CHAPTER ONE

Fifth-Century Athenian History and Tragedy

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Prologue: 431 BCE

Before dawn on the fourteenth day of Elaphebolion during the final months of the archonship of Pythodorus, residents of Athens and visitors alike made their way to the theater. The usual buzz and stir surrounded the celebration of the City Dionysia. Before the official opening of the festival, the tragic poet Euphorion had previewed his plays about the Titan Prometheus. Euripides, long overdue for a victory, would offer *Medea*, *Philoctetes*, and *Dictys*, followed by the satyr-play *Reapers*.

Not all of the excitement had to do with the festival. Two years earlier (433 BCE) the Athenians had accepted the Corcyraeans into alliance, and in so doing had embroiled themselves in a quarrel with Corinth, Corcyra's mother-city and a powerful member of Sparta's alliance, the Peloponnesian League. The Athenians had hoped that by limiting themselves to a defensive agreement they could avoid direct contact with Corinthian forces, but their plan had misfired. In retaliation the Corinthians sent forces the following year to help the Potidaeans (colonists of theirs but members of Athens' alliance) secede. Then, with Potidaea besieged and their own forces trapped in the city, they had lobbied the Spartans to invade Attica. Early in the fall, a full synod of the Peloponnesian League had voted that the Thirty Years' Peace had been broken and that the league should go to war.

Despite the vote, war with Sparta and her allies was not yet certain. Members of both alliances continued to exchange heralds, and as the Greek world knew, despite their reputation as the world's finest hoplite force – or perhaps because of it – the Spartans were slow to go to war. If Potidaea were to fall soon, war might be avoided; at least the Corinthians could not argue that an invasion of Attica would help their colonists. The Dionysia brought a welcome break from rumors of war.

Euripides won only third prize at the Dionysia of 431; nevertheless, it is tempting to imagine that the crowd leaving the theater that evening spoke mostly of his *Medea*. The audience would have known the story, but most likely did not suspect the magnitude of the crime Medea would commit in Euripides' play. Even so, the poet

had persuaded them to feel sympathy for his protagonist, much as Medea had persuaded the chorus of Corinthian women to keep secret her plan to protect her honor and avenge herself on Jason by murdering her own children. King Aegeus, Medea's friend and ally (*philos*), also succumbed to her persuasion and promised her refuge in Athens, provided she could get to the city on her own (723–24). The king's offer of sanctuary occasions a choral ode in praise of Athens that sits rather oddly in the mouths of the Corinthian women who comprise the chorus. Still, it must have pleased the Athenian spectators to hear their city praised as the birthplace of Harmony (830–34), where "sweet gentle winds breathe upon the land" (838–40).

Within two weeks of the festival, a small band of Thebans invaded Plataea, a Boeotian city allied with Athens. For Thucydides, the invasion marked the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. The historian, however, did not begin his account of the conflict with the attack on Plataea, but with the quarrel between Corinth and her colony Corcyra. This quarrel between *philoi*, cities related by blood, had escalated into a larger conflict between more powerful *philoi*, Athens and Sparta, cities tied by the customary obligations of a treaty of peace. Despite limiting themselves to a defensive alliance with the Corcyraeans, the Athenians had invited the quarrel between Corinth and Corcyra into their own city. As in Euripides' play, honor, revenge, and conflicting obligations – to friendship based on blood ties and friendship based on custom – would all figure prominently in Thucydides' account.

Tragedy and History

Both Thucydides and Euripides may have been present when Corinthians, Corcyraeans, and Athenians debated the proposed alliance. Both are likely to have known about the quarrel that prodded Corcyra, despite a long history of avoiding alliances, to seek Athens' help. And, as we have noted, there is a certain overlap of themes in *Medea* and the first book of Thucydides' history. Yet no one would argue that Thucydides modeled his account of the quarrel between Corinth and Corcyra on Euripides' tragedy or, conversely, that Euripides took inspiration from the quarrel between Corinth and Corcyra. The interrelationships between the two narratives are at once more subtle and more pervasive. To begin with, the questions they raise are not peculiar to them or to 431 BCE. In meetings of the assembly and in the law courts – in other tragedies as well – Athenians will have witnessed debates in which honor competed with expedience and conflicting obligations clashed. Moreover, although Euripides' tragedy ends with its protagonist about to flee from Corinth to Athens, the Corinth of *Medea* is not the Corinth of the fifth century, nor is Athens of the tragedy the Athens of Euripides' audience.

