteocles' denial of this claim (664ff.), is settled by an impartial judge, Ares (945). Both receive equal land-- enough for a grave--as the messenger declares in legal terms (816-8). The chorus pun grimly on the term μοῖρα ("fate" and "portion", 947-50) when speaking of this settlement. Oedipus' estate is at last fairly divided between his heirs and they receive just reward for their evil enmity.

The metaphorical language of the Seven does not recall the past and rarely predicts the future, although this may have been the case in the earlier plays. In a play of unseen action and single locality it functions as the major vehicle for the expression of the dramatic conflicts, evoking the noise, ferocity and danger of the Argives' attack. It further elaborates the deeper conflicts of the

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[138] Cf. Athenian διαιτηταί "arbitrators": Plato, Laws, 956c.

[139] Cf. Hesiod, Works and Days, 37, Pindar, Olympian Odes, 7, 58; Demosthenes 43,51.

play and gives them visual and audible form. Thus the imagery is dramatic. Because it derives from tradition and from a contemporary association of fact and idea, it can envision the complexities of the drama's meaning. It creates from a simple story of a doomed dynasty a drama of archetypal religious and political significance.

The Seven is a highly complex play which deals principally with the operation of a family curse and reveals both divine and human motivations and actions operating in an integrated world-view. The problem of evil is at the centre of its meaning and it is Eteocles' progress towards awareness of all the forces operating in the siege of Thebes and his quarrel with his brother that is the focus of the action. Aeschylus ends his Theban trilogy with a third and final working of the family curse that is its subject and has interwoven into his play much religious, social and political significance. Subsequent treatments of Theban legend owe much to his trilogy but explore with equal penetration and universality other implications in these stories.

CHAPTER III

SOPHOCLES AND THEBAN LEGEND

1. Sophocles and Tragedy

The richest fruits borne by Theban legend in extant Greek Tragedy appear in Sophocles' three greatest plays, Antigone, Oedipus Tyrannus and Oedipus Coloneus. Because of their very richness of suggestion, these plays, like the rest of the Sophoclean corpus, have been the subject of a vast amount of debate in recent years and have received penetrating analyses by many scholars using several critical methods with illuminating results. Occasionally, these techniques have been exclusively applied and have been limited in outlook and awareness. Some critics have recently succeeded in synthesizing the results of several categories of criticism, and have combined acute attention to the language and action of the plays with a historical approach to the meaning of both language and content. This has led to a fairer balance between the two extremes of critical approach, between the religious and philosophical approach and the purely literary approach to Sophocles.[1] It has been said that "throughout his life Sophocles returned periodically to the

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[1]See the discussion in C. H. Whitman, Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 3-41 and A. Waldock, Sophocles the Dramatist (Cambridge, At the University Press, 1957), Part I: Critical Canons, pp. 1-46.

house of Oedipus for his profoundest inspirations",[2] and this indicates that even exhaustive study of several aspects of the play is unlikely to reveal their full implications, let alone those of the play as a whole. This survey limits itself to a brief review of recent work on the religious, social and political aspects and imagistic themes of the plays.

Of the one hundred and twenty-three plays by Sophocles known to Alexandrian scholars only seven survive, and besides the three plays to be studied, the Trachiniae also treats Theban legend. It deals with death of Heracles. Some of the lost plays, too, centred on Theban legend or were set at Thebes.[3] These have been ignored, since even if their plots could be established with any certainty, the details of their treatment would still be hopelessly lost.

The three plays about the house of Laius do not form a trilogy in the Aeschylean sense and were written at wide intervals in Sophocles' long lifetime. Their order of composition is not sequential either, for the events of the Antigone (produced 442 B.C.[4]) follow those of both

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[2] Whitman, p. 82.

[3] Following W. N. Bates, Sophocles, Poet and Dramatist (New York, Barnes, 1961): (pp. 169 f.), Alcmaeon, cf. A. C. Pearson, The Fragments of Sophocles (Cambridge, 1917), I, 68 ff., 129 ff.; (pp. 175-6), Amphiaraus, cf. Pearson, I, 72 ff.; (p. 176), Amphitryon, cf. Pearson, I, 76 ff.; (pp. 181-3), Athamas (two plays ?), cf. Pearson, I, 1 ff.; (pp. 194-5), Dionysiscus, cf. Pearson, I, 117 f.; (pp. 195-8), Epigoni, cf. Pearson, I, 129 f.; (p. 199), Eriphyle; (p. 211), Hydrophori, cf. Pearson, II, 294 f.; (pp. 241-2), Niobe, cf. Pearson, II, 96 f.; (p. 244), Oecles, cf. Pearson, II, 119 f.

[4] Cf. R. C. Jebb, Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, Part III: Antigone, pp. xlii-xlv.

the other plays in story. Only in the Oedipus Coloneus, the last play (written circa 406 B.C., performed 401 B.C.[5]), is there evidence of conscious echoes of the previous plays and even here a different version of Oedipus' death is used from that in the Antigone.[6] The plays, then, are individual treatments of separate parts of Theban story.

This method of approach to the stories is true of most of Sophocles' work (only one trilogy by him, the Telepheia, is known[7]) and accompanies other, more far-reaching changes, especially the growing importance of the actors' part.[8] The action of each play is not set into past and future prospectives as in the Aeschylean trilogy, nor seen as part of a close relationship between the will of the gods -- ultimately viewed as Justice -- and the will of man. This type of theodicy, in all its careful detail and thorough application, is Aeschylus' unique contribution to both tragedy and Greek religion, and constitutes a contemporary reworking of the myths as much as other more obvious features.[9] Sophocles omits this view-in-depth of the

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[5]Produced posthumously by his grandson (Argument to Oedipus Coloneus) and written after Euripides' Phoenissae.

[6]Contrast Antigone 49-52, 900 with the plot of the Oedipus Coloneus and compare Homer, Iliad, 23, 676 ff. with the former, cf. C. Robert, Oidipus (Berlin, Weidmann, 1915), p. 115 f.

[7]Cf. A. Lesky, Greek Tragedy, trans. by H. A. Frankfort (London, Benn, 1965), p. 103, where Sophocles' radical change of approach is confirmed with a quotation from Suidas, s.v. Sophocles.

[8]According to Aristotle (Poetics 1449a17 ff.) Sophocles actually introduced the third actor which gave scope for conflict between characters.

[9]The supposed portrait of Aristeides the Just in Seven, 592 ff. and the Areopagus in the Eumenides are examples of his use of contemporary features.

interrelationship of god and man. He focuses attention on his characters as human beings, and their actions are seen primarily as the realization of their wills. For example, there is a remarkable contrast between Eteocles' remarks on his decision to fight Polyneices in the Seven and Oedipus' on his self-discovery and self-blinding in the Oedipus Coloneus. The chorus warns Eteocles to beware of his father's curse:

ΧΟ. ἐπεὶ δαίμων
λήματος ἐν τροπαίᾳ χερνίᾳ μεταλ-
λακτὸς ἴσως ἂν ἔλθοι θελεμωτέρῳ
πνεύματι· νῦν δ' ἔτι ζεῖ.
ΕΤ. ἐξέζεσεν γὰρ Οἰδίπου κατεύγματα (Seven, 705 ff.)

Oedipus says ὁ πήνικ' ἔζει θυμός (Oedipus Coloneus 434). They both use the same verb "boiled", which, especially in the Seven, has a metaphorical reference to a storm. Eteocles uses it of Oedipus' curse and the Fury it invoked which thus direct his actions. Oedipus, however, recognizes his θυμός as part of his own nature.[10] Both experience terrible emotional disturbance which destroys their appetite for life (Seven, 704 and Oedipus Coloneus, 434 ff.). But one is an external, the other an internal complication.

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[10]This θυμός is a leading characteristic of Sophoclean heroes, just as it is Homer's subject in the Iliad: μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά ; cf. B. Knox, The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964), chapters 1 and 2, particularly, 29 ff. and 50 ff.

Though Sophocles retains divine machinery (oracles, augury and even the intervention of the gods) it operates as an imponderable and inexplicable force in human life and forms a background to the action of his human figures. It is often a terrible counterpoint to human action (the refused sacrifices in the Antigone, the oracle's command to seek the murderer in the Oedipus Tyrannus), but sometimes acts for good (the thunder and oracle of Oedipus Coloneus). Most often, the operation of oracles is unmotivated and yet the gods who send them cannot be accused of cruelty in causing a hero's downfall (cf., especially, in Oedipus Tyrannus, the plague and the oracles.)[11]

Sophocles' characters, then, stand on their own, and his heroes are isolated from gods and men both by their responsibility for their acts of will and their refusal to accept ordinary passive piety. Knox has defined Sophoclean tragedy as "the confrontation of his destiny by a heroic individual whose freedom of action implies responsibility".[12] This idea of tragedy (which Aristotle in the Poetics sees as the best form when the hero is not perfectly virtuous but does not suffer change to misfortune because of wickedness, 1453a8ff.) is a far cry from Aeschylus. Yet Sophocles' Theban plays have more than just the epic stories in common with Aeschylus' trilogy and often reveal a remarkable indebtedness of thematic material.

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[11] Cf. B. Knox, Oedipus at Thebes (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 9-10.

[12] The Heroic Temper, p. 7.

2. The Antigone

Antigone (442 B.C.) shows considerable originality in construction on the part of Sophocles. "In simplest terms the dramatic vehicle is the conflict of two persons in respect of a burial",[13] yet the number of contradictory accounts of Antigone elsewhere provides a marked contrast with the unity of the play. It is impossible to decide how early the story of Antigone's burial of Polyneices appears. The case for an epic origin rests on the supposition that Apollodorus' account (Bibliotheca, 3, 78 f.) reflects that tradition.[14] The ending of the Seven, which is probably not genuine,[15] might be considered a prototype for Sophocles' play. Yet in it Antigone is helped in burying Polyneices by a semi-chorus (1074-6) and does not elaborate his right to burial by appeal to custom (1041 ff.).[16] In any case, there are still a large number of other stories about Antigone and the play's other characters. Sallustius, Argumentum ad Sophoclis Antigone says that Mimnermus (c. 620 B.C.) has Ismene caught lying with Theoclymenus and killed by Tydeus, while Ion of Chios (c. 450 B.C.) has Antigone and Ismene burned by Laodomas, son of Eteocles, in the

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[13] R. Goheen, The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone (Princeton, University Press, 1951), p. 95.

[14] H. Lloyd-Jones, "The End of the Seven Against Thebes", Classical Quarterly, New series, 9, 1959, pp. 96-7, accepts the epic origin.

[15] See Chapter II.

[16] Cf. Jebb, p. x.

temple of Hera. In Euripides' Antigone, Haemon rescues and marries the heroine and they have a son, Maeon.[17] The Seven are either burned on seven pyres[18] or taken from the Thebans by Theseus for burial in Attica.[19] Creon only appears in Seven, 474 as father of the Theban champion, Megareus, and there is no suggestion of his rule or kinship with Jocasta (the council make the decree in Seven, 1012).[20] Sophocles, then, probably had all these variants available and may have invented a good deal of material in Antigone, especially her mode of death and its consequences.[21]

In the prologue, Antigone reveals her intention to bury Polyneices despite Creon's ban and its death penalty. Ismene rejects her appeal for help because of their weakness and duty to obey authority. Antigone leaves to accomplish her will. The chorus of

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[17] See Chapter IV.

[18] Pindar, Nemean Odes IX, 9-28. Nothing about the burial of Polyneices is necessarily implied (contra, Baldry, "The Dramatization of the Theban Legend", Greece and Rome, 2nd Series, III, 1956, p. 33).

[19] Aeschylus' version in the Eleusinians, see Chapter II.

[20] H. J. Rose, in Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v., calls Creon "stopgap name".

[21] "The play is not far from pure fiction", Baldry, p. 34.

Theban elders greets the day of victory by thanking the gods for their destruction of the boastful Argives. Creon meets his council, the chorus, to announce his succession to the throne and his decree that Eteocles but not Polyneices is to be buried. One of the guards on the latter's corpse reports its mysterious ceremonial burial. Creon rejects the chorus' suggestion of divine intervention and blames dissident citizens, commanding the guard to capture the culprits or die. The chorus sings of the wonder and terror of man's ingenuity and reflects on the danger of disobedience to the laws and divine justice. The guard returns with Antigone, taken prisoner for burying Polyneices. She claims to be following the usages of the gods who have not sanctioned Creon's laws. After an angry interchange, he summons Ismene, suspecting collusion. The latter wishes to share Antigone's fate, but is repudiated by her. Creon cannot be moved, though Antigone is betrothed to his son. The chorus (582-625) sings of the gods' prolonged attacks on the house of Labdacus, Antigone's fall and the inevitable destruction awaiting man's life if the gods clash with him. Haemon arrives and his expression of loyalty heartens Creon; when he remarks that the city sympathizes with Antigone and advises moderation, an angry exchange results, and he leaves in a fury. Creon is persuaded to release Ismene and avoid polluting the city by walling Antigone in a cave and not having her stoned. The chorus witnesses to the power of Love, and sympathizes with Antigone as she laments her lonely and untimely death. Creon interrupts the chorus' comforting stories of famous legendary heroines and has Antigone removed. The chorus offers three mythical paradigms of ambiguous application for Antigone's fate. Teiresias then describes the bad

omens caused by pollution of the altars through the unburied corpses. Once Teiresias has left, Creon's suspicion of bribery gives place to a reversal of his decisions. He will bury Polyneices, release Antigone and pray to Dionysus for the city's safety. A messenger reports the results to Creon's wife: Polyneices is buried, but Creon finds Haemon with Antigone who has hanged herself. Haemon fails in an attack on Creon, then kills himself. The queen silently enters the palace and Creon brings on Haemon's body. His lamentation is increased by news of his wife's suicide. He is a living dead man (1288). The chorus moralize his fate as punishment for pride.

Religious and political problems are basic to the tragic conflict and extensively employed in it. The problem of the individual conscience and obedience to state law is hinted at in the Seven (1032-84), but Antigone is far more than a development of this. Antigone's and Creon's acts are both political and religious in implication. The political issue at stake was well stated by Hegel: "The public law of the state and the instinctive family-love and duty towards a brother are here set in conflict. Antigone, the woman, is pathetically possessed by the interests of family; Creon, the man, by the welfare of the community."[22]

Antigone claims the sanction of her genos for burying Polyneices:

οὐδὲν γὰρ αἰσχρὸν τοὺς ὁμοσπλάγχνους σέβειν, (511, cf. 38, 80f.)

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[22] "Hegel on Tragedy", trans. by A. and H. Paolucci (New York, Doubleday, 1962), p. 178.

and uses political terms (προδοῦσ' 46, κλέος 502) to express her loyalty to the older system of social organization which radical democracy had tried to combat.[23] She stresses the physical closeness of those born of the same mother with strange expressions (1, 523, 466-7, 511, 864) and φίλος of blood relatives is her watchword (ironically Haemon, not Ismene, is loyal to her). This theme is at its height when she implies that mutual slaughter cannot cancel the tie (523), yet disloyalty has done in Ismene's case (543).

Creon recognizes this claim of Antigone but rejects its object:

ἀλλ' εἴτ' ἀδελφῆς εἴθ' ὁμαιμονεστέρα
τοῦ παντὸς ἡμῖν Ζηνὸς ἑρκείου κυρεῖ,
αὐτή τε χἡ ξύναιμος οὐκ ἀλύξετον
μόρου κακίστου. (485-8, cf. 192, 198).

Antigone never tries self-justification in terms of the city but only in terms of her <u>genos</u>. Her prologue contrasts with the parodos (100-161), where the weakness of the city and wickedness of Polyneices' treachery are dwelt on, and with Creon's address (162-210) on the overriding claims of the state, especially his καὶ μείζον' ὅστις ἀντὶ τῆς αὑτοῦ πάτρας / φίλον νομίζει, τοῦτον οὐδαμοῦ λέγω. (182-5, where φίλος clashes with Antigone's meaning for it: "relative"). The wording of Creon's speech suggests the Athenian assembly (160-1) and asserts the city's rights over the family's. He does not expect opposition, least of all from his family,[24] but, failing to induce Antigone to

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[23] See Chapter II.

[24] Cf. his suspicions that dissidents buried Polyneices (289-314).

accept the city as an obligation (512-25), he is led to condemn her to death. There he twice denies the claims of his kin, first in the decree against his nephew and next in his sentence on his niece. His scene with Haemon again makes him choose city over family (658-80) and he speaks of the latter in terms of the former (660, 677 and 730 stress κόσμος and 67 πειθαρχία within the family). His arguments, then, for city over family grow in exclusiveness, just as Antigone's for family. This is the political conflict delineated in Antigone that the Seven foreshadowed, but there is a further clash.

Both Creon and Antigone appeal sincerely to the gods. Antigone deeply reveres her family dead and is devoted to the gods below (21-30).[25] Her religious motive for burying Polyneices seems to be to ensure his honour among the dead (contrast Eteocles, who is τοῖς ἔνερθεν ἔντιμον25) and she defies other's opinions (ὅσια πανουργήσασ' 74). The gods will honour her act (77 and 450-7). She contrasts Creon's νόμους ("laws" 452) with the ἄγραπτα τἀσφαλῆ θεῶν νόμιμα (454-5" unwritten and sure usages of the gods"),[26] which will and have

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[25] Cf. Hegel, p. 68: "Antigone reverences the ties of blood relationship, the gods of the nether world".

[26] The interpretation of this phrase is much debated. Knox (Heroic Temper, pp. 94-8) contends that the νόμιμα concerned must be solely the burial of the dead and other passages about "unwritten laws" are not to the point. Cf. V. Ehrenberg, Sophocles and Pericles (Oxford, Blackwell, 1954), p. 47 on Thucydides, 2, 37, 3. The secondary meaning of νόμιμα "customary rites of burial" (e.g. Herodotus, 1, 65) speaks strongly for such a view.

outlived Creon's laws. She seems to refer here to the gods below (cf. 519, 542, 894)[27] and Creon (777) and the chorus recognize this (601 ff.). Her position would probably be sympathetic to the audience. Although it was common practice to refuse burial to traitors in their own city, and several instances of this occurred before and after the date of the play,[28] it was unusual to deny burial altogether. A similar problem is the centre of the controversy in the second half of Sophocles' Ajax, where Agamemnon and Menelaus wish to punish the traitor Ajax by refusing burial. There, Odysseus concludes the argument by pointing out that the gods' laws are outraged by this treatment of a brave and noble man (134-5). The refusal of the Thebans to bury the Athenian dead after the battle of Delium (424 B.C.) was an act against enemies and may be mirrored in the similiar situation in Euripides' Suppliants, which it probably influenced.[29] In the Antigone the situation is more crucially political, since Antigone buries Polyneices in his own city although he betrayed it. This action may imply the notions of return to earth and hero-cult (cf. especially 25, and Creon's remark τὰ πάντ' ἐφαγνίσαι 196), already exploited in the Seven, and perhaps even the undertones of fertility there are present in Antigone's ironic description of Polyneices as οἰωνοῖς γλυκὺν / θησαυρόν (29-30). Antigone's stand, then, is on behalf of customs and gods far more ancient than the city.

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[27] Cf. her continual appeals to them while ignoring the Olympians. See L. A. Mackay, "Antigone, Coriolanus, and Hegel", T.A.P.A., 93, 1962, p. 167.

[28] C. M. Bowra, Sophoclean Tragedy (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1944), pp. 48-9.

[29] See Chapter IV.

Creon, however, has decided on the fate of the dead man purely on his value to the city and so is using death as a political weapon (cf. 308, 580-1). He can talk of Hades ironically (575, 524, 653 f.), and his unconcern seems clear when he commutes Antigone's death sentence (777-80). This near-rejection of the gods below matches his espousal of the city, for his gods are its protectors (163, 184), whose enemy Polyneices was (199). This motivates Creon's rejection of the supposed divine burial of Polyneices (282-9) and the proclamation itself which expresses the will of these gods to Creon. They are invoked by the chorus in the parodos (100-162). And so "the conflict between two individuals represents the conflict between two different complexes of social and religious loyalties, one expressing the mood of the past, the other of the present".[30] The outcome shows Creon, disdainer of family, destroyed by his own family (1231-9) and destroying them (παιδοκτόνῳ 1305). He pollutes his city (1915) and endangers it (1080) despite his wishes. The formula of the chorus:

νόμους παρείρων χθονὸς θεῶν τ' ἔνορκον δίκαν
ὑψίπολις· ἄπολις, ὅτῳ τὸ μὴ καλὸν
ξύνεστι τόλμας χάριν. (368-72)[31]

has come dreadfully true for Creon and he has caused his own punishment.

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[30] Knox, The Heroic Temper, p. 102, where, however, he recognizes that both opponents retreat to "purely personal considerations, unrelated to family, city, gods" (p. 103). Antigone's odd and controversial sophistry (905-12) is viewed as a rejection of her gods and revelation of her basic motive, love, while Creon rejects the city (733-7) and its gods (1039-44), disclosing his hurt pride (655 f., 678-80).

[31] For the reading παρείρων see Goheen, p. 141, note 3 and Knox, The Heroic Temper, p. 185, note 3.

On the other hand, the family does not repudiate Antigone. Ismene tries and Haemon succeeds in sharing her death, and her honour with her relatives below is assured. Her loyalty to family, right for the city also in this case, was too exclusive and this total rejection of city brings death as its reward (890). She will remain cityless below also (852, 370). The gods do not save her, but they fulfil her prayers (927-8) and her wish to "join in loving" (συμφιλεῖν 523). Sophocles has illuminated his play with two vast contemporary visions of political and religious significance, and, though his characters bear the weight of these visions, they remain triumphantly human and do not degenerate into symbols.

This clash of city and family is, however, strongly linked with a knowledge problem just as in the Seven. There, the great problem of knowledge in the central scene was the differentiation of seeming from being.[32] In the Antigone, both protagonists have their individual yet limited means of knowing to match their opposing viewpoint. Antigone's loyalty to family is based on her "innate intuition."[33] Her view of reality is not reflected in concrete terms, except her references to Niobe (823-33) and her invocation to Nature (844-9). She uses emotional terms and elementary feelings (466-7, 857 ff., and 69-70, 73-4). The illogicality of a number of her major statements illustrates this. She

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[32] See Chapter II.

[33] Goheen, pp. 76-82.

argues that duration of time is a criterion to judge action by:

ἐπεὶ πλείων χρόνος
ὃν δεῖ μ' ἀρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε (74-5).

And again, the sophistry by which she justifies her love for her brother above all others shows a similar emotional warping (905-12). Thus her separate plane of thought is revealed by these characteristics; her intuition is a moral one and the catastrophe seems to confirm its correctness.

Creon is contrasted with her emotional intuition, for he chooses sense and reason as his criteria. This is shown in his constant references to sensibilia in his images. Three recurring verbal patterns indicate the shallowness of his judgment. Creon's ideas seem "right thinking" (τὸ φρονεῖν) and his opponents' "folly" (ἀφροσύνη) (176, 281, 561 f., 727), but this scheme is reversed after the Teiresias scene (1023, 1060 and especially 1348-56). Creon stresses sight and the seen in the first half of the play (206, 494, 690-700, 763-4), while Teiresias, as in the Oedipus Tyrannus, is the embodiment of the whole pattern, especially as he brings Creon eventually to face the reality of pollution by the corpses. The same reversal of pattern occurs after the catastrophe. Creon wishes to be blind (1328 ff.), and has insight (1290). Finally, there is considerable contrast between the demands of Nature and Law as seen by the different figures. Ismene (59-62) and Creon develop the idea that law is whatever the ruler wishes (211-14, 479, 525). Creon maintains that the claims of family are to be based directly on grounds of usefulness (641-60) and his pragmatism would eliminate any natural principles of Justice from the city, whose laws are those of its

ruler (733-49).

Antigone contrasts her fidelity to her own nature with the attitude (511-523) and she cries as a witness to Nature as a symbol of this against Creon's νόμου (842-56, 937-43). She is answered by its disruption (997-1013), just as Creon is punished by losing two of his kin. Creon rejects both the demands of the gods for Polyneices' burial and Haemon's advice on the limitation of human wisdom and relies on his own rule and the wisdom of old age (720-746). His fate seems to warn against the abandoning of the traditional values that these counsels represent and the chorus draw this moral from the play:

πολλῷ τὸ φρονεῖν εὐδαιμονίας
πρῶτον ὑπάρχει· χρὴ δὲ τἀς γ' εἰς θεοὺς
μηδὲν ἀσεπτεῖν· (1347-50).

The gods punish his hybris and this is symbolized by the pollution that falls on the city from the unburied corpses (1015-8), which was thought of as a very real infection on the city's land, animals and people. Thus Antigone's intuitive wisdom, with its loyalty to family, is a foil and corrective for Creon's factual wisdom, through both are limited, Antigone's in its means, for it ignores the city's claims which are essential for all, and Creon's in its ends, for it omits the final moral order of the world. Neither way of thinking is vindicated by their catastrophes. Sophocles rather reveals the difficulty of knowledge for human moral action. A similar difficulty is found at the end of the Seven, where a problem of Justice in the city is stated and solved in different ways by the two semichoruses (1072-84).

This problem of knowledge reflects the contemporary atmosphere of Sophocles' day. The ode on Man (332-375), which first universalizes the action into a discussion of attitudes to life as a whole, praises human intellectual achievements similar to those claimed to have been given to men by Prometheus in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound (445-506). These accounts may well reflect Sophistic culture-histories of the period, and the idea that man developed the city for himself (355-6) is probably an echo of Protagoras' famous myth which saw the city as the means of civilization (Plato, Protagoras, 320 D ff.). Sophocles' ode, however, carries an undertone of danger. The opening is ambiguous:

πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει.

(332-4). There the word δεινός implies "clever", "marvellous" and "fearsome", and this undertone of threat also colours the words for "intellect" φρόνημα (354, "pride" 459) and "civic temper": ὀργὰς (356; "anger" 280). The ode ends by stating that a city prospers if it keeps the justice of the gods, and punishment awaits rashness (366-75).[34] This stress is similar to that on Justice and Reverence in the third stage of Protagoras' myth, but the action of the play develops the dangers implied in the ode and suggests the great difficulty of the knowledge required for the Sophists' rationalist approach to ethics and government.

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[34] Cf. Goheen, pp. 53-6 and cf. C. P. Segal, "Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the Antigone", Arion, 3: 2, 1964, pp. 52-4.

Creon himself, whose refusal to accept the decision of the ode brings disaster, shows characteristics of the Sophistic movement. The argumentation and dogmas of some of his speeches (e.g.: 162-210, 679-80), his efforts to rationalize away the gods' interest in his affairs (e.g.: 280 ff., 1040-1) and his eventual resort to power politics (730-61) are all tinged with the teaching of the Sophists.[35] His upholding of his law and the concept of law is contrast to Antigone's appeal to nature and the justice of the gods has been mentioned and is perhaps his most significant Sophistic characteristic. Creon's disaster is on one plane a failure of the intellect of Sophistic man to reach full knowledge of life. Sophocles, then, sees man's intellectual achievements both as the source of progress and of danger through the limited knowledge on which they are based. This is unlike the optimism of Protagoras' myth and Aeschylus' reflection of the same ideas, and the fate of Creon, whose Sophistic features are marked, represents this judgment.

Creon's Sophistic power politics also highlight another clash in the play. Although the state's interests are uppermost in his concern and he wishes free speech to allow the best advice to be given (178-190), his tyrannical qualities soon begin to appear: his fits of anger with the guard, Antigone and Haemon, his certainty of his own judgment and his readiness to suspect treason and bribery (289-303). His effect on the citizens is to make them fear to speak their minds (504 ff., 690 ff.). He finally demands obedience even when he is

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[35]Goheen, pp. 90-1.

in the wrong (666 f.) and he claims the state as his (738). Against him Haemon uses the arguments of democratic Athens that the will of the people should be considered (733) and that the city belongs to all (737).[36] There is thus a clash between forms of government implied in Creon's rule,[37] such as appears in the Seven when Eteocles shows despotic traits in his attitude towards the chorus.[38]

This and other sides of Creon's action have suggested that his character is a portrait of Pericles. Creon is called στρατηγός "general" by Antigone (8) without any apparent mythical justification.[39] Criticism from an aristocratic standpoint of Pericles' influential generalship -- first held in 443 B.C. -- and its probable results[40] seems too narrow an intention. Sophocles seems not to have been a close ally of the oligarchs,[41] and besides, Creon's tyranny brings punishment on himself. There are, however, similiarities of policy. Creon thinks obedience to government is best for the individual (676, cf. Thucydides, 2, 60) and wishes to make Thebes great (191, cf. Thucydides, 2, 36). The probable relationship between the two men seems to be that: "Sophocles, when he created . . . Creon was,

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[36] Cf. Ehrenberg, p. 60.

[37] Cf. Ehrenberg, p. 54 ff.

[38] See Chapter II.

[39] Ehrenberg, pp. 105-12 and pp. 173-177.

[40] T. B. L. Webster, Political Interpretations in Greek Literature (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1948), pp. 52-3.

[41] Ehrenberg, pp. 137-40.

consciously or unconsciously, under the impact of Pericles' leadership of the State".[42] Thus Creon's restricted autocracy that sees the individual only as a member of the city does not represent Pericles' ideal of the city. This was equality of justice and a share in government for all, and at the same time recognition for individual merit (Thucydides, 2, 37). This combination of the claims of individual and state seems also to be Sophocles' political moral in the Antigone, an aim far greater than propaganda for one political party.

The conflicts of the play are illuminated by the frequent recurrence of dominant images. These help express both the differing value-systems behind the clash of characters and the ultimate facts of the nature of evil and man's relationship with the gods. Much of the imagery springs from the ode on man and its implied praise of intellectual achievements is severely modified in the course of the play. Imagery of money and merchandising[43] delineates the divergencies of value-system between Creon and Antigone. He employs it to denote a materialistic view of his enemies (220-2, 295-303) and, though Antigone proves him wrong here, he quickly reassumes it (1035-9). Antigone and Haemon use it in an opposite way, of her emotional decision to brave death (29-30, 461-8, 683-4, 699). The messenger (1168-71) and chorus (1326) ironically echo Creon's earlier use, after the reversal, implying a clash of values. This sequence underlines a clash of values between the antagonists and the superficiality of Creon's judgment contrasts with Antigone's decision.

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[42] Ehrenberg, p. 149.

[43] Goheen, pp. 14-19, cf. Segal, p. 48.

The military images[44] envision the nature of civil control. Antigone describes Creon as an Athenian general, (8-10, 86-7) and he assumes this role in his speeches too, particularly in the form of his decree, which is announced by a herald (168-9, 215-7, 241-2). These images only reach full statement in his crucial scene with Haemon where he portrays civic and family order in military terms (632-40, 666-76), and Haemon sees his filial duty in the same fashion (688-90). The Teiresias scene has a similar pattern of image and rebuttal (1033-5, 1084-6, 1095-7 all archery images). Creon finally perceives the shortcoming of his view in these terms:

ἀνάγκη δ' οὐχὶ δυσμαχητέον (1106)

-- it does not include a sufficiently wide view of life to be satisfactory. So the image reverses itself on Creon.

The most important sequence for character and value-systems is that of animals and their control.[45] It correlates man's relationship to animals with the gods' to man. This pattern reveals the moral order of the universe. Creon breaks this moral order by seeking to put himself on the plane of the gods and this he symbolizes by describing the dissident buriers of Polyneices (as he imagines them) in the guise of yoke animals (289-92).[46] He sees Antigone as an unbroken horse (477-9)

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[44] Goheen, pp. 19-26.

[45] Ibid., pp. 26-35.

[46] Cf. the connection of yoke and slavery in the Seven (75, 322, 471 and 793) where the threatened chorus also think of themselves as hunted animals. See Chapter II.

and Polyneices as a beast and carrion for the birds (201-6, 1040-3, 1080-3). The slavery threatened by her brother (202) becomes Antigone's lot (479) -- another image in which Creon equates himself with the master. Antigone, however, answers that Polyneices is not a slave despite Creon's treatment (517), just as, in reverse, Creon accuses Haemon of being Antigone's slave (755-6). The sisters are animals for Creon (531-3, 578-81) and Antigone's imprisoning is like a trapped beast's (φοβῆς 775). The sequence presents Creon's attitude to authority and the chorus further extends its application. In the parodos, the gods' destruction of Polyneices and the Argives is like the wild driving of chariots (106-9, 131-3, 139-40), which ironically matches Creon's final image of his fall (ἐν δ' ἔσεισεν ἀχερὰς ὁδοῖς 1274). Man's taming of animals is contrasted with his self-taught government of cities in the first stasimon (332-356) but the gods are masters of man's destiny (365-75). This formula of man's power over animals equal to gods' power over men is set out distinctly in the next ode on Love (781-99), especially παρασπᾷ "drive out of the course" (791-2). The chorus repeats the racing metaphor to picture their divided loyalties (800-1, cf. the suggestive repetition of θεσμῶν 799, 802 meaning first gods', and then men's "laws"). Finally the chorus turns against Creon and their use of animal imagery (947, 955 and 985) suggests their protest. Likewise, Teiresias describes augury in there terms (999-1004, 1021-2) and the Messenger Haemon's reaction to Creon at the tomb (1231-2), even Creon himself there (1214).

Animal imagery also appears in the Seven where it is used to characterize enemies (Argives: 435, 503; Eteocles of the chorus: 243-4, 281), or the innocent (chorus of themselves: 292-4, 348).[47] Eteocles, after combatting the animals hostile to Thebes, also becomes an animal in his battle fury (692, 704). Both reversals are the outcome of true knowledge gained at the turning point of the play.

A related image sequence, that of birds, centres on Antigone.[48] The ode on Man includes bird-catching as an achievement (343-4), but the birds feeding on Polyneices' corpse (29 ff., 205) symbolize Creon's rejection of religious practice for political expediency. Teiresias is warned by these birds of Creon's pollution of the city's affairs, and the art (998) of prophecy, that relies on them, is separate from the arts of control by its sympathy with nature. To the guard, Antigone is like a bird that mourns her young (423-5) or is hunted (433). Antigone's sex is thus emphasized, as later in Creon's harsh images of animal conquest (473 f.), also connected with domination of male over female (484 f., 525). Creon sees Antigone's defiance as woman's attempt to rule man (678, 746, 756) and the clash between his masculine reasoning and her complete acceptance of her feminine natural affections, with the eventual vindication of woman's insight, has been prefigured in the Seven.[49]

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[47] See Chapter II.

[48] Segal, pp. 56-7.

[49] See Chapter II.

These images of birds, the psychological conflict of the sexes and the answering of the art of the ode on Man by Teiresias' god-given art of divination form a complex revealing that control and authority over nature and man is more difficult than the ode and Creon suggest.

A further sequence concerns marriage with Death.[50] Creon refers unsympathetically to Antigone's love for death (648-54) in contrast to the chorus' sympathy (802-5). The kommos (806-33) is imagistically an ironical marriage procession. But Antigone prefers this wedding and her family (891-4, 916-20), and this image takes the place of a developed erotic subplot, as in Euripides' Antigone,[51] to provide motivation for Haemon's suicide. The messenger's employment of this image (1204-7, 1223-5, 1240-1) reverses Creon's ironic use, as does the tableau of the lovers in death. The suggestion of an after-life (1070-6) is outweighed by a feeling of tragic waste. The tension between the two forms of life hints at the conflicting claims of body and spirit and forms a background for judging the characters' actions.

Imagery of disease and cure,[52] symbolizes the problem of evil and the relations of god and man. The "disease" (419-21) of dust that buried Polyneices, similar to that in Homer, Iliad I, signifies the gods' intervention according to both guard and chorus,[53] an inter-

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[50]Goheen, pp. 37-41.

[51]Cf. C. Robert, Oidipus, II, 381-95, and Chapter IV.

[52]Goheen, pp. 41-44 and Segal, pp. 61 and 64.

[53]Antigone's tacit admission of this burial (435) is still debated. Knox argues well for its acceptance, Heroic Temper, pp. 176, note 3, 180-1, note 43.

pretation that Creon rejected earlier (278-89). He suggests that Antigone is "epileptic" (732); but Teiresias points out the genuine illness of the city and attributes it to Creon's evil (1023-7, 1052). This accusation foreshadows Oedipus' clash in Oedipus Tyrannus with the same prophet, where it is made to an unwary polluter (303-7). Creon, unaware of the macrocosm of man's existence, claims man cannot pollute the gods (1043 f.), but himself infects the city (1080-3). The chorus invokes the religious association of disease again as they pray for healing to Dionysus (1115-54). Ironically, the cure that comes is retribution and tragic waste, which affirms the god's authority and power over human life as Creon comes to recognize in these terms (1284 f.).

In the Ode on Man, shelter from the missiles of storm and the open air is a triumph of civilization (356-9) but exposure to the elements (410 ff.) and to Creon's storm (391) is the guard's lot, an ironic contrast to civilization. Creon, according to Haemon, should rule a desert (740), and he acts this out by making Antigone deserted (887, 919, 713). Polyneices' exposure also illustrates Creon's failure to grasp an essential of civilization and his disregard of the gods. Antigone's burial -- a sheltering -- signifies her greater insight.

The image sequence of the sea and sailing[54] stresses human ingenuity and need for co-operation. Conquest of the sea reveals man's daring and resourcefulness (334-7, 615-6, 953-5) and discloses the power of Love and Dionysus (785, 1117-9). Ismene and Antigone develop the commonplace of the "sea of life" and "storm of troubles" (20, 83, 536-7)

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[54]Goheen, pp. 44-50, cf. Segal, p. 63.

and these are especially linked with the troubles of their family and the gods' power over men (582-97). In the Seven a sea of troubles surrounds the city (32-3, 60-4) and then Eteocles' doomed family (690-1, 705-9, 854-60). Creon's "ship of state" commonplaces illustrate his claims to leadership (162-3, 178-83, 188-90) and, while suggesting patriotism, may also hint at boastful tyranny, as with Eteocles' usage in the Seven.[55] Teiresias uses the figure of Creon's past rule in the revelation scene (991-4) as another ironical reversal of image against Creon. In the second stasimon also (582-97) the image is developed at length in threatening terms,[56] ostensibly for Antigone and Ismene, but through his kinship, for Creon also, and contrasts his and the Ode on Man's attitude of control with the imponderability of irrational suffering. The cosmic nature of the sea adds an awareness of man's moral responsibility and the gods' power in shaping human life. It is a testing ground for man's hopes and achievements, and calamities can be caused by both the unaccountable violence of the sea and by poor seamanship. Haemon warns his father of the latter (710-7) and Creon finally admits he has piloted them to the harbour of Hades (1283-5). Moral irresponsibility on his part and unpredicatable forces in the world are jointly responsible for the catastrophe. The ship

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[55] See Chapter II.

[56] Jebb, p. xii.

imagery in the Seven also carries connotations of the limited knowledge of man, but there Eteocles' pilotage of the ship of state is seen in reality to be his helpless journey to Hades on his family's vessel.[57]

Although these image sequences have been treated separately, they are not experienced in this way. They deal with similar themes and add each a different dimension to them. Many of them receive crucial statement in the ode on Man and their subsequent appearance recalls its optimistic connotations, often ironically. The images of army, sea, birds, shelter and exposure, and animals, together with the conflict of sexes, indicate different ways of controlling and their limitations, while the divergent views of Creon, Antigone and Haemon on human nature and motives are symbolized by the marriage, money, military and animal sequences. The interaction of imagery is of profound importance in the Teiresias scene where several sequences ironically reverse themselves against Creon and his usage of them. By their development and interaction, they all form a significant mode of communication for the poet's dramatic and other intentions. They interweave illuminating symbols and ideas from contemporary life and poetry into the texture of the play.

In Antigone, Sophocles has created a complex structure of political and religious significance illuminated with elaborate poetry. Many themes found in the Seven are given profound development, even if the spurious ending cannot have influenced the play. The conflict

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[57] See Chapter II.

of city and family and the problems of human knowledge recur. While Antigone remains loyal to her loving nature and family by intuition, Creon champions the state above all and suffers a fatal and ironic retribution through his family. These twin themes of knowledge and of unsuspected relationship, especially unknown enmity with kin, are inherent in both the Seven and Antigone. Besides, several analogous images occur in both, particularly that of the sea and sailing, in connection with these themes.

3. Oedipus Tyrannus

The Oedipus Tyrannus (probably produced circa 429 B.C.)[58] is Sophocles' enigmatic masterpiece and has attracted various imitations and interpretations through the centuries.[59] In antiquity, too, the theme was popular,[60] but though his play probably became a classic model,[61] he may have followed the plot of Aeschylus' Oedipus in outline,

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[58]The plague and preoccupation with oracles seem the only prominent (and doubtful) criteria for dating, but suggest Athens just after 430 B.C., cf. Jebb, Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments, Part 1, The Oedipus Tyrannus (Cambridge, 1887), pp. xxix-xxx; Whitman, pp. 49-50 and Ehrenberg, p. 114, note 2.

[59]To Jebb's discussion, pp. xxxiii-xlvii, of later treatments can be added Jean Cocteau's La machine infernale and Freud's interpretation of the play's appeal, discussed by Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, pp. 3-14.

[60]Fifteen known treatments, according to Daly, Real Encyclopädie (Stuttgart, 1896 -), 17, 2107, 8ff.

[61]Cf. Aristotle's praise and constant use of Sophocles' version (e.g. Poetics, 1552A34).

adding considerable elaboration of the search.[62] The fragments of the cyclic epic, the Thebaid, suggest that many of Oedipus' tragic characteristics were already formed there, especially Oedipus' two curses on his sons, his captivity because of his pollution and his blindness.[63] Aeschylus used these three motifs[64] and included Oedipus' parricide and marriage to his mother -- older themes in the story.[65] Of these, Sophocles omits the curses to focus attention on Oedipus' search and its results, and changes the place of Laius' murder from Potniae (Aeschylus, Oedipus, fr. 173 Nauck) to Daulis (Oedipus Tyrannus, 733-4). It is not known whether Aeschylus followed the version of Oedipus' childhood used by Carcinus, in which Oedipus' mother hid him from a relative (Laius ?),[66] or the tale of his exposure in Sophocles. The defeated Sphinx and her riddle[67] and Laius' oracle(s)[68]

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[62] Baldry, p. 33.

[63] On the implication that Oedipus is blind, see Robert, I, 171, and on the whole tradition, E. L. de Kock, "The Sophoklean Oidipus and its Antecedents", Acta Classica, 4, 1961, pp. 18-22.

[64] Cf. Seven, 720-91, see Chapter II.

[65] Odyssey 11, 271-6.

[66] Fr. 798 Nauck.

[67] Cf. Robert, I, 57.

[68] Pindar, Olympian Odes, II, 38-40 (476 B.C.).

were also in the tradition before Aeschylus and appear in his play. Sophocles, however, concentrates attention on these aspects of the story. The victory over the Sphinx stresses Oedipus' wisdom, and the oracles unrelentingly confront an uncomprehending Oedipus with the truth about himself. Since those were from Delphi, they had probably introduced the religious ideas of pollution of the individual and of his community through crime within the family, and of the wisdom of humility before the gods.[69] In the Oedipus Tyrannus the plague and Oedipus' self-blinding result from direct or imagined pollution and the knowledge of Oedipus -- whether he knows himself before the gods or not -- is the supreme element of dramatic tension. The Sphinx's attack on Thebes and Laius' oracle are unmotivated, however, and so Oedipus' fate is not set in a background of family crime, such as Aeschylus' Theban trilogy portrayed.