What *is* the relationship between tragedy's mythical past and the fifth-century Athenian audience's present? The goal of this chapter will be to lay the groundwork for answering this question. In order to suggest the range and direction of the movement between past and present in surviving tragedies, I will interleave with a brief overview of fifth-century Athenian history discussions of different facets of the interplay between tragedy and history. These subjects are, of course, more complex, and the scholarly debate much more nuanced, than I can convey in a short survey. Indeed, even the terms "tragedy" and "history" require some preliminary explication.

By "tragedy" I mean simply one of the thirty-two surviving dramas produced by Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides and performed at the dramatic festivals, presumably in Athens (on lost tragedies see Cropp, chapter 17 in this volume). Not all of these tragedies, as it will turn out, lend themselves to a historical approach. "History" is more complicated. In one sense it refers to what Pelling calls "real-world events" (1997b, 213). But "history" does not consist of empirical facts to which poetry responds. Historians as well as tragic poets compose narratives. The narratives of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon provide the basis for our understanding of Athenian history of the fifth century (on sources see Rhodes 1992a, 62–63), but they also reflect their authors' purposes and bias and are colored by their historical circumstances (as is true of my own historical overview). Nonetheless, as products of the same culture as tragedies, ancient historical narratives are likely to "reflect its categories and concerns, whether psychological, social, or political" (Boedeker 2002, 116, on myth and history).

The tragedies under discussion fall into two broad categories. In the first, the poet alludes directly to fifth-century events or developments, but moves them back into the mythological past. In this category I place Aeschylus' *Persians* and *Oresteia*. Tragedies in the second group generally avoid overt references to fifth-century events or figures; paradoxically, they also draw the mythological past into the present (see Sourvinou-Inwood, chapter 18 in this volume). The bulk of the plays in this category are by Euripides. Strains of fifth-century Athenian rhetoric, sketches of political types, and reflections of Athens' institutions and society lend plays of this category a distinctly fifth-century Athenian flavor. The emphasis in Euripides' *Orestes* on political factions, for example, is directly relevant to the Athens of 408 BCE.

Sophocles contributes to both categories; indeed, one of his tragedies moves in both directions. Although Ajax's followers resemble fifth-century Athenian rowers more than heroic-age spearmen, the first half of Sophocles' *Ajax* draws the audience toward the epic past. Following the hero's suicide, however, the play's historical motion reverses direction. Sophocles' Agamemnon and Menelaus, with their meanness and flawed rhetoric, have more in common with what we know of politicians of the second half of the fifth century than with characters in epic or, for that matter, in any of Aeschylus' extant dramas. Questions raised by *Philoctetes* (409 BCE) concerning the relative power of *nomos* and *phusis* (roughly "nurture and nature") locate it squarely in the midst of a fifth-century sophistic debate. The suspicion of rhetoric *Philoctetes* generates, as well as the conflict in the play between appearance and reality, also project its mythic past into the world of Athenian politics of the final decade of the century.

Sophocles locates *Oedipus at Colonus* (406 BCE; his last tragedy) in the mythological past of Athens under King Theseus. The poet distances the action from contemporary Athens by shifting the setting from the heart of the polis to its outskirts at Colonus. This move, as we will see, allows the tragedy to gesture toward a future that bodes well for Athens.

Athens and the Sea

Of the more than nine hundred tragedies that could have been performed in the fifth century at the City Dionysia alone, only thirty-two have survived. Moreover, these do

not span the entire fifth century, but were composed roughly between the end of the Persian Wars and Athens' defeat by Sparta and her allies (on the fourth-century *Rhesus* see Cropp, chapter 17 in this volume). When Vernant (1988a) speaks of tragedy's "historical moment" and tries to explain why Greek tragedy "is born, flourishes, and degenerates in Athens, and almost within the space of a hundred years" (25), he ignores the role that chance played in preserving the fewer than three dozen plays that have survived (see Kovacs, chapter 24 in this volume).