The play opens with Thebes stricken by a plague affecting crops and men. Suppliants have come to seek Oedipus' aid. He greets them and tells how he sent Creon to Delphi days before and impatiently awaits his return. Creon arrives with Apollo's command to rid the city of its pollution -- the murderer of Laius, the former king. The Sphinx, Creon says, had prevented a search at the time. Oedipus dismisses the suppliants and summons his council of elders, the chorus. It enters, praying to the gods for deliverance. Oedipus makes a proclamation: the murderer must be found and exiled and anyone hiding

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[69] de Kock , pp. 22-27.

the truth is cursed. The chorus does not know about the crime, but suggests sending for Teiresias, whom Oedipus says he has already summoned. Teiresias arrives, but is silent until Oedipus charges him with complicity. Teiresias counterattacks with a full revelation of Oedipus' guilt. Oedipus in disbelief accuses him of conspiracy with Creon, failure to defeat the Sphinx and false prophecy. Teiresias rebukes this distrust of the family prophet, but only riddles Oedipus' true identity. The chorus ponder the killer's plight and the merits of the recent argument. Creon ineffectually defends himself from probabilities and needs Jocasta and the chorus to save him. Jocasta tries to comfort Oedipus with the "failed" oracle that Laius would be killed by his son, mentioning the crossroads where he died. Oedipus remembers the murder he committed as he fled from Delphi because of an oracle that he would kill his father and marry his mother, Polybus and Merope of Corinth, as he thought. The two murders seem different as the one witness blamed bandits, not one man, for Laius' death. The chorus hopes pious conduct will remain valid despite the doubt cast on oracles and the gods' rule in life, otherwise why serve the god as chorus? Jocasta brings offerings to Apollo as Oedipus is disturbed. A Corinthian interrupts with news of Polybus' natural death, apparently confirming Jocasta's disbelief in oracles. But Oedipus will not return to Corinth while his mother lives. The Corinthian tells how he received Oedipus as a baby from a servant of Laius and gave him to Merope. Jocasta fails in a last bid to end Oedipus' search and exits to die, while Oedipus, a son of Chance, will learn his parentage. The chorus speculates on Oedipus' divine birth. Laius' servant refuses to

speak, though recognized by the Corinthian and the chorus, until, under torture, he tells the truth about Oedipus' parents and the murder. Oedipus enters the palace in despair. The chorus sing of man's precarious happiness as exemplified by Oedipus. A servant reports Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-blinding. Oedipus enters and laments with the chorus. He charges Creon to care for his children and attend to Jocasta's burial. A farewell to his daughters has been arranged, but, despite his entreaties, Creon sends to Delphi for guidance before exiling Oedipus, who enters the palace in isolation.

A profound religious statement seems to be made in the Oedipus Tyrannus about the validity of oracles and the operation and power of the gods in human life. The plague in the opening of the play motivates Oedipus' search for Laius' murderer and its blighting of generation is the punishment for his crime of incest.[70] The connection of the breaking of moral sanctions and the plague also occurs in the Antigone. Both pollutions are the result of contravening the close ties of kinship. Oedipus sought to avoid Apollo's oracle by fleeing from Corinth (790 ff.) and his action led to both his parricide and his incest. The oracle was thus fulfilled. Teiresias' statements that Oedipus is the murderer (362-3) and lies with his kin (366-8) are both later discovered by Oedipus to be true. Even Laius' oracle that he would be killed by his son is fulfilled. The gods' prophecies all come tragically true for Oedipus and his family and reveal the limitations of the human knowledge on which he bases his actions.

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[70] Xenophon, Memorabilia IV, iv, 20-23 says defective offspring results from incest.

The play, thus, is a "terrifying affirmation of the truth of prophecy"[71] and reveals the irony that Oedipus, who seemed at the start to have avoided the worst of predictions so successfully, had in fact fulfilled it long ago. The conclusion that oracles are true and gods' knowledge superior to man's most profound knowledge is inevitable.

The oracles of the gods, however, do not prophesy the events of the play. Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus' self-discovery and self-blinding (1230-1) are all the results of human, not divine, will. Even Teiresias' statements do not have any effect (439)[72] and are partially forgotten (767). The plague, though demanding Oedipus' attention and action, is not specifically the gods' intervention and the famed plague, sent by Apollo in Homer, Iliad I, is difficult to reconcile with the chorus' prayers to Apollo for release (149 f., 163, 205 f.). Oedipus' inquiry to Delphi is his own idea (93) and so, too, are the curse (not demanded by Apollo) and summoning of Teiresias. Oedipus decided on the search himself (145, 148) and, despite four attempts to end the search (Teiresias 320-1, Jocasta 848, 1060 ff. and the shepherd 1165), stubbornly persists to the end. His free acts of will form the action of the play and in it he appears totally responsible for the discovery of the past. Although the gods' power and oracles are both affirmed, the play focuses on Oedipus' will as seen operating in his search.

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[71] Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, p. 43.

[72] Knox's rejection of Brunck's emendation in 376 is persuasive (Oedipus at Thebes, p. 8).

Oedipus' conflict with divine omniscience starts from his self-confidence in the abilities of his mind to solve all the problems of human life. He has already seemingly escaped the oracle's prophecy by flight and solved the Sphinx's riddle on his own. In fact, he has usurped divine ommiscience for himself. There are subtle suggestions that he has assumed the role of a god (2, 16, 29, 216-8). His catastrophe reveals his true relations with his kin, and the epithets of his godlike power return to the gods (κρατύνων 14, 904; μεγάν 441, 872; ἀρχή 259, 905). His pretensions are mocked, just as his lameness and the play of words on πούς (130, 48, 479, 866, 876) mark him as an outcast in the past and for the future. Most ironic, too, are the frequent repetitions of the word οἶδα ("know") and its cognates (especially Oedipus' doubly ironic ὁ μηδὲν εἰδὼς Οἰδίπους 397) so close to Oedipus' own name (he solves the riddle of the feet, he is "know-foot").[72] Together with the complex of scientific metaphors that make Oedipus' search a symbol of fifth century achievement, these ironies of language point to the tragedy of knowledge in the play. His search began as a hunt for a murderer but becomes a quest for his own identity. He refuses to give up, completely unaware of the ghastly truth, though he has heard it spoken by the gods. Once the horror is revealed, his sense of his own pollution and the impossibility of facing such knowledge bring about his self-blinding. In his blindness, however, he

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[73] See Knox, p. 264, note 69 for the originators of these observations.

sees man's essential ignorance and firmly grounded on this genuine knowledge he "transcends his ordinary measure, limits and bounds, and becomes greater than man." [74] Similarly, in the Seven Eteocles was ignorant of his real, violent relations with his kin and reaches knowledge unexpectedly by his own device (he has chosen the seventh gate). Creon, too, fits this pattern. All three kings are ironically revealed as ignorant by their kingly rule, despite their poses of wisdom. All three come to a realization of man's limited knowledge, even of his relationships with his closest kin.

Oedipus' pair of crimes are committed against both family and city and constitute at once strife within the family and within the city. The opening line of the play contrasts Oedipus' paternal attitude to the Thebans with a hint of the truth to be discovered:

ὦ τέκνα, Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαι νέα τροφή

His word of address "children" opposes his real relationship with the city and Cadmus -- a son. The contorted order that juxtaposes the words "ancient" and "new" before "nurslings" (literally "nursing") suggests the paradox that Oedipus is to become Cadmus' newest, yet ancient, descendant. The search for Oedipus' parentage develops from the search for Laius' murderer, but the former, a family affair, uncovers the latter, a crime against the city. [75] Oedipus finds both his

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[74] Lazlo Versenyi, "Oedipus: Tragedy of Self-Knowledge", Arion, 1,3, 1962, p.62.

[75] S. Benardete, "Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus", reprinted in Sophocles: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by T. Woodard (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 107.

identity and his home in his investigation and also discloses the dreadfulness of these. After the possibility that Oedipus killed King Laius, his predecessor on the throne, has been revealed, the chorus sings of the tyrant who transgresses the law of the gods (863ff.), which must be the prohibitions against parricide and incest (cf. 823-33). The tyrant symbolizes the extreme form of illegality in both the city, often usurping power by force -- as Oedipus did in effect -- and the family, since the offspring of incest is always illegitimate. Oedipus' parricide is also regicide and threatens to make the family independent of the city by endogamy. Thus the search's progress moves deeper into political and family problems, and discovers Oedipus' crimes against both.[76] His self-blinding is punishment for his taboo-breaking and he longs for exile as punishment for his crimes against his city (1331ff.; 1449ff.). Oedipus, whose nature was wholly public as seen in his willingness to have the oracle's answer told to all and his sorrow which is the collective suffering of the city and the individual (93ff.; 59-63), proves to be the completely natural man who breaks the divine laws of the city through his natural hybris (873). Finally, only his kin are able to look on his woes (1430-1) and he enters the palace where he truly belongs, both as rightful king and head of the family. Oedipus discovers that he has broken the highest laws of city and family, and his great services to the city are seen as the worst possible acts he could have done. The clash of city and family is at its most critical within the single figure of Oedipus.

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[76] Benardete, p.108.

All these three themes have a particular reference to the fifth century climate in which the play was performed and are not only universal themes in the play. The Sophistic movement and its rational humanistic approach to ethics, and particularly government, has already been discussed in regard to the Antigone. If the dating of the Oedipus Tyrannus in 429 B. C. is correct, the religious teaching of the Sophists is especially pertinent to the times. The plague in Athens and the Peloponnesian War in general brought a large number of oracles and prophecies into circulation (Thucydides, 2, 8). Cynicism and rationalization inevitably were applied to them (cf. Thucydides' own remark that only one of them came true -- 5,26) and this attitude had its extreme form in the attacks of the Sophists. Protagoras set up man's intelligence as the canon of existence: "Man is the measure of all things: a measure of the existence of the existent, and the nonexistence of the nonexistent".[77] Antiphon the Sophist relates this approach to prophecy and calls it "the guess of an intelligent man".[78] Aristophanes (e.g. Knights, passim) witnesses to the number of oracle-mongers of dubious worth in Athens and this illustrates Jocasta's argument that prophecy is vain because some prophets are charlatans (711ff.). Oedipus' accusation that Teiresias was a political pawn of Creon's (379ff.) is similarly exemplified by Cleon's use of oracles to control the people in the same comedy (Knights, 6 and 1005ff.). When the chorus in the second stasimon make the truth of religion as a whole

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[77] Diels-Kranz, Vorsokratiker (7th edition, Berlin, 1954), Protagoras B1.

[78] Ibid., Antipho, A9.

depend on the fulfilment of oracles and underlines this by referring to their actual function in the Dionysiac festival (898-910; τί δεῖ με χορεύειν; 896), their answer is a complete vindication of prophecy and a proof that ἔρρει τὰ θεῖα (910) is wrong. Oedipus on one level is a παράδειγμα of this truth and the moral to be drawn from his fate for the contemporaries of Sophocles is relevant particularly to the Sophistic movement and its humanistic stress on the intelligence of man that disregards the gods in its view of the world.[79]

On the political plane the play contains a clash between two ideologies in the role of Oedipus. When the chorus learns that he may have come to the throne by killing Laius, it sings of the hybris that creates tyrants, because regicide was both violent hybris and the mark of a tyrant.[80] Oedipus pronounces himself (380, 535, 541) and is pronounced a τύραννος (514, 588, 925, 1095), more often than Creon, a more obvious example of tyranny (only four times in Antigone).[81] Oedipus' power is absolute (237, 46 ff., 63) and he rates his royal position highly (128 f., 257 ff., 267 f.). He suspects bribery (388-9) and does not trust his co-regent, Creon (378 ff.). The other side of Oedipus, however, contrasts strongly with tyranny. He holds a strange joint rule with Jocasta and Creon (579), lacks other hybristic attitudes to the people (rape, summary execution, cf. Herodotus 3, 80; plundering, fear for life, cf. Herodotus 3, 39).

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[79] See Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, pp. 44 ff.

[80] Ibid., pp. 57-8.

[81] Tyrannus was probably not the original title, however; Aristotle calls the play "Oedipus", eg. Poetics, 1452a24.

He is democratic, and summons an assembly (144). Creon's reply from Delphi is given to all the people by Oedipus' command (91-3). He even gives way to Jocasta and the chorus over Creon, although he thinks his own safety is threatened. Oedipus' rule is tyrannical and democratic. This clash of political methods has already been found in the Seven and the Antigone.

The conflict, however, has often been seen as a portrayal of Pericles' leadership of Athens. Thebes under Oedipus is a democracy that is ruled by its leading citizen (προστάτης 411).[82] Other characteristics continue the parallel: the hereditary curse of the Alcmeonids; the rule of the "first man" (33, cf. Thucydides, 2, 65); tyranny (cf. Plutarch, Pericles, 3); and the titles στρατηγός (33) and προστάτης (882, cf. [Aristotle], Athenian Constitution, 28). Such details, however, are vague and have to be weighed against the over-all inapplicability of Oedipus' situation to that of Pericles. They betoken the poet's subconscious impression of his time and its leading personalities.

The more fruitful analogy compares Athens itself with Oedipus.[83] The mixture of democracy and tyranny in Oedipus' rule recalls Pericles' remark that Athens' empire was a τυραννίς .[84] Athens like Oedipus has wealth (380 ff., cf. Thucydides, 1, 80) and skill (Isocrates 4, 40) which arouse jealousy (48, 381-2, cf. Thucydides, 1, 75). The empire, like Oedipus' rule, was won by self-exertion -- a new hegemony for Greece -- and was originally offered to the Athenians (303-4, cf.

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[82] E.g. Ehrenberg, pp. 116 f., 148 f. and Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, pp. 63-4.

[83] Knox, ibid. pp. 53-77, 99-106. [84] Thucydides, 2, 37, cf. 6, 85.

Thucydides, 2, 62 and 1, 75). The idea that a specifically Athenian character was responsible for these achievements was current (Thucydides, 1, 70). Oedipus even provides a close pattern of resemblances to Thucydides' portrayal of this character. He is a man of action (δρᾶν, πράσσειν of him: 65, 72, 77, 145 etc. cf. Thucydides, 2, 64; 1, 70) and of courage (536, cf. Thucydides, 1, 74). From his vigour he gains great experience, of which he can boast (8, 35, cf. Thucydides, 7, 61). His success in the past has been the result of his swift decision (67-8, 108-9, cf. Thucydides, 1, 70) which leads to anticipation of required action (Creon sent to Delphi, 67-9, 619, cf. Thucydides, 3, 3) and impatience with slower men (289, cf. Thucydides, 1, 70). He also has self- confidence (835-6, cf. Thucydides, 2, 62) patriotism (510, 59-64, cf. Thucydides, 2, 60) and responsibility (136, 314, cf. Thucydides, 1, 70). Even his anger is Athenian (334 ff., cf. Xenophon, Hellenica, I, 7, 35, against the Arginusae generals). The characterisation of Oedipus' search as the typically Athenian process of legal investigation and his sophistic and scientific outlook also point to the same conclusion. The city may be heading for a similar fall, because of its rejection of the divine and its other hybristic attitudes. At the end of the play, however, Oedipus undergoes a limited return of his character, his intelligence (1309-11), his deliberation (1367-70), his activity (1330-1), especially over his self-blinding, where his swift action and responsibility are at work (1231, 1329-31). His self-confidence is based on true knowledge now (1454 ff.) and he is just as eminent in disaster as in prosperity (1414 ff.). His greatness,

then, may be a "prophetic vision of a defeated Athens which will rise to a greatness beyond anything she had attained in victory".[85] This is not however political propaganda but rather a tragic vision of the defeat that is inherent in such splendour as Athens displayed in its Golden Age under Pericles.

The language of the play brings alive its action and adds many dimensions to the religious, political and social significances of Oedipus' universal nature. A principle mode of imagistic action is the characterisation of Oedipus' search as a legal investigation.[86] The Athenians associated themselves with the institutions of civic justice, as the glorification of the Areopagus in Aeschylus' Eumenides proclaims. They provided law-courts for their empire (Thucydides, 1, 77) and legal language must have been familiar to many because of the large number of jurors that tried each case. The images of law are couched in terms of both public and private law, the former because the murder of Laius is treasonable, the latter because an individual, not the state, prosecuted for murder in Athens. Legal terms are rigidly applied (μηνύει 102, possibly ζητούμενον 110, ἐκφεύγει 111). Oedipus' proclamation is typical (236-40, cf. Demosthenes, 24, 11), and so is his curse (246-8, cf. Plutarch, Alcibiades, 22,4). The fact that only a relative could bring a murder prosecution adds further irony to Oedipus' remark that he will seek Laius' murderer as though he were his son (258-64) and the herald's proclamation is also proper to private proceedings (Antiphon, 2, γ, 34).

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[85] Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, p. 195.

[86] Ibid. pp. 78-98.

Teiresias is a hostile witness (320), but he has rights (he does not need Creon as a προστάτης 411). He produces court invective (415, 427), while the chorus acts as judge (404-7, 480 ff.), finds no motive (490-3) and so decides on the past records of the adversaries (498-510) -- a reversal of Oedipus' position as prosecutor. Creon's defences (513-19, 583-615, cf. Antiphon, Tetralogies for arguments from probabilities) are in the sophistic manner and receive equally legalistic charges in reply (643, 657), but Creon is saved by an appeal to pity (672). Jocasta's attempt to invalidate Teiresias' evidence leads to confirmation of the charge against Oedipus (703) and the penalty for conviction (825). The shepherd becomes a vital eye-witness. Meanwhile the chorus prays for purity (864) and the punishment of crime to uphold the laws (885-904), reassuming their role as judges (890 ff.). The recognition scene is a legal examination with torture for the slave (1153 ff.). Oedipus' crimes are exposed (πεφάσμαι 1171). The stasimon following calls Oedipus a παράδειγμα (1193, cf. 1213 ff.) of the brevity of human happiness. This complex of imagery employs one of Athens' boasted achievements -- the law -- to symbolise Oedipus' search and delineate it as man's search for knowledge, just as in the sphere of ethics law is mankind's main instrument of truth. It also implicates the sophistic movement and its close concern with both law-courts and rational moral principles in the investigation.

Sophocles in the Antigone typified man's ingenuity by his hunting animals, his crossing the seas and his ploughing the earth and warned of the dangers to man's intelligence by the ironic

reversal of these images. All three patterns recur in the Oedipus Tyrannus with a similar twist. The hunting image appears as the first metaphor for the search (108-11), and Teiresias points to Oedipus as the prey (354 f.). The choral ode depicts the hunted murderer (474-6), where the puns on Oedipus' name emphasise the truth (468, 479). Finally, Oedipus is revealed as the hunted, not the hunter (1255, 1265, 1451). The image mirrors his reversal.

The ship imagery begins with the commonplace of the "ship of state" in a storm (4-5, 12-14, 101, 103 f.) with Oedipus its pilot (694-6). He proves a bad helmsman (922-3) both of the city and his own ship (420 ff.). Though he has plotted his course (794-5), it brings him to an unspeakable harbour (1207-10) and ironically fulfills the chorus' wish for the plague to voyage away (192-7). Thus Oedipus' captaincy is his downfall, his knowledge is false, he wishes for drowning (1411). The irony of Oedipus' nautical skill, like that of Creon's symbolises the limitation of man's knowledge.

The antitheses of birth and death, and the growth and decay of nature are linked together principally through the visual symbol of the plague. An interruption in the cycle of nature is blighting the crops and people of Thebes (25, 171-2, 254, 270). The person responsible for this is cursed by Oedipus in both these aspects of generation (270-1). It is his own marriage, however, which proves the antitype of Dionysus' holy marriage with his Athenian 'bride', the fertility rite that was performed annually for Athens' prosperity

(1043-5).[87] Oedipus is both sower and seed and he is the pollution (353, 1396). Finally, birth and destruction, and Oedipus' parents as the agents of these for him, become the same to him (438, 1454). The ploughed and sown field are the constant symbols of this confusion of kin (1256 f., 1485, 1497 f.). Oedipus' skill as ploughman risked and suffered a terrible calamity, and so also do all man's skills. This sequence of images stresses too the ignorance of kinship relations, just as Creon's acts in Antigone bring terrible disease on Thebes and he is punished by the deaths of his relatives, 'hard to cleanse' (1283). Eteocles in the Seven learns he must reap his brother's blood (718). All three heroes have their true relations to kin revealed by this nature image, and their ignorance is also disclosed.

Many other images cluster round Oedipus' search and illustrate it in the terms of fifth century science, that Athens fostered. Knox has profoundly analysed these and suggests the following categories:

a. General attitude of Oedipus: ἄριστος εὑρίσκειν (440), ζητεῖν "to investigate", ζήτημα (278), "investigation".

b. Methods of investigation: σκοπεῖν "to contemplate", ἱστορεῖν "to inquire", τεκμαίρεσθαι "to infer".

c. Instruments of investigation: γνώμη "intelligence", γιγνώσκειν "to recognise", νοῦς "mind".
(Activity of intelligence: φρόντις "thought").

d. Results of investigation: οἶδα, εἰδέναι "to know",

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[87] These three images are discussed in P.W. Harsh, "Implicit and Explicit in the Oedipus Tyrannus", American Journal of Philology, 79, 1958, pp. 243-58.

εὑρεῖν "to find, discover", (ἐξευρήματα 378 "discoveries"), φαίνειν "to bring to light", (resulting in σαφής "visible, clear, true"), δηλόω, δείκνυμι "to make evident", μανθάνειν "to learn", διδάσκειν "to teach", (παράδειγμα 1193 "example").

e. Claims of investigators: σωτήρ "saviour" (and cognate forms), ἐκλύω "to free, release".[88]

With many of these words there is a reversal pattern working against Oedipus to emphasise that he is the object of the inquiry and the inquirer, the discovery and the discoverer, the lesson and the teacher. He does not save as he had hoped (48), but was saved for a terrible fate (1457). These reversals once more illustrate the real and seeming knowledge of Oedipus, of the Sophists, and of universal man.