Tragedy did not end with Athens' defeat in 404, nor did it spring full grown from the head of Aeschylus in democratic Athens following the battles of Salamis and Plataea. The sixth-century tyrant Pisistratus and his sons may very well have set the stage for the political and cultural developments of fifth-century Athens. Nonetheless, the series of conflicts between Greeks and Persians culminating in Persia's defeat in 478 was a cultural as well as historical turning point. Recently discovered fragments of an elegy by Simonides on the battle of Plataea suggest that the feats performed by the Greeks against the Persians quickly became matter for poetry on a level with the heroic deeds of the Trojan War (Boedeker 2001; on Simonides' poem on Salamis see Plutarch, *Themistocles* 15). Tragedy, too, recognized the potential of this theme. An early failed experiment was Phrynichus' *Capture of Miletus* (Herodotus 6.21.2). Aeschylus was more successful with *Persians*, whose subject is the battle of Salamis.

Salamis was one of the final engagements of the Persian Wars, but, according to the boast of Athenian speakers in Thucydides (1.74.1), it was the first to show the extent to which "the affairs of the Greeks depended on their ships" – by which they mean Athenian ships. War with Aegina (around 505–491) is said to have forced the Athenians to become seamen (Herodotus 7.144). Athens' shift in military strategy from hoplites to a large state-owned fleet of triremes was unusual, at least for a Greek city. Given the manpower required by triremes (a full complement was 170 rowers per ship), a fleet of these warships was enormously expensive to maintain. Persia, of course, could finance its fleet with tribute from its subjects (Wallinga 1987).

Ancient writers characteristically attribute innovations to a single individual, and the Athenian fleet is no exception. Seven years after the Athenians helped to repel the first Persian assault on Hellas at Marathon, Themistocles advised the Athenians to use the profits of a newly discovered vein of silver at Laurium in southern Attica to expand their fleet for the war against Aegina. While Herodotus (7.144) says merely that the ships were never used against Aegina, Plutarch is more explicit: Themistocles' real motive was to prepare a defense against the Persians (*Themistocles* 4). A leader less shrewd than Themistocles could have anticipated a renewed Persian assault. Only the fortuitous destruction of Darius' ships off the Chalcidic coast (in 492) had saved Athens from the Persian navy. When Xerxes began the excavation of a canal through the peninsula of Mount Athos around 483 (Herodotus 7.22), he made clear his intention to take up where his father left off, to punish the Greeks who had assisted in the rebellion of the king's Ionian subjects (contra, Wallinga 1993, 160–61).

Soon after the final battle at Plataea (479), the Spartans abdicated leadership of the Greek alliance formed to repel the Persians. Thucydides says that the allies wanted the Athenians to assume leadership of the alliance and that the Spartans conceded, in part because they wanted to be done with the war against Persia, in part because they were still friendly toward Athens (1.95–96; cf. Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 23–24). The role that Athenian ships and soldiers played at Salamis and their

willingness to pursue the enemy in the aftermath of that battle made them the likely candidates to assume leadership of an alliance of Greeks, primarily islanders, against Persian aggression.

In Thucydides' condensed (and tendentious) account of the approximately fifty years between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, the so-called Pentecontaetia (1.89–118), Athens methodically expands its power and control over its allies. Other sources tend to support Thucydides' picture. Immediately following the battle of Salamis, for example, Themistocles tried (in vain) to extort money from the island of Andros; he was more successful with Carystus and Paros (Herodotus 8.111–12). Around 476 the Athenians captured Eion and Scyros and sold their inhabitants (non-Greeks) into slavery. Nor was membership in the new alliance, the so-called Delian League, always voluntary. After the capture of Scyros, and not long before Aeschylus produced *Persians*, the Athenians forced the Greek city of Carystus on Euboea to join the league (around 474–72). Soon afterwards (around 471–65) they prevented Naxos from withdrawing from the alliance (Thucydides 1.98). Not all of the cities of Asia Minor may have been eager to exchange Persian for Athenian control (on Phaselis see Plutarch, *Cimon* 12).