Further verbal complexes drawn from science follow a similar pattern. The climax of man's achievement in the ode on man in the Antigone is medicine (361-2) and Oedipus is portrayed as a doctor for the plague (23-4). Yet Creon sees him as a patient (674, cf. 678, 915, 922) and Oedipus' self-blinding is described as if it were an operation (1278). He stresses his sickness (1395). Mathematics, a prominent symbol of man's ingenuity in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound (647), provides the fullest scientific metaphor for Oedipus and his search. Equations false and true recur throughout and end with man equated not to the gods but to himself. The priest wishes Oedipus to equate himself not with the gods (23) but with his former self,

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[88] Knox, Oedipus at Thebes, pp.116-158.

the solver of the Sphinx's riddle (52). His name itself equates his seeming knowledge (oida) with the swell-foot (pous) that marks him as Laius' son. Oedipus is constantly measuring (61, 73, 84) and this is Protagoras' definition of man ("Man is the Measure"). The problem of the one survivor who may reveal many things (118-20) seems mathematically solvable to Oedipus, but not to the chorus (168, 179). Teiresias adds further equations: himself and Oedipus (408-9) and Oedipus with himself and his children (425), which Oedipus must solve (461). Creon also deals in equations (544, 561, 563) and some are ironic (581, cf. 1507). Jocasta introduces more numbers and Oedipus finds hope in their impossible solutions, but the chorus insists that these equations work out (902). With further equations from the Corinthian (937), Jocasta rejects calculation (979), only to have the Corinthian prove Oedipus' equations wrong (1018). Jocasta cannot pronounce the answer of the equations (1071-2), while Oedipus finally equates himself with the universe (1083). Oedipus, however, quickly completes the true equation (1182), and the chorus equates him with zero (1187). His return to his previous greatness at the end of the play suggests that Oedipus is not a cipher. The finale, however, hints at an equation for the relations between Apollo's prophecy and Oedipus' actions. Despite Oedipus' freedom of will, the two are equated, but this is not a causal connection, rather an equation of two separate entities. Oedipus, for all his skill in calculation, cannot alter the truths of life by it, only discover them, and how incalculable these are. This formulation of Oedipus' search underlines the clash between the certainty of the gods' oracles

and Oedipus' free will. The frailty of sophistic knowledge, and human knowledge in general, are both integrated into Oedipus' search.

The Oedipus Tyrannus centres on its dominating hero. His universality results from the operation of many strata of images that depict his search in the form of several spheres of human endeavour. Each of these is a facet of contemporary Athens and many features of its democracy and imperialist tyranny are reflected in his character and position in Thebes. The greatness of his humanity asserts itself in the determined search he undertakes, and, despite an awful result, revives to greater heights, victorious though defeated, in the knowledge of man's ignorance.

4. Oedipus Coloneus

Sophocles' last play, the Oedipus Coloneus, was written in 406 B. C., when the fall of Athens was inevitable. Its theme is Oedipus' last sufferings and miraculous death at Colonus in Attica. Its events therefore fit between those of the Oedipus Tyrannus and Antigone in Theban legend. Oedipus' apotheosis may have been alluded to in Euripides' Phoenissae, 1703-9, produced in 409 B. C.[89] Elsewhere in the literary tradition, Oedipus is buried at Thebes, as in Aeschylus, Seven, 1010,[90] but cult-shrines at Eteonus in Boeotia,

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[89]Perhaps interpolated, see D. J. Conacher, "Themes in the Exodus of Euripides' Phoenissae", Phoenix, 21, 1967, p. 100.

[90]Cf. Iliad, 23, 679-80; Hesiod in an unknown work (Scholiast on Homer, Iliad, 23, 679); Sophocles, Antigone, 49-52, 900.

at Colonus itself and at Sparta -- a foundation by order of Delphi -- may have suggested the ending to Sophocles.[91] In the Thebaid fragments, two curses of Oedipus are found, one of continual fraternal strife, the other of mutual slaughter. Of these, the first is deliberately provoked by Polyneices, the second motivated by the sons' neglect.[92] Aeschylus in his Oedipus probably used the second story and stresses the rage of Oedipus' curse in the Seven (724, 780). Euripides' Oedipus also curses his sons in madness (Phoenissae, 66, 874).[93] In Sophocles' Oedipus Coloneus, the hero has already cursed his sons when exiled (1375),[94] and confirms this curse in the course of his interview with Polyneices (1369ff.). The trifling change of the brothers' relative ages (1295) strengthens Polyneices' case for help from Oedipus. Apart from the curses and the characters of the legend, Sophocles seems to invent much of the action in the Oedipus Coloneus.[95]

Oedipus, old, blind, ill-clad and beggarly, arrives at Colonus on the arm of Antigone and rests by accident in an inviolable grove of the Eumenides. A local man warns him of this and goes to

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[91] See Chapter II.

[92] Cf. ibid.

[93] For a recent account of the curses, E. L. de Kock, "The Sophoklean Oidipus and its Antecedents", Acta Classica, 4, 1961, pp.18-20.

[94] Cf. the scholiast, using the Thebaid and H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study (New York, Doubleday, 1954), p. 415, n.2.

[95] Cf. Baldry, p. 35.

consult his neighbours. Oedipus recalls Apollo's oracle that he would die in such a place, a benefactor to his hosts and a bane to his enemies. The chorus persuades him to move from the grove, but on hearing his name wishes to banish him to prevent pollution, ignoring his pleas of innocence. Theseus' arrival is awaited, however, since Oedipus tells of the benefits he will bestow on Athens. Ismene, who has been spying for Oedipus in Thebes, comes to reveal that an oracle has declared Oedipus' decisive influence on the war between his sons and Creon is about to fetch Oedipus and place him on Thebes' borders because of it. Oedipus wishes for continual strife between his sons since they did not prevent his undesired exile. The chorus advises a sacrifice to the Eumenides, which Ismene leaves to perform, and again discusses with Oedipus his claim of innocence. Theseus assures him of protection and hears the benefits Athens will receive. The chorus sings of Colonus' beauty and protecting gods. Creon fails with his wily approaches to the chorus and Oedipus and seizes Antigone -- he has already captured Ismene. As he tries to remove Oedipus, Theseus enters, rebukes him and gives orders to stop his henchmen. He holds him hostage for Ismene and demands to be taken to her. He ignores Creon's argument that Oedipus is not fit to live in Attica, which Oedipus refutes by contrasting his innocence with Creon's deliberate violence. The chorus describes places in Attica where Creon's followers may be fleeing and prays for an Athenian victory. Oedipus greets his rescued daughters and thanks Theseus for his kindness. Antigone, backed by Theseus, begs Oedipus to accept a suppliant and he agrees, half realising that this is Polyneices, his son. The chorus laments

the bitterness of old age and of life: not to be born is best, to die young is second best. Polyneices apologizes for his neglect of Oedipus and pleads for his good will in his conflict with Eteocles, who has unjustly expelled him from Thebes. Oedipus renews his curse of mutual slaughter on his sons for their neglect. Polyneices will not give up his fight, despite the curse and Antigone's pleas: only his burial need concern her. He leaves to die. A thunderclap interrupts the chorus' comment; Oedipus is summoned by the gods. With Theseus and his daughters, Oedipus, though blind, leads the way into the grove to his place of death. The chorus invokes the gods of death. A messenger describes Oedipus' preparations and summons by a supernatural voice. Oedipus and Theseus went further into the grove, and then Theseus alone was seen. The sisters return and lament. Theseus comforts them and promises to send them home to Thebes where they hope to stop their brothers from fighting.

The core of the play is a religious action: "the apotheosis of Oedipus is what the play is all about".[96] Oedipus gains the status of a hero such as receive worship in Greek hero-cults. Such cults formed both a kind of personal religion for fifth century Greeks,[97] with which Sophocles himself was connected -- he even became a hero himself after death[98] -- and also a city cult. They did not imply a godhead like the Olympians, but a spirit with powers over

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[96] Waldock, p. 219.

[97] The term of A.J. Festugière, Personal Religion among the Greeks (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1954).

[98] Connections with Halon, Heracles and Asclepius (Vita, 11 ff.); worshipped as Dexion (Etymologicum Magnum, 256, 6).

fertility and the dead. The hero's state isnot important; they are "helpers or avengers of the living . . . , but their own happiness is hardly in question."[99] Prophecy is often attributed to such cults.[100] The play shows Oedipus slowly developing these several functions. Oedipus' first action is to enter the grove of the Eumenides. This suggests the final play of the Oresteia, the Eumenides. The name of the goddesses here is significantly that which they come to gain in the course of Aeschylus' play. Athena persuades them to turn from their pursuit of Orestes as the Furies and adopt the fertility characteristics of the Athenian cult of the Semnai on the Areopagus.[100a] In the Coloneus Oedipus begins by invoking both their aspects (84-110) and his self-justifications in the play hint at their espousal of the justice of the Areopagus, that is implied in the resolution of the Eumenides. The events of the Coloneus, however, reveal that Oedipus "seems to earn his place among the chthonian powers by administering that kind of blind and passionate justice, based on the principle of retaliation and involving the innocent with the guilty, which we associate with the earlier phases of the Oresteia rather than with the closing scene of the Eumenides."[101]

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[99] Guthrie, p. 305.

[100] E.g. the cults of Trophonius and Amphiaraus.

[101] R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "A Religious Function of Greek Tragedy", Journal of Hellenic Studies, 74, 1954, p. 24.

[100a] Oedipus had a sepulchral monument in their sanctuary (Pausanias, 1, 28, 6), but this may have been the result of this play, see L. R. Farnell, Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality (Oxford, Clarendon, 1921), p.334.

Oedipus' anger was traditional, but it is one manifestation of his growing divinity.[102] His curses, too, and his power of blessing (εὐμένειαι 631) give similar evidence. The two "curses" are contrasted. The first is expressed as a wish (421 ff.), while the second is an extravagent curse (1375 ff.). The growth of prophecy in Oedipus witnesses to his gathering deity.[103] Apollo's oracle at first guides his decision to stay in the grove (84 ff.), and this is supplemented by Ismene's new oracles (387 ff.). These fit the pattern of the former when Oedipus learns that at his tomb the Thebans will come to grief (411 ff.). Oedipus then decides to aid Athens and wishes a fatal issue to his sons' quarrel. His prediction of his powers to Theseus is qualified:

εἰ Ζεὺς ἔτι Ζεὺς χὠ Διὸς Φοῖβος σαφής. (623)

In the Creon scene, however, Oedipus prophesies in his own name (787-90). Again, to Polyneices he foretells the fulfilment, not of Apollo's prophecy but his own curse (1372 ff.), and Antigone accepts his mantic powers, when she tells Polyneices he is fulfilling Oedipus' oracles (1425, 1428). Polyneices discounts them, an echo of Jocasta's similar ironic act in Oedipus Tyrannus (1443-4, cf. Oedipus Tyrannus 857-8). Theseus finally accepts Oedipus' superhuman power (1525-6) and the pattern of Oedipus' divinity is complete. The gods impatiently

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[102] Antigone (1181 ff.) and Theseus (592 ff.) both comment on its excessiveness, see Knox, Heroic Temper, p. 152. The interpretation of T.G. Rosenmeyer, "The Wrath of Oedipus", Phoenix, 6, 1952, pp. 92-112, that the anger of Oedipus, operating through his curse, has the function of removing his taint to his sons, is refuted by Oedipus' remark that he is tainted (1132ff.).

[103] Knox, Heroic Temper, Chapter 6, passim.

summon the hesitating mortal:

ὦ οὗτος οὗτος Οἰδίπους τί μέλλομεν
χωρεῖν; πάλαι δὴ τἀπὸ σοῦ βραδύνεται. (1627-8).

At the end of the play, Oedipus returns to the bronze-stepped threshold rooted in earth (1590 ff.), where the beginnings and ends of earth, sea and sky originate, according to Hesiod (Theogony, 726-8, 736-41, 811-13). Theseus is seen reverencing earth and Olympus together (1653-5). Oedipus returns to earth and receives the hospitality of the gods in the grove of the Eumenides, his sacred birth-right.

This does not mean, however, that the play "is justifying the cult of a recognised hero".[104] The three points which, on this interpretation, Sophocles must explain, are: Oedipus' alien nationality, his weakness at death and his pollution from taboo-breaking. Oedipus' place in epic was probably sufficient to justify his claim to worship anyway.[105] The "crimes" of Oedipus may have been part of his spiritual power. Taboo-breaking gave a man strange status. It was responsible for the deification of Cleomedes of Astyphalaea, who killed an opponent at boxing in the Olympic Games. The Delphic oracle decreed him cult-rights.[106] Oedipus is received by Theseus before he has made any defence of his innocence, and so

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[104] S.M. Adams, Sophocles the Playwright, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1957) pp, 162 ff., cf. his earlier article, "Unity of Plot in the Oedipus Coloneus", Phoenix, 7, 1953, pp. 136-147.

[105] Cf. Farnell, Chapter XI, The Cults of Epic Heroes, pp. 280-342, especially pp. 332-4 on Oedipus himself.

[106] Pausanias, 6, 9, 7.

Sophocles does not manifest a primary interest in justifying the cult of Oedipus.[107] The play is a patriotic mystery rather than a piece of religious propaganda.

The central theme of the play, then, is the display of Oedipus' heroic character in its final sufferings and the endurance of these that leads to his attaining the status of hero. He gradually manifests all the qualities of spiritual power connected with hero-cult, especially prophecy and influence for good and ill. The fertility aspect of his powers, mentioned repeatedly throughout the play, is an overt statement of the theme traced in the Seven in regard to his sons. Both his suffering and his influence on prosperity connect him closely with Dionysus, preeminently a god of Thebes. The celebration of his deification forms a religious ritual inside the worship of Dionysus, which is tragedy itself.

Among the many motifs that repeat themselves from previous Sophoclean tragedies, the theme of knowledge is foremost in the Oedipus Coloneus. This play seems to reverse the movement of the Oedipus Tyrannus. While Oedipus is confident of his insight, reason and knowledge in the latter play, he enters blind, accursed and led by his daughter, Antigone, in the former. His confidence in his grasp of Apollo's will induces him to curse the unknown criminal, in contrast to his petition to the Eumenides in the Coloneus. Like

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[107] Kitto, pp. 410-11.

Teiresias in both previous Theban plays, the blind Oedipus shows insight which neither Creon nor Polyneices recognise. Finally, his knowledge is vindicated as he leads Theseus to his burial-place by his inner vision. He knows man's ignorance and the limitations of the human mind, and speaks of them to Theseus:

μόνοις οὐ γίγνεται
θεοῖσι γῆρας οὐδὲ καταθανεῖν ποτε.
τὰ δ' ἄλλα συγχεῖ πάνθ' ὁ παγκρατὴς χρόνος. (607-9)

Everything human is in a state of flux and man's knowledge is really ignorance. His own prophecy follows and underscores his genuine insight. He has learnt the lesson of the Oedipus Tyrannus and remains its παράδειγμα. In the Coloneus he cautiously re-assumes the attributes of divinity and is finally made equal to the gods.[108] The turning-point of the play reveals his knowledge, not his ignorance, and the gods finally endorse it. The theme of knowledge, then, appears as Oedipus' main divine attribute and echoes all the connotations found in Sophocles' other Theban plays.

The sufferings of Oedipus are sharpened in this play by his conflict with his sons, the last statement of the perennial clash between city and family in the Theban plays. His sons permitted him to be exiled against his will for political power (448) and Oedipus contrasts their effeminate and unnatural family attitudes with those of his two daughters, who have supported him (337 ff.). Polyneices

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[108] Cf. R.D. Murray, Jr., "Thought and Structure in Sophoclean Tragedy" in Woodard, pp. 26-7.

at least προσλαμβάνει κῆδος καινόν (378-9), and is rejected by Oedipus together with his brother. Not only are both brothers no sons of Oedipus (1369), but Polyneices has become his murderer: σοῦ φονέως μεμνημένος (1361). They are to learn the duties of kin too late. Oedipus also struggles with and rejects his city. He clashes with Creon, the representative of Thebes (736-7), who wishes him to return to his city (741 ff.). But Oedipus, a city-less wanderer at the outset, has accepted a new citizenship in Athens at Theseus' hands (637) and refuses the feigned end of his exile that Creon offers. Instead, he will be a curse to his former city (788). At the twilight of life, Oedipus is at war with his kin and with his city. Athens and her people become his new kin, his new city.

There are several themes of specifically political relevance in this play. The major antithesis that recurs in the play is that between Athens and Thebes. Oedipus, a Theban hero, seeks and finds refuge in exile from his city and in return rewards Athens for its services. The eulogy of Athens is central to the play and Thebes is both the object of Oedipus' hatred and a foil for an idealised Athens. This reflects the enmity of the two cities at the end of the Peloponnesian war. Thebes wished to raze Athens and enslave her people in 404 B. C. (Xenophon, Hellenica, II, 2, 19). The Athenian reaction to this may be reflected by the constant references to Oedipus' potential for Thebes' destruction (93, 389ff., 409ff., 460, 606, 614ff., 788, 1533ff.). Once this is combined with a historical reminiscence of a battle fought nearby at Acharnae in 407 B. C., which may have

been attributed to the hero.[109]

The main vehicle for this antithesis is the contrast between the Thebans, Creon, a wily and power-crazy despot, and Polyneices, the fratricidal hypocrite, and the idealized Athenian king, Theseus. The characterization of the Thebans may represent a typical Athenian viewpoint and Theseus could certainly not symbolize the Athens of that period. The aggressive Sicilian expedition of some years before and a number of other wartime atrocities had stripped the city of any serious pretence of upholding Panhellenic ideals. Theseus, however, is humane, generous and compassionate in his reception of Oedipus and shows traditional Athenian willingness to accept outsiders (258ff.). He embodies the best traditions of Athens' partly mythical past.[110]

This vision of old splendour and greatness is noticeable too in the ode on Colonus, just after Oedipus has received his citizenship in Athens (668ff.). The pre-war beauty of Attica is recreated, the crops and olive-groves, probably burnt long before, the birds and flowers, no longer enjoyed by the besieged citizens. Each detail glorifies some aspect of Athens as well as Attica. The ivy suggests Dionysus and his theatre, the narcissus the mysteries of Eleusis, the olive Athens' chief

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[109] Bowra, p.308, cf. lines 621-2.

[110] Whitman, pp. 209-10.

export, the oar Athens' naval supremacy.[111] Yet even here there is a hint of sadness. The nightingale is the bird of sorrow, the narcissus the flower of death and the crocus a grave flower. For all her beauty Athens is dying, just as Oedipus' grave had been the site of an eleventh-hour defeat of the Thebans. Some hope remains: the Eleusinian mysteries promised life after death to their initiates and the olive can create itself (678). Athens is to die but become immortal. Under the guise of Theseus the city represents a world of real human values and only there can Oedipus find his home.[112] Sophocles imitates Aeschylus, especially the technique of the Eumenides, in employing an Athenian tradition for dramatic and religious purposes and creates a "solemn religious and political pageantry".[113]

Little study has been made of the imagery of the play, but a number of motifs from elsewhere in Sophocles' Theban plays can be detected. There is considerable sight-blindness imagery.[114] The sequence begins in the very first line: Τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος, Ἀντιγόνη and occurs ten times in the opening forty two lines, often through references to Antigone's sight. Most important, Antigone sees for Oedipus (33-4). She can only guess that they are at Athens and that

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[111] Knox, Heroic Temper, pp. 154-5.

[112] Whitman, p. 210.

[113] L. A. Post, From Homer to Menander, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1951), p. 169; he places the emphasis on the political aspects of the play, calling it "wholly political" (pp. 156-7).

[114] M. G. Shields, "Sight and Blindness Imagery in the Oedipus Coloneus", Phoenix, 15, 1961, pp. 63-73.

the grove is sacred (15-16), but the stranger tells them it is consecrated to τὰς παν θ' ὁρώσας Εὐμενίδας (42). Oedipus contrasts his blindness with their sight and at the same time claims inner vision:

ὡσ' ἄν λέγωμεν παν θ' ὁρῶντα λέξομεν. (74).

His fearlessness in regard to them objectifies the suggestions of the previous images and is confirmed by by his address to them as δεινῶπες (84).

The chorus' search in the parodos expresses the image in terms of action. They look and look without result (130, 135-7). Then Oedipus reveals himself and their exchange is full of words for sight (141f., 145, 146-8, where the contrast between Antigone and Oedipus suggests he is truly μέγας). The chorus conjectures wrongly that Oedipus has been blind since birth (148ff.), thus emphasizing the weakness of their vision. Antigone suggests that the chorus should pity Oedipus by seeing him with her eyes, as the postion of words shows:

ἄντομαι οὐκ ἀλλοῖς προσορωμένα
ὄμμα σὸν ὄμμασιν . . . (244-5)

They must understand him as Antigone does to have her compassion on him, using their eyes fully (252-3). This idea of weeping from pity as the form of right seeing occurs with Ismene (324ff.). After this, the first episode contains only obvious references to Oedipus' blindness and occasionally his insight (279-80, 285f.). In the first half of the play, the image underlines the central paradox that Oedipus, though blind and feeble, has greater vision than the ordinary man.

Oedipus makes clear that his only mode of communication is

hearing, through which knowledge and oracles come from the gods:

πολλῷ γ', ὅσῳπερ κἀκ σκφεστέρων κλύω,
Φοίβου τε κἀπὸ Ζηνός . (792-3)

This contrasts with Creon who hears but does not know, as his scene with Oedipus reveals. Oedipus calls the Sun's all-seeing eye to fulfil his curse on Creon, whose invitation to the chorus to 'see' Oedipus' words hints at the underlying irony of the scene -- the discomfiture of his superficial pragmatism by Oedipus' truer insight. (866-72).