The Persian threat may not have been dormant in the 460s. The forces the Athenians defeated at the Eurymedon could have represented an attempt by the Persians to reestablish themselves in the Aegean. Perhaps as late as 465 the Athenians routed Persians from the Chersonese, just before the revolt of another ally, Thasos (Thucydides 100.1–3). Diodorus (11.60) implies that Persian military activity was a response to Athenian aggression, although modern scholars are less certain (e.g., Meiggs 1972, 77–79). By the second half of the 470s, however, the line between offensive and defensive operations had been blurred. The war to save mainland Greeks from Persian aggression was increasingly presented as a war of liberation, protracted in order to extend freedom to the Greeks of Asia Minor (see, e.g., Raaflaub 2004, 58–65, 84–89). Regardless of whether the Athenians were justified in extending their power, by the time that Aeschylus produced *Persians* they had taken the initial moves to transform their alliance into empire.

Aeschylus' *Persians*

The relation of *Persians*, our earliest extant play (472), to history is, at first glance, the least problematic. It is the only surviving tragedy whose focus is a historical event, the defeat of the Persian king Xerxes at Salamis by the Greek fleet a mere eight years before the performance of the play. Aeschylus himself is thought to have been a veteran of Salamis (on the difficulties in extrapolating historical details from *Persians*, see Pelling 1997a). The tragedy is also unusual in that we can directly compare it with a fifth-century historical account of the same engagement (Herodotus 8.40–94). The exercise, however, is more complicated than it may seem. Although Herodotus does not agree with Aeschylus on all points, it is likely that he used *Persians* when composing his own account of Salamis (Saïd 2002b, 137–38). Conversely, although the historical referent of *Persians* is clear, modern scholars' interpretations of the poet's use of the event are shaped in large part by how far they believe the Athenians had moved toward empire by the end of the 470s. Both Herodotus and Thucydides play important roles in conditioning those beliefs.

Whereas Herodotus places Salamis within the context of a number of engagements between Greeks and Persians on land and at sea, Aeschylus conspicuously plays down the importance of land battles. The chorus, comprised of Xerxes' advisors, does refer to the Persian defeat at Marathon (244), but as the audience knows, they are wrong to overlook the importance of Athens' navy. Toward the end of the play the ghost of Darius predicts a Greek victory (on land) at Plataea (816–17), but the battle seems to be an appendage to the defeat of Persia's naval forces (e.g., Podlecki 1966a, 12). From a dramatic perspective, the diminution of the importance of land battles dissociates Darius from Marathon and allows the poet to portray him as an exemplary king, embodying the virtues of moderation and self-control in contrast to the rashness of Xerxes (Pelling 1997a, 10).

Saïd (2002b, 145) may be right to conclude that Herodotus' version of Salamis contains a warning to the Athenians about their own expansionism (more generally, Moles 2002). After all, Herodotus may have been composing his *Histories* well into the 420s or later (Fornara 1971), by which time Athens had firmly established its empire. Some have seen in *Persians* a similar warning (e.g., Rosenbloom 1995). The tragedy's emphasis on sea power seems to point out a parallel between Persia and Athens. The poet's reference to territories that once formed part of the Great King's domain, but which in 472 were part of Athens' alliance (864–906), would seem to highlight the Athenians' inheritance of Xerxes' position. At the very least, in 472 some Athenians – whether supporters or opponents of rule over the allies – may have been wary of the rapid pace and nature of the changes they were witnessing (Raaflaub 1998, 15–19).

The possibility that a reflection of Athens is to be seen in Aeschylus' Persian mirror could explain why the poet asks his audience to look at Salamis through Persian eyes and elicits great sympathy for the Persians, including Xerxes. Reminding us of the compassion that Achilles shows Priam in *Iliad* 24, Pelling (1997a) explains, "[Xerxes'] fate can still capture something of the human condition, and exemplify a human vulnerability which the audience can recognize as their own" (16).