The climax of the Oedipus Tyrannus was Oedipus' self-blinding and this culminated the sight imagery in the play.[115] The high point of the Coloneus likewise brings this motif to a peak:

ὦ παῖδες, ὧδ' ἕπεσθ'. ἐγὼ γὰρ ἡγεμὼν
σφῶν αὖ πέφασμαι καινός, ὥσπερ σφὼ πατρί.
χωρεῖτε καὶ μὴ ψαύετ', ἀλλ' ἐᾶτέ με
αὐτὸν τὸν ἱερὸν τύμβον ἐξευρεῖν . . . (1542-5)

Oedipus regains his physical sight in a mystical acting-out of his profound insight by leading Theseus into the grove. Oedipus shows himself acceptable to the gods and even godlike himself. He reveals the underlying tension between appearance and reality that has persisted throughout the play. This image pattern, as in the Seven and both of Sophocles' other Theban plays, denotes the paradox of knowledge and the insight of the blind.

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[115] Harsh, pp. 252-3, 258.

Other images that are striking for their connections with Sophocles' other Theban plays include hunting, the law and sailing. Creon attempts, but fails completely, to trap Oedipus as his quarry (950) and Theseus turns this metaphor against him (1026), an interesting parallel with the Antigone. Oedipus' self-justifications all seem to bear the stamp of the court (258-88, 509-48). His final defence is made to Theseus against the accusations of Creon that he is unfitted by his crimes to reside in Attica. His reply contains several rhetorical devices: abuse of his opponent (960-1, 980), appeal to the gods (1010-12), hypothetical example (991-4) and flattery of the "judge" (1006-9). The action as much as the words lends these scenes their legal flavour. Images of the sea and storm occur (e.g. 148, 812) and have their most pronounced effect in the lyrical description of Oedipus as a storm- battered headland:

ἐν ᾧ τλάμων ὅδ', οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος,
πάντοθεν βόρειος ὥς τις
ἀκτὰ κυματοπλήξ χειμερία κλονεῖται,
ὡς καὶ τόνδε κατ' ἄκρας
δειναὶ κυματαγεῖς
ἅται κλονέουσιν ἀεὶ ξυνοῦσαι,
αἱ μὲν ἀπ' ἀελίου δυσμᾶν,
αἱ δ' ἀνατέλλοντος
αἱ δ' ἀνὰ μέσσαν ἀκτῖν',
αἱ δ' ἐννυχιᾶν ἀπὸ Ῥιπᾶν. (1239-48)

Here the themes of exposure and sailing in the Antigone, the theme of

the sea and ships in the Tyrannus and the closeness of nature to the characters of Theban legend all interact to envision Oedipus' new mode of existence and the spiritual power he has evinced to justify it.[116] The imagery of the play not only communicates the essence of the play's meaning, but also introduces reminiscences of the other plays that preceded which deepen the suggestiveness of the whole.

In the Oedipus Coloneus many different elements coalesce to form a moving mystery play with patriotic and more deeply religious themes. Oedipus is a man of sorrows and must suffer until he dies. In his final hours he begins to assert a divine essence in himself: endurance, prophecy, anger and inner knowledge. The theme of knowledge is profoundly explored, just as it had been previously in Sophocles' other Theban plays. So, too, Oedipus' relationships with his kin and with his city are shown to be deadly, before, during and after the play. He gains a new city and a new family by becoming a citizen of Athens and bestows on them his only blessing, the benefits his grave can bring. Released from his superhuman sufferings, he dies an honoured death as a hero.

In his Theban plays, Sophocles treats individual episodes of the legend in a complex manner. In the Antigone, political and

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[116] Bowra, p. 354, points out the Epic origin of the basic simile, but not the significant development of themes (Homer, Iliad, 15, 618-22).

religious significance clusters around the two protagonists and delineates the conflict of city and family and of male and female. The tragedies of both characters spring from their limited ways of knowing about a central problem of human life. In the Oedipus Tyrannus, Oedipus, a universal symbol of Man as well as of contemporary Athens, searches for his own identity. On learning all the horrors that this entails, he can yet endure it with courage by holding fast to the knowledge of Man's ignorance. The gods eventually acknowledge his extraordinary endurance in the Oedipus Coloneus. He slowly reveals that his insight and sufferings are not of this world and in a mysterious death bestows his last favour on an idealised Athens.

CHAPTER IV

EURIPIDES AND THEBAN LEGEND

1. Euripides and Greek Tragedy; Lost Theban Plays

Even if today Sophocles' three plays seem by far the most subtle and successful treatments of Theban legend, their merits did not deter other Athenian playwrights from writing further dramas on this subject.[1] The only such pieces that survive intact, however, are two plays by his younger contemporary, Euripides (485?-406? B.C.): the Suppliants (424 B.C.)[2] and the Phoenissae (409 B.C.).[3] Both plays

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[1] E.g.: Meletus (fifth century) wrote an Oedipodeia tetralogy, cf. A. Nauck, Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta (Leipzig, Teubner, 1856), p.606; Philocles (fifth century): Oedipus (Nauck, ed.2, 1889, pp.759f.); Carcinus (fourth century): Amphiaraus and Oedipus (Nauck[1], pp.619f.); Theodectes (c.375-334 B.C.): Oedipus (Nauck, p.623) and Tydeus (Nauck, p.624); Diogenes Sinopensis or Philiscus Aeginetas or Pasiphon (third century): Chrysippus and Oedipus (Nauck, p.627); Achaeus: Adrastus (Nauck, pp.578-9) and Oedipus (Nauck, p.584). A line is quoted by Suetonius from a Greek Oedipus (Nero, 46). Suidas gives a few additional authors and titles: Astydamantes the Younger: Epigoni; Lycophron: Laius, Oedipus 1 and 2, Chrysippus; Cleophon: Amphiaraus; Nicomachus 1 and 2: both wrote an Oedipus?; Ptolemaeus Hephaestus: Sphinx; Timesitheus: Capaneus. Most interestingly, a fragment recently found belongs to an unknown writer's Seven against Thebes (? fourth B.C.?). This may, however, be an adaptation of Euripides' Phoenissae, cf. D.L. Page, Greek Literary Papyri (London, Heinemann, 1942), I, 172-181.

[2] For the date, G. Zuntz, The Political Plays of Euripides (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1955), pp.89-94.

[3] For the date, R. Goossens, Euripide et Athènes (Brussels, Académie Royal de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques, Mémoires, Tome LV, fasc. 4, 1962), p.628, n.62. Neither of these dates is sure, but metrical evidence seems to confirm the political allusions.

deal with parts of the legend already treated by his predecessors: the first with the recovery of the bodies of the seven against Thebes by Theseus, king of Athens, handled by Aeschylus in his Eleusinians, and the second with the duel and death of Eteocles and Polyneices, Creon's refusal of burial for Polyneices and the exile of Oedipus, a combination of themes from Aeschylus' Theban trilogy, especially the Seven, and from Sophocles' Antigone (the Oedipus Coloneus was written after the Phoenissae in about 406 B.C.). Euripides' outlook on life and art, however, makes for sweeping changes of treatment and atmosphere compared with the approaches of his predecessors, no less in his Theban plays than elsewhere in his work, and, while the formal elements of his tragedies tend towards standardization, his attitude to the received myths shows constant innovation with the accent on re-expression in terms of contemporary political and social actualities.

Although Aristophanes' comments in the Frogs (1206-47) deal specifically with the metrical and grammatical rigidity of Euripides' prologues (Aeschylus fits in his ridiculous ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν to eight Euripidean prologues!), they may be criticized as a whole for their lengthy and sometimes colourless explanation of the mythical scene. In this vein Jocasta's opening monologue in the Phoenissae contrasts with Aethra's to the Suppliants which introduces the dramatic situation briefly and pointedly, although the former has more liberties with the legend to introduce. Similarly, the chorus of the Suppliants is as much an actor in the play as any of the characters. It is their petition to Aethra which eventually leads to Theseus' recovery of their sons' corpses. In employing this type of chorus

Euripides follows the practice recommended by Aristotle in the Poetics (1456a25). Their comments are rarely generalizing and mostly relevant to the dramatic situation.[4] The Phoenissae, on the other hand, has a chorus of Phoenician women on their way to Delphi as a gift to Apollo's shrine (200 ff.), who are tenuously connected to the actual plot of the play. They function both as symbols of the past history of the house of Oedipus through their kinship with Phoenician Cadmus and their constant reference to Oedipus' predecessor in such stasimon, and also as an "ideal spectator" seeing both sides of the brothers' struggle impartially and the whole agony of war.[5] The swift action of the last half of the play allows them only one stasimon (1019-66) and little else. Their role is typical of Euripidean tragedy, however, and that of the chorus in the Suppliants an exception.

Probably the most remarkable of the formalistic tendencies of Euripides is his passion for set debates. Conflict in debate is a major dramatic principle of Greek tragedy from Aeschylus onwards -- for example, it is the whole action of the Prometheus Bound -- since violent action is almost never portrayed on stage. In Euripides, however, situations seem almost contrived specifically for treatment of both sides of an argument. This technique of δισσοὶ λόγοι is

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[4] Cf. G. M. A. Grube, The Drama of Euripides (London, Methuen, 1941), p. 89.

[5] Euripides, The Phoenissae, ed. A. C. Pearson (Cambridge, 1909), pp. xxx f.

derived from the Sophists as the anonymous treatise of this name declares. This treatise was probably based on the approach of the mid-fifth century Sophist, Protagoras, whose lost book, the Antilogies, was the principal work of Sophistic dialectic.[6] Since Protagoras was probably a close friend of Euripides,[7] it is likely that the technique of attacking and then defending a thesis which appears in Euripides' tragedy was the result of this friendship. The tone of Eteocles' and Polyneices' remarks in their debate (Phoenissae 469-634) is Sophistic as are several of their philosophical doctrines, especially the politics of power adopted by Eteocles.[8] This debate is very much part of the drama, but the lengthy discussion between Theseus and the Theban Herald in the Suppliants on the best form of constitution (403-510) not only strains the heroic setting by the king's anomalous championing of democracy but also hinders the development of the plot, though adding greatly to the social implications of the play.[9] The same problem of relevance occurs in the reverse aspect in the Suppliants and Phoenissae with regard to Euripides' use of unexpected episodes. For here two pieces of plot action -- Evadne's suttee (Suppliants 900 ff.)

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[6]Cf. W. Jaeger, Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture, trans. by G. Highet (2nd ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1965) I, 315 f.

[7]Diogenes Laertius (IX, 54) says Protogoras read his book at Euripides' house and Philochorus (ap. Diog. Laer. IX, 55) claims Euripides alludes to his death in the Ixion, cf. P. Decharme, Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas, trans. by J. Loeb (2nd ed., New York, MacMillan, 1909), pp. 34 ff.

[8]Cf. Pearson, on 499, 501, 509, 536 ff.

[9]Grube, p. 36.

and Menoeceas' patriotic suicide (Phoenissae 991 ff.) -- are examples of Aristotle's idea of an episodic plot (Poetics 1451b33 ff.), because they merely follow the preceding incidents without probability or necessity. If, however, with Kitto, Iphis and Evadne (and Menoeceus too) are considered 'hot melodramatic characters but more examples of Euripides' abstract or suggestive use of plot",[10] a juster and more appropriate judgment of Euripides' intentions is made. His dramatic method is not concerned solely with involving the audience in the fate of one or more characters in an organic Aristotelian type of plot, but rather with communicating his vision of tragic waste by exploiting a whole range of theatrical resources including surprise techniques such as in the two episodes mentioned. Menoeceus fools his father only to reveal his noble decision ironically afterwards, while Evadne appears in her wedding garments in sad contrast to her intention (Suppliants, 1054 f.). Despite their apparent melodrama, these episodes intensify the tragic effect of both plays, especially the Suppliants in which the Evadne episode turns the balance towards the sufferings of war and underlines the ironies in an apparently melodramatic ending.

Besides influencing Euripides' formal techniques and encouraging innovation, the Sophistic movement affected the style and characterization of his dramas. The iambic dialogue of his plays (except for the traditionally elaborate messenger speeches) shows an unparalleled

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[10] H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study (New York, Doubleday, 1954), p. 234.

closeness to prose and this aids the naturalism of his characterization. Aristophanes' parody (Acharnians, 411 ff.) of Euripides' beggar-king, Telephus, reveals the external realism Euripides affected. He treated the characters of myth as everyday members of his own society. He depicts Eteocles' motive for defending Thebes as lust for power and justifies Polyneices' attack on his mother-city. He thus refuses to accept Aeschylus' and Sophocles' idealised patriot and impious traitor, and the divine intervention that is a final cause of the duel in the Seven. He can even contrast his own approach with that of his predecessors by parody, as, for example, in the Suppliants Adrastus' eulogy of the hybristic Argives is possibly an ironic echo of a similar speech in Aeschylus' Eleusinians.[11] Similar jibes at Aeschylus over the conventional static description of the combat of heroes occur at Suppliants 846 ff. and Phoenissae 751 f.[12] and suggest that Euripides is not above the kind of carping competition with Aeschylus that forms the centrepiece of Aristophanes' Frogs (1119 ff.). Sophocles, then, was right to say αὐτὸς μὲν οἵους δεῖ ποιεῖν, Εὐριπίδην δὲ οἷοί εἰσίν (Aristotle, Poetics 1460b33 f.), for Euripides is the culimination of the increasingly more radical process of painting the heroes of myth in contemporary colours. He reacts from the limited effects and formalized vision of his predecessors and shows the influence of intellectual trends of his day.

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[11] Cf. J. W. Fitton, "The Suppliant Women and the Heraklеidae of Euripides", Hermes 89 (1961) pp. 439 f.

[12] Cf. especially, the long parody of Aeschylus' Choephoroe in the recognition scene of the Electra (518-44).

Much innovation in treatment appears even in the fragments of Euripides' two major lost plays on Theban legend. In the Oedipus, of which new fragments have recently been found on Egyptian papyri,[13] the action of the play still remains problematic, since the placing of the fresh material in the play is a matter for conjecture. The two major new fragments[14] tell the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx and seem not to be part of the prologue but of a descriptive speech, which deals with events prior to the play.[15] This would mean that Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta is longstanding in the play, since a number of general remarks also point this way (frs. 547, 549, 550 Nauck).[16] The significant

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[13] The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part 27, ed. by E. G. Turner et al. (London, 1962), No. 2459, frs. 1-5 and see B. Snell, "Der Anfang von Euripides' Oedipus", Hermes 91, 1963, p. 120 for the identification of the first line from P. Oxy. 2455 fr. 4, col. iv, p. 39 and Nauck, frg. trag. adesp. 309.

[14] Frs. 1 and 2.

[15] Turner, p. 82.

[16] Cf. J. Vaio, "The New Fragments of Euripides' Oedipus", Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies 5, 1964, pp. 50-2.

detail that is known about the Oedipus, however, concerns the blinding:

ἐν δὲ τῷ Οἰδίποδι οἱ Λαΐου θεράποντες ἐτύφλωσαν αὐτόν
ἡμεῖς δὲ Πολύβου παῖδ' ἐρείσαντες πέδωι
ἐξομματοῦμεν καὶ διώλλυμεν κόρας.

(Scholiast on Euripides, Phoenissae 61).

Arguments against the reliability of this account have been based on: (1) a mythographer's account of the Oedipus story, the so-called Pisander scholium, which is alleged to use this play but probably uses the Phoenissae,[17] (2) the unlikelihood of Euripides departing so far from the received account of the legend![18] Since Oedipus is called the son of Polybus the blinding must occur before the recognition of his true identity and thus probably before the play.[19] Whatever the circumstances of the marriage, the drastic change of the legend is virtually assured.

In Euripides' lost Chrysippus, the companion play of the Oenomaus and the Phoenissae, other striking innovations are found. Euripides,

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[17] E. L. de Kock, "The Peisandros Scholium -- Its Sources, Unity and Relationship to Euripides' Chrysippus", Acta Classica 5, 1962, pp. 35 f. maintains the scholium is a composite of themes from the Oedipodeia as well as Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, but that the Chrysippus and Phoenissae were the main sources.

[18] See Vaio, pp. 52-4.

[19] Vaio, pp. 54 f. For another view, cf. C. Robert, Oidipus (Berlin, Weidmann, 1915) I, 306 ff.

probably for the first time, makes Laius the first paederast among men (Aelian, de Natura Animalium, 6, 15; Varia Historia, 13, 5) and so motivates Pelops' curse that causes Laius' childlessness and death at his son's hands.[20] Besides this remarkable invention, there is a fragment containing an interesting cosmogony deriving life from the marriage of Earth and Aether (fr. 836 Nauck), which Vitruvius (VIII, praef. 1) seems to link with Anaxagoras. Another piece of Sophistic philosophy deals with the opposition of Nature and Reason (fr. 837 Nauck), clearly concerned with the basic theme of the play. Euripides' powers of invention and preoccupation with the intellectual revolution of his time are both illustrated in the Chrysippus.

The Antigone, probably part of the trilogy of 410 B. C. with the Auge and Ixion,[21] also shows creative use of myth. The Argument to Sophocles' Antigone notes that:

κεῖται ἡ μυθοποιία καὶ παρὰ Εὐριπίδῃ ἐν Ἀντιγόνῃ· πλὴν ἐκεῖ φωραθεῖσα μετὰ τοῦ Αἵμονος δίδοται πρὸς γάμου κοινωνίαν καὶ τέκνον τίκτει τὸν Μαίονα.[22]

Euripides' Antigone was apparently a melodrama with a happy ending, sealed by

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[20] de Kock, pp. 30 and 35.

[21] Goossens, p. 597.

[22] For Maeon, cf. Homer, Iliad, 4, 397.

the divine intervention of Dionysus (fr. 177 Nauck).[23] The romantic motif (cf. frs. 161, 162, 164 Nauck) seems to dominate the denouement, for Haemon's love prompts him to rescue Antigone, according to the scholiast on Sophocles, Antigone 1350: φωραθεῖσα ἐκείνη διὰ τὸν Αἵμονος ἔρωτα ἐξηκοδόθη πρὸς γάμον, ἐνταῦθα δὲ (= Sophocles' play) τοὐναντίον.

In the fragments, the marked recurrence of anti-tyrannical comments (frs. 171-173 Nauck) suggests pro-moderate propaganda at the time of the Four Hundred in Athens (410 B.C?), especially since similar remarks occur in its sister play, the Auge (frs. 277 and 279, Nauck).[24] It is interesting to note that imagery of disease (frs. 160, 166 Nauck) and the yoke (frs. 175 Nauck), so important in Sophocles' Antigone, recurs even in these short excerpts. Euripides' Antigone, then, seems to have been both a romantic and a political play with a novel plot differing radically from Sophocles' version, but highly conscious of it. Of Euripides' other Theban plays a considerable number have been lost,[25]

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[23] Cf. J. Mesk, "Die Antigone des Euripides", Wiener Studien 49, 1931, pp. 11-12. The play is reconstructed with a tragic ending involving the suicide of Antigone and Haemon and the divine intervention of Heracles by C. Robert, 381-95, using a vase-painting and Hyginus, Fabulae 72, a considerably more speculative view.

[24] Goossens, p. 627, note 60.

[25] Among the remaining Theban plays not on the theme of Laius' house: Heracleidae and Heracles. There are fragments of the following: Alcmeon through Psophis (438 B.C. with Alcestis, cf. Nauck, frs. 65-74); Alcmeon through Corinth (407 B.C. with Bacchae, cf. Nauck frs. 65 and 75-8; frs. 79-88 are attributed just to the "Alcmeon", without further distinction; and Page, Greek Literary Papyri (London, Heinemann, 1942) I, 54-5); Alcmena (Nauck, pp. 308-10); Antiope (Nauck, pp. 326-339, cf. Page, pp. 60-71); Cadmus (Nauck, p. 394); Hypsipyle (Nauck, pp. 467-471), cf. Page, pp. 76-109); Ino (Nauck, pp. 383-389); Licymnius (Nauck, pp. 402-404); Phrixus 1 and 2 (Nauck, pp. 492-497, and P. Oxy. 27, 2455, fr. 14: Phrixus 1 and fr. 17: Phrixus 2 -- two lists confirming both plays); Rhadamanthys (Nauck, pp. 445-6).

while among surviving plays on Theban legend other than that of the house of Laius is the Bacchae, a vivid dramatization of Dionysus' persecution by Pentheus and valuable for its revelation of Dionysiac cult worship.

2. The Suppliants

Both extant plays on the Theban legend of the house of Laius add further developments and ramifications to the stories in accordance with Euripides' personal approach to tragedy. The Suppliants treats again the subject matter of Aeschylus' Eleusinians[26] and portrays the recovery of the corpses of the Seven against Thebes by Theseus and their cremation at Eleusis. Both these plays ignore the version of the Thebaid, in which the seven were buried at Thebes,[27] and also perhaps the story of Antigone's illegal burial of Polyneices, well-established by Euripides' time especially after Sophocles' version. Euripides' differs from Aeschylus' (and others') treatment of this story according to Plutarch, Theseus 29): συνέπραξε δὲ καὶ Ἀδράστῳ τὴν ἀνάιρεσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ Καδμείᾳ πεσόντων, οὐχ ὡς Εὐριπίδης ἐποίησεν ἐν τραγῳδίᾳ, μάχῃ τῶν Θηβαίων κρατήσας, ἀλλὰ πείσας καὶ σπεισάμενος· οὕτω γὰρ οἱ πλεῖστοι λέγουσι.

(Cf. the Theban version in Pausanias, 1, 39, 2)

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[26] Cf. Chapter I.

[27] Cf. scholiast on Pindar, Olympian Odes VI, 15 ff.

This deviation from the usual story obviously had a patriotic appeal and possibly, too, an anti-Theban allusion to the battle of Delium (424 B. C.). Eteocles' peace offer (739 ff.), another new element, may be a similar contemporary reference. The strange funeral speech of Adrastus (857 ff.), in which the hybristic Argive champions of Aeschylus' Seven (375-652) are praised in contrast to their legendary characters, seems to have a satirical purpose. Evadne's suicide leap onto her husband's pyre is Euripides' own invention.[28] Certainly, its theatricality bears the hallmark of Euripides' dramatic technique. The play, then, reveals innovation in legend for dramatic and other purposes.

The prologue of the play, spoken by Aethra, the mother of Theseus, introduces the main action of the play immediately, as well as setting the scene at Eleusis and introducing the main characters. Aethra has been interrupted in her sacrifices at the altar of Demeter by the chorus of Argives, the mother of the seven attackers of Thebes, who besiege her there. Together with Adrastus, king of Argos, and sole survivor of the leaders, they supplicate for the help of Theseus to recover their son's bodies which the Thebans refuse to surrender. Theseus enters seeking his mother, and on hearing the suppliants' request, cross-examines Adrastus revealing the illogical folly of his sponsorship of Polyneices' expedition. Adrastus appeals for sympathy and avers that his natural ally, Sparta, lacks the character to help him and other cities lack the strength. Theseus rejects his pleas, and points

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[28] Cf. H. C. Baldry, "The Dramatization of the Theban Legend", Greece and Rome, Second Series, 3, 1956, p. 35.

to Adrastus as an example of overconfidence bred by man's civilization. Adrastus must endure the results of his stupidity. Aethra, however, urges respect of the suppliants and of the Panhellenic custom of burial as duty to the gods and dwells on the glory to be gained by fulfilling it. Theseus agrees and leaves with Aethra to persuade his citizens to accept his decision. After the chorus sings of the favour they hope for from Athens, Theseus enters giving his instructions to his herald. A Theban herald interrupts and asks for the "tyrant" and so provokes a debate with Theseus on the merits of oligarchy and democracy. The herald warns him not to allow Adrastus into Attica, which would constitute an act of war, and to leave the dead Argives to their just punishment. Theseus disavows any hostility towards Thebes but puts the case for customary burial. The herald leaves defiantly and Theseus gives his marching orders, leaving Adrastus behind as a sign that his expedition is no continuation of the Argives' war. The chorus is afraid and questions the justice of the gods. A freed Argive prisoner-of-war tells of the Athenian victory that follows the Theban's refusal to negotiate and Theseus' courage that turns the battle and his refusal to enter Thebes afterwards. Adrastus moralises on the foolishness of Argives and Thebans alike and learns that the slain Argives have been buried at Eleutherae and the leaders' bodies, tended by Theseus himself, are being brought to Eleusis. When the biers appear the chorus is joined by Adrastus in a lament (first Kommos 798-836), followed by Adrastus' funeral speech on the civic merits of five of the chieftains. Theseus adds comments on the fates of Amphiaraus and Polyneices, once his guest. The two kings leave to arrange the cremation and the chorus

mourn their sons. On the roof of the stage building Evadne, wife of Capaneus, suddenly appears. She sings of her intended suicide on her dead husband's pyre. Her father, Iphis, enters on his way to take his dead son, Eteoclus, another of the Seven, back to Argos, sees his daughter and learns her intention too late to dissuade her. She leaps to her death and Iphis leaves grieving for his childless old age. The ashes of the Seven are brought on by their sons who join their mothers in lamentation (second kommos 1113-1164) and soon pray for revenge, to their mothers' distress. Theseus dismisses Adrastus and the Argives, charging them to show Athens due gratitude. Athena from the machine intervenes and bids Theseus exact a solemn oath and treaty of alliance from Adrastus, detailing ritual procedure. She prophesies the victory of the sons of the Seven over Thebes and Theseus accepts her orders, commending the city to her protection. The Argives leave to take the oath.

The theme of the Suppliants is admirably fitted for treatment as the ἐγκώμιον Ἀθηναίων that the writer of the hypothesis claims it is. Theseus, the legendary founder of the Athenian democracy (Plutarch, Theseus 25), leads his city in a disinterested and triumphant campaign to champion the unwritten custom of all Greeks. He shows great moral and physical courage and humanity and seems to have a good enough character to be a vision of ideal Athenian political action, as many critics see him. This straightforward view of the character of Theseus and the appeal of the play requires the assumption that Euripides "identifying himself with a definite set of contemporary ideals, offered his fellows, in the time-honoured form of tragedy, some definite

and salutary teaching".[29] On closer examination of both religious and political attitudes in the play this appears to be an oversimplified view of the play.

The religious issues of the play are basic to its meaning, for the central problems are the conditions under which the right of suppliance may be disregarded and the validity of the Panhellenic custom of burial. Both these themes, however, are seen in their political and social contexts and are used to probe the relationships of individual (especially politican) with city, and city with city. The supplication of the Argives requires from Theseus and Athens a series of critical decisions.[30] Pelasgus in Aeschylus' Suppliants faces a similar clash of loyalties between the demands of suppliance and his city's safety, but, unlike Theseus, he is blackmailed by a threat of suicide which would pollute his city's altars (455-89). Theseus questions Adrastus in a Socratic manner and eventually elicits from him the admission that the Argive disaster was his fault and his only claim on Athens is human sympathy (115-246). Theseus, then, sees only the political situation and is unwilling to honour the supplication of an evil man whose ills are of his own making. But Aethra, though admitting Adrastus' wickedness (304ff.), points first to religious duty and exhorts Theseus:

ἐγὼ δέ σ', ὦ παῖ, πρῶτα μὲν τὰ τῶν θεῶν
σκοπεῖν κελεύω μὴ σφαλῆς ἀτιμάσας. (301-2).

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[29] G. Zuntz, p.22.

[30] Ibid., p.7.

She then stresses the honour Athens and Theseus will gain by upholding the custom of all Greece (306-13) which he himself has accepted as sacred (123). He approves of her advice on the grounds that he has not shirked noble deeds before (338ff.) nor his mother's requests (361ff.). He makes no mention of the duty involved in suppliance and seems to ignore any implication that it entails anything more than a simple request for help.

Not until challenged by the Theban herald does Theseus produce any religious, as opposed to personal and political, grounds for war, and proclaim his defence of Panhellenic custom (523ff.).[31] Even there this rests mainly on rationalistic arguments that soldiers would not fight if disregard of burial became general (538ff.). He does not mention the gods' sanction of burial as his justification until his parting lines:

ὡς εἰς ἐμ' ἐλθὼν καὶ πόλιν Πανδίονος
νόμος παλαιὸς δαιμόνων διεφθάρη. (562-3)[32]

A similar attitude towards Panhellenic customs is found in the speeches of both Athenians and Boeotians after the battle of Delium (Thucydides, 4, 98-100) where both sides defend their actions by attacking their opponents' breaking of the prohibition on fortifying enemy temples-- the Boeotians' plea-- and of the custom of burial-- the Athenians' excuse. The Boeotians defy the second to secure the

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[31] His claim to be κολαστὴς τῶν κακῶν (341) seems more political than religious.

[32] Cf. D.J. Conacher, "Religious and Ethical Attitudes in Euripides' Suppliants", T.A.P.A., 87, 1956, pp.15f.

Athenians' retreat and claim retaliation for the violation of the first principle, while the Athenians deny the currency of the first principle to exert pressures on the Boeotians to comply with the second. In political negotiations, such customs seem little more than the "rules of war" and just as flexible.[33] For Theseus, too, the custom is little more than a useful expedient for the glorification of Athens, and this contrasts strongly with the deep exploration of the religious and social, as well as political and personal, implications of the burial custom found in Sophocles' Antigone and even in the spurious ending of the Seven.

This ambiguous treatment of religious themes is echoed by the ambivalent attitude of Theseus to the gods generally. This is underlined by contrast with that of Aethra, whose piety has been seen to stress the religious aspects of suppliance and burial (301ff.).[34] In his more optimistic moments, Theseus can speak, like Prometheus (Prometheus Bound, 442ff.) or the chorus in Sophocles' Antigone (334ff.),[35] of the god whose influence has helped man progress from barbarism to civilization through the gifts of language (203-4, cf. Antigone, 354f.), crops (205ff.,cf., Antigone, 338ff.), sea-trade (209ff., cf., Antigone,

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[33]Fitton, p.431. The burial of the dead had been observed in in the Persian wars by both sides (Herodotus,7,228 after Thermopylae) and later, in the Peloponnesian war, the Athenian generals at Arginusae (406 B.C.) were condemned to death for failing in this duty (Xenophon, Hellenica,1,7,22) and Lysander was stigmatized for life for a similar failure after Aegospotami (405 B.C., Pausanias,4,22,7). Euripides' Theseus seems strongly atheistic in omitting the religious aspects of a subject on which feelings ran high.

[34]Cf. Conacher, pp.19-20.

[35]In Antigone man achieves these talents for himself and they lead to to hybris and the gods' punishment (365ff.); a similar cycle appears in Supp. 216f.

335ff.) and the art of seers (211ff., cf. Prometheus Bound, 484ff.). When dealing with Adrastus, however, he seems to expect a rational approach to prophecy (220ff.) which he implies should be acted on only if not contrary to practical principles (223ff.). This apparently entails a sneer at Delphi whose oracle Adrastus was interpreting.[36] The fact that this practical criterion is spoken of as the way "god" works underlines Theseus' pragmatic superstition:

κοινὰς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰς τύχας ἡγούμενος
τοῖς τοῦ νοσοῦντος πήμασιν διώλεσε
τὸν συννοσοῦντα κοὐδὲν ἠδικηκότα (226-8)

In a similar vein, Theseus contrasts human experience of evil with the luxury of the "god" (550-5). He apparently shares Gloucester's view: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods: they kill us for their sport" (King Lear). Elsewhere, however, he ignores such a world-view with its accompanying taboos and, to the surprise of Adrastus, disregards miasma (763ff.). His reference to his own daimon (592 δαίμονος τοὐμοῦ μέτα, cf. 226ff.) suggests a devotion to personal luck that becomes so important later in Hellenistic times.[37] While the chorus pose the question of belief in divine providence or blind chance (598ff.), Theseus' words seem to oscillate between these two views

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[36] Conacher, pp.17f., but the irony is furthered by Aethra's remark that her marriage, of which Theseus is the felicitous product, was arranged Λοξίου μαντεύμασιν (7).

[37] G. Norwood, Essays on Euripidean Drama (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1954), pp.121f. sees in this a reason for considering this a portion of the play written later in Hellenistic times.

with marked irony.[38] He accepts some traditional ideas but acts mainly on practical and humanistic considerations.[39]

Elsewhere, the important theme of the gods' punishment of hybris is also touched on by Theseus in this equivocal manner. He concludes his parting speech by declaring:

τοὺς θεοὺς ἐχεῖν, ὅσοι
δίκην σέβονται· ταῦτα γὰρ ξυνόνθ' ὁμοῦ
νίκην δίδωσιν. ἀρετὴ δ' οὐδὲν λέγει
βροτοῖσιν, ἢν μὴ τὸν θεὸν χρήζοντ' ἔχῃ (594-7)

There is a hint here that only a fortunate operation of the "gods who honour justice" and human valour jointly can be successful and this is made explicit by the chorus in their self-questioning (598ff.).[40] But just as earlier Adrastus admitted that the Argives' defeat was punishment for hybris (156ff., cf. 494ff.), so now Theseus' victory seems to confirm the chorus' optimistic view of the gods (741ff.). But before the play has ended, the Argive heroes are alleged to have died nobly (856ff.) and even Capaneus' hybristic boasting is seen in a different light (860ff. contrasted with 496-9).[41] Even if the last is deliberate parody, the suggestion still remains that chance has

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[38] Fitton, p.443.

[39] Conacher, pp.18-19, cf. Fitton, pp.431ff.

[40] Conacher, pp.21-2.

[41] Norwood, pp.126ff.

has played a part in their fate. The heroes' sons, too, pray for vengeance, again suggesting the humanity rather than the monstrosity of their fathers, but their mothers emphasize the suffering entailed in further hostilities (1143ff.). Athena, however, soon confirms that such is the will of the gods by commanding this retribution (1213ff.) and the final theophany which should end the play on a note of resolution contrasts the harshness of divine justice with Theseus' temperance. The apparently simple theme of hybris and its punishment by just gods, which appears in all the Theban plays, especially in connection with the Argive champions, is treated with typical Euripidean irony in this play and this stems from his realistic attitude towards the motivation of personal and political action.[42]

Irony and rationalism appear also in Euripides' treatment of the burial theme of the play. When Theseus accepts Aethra's arguments in favour of the Greek custom of burial, these include the related religious aspects of this custom which she has pointed to (301-3): νεκρούς / τάφου τε μοίρας καὶ κτερισμάτων λαχεῖν (308-9). This agrees well with the opening chthonic note of the play, which concentrates on the Eleusinian locale and its associations. Aethra's interrupted sacrifice to Demeter was apparently the Panhellenic fertility rite (προηρόσατο cf. 28-9 and

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[42] Conacher, pp. 21-26.

Suidas, s.v.)[43] which she was offering for the city (cf. the epithet of Demeter: Δήμητερ ἑστιοῦχ' Ἐλευσῖνος χθονὸς 1),[44] and not part of Demeter's Mysteries, though these were very much concerned with fertility.[45] This connection with Eleusinian Demeter is emphasized by Aethra's further mention:

πρὸς τόνδε σηκόν, ἔνθα πρῶτα φαίνεται
φρίζας ὑπὲρ γῆς τῆσδε κἄρπιμος στάχυς.(30-2)

Here σηκόν is a technical term as is ἑσχάρας (33, cf. 290 σεμνὰς Δηοῦς ἑσχάρας), while elsewhere notable landmarks of the Eleusinian area are cited: the Telesterion (104) and Well of Kallichoros (392, 619, cf. Homeric Hymn to Demeter, 270-2).[46] Of particular importance is the reference, just quoted, to the first ear of corn, for not only was Demeter probably a corn goddess,[47] but she was worshipped together with Triptolemus whose mission it was to take this gift throughout the world.[48] This story is part of the Athenian claim to have been the source of civilization and suggests that the "god" whom Theseus praises as the giver of man's culture (201 ff.) may be Demeter, especially with the pronounced stress on the gift of

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[43] Cf. B. Lavagnini, "Echi del rito Eleusinio in Euripide (Suppl. 53, 470)", American Journal of Philology, 68, 1947, pp. 82-3, and G. Mylonas, Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961), p.7.

[44] Cf. T. Nicklin, The Suppliant Women of Euripides (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1936), ad loc.

[45] Mylonas, p. 282: "We may assume that the fortunes of Demeter and Persephone symbolized the vegetation cycle."

[46] For its importance and fifth century date, Mylonas, pp. 97-8.

[47] Guthrie, p. 283. [48] A.C. Pearson, The Fragments of Sophocles

agriculture (205-7).[49] Lavagnini[50] argues further that there is an actual echo of the Mystery ritual where the chorus address Aethra: ἔτεκες καὶ σύ ποτ', ὦ πότνια, κοῦρον (53). He quotes Hippolytus Refutatio Omnium Haeresiarum, V, 8, p. 96:

> ὁ ἱεροφάντης . . . νυκτὸς ἐν Ἐλευσῖνι ὑπὸ πολλῷ πυρὶ τελῶν τὰ μεγάλα καὶ ἄρρητα μυστήρια βοᾷ καὶ κέκραγε λέγων· "ἱερὸν ἔτεκε πότνια κοῦρον· Βριμὼ Βριμόν." τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἰσχυρὰ ἰσχυρόν.

Since Demeter's son was Ploutos, the parallelism may be a compliment to Theseus. It seems likely, however, that Hippolytus is interpolating the goddess Brimo from the Phrygian mysteries of Rhea,[51] and so cast doubt on this suggestion. A more likely echo may be found when the chorus speaks of ξεξι- |πυρους θεῶν θυμέλας (63-64.), since at the supreme moment of initiation the Hierophant emerged in a great light with the Hiera (Plutarch, De Profect. Virt. 81E). Lavagnini[52] also wishes to see a further reference to the Mysteries in the herald's command to remove Adrastus from Eleusis:

> λύσαντα σεμνὰ στεμμάτων μυστήρια (470)

(Cambridge, 1917), II, 243, fr. 596.

[49] Contrast the god-given nature of this gift with man's invention of it in the ode on man (Sophocles, Antigone, 338 ff.). Agriculture is notably missing from Prometheus' list of benefits (Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, 442 ff.).

[50] Pp. 83-4.

[51] Mylonas, pp. 305-7.

[52] Pp. 84-6.

Instead of taking στεμμάτων as a mere complement to μυστήρια ("ritual wreaths"), he convincingly compares the frequent use of λύω with accusative and genitive and translates: "liberare gli augusti misteri dalla presenza delle supplici bende" (cf. 173). The locatival sense of the word is illustrated by the development of τελεστήριον from τελετή. Elsewhere, too, echoes of the Mysteries occur. Demeter (her epithet reminiscent of her Mysteries) and earth are connected by Adrastus in 260-1: θεούς τε καὶ γῆν τὴν τε πυρφόρον θεὰν / Δήμητρα (cf. 290).

This association of Demeter and her Eleusinian Mysteries with earth draws its main importance from the graves of the Seven which Pausanias saw at Eleusis (1, 39, 2) and which were formed into a heroön in the sixth century B.C.[53] It was for such burial that the chorus supplicated Aethra and Theseus. Thus the purpose of their supplication and the stress on locale and on fertility cult in the opening combine to give a vision of the subsequent action of the play as a kind of ritual for the prosperity of Athens and Argos, honouring the potency of the Mysteries and the seven heroes alike.[54]

There are suggestions, however, that Theseus allows the Argives to take their heroes' ashes home (1167, 1185 ff.)[55] and he certainly rationalises away the notion of the powers for good and evil associated with a hero's burial (537 ff.)that plays so important a role in Aeschylus' Seven and Sophocles' Oedipus Coloneus. His remarks

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[53] Mylonas, pp. 62-3.

[54] Cf. Conacher, p. 16, n. 20.

[55] Capaneus at least has a tomb (934 ff.) and is a holy corpse (935).

are chiefly aimed at superstitious fears and are allied with a philosophical idea of death as the separation of body and soul and their return to earth and air respectively -- a kind of impersonal immortality.[56] This realistic approach is especially applied in the funeral speech of Adrastus, where the five heroes become exemplars of civic virtue instead of the hybristic monsters of tradition (857 ff.). This may well be a parody of a similar attempt by Aeschylus in his Eleusinians (the last play of a trilogy)[57] and the whole Eleusinian atmosphere may also derive from the same source, especially as Aeschylus, a native of Eleusis, could hardly have ignored the graves of the heroes there and their implications.[58] The function of this religious atmosphere, then, and of the other religious attitudes and themes in the play may well be ironical in that peace and fertility are not the result of this invocation of gods Olympian and chthonic, but, in contrast, Athena's threat of war to come -- the final cadence of this play.

The religious themes of the play have initial importance as the foundation of the plot and the combination of supplication and the Panhellenic custom of burial form a situation that requires a political solution when posed to Theseus, the king and representative of an idealised mythological Athens. The substance of the play is the analysis

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[56] On the origins of this idea in Ionian scientific thought, see Guthrie pp. 262 ff. He quotes, however, an Athenian epitaph (432 B.C.) for it also.

[57] Fitton, pp. 439 ff.

[58] Ibid. 444 n. 3; perhaps this play caused Aeschylus' persecution for revealing the Mysteries, and the references in Euripides may reflect this.

of Theseus' political decisions in dealing with this problem. This issue is similar to that posed in previous Theban plays, especially Sophocles' Antigone, where a religious custom (again that of burial) is subordinated to political contingency by a king, with disastrous results. The duty of burial and its implications of family loyalty are upheld by the women in both plays (and their representative, Adrastus, in the Suppliants), while political and judicial considerations are advanced by the men. Theseus does this in his Socratic examination of Adrastus' motives for war. While the women's appeal is essentially to human ties and sympathy (Aethra 34 ff. chorus 194, cf. Theseus 284 ff.). Theseus' view criticises only the integrity of the people and actions, that his help will support. The opening scene, then, shows a clash between family and religious loyalty on the one hand and city and political considerations on the other, which is further delineated as a contrast between male and female psychological approaches to life. Aethra underlines this by her hesitancy to interfere in politics because she is a woman (295 ff.). This situation has affinities with that in Aeschylus' Theban trilogy and Sophocles' Antigone,[59] but Euripides explores the situation and its results with greater emphasis on the purely human motives operating in the action. Aethra's speech is the turning-point for the political themes of the play. Though she pleads the case for religious duty (301 ff.) and Panhellenic custom (311), which Theseus himself uses to refute the Theban herald (526 ff.) she quickly

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[59]Its affinities to Aeschylus' Suppliants have been seen above.

turns to the honour that will accrue to Athens from upholding these (306), contrasted with the reputation of cowardice that will be Theseus' if he overlooks them (314-9). She defends Athens' policy of interference which is the only (dangerous) road to glory (324-331). Her arguments smack of an appeal to Theseus' ego rather than political philosophy and his reply reveals his jealous guarding of his reputation (338-45) and respect for his mother's wishes (361 ff.) as his main motives. His conviction that he will easily have his will ratified by a sovereign people (349 ff.) is perhaps a deliberate paradox and meant to reflect the realities of Athenian democracy under its democratic leaders, particularly Pericles and Cleon.[60] The notion of an encomium, with Theseus as an ideal personification of Athenian policy, seems to be only superficial. Euripides seems to parody this idea, while he treats the war and its motivation in a more tragic manner by dwelling on its realism and psychological aspects. He contrasts the ideal with the real in both character and action.

This many-levelled approach has not prevented much speculation on the possible historical persons and events that may be represented by the play and the consequent political lesson or propaganda lying behind it. The date of the play is crucial for many of these views but cannot be firmly established. Metrical considerations give the limits 427 to 416 B.C., with greater probability for a date before 420.[61] More specific dates have been advanced on the basis of various

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[60] Fitton, pp. 431-2.