Unlike Xerxes, however, Priam and the Trojans fought to defend their own city, not to conquer Greece. Nor did the Trojan king defy natural boundaries, as Aeschylus implies Xerxes does when he yokes the Hellespont (e.g., 65–71). Even without subscribing to a cultural stereotype of the barbarian East that had been crystallized by the Persian Wars (Hall 1989), many members of Aeschylus' audience had personal reasons to view the Persians with hostility: they would have witnessed the destruction that Xerxes wreaked on their city and lost friends and family in battles against Persian forces. Is it possible, then, that the sympathy the poet elicits for the Persians prompted his audience to imagine their city suffering a fate similar to that of Xerxes? To what extent does Aeschylus draw the recent past into the present – and extend it to a warning about the future?

Because modern readers know the ending of the story of Athenian imperialism and cannot "unread" the narratives of Herodotus or Thucydides, it is difficult to answer this question. There are, however, grounds for caution. That there is only a single passage alluding to Athens' alliance weakens the appeal of a minatory interpretation of the tragedy, as does the play's positive view of Greeks. The messenger reports that the gods saved the city (347). The song he hears at the beginning of the attack is noble: "Sons of Greeks, come, free your land; free your children and wives, and the

temples of your ancestral gods and tombs of your forebears" (402–5). To the queen's question, "Does Athens remain unsacked?" (348), the messenger's response, "When [their] men live, [their] defense is secure" (349), echoes what seems to have become an Athenian commonplace after Salamis (e.g., Thucydides 1.74.3). By placing praise in the mouths of enemies, Aeschylus elevates the Athenians and would seem to agree with the boast of Thucydides' Pericles: "This city alone does not irritate the enemies who attack it, because of the kind of men they are at whose hands they suffer" (2.41.3).

Empire and Democracy

Fourteen years later, when Aeschylus produced his *Oresteia* trilogy, there could be no doubt about the nature of the Athenians' imperialist goals. Their ambitions came at a cost. Despite the Spartans' apparent acquiescence to the change in leadership of Greeks, they were far from content with the Athenians' growing strength and influence. Around 465 the Spartans promised to invade Attica if Thasos rebelled from the Delian League, but were prevented from putting this plan into action by an earthquake and the subsequent threat of a revolt of their helots, state-owned slaves (Thucydides 1.101). The transfer of the treasury of the league may have taken place around this time, given the degree of control Athens was exercising over the Aegean as early as 463: by then all of the islands of the Aegean except the Dorian colonies Thera and Melos were under Athens' control (e.g., Sealey 1976, 252–53; Robertson 1980, 112–19; contra, Rhodes 1992b, 51).

Growing tension between Athens and Sparta came to a head when the Spartans sent back Athenian forces they had requested to help with the siege of rebellious helots on Mount Ithome (around 462). Thucydides says the Spartans suspected the Athenians of meddling within the Peloponnese and mistrusted them because they were not "of the same tribe" – that is, the Athenians were of the Ionian rather than the Dorian Greek ethnos. According to Plutarch the Spartans thought the Athenians were "revolutionaries"(*Cimon* 17). Deeply insulted, the Athenians broke off the alliance still in effect from the Persian Wars and allied themselves with Sparta's enemy, Argos. Soon afterwards, Megara defected from the Peloponnesian League and the conflict known as the First Peloponnesian War began (around 462/61).

Plutarch's explanation for the dismissal of Athenian forces reminds us of the close connection between Athens' domestic and foreign policies (Rhodes 1992a, 73–75). The complaint about revolutionary tendencies most likely alludes to Ephialtes' reform of the Areopagus in 462/61 and its consequences. About Ephialtes we know very little (see Aristotle, *Constitution* 25–26; Plutarch, *Cimon* 10, 13, 15–16). His renown rests on his having successfully deprived the aristocratic council of the Areopagus of much of its power and shifted it from the elite to the Athenian people (Rhodes 1992a, 69–72). Soon after expressing his opposition to these reforms Cimon, who had urged the Athenians to cooperate with Sparta, was ostracized (Plutarch, *Cimon* 17). Quarrels triggered by the reforms are believed to have been responsible for the murder of Ephialtes in the following year. Athens, it would seem, was on the brink of civil war.