[61] Zuntz, pp. 56-8, 68-71, 88-94.

incidents in the play, especially the similarities of situation with the battle of Delium (424 B.C.) and Athena's reference to a treaty with Argos (like the one in 420 B.C.). But closer examination reveals subtleties which diminish the importance of such historical reminiscences as factors for the dating and understanding of the play.

At the battle of Delium, the Athenians lost the fight after their right wing had defeated its opponents, only to meet the Theban cavalry (Thucydides 4, 76). In the Suppliants (703-10) a similar victory is not reversed by the enemy but turned to total victory by Theseus' valour, like that of the Boeotian commander's at Delium. The actual battle in the play seems "une revanche sur la réalité".[62] The Thebans refused to return the Athenian dead after Delium and a similar situation follows the Argives' defeat in the play. The Panhellenic custom of burial was at stake in reality and in the play. A close parallel between play and history is unlikely, however, for Aeschylus had already dealt with the theme[63] and the ambivalent approach that has been traced in Euripides' portrayal of Theseus' actions can hardly suggest a satisfying wish-fulfilment for the Athenians, but rather an only too actual account of the follies of such idealogical wars. Euripides, then, appears to intend an uncomfortable feeling of historical reminiscence in the play, but does not reverse the verdict of Delium to gratify his audience. He rather

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[62] Goossens, pp. 417-20.

[63] Zuntz's curt dismissal, of a contemporary political interpretation, p. 4.

propounds the paradox that even in her most high-minded campaigns Athens' desire for self-aggrandisement is a major factor, and this is true of war universally.

Further appeals to Athenian sympathies are made in the anti-Spartan comment of Adrastus (184 ff.) and Athena's recommendation of an Argive alliance (1183 ff.). The contrast of Athenian generosity and Spartan selfishness cannot be denied and is part of the contemporary politics which form the play's milieu.[64] This deepens the dissection of Athenian policy by revealing that even a state which has an ideal is yet motivated by unworthy reasons for its wars. The proposed alliance with Argos is developed in detail. Zuntz shows that its form is similar to the actual treaty of 420 (Thucydides, 5, 47).[65] The terminology used, however, is that standard in international agreements of the period and exactly parallels the wording of a treaty between Athens and Dionysius I of Syracuse. There need not, then, be a direct reference implied. Besides, Argos has been seen in a poor light throughout the play and the treaty is completely one-sided since Adrastus is compelled to accept Athena's conditions, unlike the equal treaty of 420 B.C.[66] The relics that Athena mentions may well have existed and thus confirmed the validity of the alliance in the play,[67] but the whole episode ironically contrasts Athena's Cleon-like advantage-seeking and Theseus' humanitarianism.[68]

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[64] Goossens, pp. 417-18.

[65] Pp. 73 ff.

[66] Zuntz, pp. 71 ff. The treaty probably reproaches Argive neutrality, cf. Goossens, p. 443.

[67] Zuntz, pp. 76-8

[68] Fitton, p. 443.

Perhaps the implications of Athena's command and the Argos treaty--further war -- are a sardonic comment on Cleon's peace negotiations with Argos.[69] Such a view of Euripides' purpose would seem to endorse the suggestion that Eteocles' peace offer (739-41), with the remark of Adrastus on Eteocles' later conduct: λαβὼν πένης ὡς ἀντίπλουτα χρήματα (742), is possibly a reference to the Athenian rejection of the Spartan peace proposals of 425 B.C. and the simile used by the envoys of this Athenian refusal (Thucydides, 4, 17).[70] Zuntz's suggestion that Euripides is merely following the epics here seems unlikely in view of the brothers' arrangement of alternative reigns which is followed by a quarrel, found so frequently elsewhere.[71] Though Adrastus fits the simile into a cycle of hybris and its punishment, this may be thought to add to the discomfort of the allusion. The play, then, seems ironically to echo historical events and incorporate them into Euripides' "tragic satire" which shows how good intentions can lead good people into an inescapable vortex of folly and suffering, especially in war.[72]

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[69]Fitton, p.442, n.2 quotes Aristophanes' Knights, 465-6 for intrigues in 424 B.C.

[70]Cf. Fitton, p. 436 quoting Wilamowitz.

[71]Zuntz, p. 63, contrast the Thebaid, fr. 2, the description of the Argives in the Seven and the absence of any hints in the Antigone of Sophocles, where Creon might well use such an argument.

[72]Cf. Fitton, p.442.

The character of Theseus has also suggested many historical equivalents. His similarity to Pericles in his ideal aspects and actual policies is counterbalanced by less flattering hints of Periclean autocracy.[73] Theseus' caution in helping Adrastus is like Pericles' wish not to involve Athens in external commitments during the Archidamian war,[74] and both have a similar attitude to the people they advise. Theseus' assurance that his democracy will accept his decision (349 ff.) recalls Thucydides' estimate (2, 65) that Athens under Pericles was λόγῳ μὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή both rather unfavourable judgements. The constitution which Theseus has set up mirrors the arrangement of political power in Pericles' time. In both, the poor had equal rights with the rich (349 ff., cf. Plutarch, Pericles, 7). Theseus also acts on the imperial policy of Pericles: friendship through bestowing, not receiving, benefits (1168 ff., cf. Thucydides 2, 40). These hints are strengthened by Pericles' frequent appearance in comedy as a god or hero, and even as Theseus himself on Phidias' shield of Athena Parthenos.[76] Despite the fact that Pericles' policy led to the Peloponnesian war, his period of power seems already to have become an ideal era for Euripides' audience. But Euripides

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[73] Cf. Goossens' detailed analysis, pp. 433-440, though his conclusions differ.

[74] Cf. Thucydides 2, 65 on the over-ambitious foreign policies of the demagogues after Pericles, Goossens, p. 435.

[75] Goossens, p. 435.

[76] Cf. Goossens, p. 436 and for Phidias' portrayal: Plutarch, Pericles, 31.

probes deeper into events and their universal meaning and shows the ambivalent nature of the policies and approach of Theseus and his archetype, Pericles. The allusion seems ironic.

Other suggestions have been made which can reasonably be dismissed. Blatant propaganda on behalf of Alcibiades, the "young general" (190), is offset by the warnings about the pernicious ambition of young men (160, 232, 250,).[77] That a pious devotion to augury is part of Theseus' character when Pericles was a sceptic has suggested that Euripides was proposing Nicias as Pericles' successor.[78] Nicias was also a moderate[79] and hostile to imperialist enterprises.[80] The ambivalent attitude of Theseus towards the gods and the Delphic oracle, together with his personal motives for war, suggests that Euripides was depicting human affairs in a far different light to that required for such commonplace propaganda purposes.

These particular political references do not exhaust this

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[77] Zuntz, p.4. If Alcibiades is involved, chronology requires the play to be performed after 420 B.C. and this applies also if the Argive alliance of that year is concerned, Goossens, p.443.

[78] Goossens, pp.442f. For Pericles' scepticism: Plutarch, Pericles,6 and 35; and Nicias' piety (Thucydides,7,50), cf. Suppliants,211ff.

[79] Cf. [Aristotle], Athenian Constitution,28, 3 and 5; he led the oligarchic party. The remarks about the middle class (238ff.) hint at the moderates, cf. Goossens, pp.429 ff.

[80] He opposed the Sicilian expedition: Thucydides, 6,8ff.

aspect of the play.

Other political concepts further the contemporary Athenian atmosphere of the plays as well as its universal application. The most marked of these is the long debate between Theseus and the Theban herald over forms of government (399 ff.). Even here there is considerable irony, for, though its provocation is the mention of the word τύραννος and Theseus' quick attack on this in favour of democracy, he himself has acted like an autocrat (349 f.). Both opponents attack the weaknesses of the other's constitution (Herald: 411-425, 471-488; Theseus 428-431, 444-455) more than they praise their own (Herald: 410-11, Theseu 405-8, 432-443). There is an ironical reversal of expected positions when the herald advocates peaceful co-existence and Theseus threatens war. This comes to the fore when Theseus' Athens, shown in all the contemporary fifth century aspects that the herald delineates, is seen to jeopardize peace in some of the most moving lines of the play (481 ff.). The stress here on motivation when deciding on war might illustrate Theseus' decision earlier. Thus plausible views of the play's situation are given by both speakers but neither seems the best, and no clear-cut argument in favour of war is presented. Theseus' ideal Athens, championing Panhellenic custom, seems militaristic as its policy leads to war.[81] This underlines the clash between ideal and actual in the portrayal of Theseus and Athens, as well as holding perennial interest for Athenian audiences.[82] The clash between tyranny and democracy in debate and conduct occurs in

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[81] Cf. Fitton, pp. 432ff.

[82] Cf. Herodotus, 3, 80ff., and especially Pericles' praise of the Athenian constitution in the Funeral speech (Thucydides, 2, 36ff.).

other Theban plays, especially the Antigone by both authors and Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus.

The remaining political passage in the play -- Adrastus' funeral speech -- has already been discussed and some of its ironies outlined. Zuntz[83] has pointed out that it does not correspond in detail to the speeches made annually in the Ceramicus over the Athenian war-dead -- this function is more closely that of the debate on government and the action of the play itself in its ideal aspects.[84] There is praise of the dead heroes, preceded and followed by their relatives' lament, as at the festival, and their valour is attributed to their civic upbringing.[85] They are models for the citizens.[86] But at Athens no personal tributes were paid and praise was given by exalting the ideals for which the men had died.[87] Adrastus can employ neither of these themes because Argos is disgraced, but he completely reverses the procedure and describes their lives rather than their deaths. Here deliberate "dissonance" is at work.[88] Each hero's attributes seem to

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[83] Pp. 19-20.

[84] Cf. Zuntz, pp. 16-18: Athens' freedom (405 ff. cf. Hyperides, IX, 25), equality of law (433 cf. Lysias, II, 18 f.), equality of citizens' rights (407-8 cf. Thucydides, 2, 37), character (340 cf. Thucydides, 2, 41), its example to Greece (367 cf. Thucydides, 2, 41), help for the injured, often this story -- (380 cf. Isocrates, XII, 178), upholding of Panhellenic law (526, 671 cf. Plato, Menexenus, 243a).

[85] 909 f., cf. Thucydides, 2, 42.

[86] 917, cf. Plato, Menexenus, 236e.

[87] Cf. Zuntz, pp. 13-15.

[88] Zuntz, p. 25, cf. p. 23, recognizes this but silently blames Euripides' artistry.

parody Aeschylus' portrait in the Seven: Capaneus is εὐπροσήγορον στόμα (869, cf. στόμαργος Seven, 447); Parthenopaeus is very handsome (889, 899-900, cf. χορηγὸν δ' ὄμμ' ἔχων Seven, 537); Hippomedon employs his body usefully (887, cf. σχῆμα καὶ μέγας τύπος Seven, 488). The absurd bathos is underlined by the moral (917) that the young should follow these examples. Rather, these sketches reveal how the real evil of these men may be passed on to their children, and this is soon confirmed by the boys' entry.[89] Clearly, the suggestions that see any Athenian statesman of the time in these caricatures is also mistaken.[90]

Euripides' use of various contemporary political ideas and personalities in the Suppliants is not surprising in so civic a play. His themes are universal: the motivations and assumed attitudes of politicians advocating war and, more generally, of men amidst the evils of life at large. The folly of the actions of even good men trap them in evil consequences they cannot escape and did not intend. Even though Theseus' expedition succeeds, it is seen as part of an inevitable cycle of war breeding war. Peace is unstable while men continue to act with stupid and self-centred limitation of vision, and the gods with harshness.

No study has been made of the use of imagery in this play and a brief survey reveals few major image sequences. The principal recurrent metaphors in the play seem to be military ones that show much evidence

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[89] Cf. Fitton, pp. 437-9.

[90] Cf. Goossens, pp. 450 ff. for attempts.

of the irony found in other aspects of the play. Aethra intimates her involvement in the war when she calls her ritual garland δεσμὸν ἄδεσμον (32) and the chorus similarly describe themselves as taking part in a contest: ἀγὼν οὐδ' ἄλλος ἔρχεται γόων γόων / διάδοχας (71-2). Theseus often uses military terms metaphorically (93, 159, 195, 207-8, 219) and his middle-class maintain stability in the city in military terms:

κόσμον φυλάσσουσ' ὄντιν' ἂν τάξῃ πόλις (245).

War, too, provides a picture for Adrastus' vision of man's hybris:

ὦ καιροῦ πέρα / τὸ τόξον ἐντείνοντες· ὦ κενοὶ βροτῶν (744-5).

For Evadne, marriage is associated with wall-building and her happiness with martial activity:

τῶν ἐμῶν πόλις Ἄργους
ἀοιδάς, εὐδαιμονίας,
ἐπύργωσε καὶ γαμέτα
χαλκεοτεύχους, αἰαῖ, Καπανέως. (996-999).

There is even a subtle suggestion that Theseus' deed is to become the paradigm for soldiers' valour in his own words towards the end, for the Argives must tell their sons of his favour: μνήμην παραγγέλλοντας ("passing on the watchword") ὧν ἐκύρσατε (1173). The military images, which constantly recur, seem, then, to play a counterpoint with the theme of ideal action in a good cause and add undertones of the unavoidability of continuing war and its human suffering.

Similarly, the images of athletics serve a function common in Greek poetry: they depict war (e.g. 317, 637, 665, 685, 706) and its combatants (704) but also hint at ironic dissonances in the glory attributed to its victors, especially when Evadne says: ἐνταῦθα χάρις

δὴ καλλίνικος ἔρχομαι (1059), echoing Adrastus' title for Theseus (113). Her father Iphis reiterates this ironically, using the same metaphor as Theseus himself had earlier (550: παλαίσματ' ἡμῶν ὁ βίος): ὦ δυσπάλαιστον γῆρας, ὡς μισῶ σ' ἔχων (1108). Images from the games, then, evince the glorious aspects of war and, by ironical usages, the horrors that life holds, especially the results of war. This second function is shared by the continual antithesis between childlessness and good children throughout the play (18, 35, 45-7, 66-7, 810, 955ff., 1132ff.), particularly associated with the chorus. This culminates in the appearance of the heroes' ashes in their sons' hands.

The animal imagery frequent in the play shows considerable development and application. The chorus and Adrastus bear a burden (20), like a pack animal, and seem worse than wild animals in their lack of protection (267), Adrastus being yoked to an oracle (220). This oracle was about the contest of a boar and lion -- Polyneices and Tydeus -- who, like the armies (653 φῦλα, cf. 703), are wild beasts (140ff., 316), as man himself was before civilization (201: θηρίων δίκην). The chorus suffers like a dog (τὰ κύνται' ἄλγη κακῶν 807), and Evadne in her romantic suicide shows the wistful sadness of a bird (Philomela ?):

ἰδ' ἐγὼ πέτρας ἔπι
ὄρνις τις ὡσεὶ Καπανέως ὑπὲρ πυρᾶς
δύστηνον αἴρωμα κουφίζω, πάτερ (1045-7).

The theophany of Athena results in Adrastus being yoked once more by his oath (1229). The animal imagery shows ironic development similar

to the other patterns, and the play's dominant note of tragic irony is echoed by the Aeschylean diction of the two kommoi that set the tone of the finale.[91] The mixture of grief and joy is paralleled in Aeschylus' Seven (825, cf. Suppliants, 778) and, as there, marks a return to present action (847 cf. Suppliants, 794) after a discussion of past evils (832 ff. cf. Suppliants, 778 ff.). The final stanza of the first kommos in the Suppliants (832 ff.) is especially reminiscent of Aeschylus, Seven (941), with the final word Ἐρινύς (836) as in Seven (791). The pathos of the Aeschylean play is recalled, but in an atmosphere of greater hopelessness and more tragic suffering. This impression is quickly sealed by Evadne's suicide and the ironic vows of vengeance by the boys. The Suppliants, in its religious, political and imagistic aspects, is filled with Euripides' tragic sense of futility and suffering despite the apparent encomiastic and optimistic nature of its plots and ideal mythical characters. Its place among the Theban plays is not so obvious as the other plays dealt with since its substance is as much Attic as Theban, but a number of themes, religious, social and political, reflect previous treatments. Its relationship with the lost Eleusinians of Aeschylus, already seen to be close, may be more important than can be conjectured in the present state of knowledge.

3. The Phoenissae

The final play of Euripides on Theban legend of the Labdacid house is the Phoenissae. It was put on with the Oenomaus and the

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[91] Cf. Zuntz, pp. 11-12.

Chrysippus (probably produced in 409 B.C.)[92] but has no links with the former and only tenuous ones with the latter, though this play deals with Laius and his fall.[93] The inventiveness of plot in that play is seen again in the Phoenissae, which in a long pageant (however altered by later producers)[94] displays most of the major members of the house of Oedipus by a remarkable series of mythical innovations. The plot covers the same ground as Aeschylus' Seven and Sophocles' Antigone, though with fresh incidents created by various manipulations of the legend. Jocasta, who gives the prologue outlining the family's past as far back as Cadmus, is kept alive after the discovery of her incestuous marriage and can thus arrange an eleventh-hour truce for her sons in which they reveal the pathos of family love divided by dispute. Oedipus, too, is still living but shut up in the palace, a blind brooding presence round whom the play revolves. The two brothers' roles are reversed and Polyneices, though a traitor, is more sympathetic than his power-greedy brother. Polyneices' burial, forbidden by Eteocles and later Creon, becomes a dilemma for

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[92]Cf. Euripides, The Phoenissae, ed. by A. C. Pearson (Cambridge, 1909), pp. xxxii ff. and Goossens, p. 628 note 62 on the difficulties involved in the acceptance of this date. The Argument in Vaticanus 1345F fixes the plays of the trilogy, at least.

[93]See supra.

[94]Recent writers tend to be more conservative in their treatment of corruption in the play, cf. Baldry, p. 36: "the forger or forgers seem to me not to have departed far from Euripides' own purpose".

Antigone, as elsewhere in the Theban plays. Creon himself evokes pathos in his fate. Teiresias, prophet of divine riddles, proclaims that Menoeceus, Creon's son, must die to propitiate Ares. The boy, deceiving his father, commits patriotic suicide, a story perhaps associated elsewhere with the name Megareus (Aeschylus, Seven, 474, 477 and Sophocles, Antigone, 1303 f.).[95] Jocasta, too, commits suicide over the bodies of her sons after failing to prevent their duel, while Antigone breaks off her marriage to Haemon in defiance of Creon so that she may accompany Oedipus into exile. It is Creon who orders this final indignity, unlike other versions (Oedipus is retired somehow in Thebaid, frs 2 and 3, cf. Aeschylus, Seven, 785 ff.). Clearly much of the play's action is novel and unfamiliar because of Euripides' creative changes in the story.[96] The play has an effect of breadth, like an epic poem, but, despite the theatrical surprise involved in the presentation of so many characters in one play, there is, too, an overriding tone of tragic irony in the contrast between the family's fatal strife and its past glories, a theme that displays Euripides' sardonic vision of human suffering.

Jocasta opens the play and immediately carries the story back to the time of Cadmus, including the stories of Laius and Oedipus,

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[95] Cf. Pearson, p.xxiii.

[96] Cf. Baldry, pp.36 f.

Apollo's oracle, the parricide, the solving of the Sphinx's riddle, the incestuous marriage and its discovery, Oedipus' self-blinding and curses on his sons and finally their agreement and quarrel, which Jocasta hopes to end by her truce. Antigone, a secluded young girl, and her tutor appear on the walls and view the violent attackers from Argos, among whom Polyneices inspires the girl's tender affection. The chorus is composed of Phoenician women. They enter, explain their mission to Delphi as an offering to Apollo and describe their fear for their kindred city where they are stranded by the war. Polyneices enters the city warily under the truce and is greeted passionately by Jocasta's lyrics. Her questions reveal the wretchedness of his exile and the oracle's command that led to his strange marriage to Adrastus' daughter. Eteocles, on entering, reveals his hatred for his brother and is unmoved by his brother's plea for justice. Love of power is Eteocles' only reply, come what may. Jocasta pleads for Equality and Moderation as the only stable principles in life. The two brothers lapse into hatred and promise to seek each other on the field. The chorus tell of Cadmus' struggle to found Thebes and its first citizens that sprang from the dragon's teeth. Eteocles and Creon plan strategy and settle Creon's succession if Eteocles dies, then send for Teiresias' advice. The chorus ponder Cadmus' and Oedipus' stories again, stressing their deadly struggles. Teiresias reveals to Creon Ares' demand for Menoeceus' death as a propitiation for Cadmus' slaying of the dragon. Creon bids his son escape from the city, but, deceived by pretended compliance, leaves. Menoeceus reveals his intended suicide for the city. The chorus sings of Oedipus and the Sphinx. A messenger tells of

Menoeceus' suicide, a fierce battle and the brothers' planned duel to decide the issue. Jocasta and Antigone leave to prevent this. The chorus laments the horror of this duel. Creon enters seeking Jocasta's help to lay out Menoeceus only to hear that both brothers have died and Jocasta has committed suicide after a momentary reunion with her sons. Antigone, back from the scene, laments this horror and summons Oedipus from the palace. He enters, a dream-like spirit, hears the fates of his wife and sons and then is banished by Creon. Polyneices is forbidden burial by Creon, despite Antigone's pleas. In return, she rejects her betrothal to Haemon, Creon's son, to leave with Oedipus for exile after a lament.

The play's remarkably wide coverage of the events of Theban legend is matched by its equally numerous invocations of gods connected with Thebes and references to divine intervention of various kinds in the human action of the story. It is exceedingly difficult to see any fully developed religious themes running through the play. Rather, like the plot itself, Euripides introduces the accepted divine part in the action and adds to it further myths and gods whose connections seem tenuous. The play restates many themes from previous writings but only its overall pathos can really be claimed as an indictment of the gods. Most of the outspoken passages are repetitions of old ideas and only cumulatively make an effective statement. In contrast to plays like the Hippolytus, there is no conflict of cruel, amoral gods, whose will acts on men whatever their worth, and responsible, moral humans, cast down despite

their merits. The gods are cruel, but their will is fulfilled by the interaction of human pride, self-will, wickedness and greed.

The contradictions that appear in such a treatment are best seen in Teiresias' view of the situation (865 ff.), which bears the stamp of Apollo's approval. He says that the evil in Thebes is the result of Laius' disobedience (caused by lust and drunkenness according to Jocasta, 21 ff.) of Apollo's oracular command not to have a son and that the gods disclosed this to Greece by the self-blinding of Oedipus. His sons ignored this warning and tried to escape the gods' vengeance by their pact. Oedipus then cursed them and in the face of Teiresias' warnings they undertake the fatal duel. The only way to save Thebes is to sacrifice Menoeceus, an innocent victim (885 ff.), to propitiate Ares for Cadmus' slaying of the dragon. It seems impossible to rationalize this sacrifice, and Cadmus' slaughter nowhere else provokes such revenge from the god. The episode is an invention of Euripides, perhaps suggested by the chthonic link between Eteocles and Theban earth in the Seven, where the brothers' combat ends with their blood soaking earth (735 ff.). Certainly, the dramatic effect of the unexpected suicide is intensified because it precedes the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices, which are anticipated and, though moving, not unjustified. The preceding scene with Jocasta and her sons has revealed the false gods that lured the brothers to their deaths. Eteocles' gods are Tyranny (506) and Ambition (531), Polyneices' is Justice that sees only his own

profit (470, 495 ff.); both contrast with Jocasta's Equality (535 ff.). These motives seem more real than the divine factors often spoken of and Jocasta says:

ὄλοιτο, τλῆδ' εἴτε σίδαρος
εἴτ' ἔρις εἴτε πατὴρ ὁ σὸς αἴτιος,
εἴτε τὸ δαιμόνιον κατεκώμασε
δώμασιν Οἰδιπόδα. (350-3, cf. 379)

Elsewhere, on more conventional lines, the chorus considers as destroyers Ares (252 f., 783 ff., 1576; cf. Teiresias), the Fury (255, 1305, 1503) and Oedipus' curses (253 ff., 474 ff., 1355, 1426, 1556).[97] Both the Fury and Oedipus' curse were operative in Aeschylus and with other gods form part of the forces that brought about disaster for the house of Laius. Jocasta, Antigone and Oedipus (1595 ff.), and especially Menoeceus, seem to be innocent victims of the gods caught up in the consequences of others' crimes. Their fates appear to illustrate Oedipus' words:

τὰς γὰρ ἐκ θεῶν ἀνάγκας θνητὸν ὄντα δεῖ φέρειν (1763).[98]

The throng of gods, then, who in various ways cause the sufferings of some of the characters, are incalculable factors in human life whose power is undeniable. Since Euripides' main theme is the combat and death of Oedipus' sons whose fate seems humanly justified,

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[97] Even the curse of Pelops on Laius is mentioned (1611, see the scholiast quoted by Pearson, ad loc.), which was the result of Laius' seduction of Chrysippus, as Euripides showed in the play of that name.

[98] This passage may be modelled on Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus, 1524 ff., but this line does not occur there. Pearson, ad loc., suggests Medea, 1018 and Phoenissae, 383. The latter hints at genuineness.

there is no central emphasis on the cruelty of the gods, though the history of Laius' house reveals this as far back as Cadmus.

As in several of the other Theban plays examined, the theme of burial in Mother Earth occurs with some importance in the Phoenissae. This is a leading motif at the end of the play, where the burial of Polyneices is forbidden by Creon. This is seen in a wider context. The story of the Sown Men of Cadmus is again the paradigm for the self-destructiveness of the house of Laius, as in the Seven, and their story occurs repeatedly (657ff., 818ff., 1060ff.). A central episode in the play, that of Menoeceus' patriotic self-sacrifice, is the direct result of Cadmus' killing of the dragon whose teeth were the seed of the Sparti. According to Teiresias, Ares and Earth require this sacrifice as appeasement for the loss of their child (934ff.), demanding one of the descendants of the Sown Men in return for favour. Thus the closeness of the Cadmean race to Mother Earth is emphasized and also the idea that death for these men means return to Mother Earth and consequent enrichment. It may well be that Euripides is also hinting at the chthonic cult dedicated to Menoeceus that Pausanias witnesses to at Thebes (9, 25, 1). Near the Neistan gate, there was a tomb of Menoeceus on which grew a pomegranate tree, a plain association with Hades and the dead.[99] Such an aetiological interest is displayed by Euripides in Hippolytus (1423ff.), but there it is clearly

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[99] Cf. the way in which Persephone was trapped into returning to Hades by eating a pomegranate (Homeric Hymn to Demeter, 411 ff.). Pausanias' account says Menoeceus was obeying Delphi's command and perhaps points to a pre-Euripidean origin for the story; but against this: Robert, pp. 416 ff.

stated. This nexus of ideas, however, lends undertones to the problem of Polyneices' burial. He has sworn by τὴν θρέψασαν γαῖαν(626) and requests burial in it:

θάψον δέ μ', ὦ τέκουσα, καὶ σύ, σύγγονε,
ἐν γῇ πατρῴᾳ, καὶ πόλιν θυμουμένην
παρηγορεῖτον, ὡς τοσόνδε γοῦν τύχω
χθονὸς πατρῴας, κεἰ δόμους ἀπώλεσα.(1447- 50)

The theme is a familiar one and, when Creon forbids his burial, Antigone's opposition is inevitable, especially as her affection for Polyneices earlier (154- 169) and Eteocles' strict ban on it have prepared the audience's mind for it.[100] The development of the conflict is possibly different here, as Antigone, after her pleas fail to move Creon, seems to relinquish her plan (assuming interpolation in 1743-6). This may be because Creon has full knowledge of her intentions and can easily prevent them. This unexpected twist may be mitigated by her venting her pique in refusing to marry Haemon and accompanying Oedipus into exile.[101] This would then be psychological compensation for her frustration. Polyneices' burial, then, despite its significance in the Seven and Sophocles' Antigone, appears to be tragically denied and adds further tribulation to the outcome of the duel for the house of Laius. Though the chthonic associations of the play are marked,

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[100] Cf. D. J. Conacher, "Themes in the Exodus of Euripides' Phoenissae", Phoenix, 21, 1967, p.94.

[101] For these and other arguments against removing the burial motif from the ending of the play, cf. Conacher, "Themes . . . ", pp.97ff.

particularly with reference to local heroes of Thebes (Amphion and Zethus: 115, 145, 606, 824, cf. Pausanias, 9, 17, 4; Niobids: 159ff., cf. Pausanias, 9, 16, 7 and Amphiaraus; 174ff.) and their Titanic opponents, connected with the Argives as in the Seven (Hippomedon: γίγαντι γηγενέτᾳ προσόμοιος 128 with Argus on his shield, 1115f., cf. Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, 677-8; Tydeus with Prometheus the Titan on his shield, 1121; Capaneus with a γίγας γηγενὴς on his shield, 1131; and Adrastus with the Hydra on his shield, 1135f.),[102] these seem merely reminiscences from Aeschylus. The themes of the Sparti and Polyneices' burial are considerably adapted and elaborated as part of the tragic effect of the play. Although, like the Seven, this play abounds in references to the gods, their part in the play resembles baroque ornamentation: rich and florid but included for its own sake. The references to Dionysus (228ff.. 650, 783ff., 1489, 1951ff.) -- a god of Thebes, but with little part to play -- and Io (828ff., 678ff.) -- a distant ancestor of Theban kings -- illustrate this tendency. Only the roles of Ares and Theban Mother Earth show some ironical comment on the cruelty of the gods.

The political themes of the play considerably develop motifs exploited in other Theban plays. The main plot of the play centres on the quarrel of Eteocles and Polyneices. While Aeschylus' Eteocles

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[102] The messenger speech (1091 ff.) containing many of these descriptions is often thought an interpolation, cf., e.g., E. Wyckoff, The Complete Greek Tragedies (Chicago, 1959), Euripides V, Introduction to The Phoenician Women, p.68.

identifies himself with the city in the first half of the play and appears an ideal representative until faced with his brother, neither brother is idealised by Euripides and Polyneices is the more moderate of the two. Both are prepared to sacrifice the ties of city and family for their personal interests, Eteocles for tyranny (506ff.) and Polyneices for his due share in the ruling of Thebes (486ff.). In set speeches the two brothers state their cases. Polyneices has suffered severely in exile (389ff.), which was his part of the agreement to share the rule at Thebes (477ff.), and now comes to claim his rights, by force if necessary (490ff.). Jocasta's censure on the injustice of such an attack on his homeland is sufficient to show his disregard of kin and city alike (568ff.). Eteocles, on the other hand, preaches power politics like that of the sophists Thrasymachus and Callias and of the Athenian demagogues over Melos (503ff.).[103] Tyranny is his god (τῶν θεῶν μεγίστην . . . τυραννίδα 506) and he would go to any lengths to obtain it. Jocasta points out the dangers of ambition:

ἄδικος ἡ θεός·
πολλοὺς δ' ἐς οἴκους καὶ πόλεις εὐδαίμονας
ἐσῆλθε κἀξῆλθ' ἐπ' ὀλέθρῳ τῶν χρωμένων. (532-4)

Eteocles is clearly at war with both city and family. His espousal of tyranny is contrasted with Jocasta's view on the principle of democracy, Equality, which operates as much on the personal as the

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[103] Cf. Grube, p.359.

political level:

ἰσότητα τιμᾶν, ἢ φίλους ἀεὶ φίλοις
πόλεις τε πόλεσι συμμάχους τε συμμάχοις
συνδεῖ· τὸ γὰρ ἴσον νόμιμον ἀνθρώποις ἕφυ (536-8)

If Equality is not present among men, jealousy and strife is always the outcome. This contrast of power-greedy, self-centred tyranny with egalitarian, just democracy recurs throughout the Theban plays.

This clash of attitudes is set within a wider vision of the relations between Thebes and its ruling house. Since the days of Cadmus there has been strife within the family, as the archetypal symbol of the Sparti illustrates. These strife-torn men were the first citizens. Laius' death at the hands of Oedipus was a further family conflict, even if in ignorance, and it left Thebes to face the Sphinx defenceless (37ff.). On attaining manhood, Oedipus' sons confined their father and provoked his curses, which despite their precautions lead to strife in family and city (63ff.). This latest quarrel is the focus of the first half of the play. The family's past, a recurrent theme of the choral odes, justifies Teiresias' stricture:

ἐκεῖνο μὲν γὰρ πρῶτον ἦν, τῶν Οἰδίπου
μηδένα πολίτην μήδ' ἄνακτ' εἶναι χθονός,
ὡς δαιμονῶντας κἀναστρέφοντας πόλιν (886-8)

Creon's harsh banishment of the feeble Oedipus and Antigone that follows the self-destruction of the rest of the line is the final removal of the strife-ridden family from Thebes, the city it has jeopardized so often.

The theme of family and city has a further ramification in

the play. Creon refuses to accept Teiresias' prophecy and surrender his son:

ἐγὼ γὰρ οὔποτ' ἐς τόδ' εἶμι συμφορᾶς,
ὥστε σφαγέντα παῖδα προσθεῖναι πόλει. (963-4)

His family affection comes before the city's need. This contrasts with Eteocles, who is untouched by all but self-love, and Polyneices, whose love for his mother and city (358ff.) is limited by his selfishness. Menoeceus is at the opposite end of the scale to the brothers and his love for city and family is stronger than life itself (994ff.). He shows this in action by his patriotic self-sacrifice. Menoeceus emphasizes the clash of loyalties within Oedipus' house and its self-seeking that lead to its eventual destruction.

Another important theme in the play is that of exile and its suffering. Polyneices enlarges on the hardships and sufferings exile involves even for a young man (389ff.) and the frequent references to Oedipus and his ruin, repeatedly before the audience's mind,[104] hint that Euripides is keeping him back for a grand finale, which can only be his exile.[105] Creon's harsh interpretation of Teiresias' remark that Thebes would have been better off without the house of Oedipus (886-8) may show his self-interest removing his rivals,[106] just as Antigone's wedding is to be next morning (1635ff.). At least, his decree is the final blow to the house of Laius and Antigone, rejecting marriage,

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[104] Cf. Grube, p.359.

[105] Nowhere else is Oedipus in Thebes during his sons' fighting; for defence of the burial theme, Conacher, "Themes . . . ",p.94.

[106] Conacher, ibid., p.95.

accompanies Oedipus to death in exile (1619f., 1681). The last remaining members of Oedipus' house thus leave behind the city their kin have tortured. At last the city can reject and punish instead of being rejected and punished itself. The final cadence of the play is one of tragic pathos for the dead, the unburied, and the exiled.

The importance of this theme of exile has been taken to have a more precise reference to the political events of the day. If the date 409 B.C. for the play's production be accepted, it will have been played in the same festival as Sophocles' Philoctetes which also has exile and its distress as a leading motif. The situation at Athens was critical in that year. The Four Hundred oligarchs, who had taken over the city in 411 B.C., had excessively employed the useful political weapon of banishment (Thucydides 8, 98) and had just been replaced by the Five Thousand, with the return of the democracy. Before the Dionysia of 409 B.C. the Athenian people, in fulfilment of the decree of Demophantus, had to swear an oath that they would do everything in their power to destroy any who tried to overturn democracy again (Andocides, I, 96-8). Besides, the fleet at Samos that had maintained a democratic opposition all along under the generalship of the exiled Alcibiades and had saved Athenian power in the Aegean,[107] was obviously hoping for reconciliation with Athens and recall for its general. Theramenes' decree in 409 B.C. seemed to fulfill their wishes by recalling exiles, but the situation was by no means settled. The city, like

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[107] At the battles of Cynossema (411 B.C.), Cyzicus (410 B.C.) and Abydos (411 B.C.).

Thebes in the play, was split into two irreconcilable camps for the preceding year and Alcibiades, like Polyneices, had been unfairly exiled. Polyneices speaks of exile like an Athenian, complaining of its slavery (393 ff.) and lack of παρρησία (391). Eteocles' motives are similar to the oligarchs', whose ambitions did away with traditional Athenian liberties. Goossens concludes, however,[108] that there is a contrast between Thebes and Athens, since the latter avoided civil war, principally through the tact of Alcibiades (Thucydides, 8, 82 and 86), despite the ambition of Critias (Xenophon, Memorabilia, I, 2, 14, cf. Jocasta, Phoenissae, 531 ff.). Democracy and moderation are the chief lessons of Jocasta's conciliatory speech (534 ff., 554 ff.) and the stability of this constitution is praised (538). This can be understood politically as a contrast with the year of oligarchy preceding. The policy of equality between parties and cities seems to represent the best way that the Athenians could hold together a crumbling empire, as well as reconcile their divided city, and both objects were achieved briefly in this way.[109] The conduct of Menoeceus hints at the need for patriotism and self-sacrifice in war (1015 ff.), but it is unlikely that any contemporary person is intended.

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[108] Pp. 605 f.

[109] Cf. Goossens, pp. 608-9 with notes, where a decree "plein de sollicitude" is cited.

In the political themes of this drama Euripides strikes again many chords that have sounded in other Theban plays, particularly the conflict of city and family and democracy and tyranny, and probably alludes in general terms to the politics of the day, advising moderation and adherence to democratic principles.

Several imagistic themes run through the Phoenissae and provide a unifying complex of conceits in a play that is otherwise "episodic and over-stuffed".[110] The first of these patterns deals with light and dark and the linked contrast of sight and blindness.[111] These images recur throughout the play but are dominant in the first six hundred lines, suggesting life and hope for the characters. Jocasta opens the play with an address to the sun in his golden chariot amid the stars (1-3) and ends her speech by reference to Zeus who lives in the "bright folds of heaven" (84). Antigone on the wall is dazzled by the glories of war and the brightness of the Argives -- Argos means literally "brightness" -- and this attribute hints at their just cause (cf. 154 f.). The plain is like lightning (110 f.), the soldiers gleam in their armour (119, 129, 146-7), Polyneices is like the sun (168-9) and recalls Jocasta's opening. The moon (175-6), the lightning that punishes Capaneus' hybris (182-3) and golden Artemis (191) complete the sequence.

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[110] Author of the Third Argument.

[111] This account follows that of A.J. Podlecki, "Some Themes in Euripides' Phoenissae", T.A.P.A., 93, 1962, pp. 355-373. Imagery of light: pp. 357-362.

The climax of the image, however, comes when the chorus, after speaking of themselves and their destination in terms of brightness (212-3, 215, 220-1, 224; 226-7), reverses the trope and describes the blood of Ares as if ablaze (241) and the city as in a cloud (250-1). This gloom is cast over the next scene between Jocasta and her son. Polyneices (276, 308-9) and Jocasta (324 ff., 343 ff., 372) are dark beings and Oedipus is hidden in and sees only darkness (377, 336). Thus the blindness of the father overcomes his sons (773) for all their actual vision (265-6, 370, 445-6, 461 ff.). These images are recapitulated in the first stasimon following (653-4, 659-60, 671), but do not again function as a unifying factor. Their importance in the brothers' death scene lends it pathos (1440-42, 1451, 1480-1) and their occurrence increases when Oedipus appears. Antigone's elaborate remark about the sun's chariot echoes Jocasta's opening address as an ironical commentary on the false hopes implied by the imagery there (1562-4). Oedipus' final address to his subjects is λεύσσετ' (1757-- spurious?).[112] The contrast of light and dark also occurs strikingly in the Menoeceus episode, where Teiresias (949-950) and later the messenger (1091-2, cf. 1010) see his act in dark colours that contrast with Menoeceus' own vision (1006).

Animals recur frequently in the play (e.g. Cadmus' heifer, 639-44 and Io, 248, 676 ff., 828-9), but only those threatening

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[112] Other instances include an interesting parallel between Oedipus (1539 ff., 1549, 1616) and Teiresias (834-5) -- "blind foot", Podlecki, ibid., p. 361, n. 12.

Thebes appear to form a pattern.[113] The Sphinx, part of the legend, is foremost among these (45-50, 801-9, nearly all the third stasimon, 1018-1054, although Menoeceus' suicide has just preceded it). Her function seems ironical: to underline the glory and the shame of Oedipus, his solving her riddle and his marriage that was its consequence (1352-3, 1732). His vanished triumph acts as a background for the action (cf. 1758 ff.), and this function is similar to that performed by the story of Cadmus' dragon. Both beasts play an important role in the shaping of events for the house of Cadmus and especially for Menoeceus. On the metaphorical plane also beast images, especially of the hunt, characterise savagery of Eteocles and Polyneices (263-4, 396, 405, 421, 698-9; the latter is a lion in the oracle: 411). Their treatment made Oedipus like a wild animal (876) and Polyneices' shield device -- the Potnian mares (1124-25) -- contrasts with Menoeceus' sacrifice like a colt (947). The brothers died like animals (1296, 1573-4, 1669) and their fate as the prey of animals (1634, 1650) parallels Oedipus' at the hands of Laius (1602-3).

The same ironic contrast between Oedipus' triumph and its ghastly results is summed up in the epithet καλλίνικος ("victor in the games").[114] Not only is Oedipus' victory wretched, but he also sends his sons to a similar end through his curse (1052 ff.)

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[113] Podlecki, ibid., pp. 362-367.

[114] Ibid., pp. 367-9.

in contrast to Creon's son, whose victory his father wished to prevent (1054 ff.). This is in turn opposed to Eteocles' selfish hopes in the same image (781, 1200, 1252-3, 1330), and later to the brothers' "contest" itself (1330, 1355). Both brothers have the same image in their prayers (1367-8, 1374 ff., 1047-8, 1420, cf. 368, 1478-9). In the finale Oedipus alludes to his former prize -- the kingdom -- with the same metaphor (1728 ff., cf. 52).

The final sequence of images seems to spring from an ironic contrast between the joyful atmosphere of the Dionysia, which was the setting of tragedy, and Antigone's surrendering her natural position as a votary of the god for exile with Oedipus.[115] The paradox developed in the second stasimon (784-883) is that the dance of war is joyless. Ares does not act like a bacchant (785 ff.) but παρέμουσος (785). The Sphinx too is unmusical in her riddle (807), while Amphion's lyre, his building tool, is the "iron circle of the besieger's force".[116] Elsewhere, the chorus invokes the Bacchic revel (235-6, 655 ff.) and Jocasta dances her joy at the sight of Polyneices (314 ff., 352-3). The chorus sees the Sphinx as a bacchant (1028) and Antigone develops this theme, calling herself a βάκχα νεκύων (1489 ff., cf. Jocasta's comment 1265-6). Jocasta's joy becomes χάρμα Ἐνυοῦς (1503) and Antigone can be a bacchant no longer (1754 ff.). The image mirrors the sadness of the situation.

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[115] Ibid., pp. 369-372.

[116] Pearson, ad loc.

The imagery builds the pictures of brightness, victory and the dance only to show their ironic reversals. Oedipus' blindness is surpassed by his sons and they are destroyed. The Sphinx -- a past glory -- is contrasted with the bestial ravaging of Thebes by his sons and the slaying of the dragon by Cadmus is paid for by Menoeceus. Antigone becomes the epitome of ruined hopes in a dance of death. These themes are repeatedly stressed by the chorus as background to the play and find echoes in the characters ' language.

In the Phoenissae Euripides gives a panoramic view of the characters and incidents of Theban legend. He contorts the myth so that brilliant scene follows scene in a theatrical pageant. The past illuminates the present and reflects the continuous struggle of kin with kin and family with city down the generations. These conflicts recall other treatments of Theban legend. Old themes are given new twists. Polyneices' burial is forbidden and Antigone leaves him to accompany Oedipus into exile. Fresh pathos is centred on Oedipus' exile as he must leave his dead sons and wife. The images also recall past treatments, though fresh ones are added. The result is a spectacular farrago of theatrical effects that communicate a great sadness and compassion for the helpless victims that remain of the once-proud house of Oedipus.

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Imagery in Aeschylus' Seven

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