Extended military campaigns abroad concurrent with the war against the Peloponnesians may have exacerbated political discontent in Athens. In 460 the Athenians

tried to increase their power at Persia's expense by sending a large fleet to help Egypt rebel from the Great King. The expedition dragged on for six years before its disastrous end: the Athenians and their allies lost 250 ships (Thucydides 1.109–10). Thucydides says that only a few men survived (1.110.1; cf. Diodorus 11.77). Based on epigraphic evidence (M-L 33; *SEG* xxxiv 45), Lewis estimates that Athenian casualties in 459 alone "ran well into four figures" (Lewis 1992a, 113 n. 57). In addition, in 458 the Athenians turned westward, forming an alliance with Egesta in Sicily (*IG* I³ 11; Rhodes 1992b, 53). At around the same time the Athenians began construction of the long walls. Once complete, the walls would transform Athens into a quasi-island, allowing the city to rely on its fleet to defend its harbor and guarantee the imports necessary to survive extended attacks by land. The Spartans and their Athenian sympathizers understood the implications of the project. According to Thucydides, "Some Athenians were secretly trying to bring in [Peloponnesian troops then in Boeotia] with the hope of checking the rule of the people and the building of the long walls" (1.107.4).

Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

The conflicts and resolution of the *Oresteia* are strongly colored by the difficulties the Athenians were facing in the 450s: clashes with the Persians, the First Peloponnesian War, and political upheavals within their own city. An outstanding feature of *Agamemnon* is the poet's use of naval power and protracted warfare conducted in distant lands as a metaphor for a perversion of natural order and a threat to the political stability in Argos. Unlike Homer's Agamemnon, Aeschylus' king is called "the elder leader of Achaean ships" (184–85) and "commander of ships" (1227). Agamemnon wonders how he can become "a deserter of the fleet" (212), and the chorus refers to the corrupt sacrifice of Iphigenia as the "preliminary sacrifice for ships" (227). The expedition acquires additional negative connotations when Ares, god of war, is called the "gold-changer of bodies" (438) and the long siege in distant Troy generates political problems at home (Rosenbloom 1995, 97–98, 105–11).

Eumenides finally brings an end to the ancient cycle of violence we see continued in *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers*. As the trilogy moves from Argos, in the first two plays, to Delphi and Athens in *Eumenides*, so too it moves historically from the earliest generations of the house of Atreus to the trial of Orestes on the Acropolis, where the mythical past borders on the audience's present. But the Acropolis is not the only backdrop shared by *Eumenides* and its fifth-century audience.

The extraordinary topicality of *Eumenides* is undisputed (e.g., Podlecki 1966a, 74–100); for example, despite differences in details, the alliance Orestes promises the Athenians (762–74) alludes to Athens' treaty with Argos in 462. It is equally certain that when Athena gives the jury of Athenian citizens the power to try cases of murder, the poet alludes to Ephialtes' reform of the Areopagus, which still retained this power in 458. In response to the Erinyes' threat to bring civil war in retaliation for Athena's decision to free Orestes, the goddess pleads with them not "to fix among my citizens war against kin, furious battle against one another" (862–63). She asks instead for war against external enemies (864). Once appeased the Erinyes – soon to be the Semnai ("Reverend Goddesses") – pray for the city to be free of civil war (976–87). Macleod cautions that "to pray for a city that it should be free of faction is natural and normal at any time" (1982, 130). Nonetheless, spectators who two or three years earlier had witnessed the factional conflicts sparked by Ephialtes' reforms were likely to be reminded of their own experience.

Athena successfully appeases the Erinyes by incorporating them into the new order: they will be installed in a cave beneath the Hill of Ares, where the cult of the Semnai will be established for them (see Pausanias 1.28.6). If given their due, the chthonic goddesses will guarantee the fecundity of the city. If dishonored, they will bring disease and its political analogue, civil war. Aeschylus' myth of the origins of the cult of the Semnai is yet another link to the world of fifth-century Athens, since it reflects contemporary Athenian religious practices.

Despite the play's topical references and its generally optimistic ending, Aeschylus deftly avoids wholesale endorsement of democratic policies (e.g., Pelling 2000, 171–77), in particular by avoiding exact correspondences with contemporary Athenian events or institutions. The terms of Orestes' alliance, for example, are not those of Athens' alliance in 462 (cf. Thucydides 1.102.4). Instead, as Macleod (1982) has shown, the Athens of *Eumenides* is the mirror image of the world of disorder in *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers*. Athena's decision reverses the confusion of gender relationships that led to Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon. The heir of the rightful king is returned to power over his own house and Argos. As Semnai, the chthonic Erinyes promise real fertility, in contrast to the rain of blood that Clytemnestra described as spurting from her husband's wounds (1388–92). It is equally important that *Eumenides* resolves the trilogy's conflicts by holding tensions in balance. Female is not utterly defeated by male. Despite the negative connotation of naval conflict in *Agamemnon* – or for that matter the negative picture of the king himself – Athena does not rule out war, but prays for war against external enemies. The Erinyes are incorporated into the new order, yet retain their former powers.

The real cessation of the cycle of violence in the *Oresteia* comes when Athena establishes the Areopagus as a court of law. It takes an Olympian to restore order, but she does so with the help of mortals. Aeschylus does not offer an idealized Athens, but he does lend authority to the origins of an Athenian institution by moving it into the past and associating with heroes and gods.

War and Peace

The conflict with Sparta that began in 461 may have encouraged the allies' renewed resistance to Athens' hegemony; irregular contributions recorded on the Athenian tribute lists may be evidence of unrest among Athens' allies in the 450s (Rhodes 1992b, 56–61). If so, it was settled by 449. Discontented cities perhaps thought the Athenians were too busy dealing with other conflicts to be able to respond to rebellion. Moreover, if Athens concluded a formal peace with the Persians around 450 (see Lewis 1992b, 121–27; in 460s, Badian 1993b), the allies would have had all the more reason to break with the alliance: after all, the raison d'être of the Delian League was to protect Greeks from the Persians. And in 446 Euboean cities and Megara (that is, cities close to home) rebelled; soon thereafter the Spartan king Plistoanax led forces of the Peloponnesian League to Attica's doorstep, only to turn back and allow the Athenians to subdue the Euboean revolt. The Spartans soon agreed to the Peace of 446 or Thirty Years' Peace.

According to the Peace, for the most part, each side was to keep what it had at the time of the treaty (Thucydides 1.40.2; however, 1.115.1; Ste. Croix 1972, 293–94). A defeat in Boeotia (late 447) convinced the Athenians to abandon attempts to expand their power on land. In effect, the Thirty Years' Peace agreed to divide leadership of Greeks between Athens, at the head of a naval hegemony, and Sparta, leader of a primarily hoplite-based alliance. Not until 431 would the Spartans and their allies openly challenge the arrangement.

Within Athens democracy had, by mid-century, firmly taken root. Although democracy was not entirely dependent on income from the empire, as is clear from the flourishing democratic system of the fourth century, the evolution of Athens' hegemony into empire helped to nourish its growth. By 454 the Athenians could use the league's treasury to pay their crews, primarily citizens of the lowest class, as well as to finance civic festivals and building projects like the Parthenon. Administration of the empire also brought allies into Athens' courts, stimulating the city's economy; pay for citizen-jurors came from allied tribute as well.

A recent argument by Eder (1998) that *real* democracy, in the sense of political power resting primarily in the hands of regular citizens, did not emerge until after the end of the Peloponnesian War, seems to go too far. But even Rhodes, who objects to such a view, agrees that "democratic leaders of the first generation were aristocrats" (Rhodes 1992a, 91). Sophocles' *Ajax*, traditionally dated to the period of the Peace, engages with the persistent tension in Athens between mass and elite.

Sophocles' *Ajax*

Although Sophocles adheres to the traditional outline of myth, he adds several new features (Rose 1995, 63–64). The audience is offered competing criteria for the army's decision to award the arms of Achilles to Odysseus: moderation, physical strength, obedience to laws. The poet also emphasizes Ajax's madness. The most pronounced departure from Homer's picture of Ajax is to put him in command of sailors – and not particularly brave ones at that – an innovation reminiscent of Aeschylus' treatment of Agamemnon. Repeated references to Salamis strengthen the connection to the navy (Rose 1995, 69–71).

As the tragedy moves from the indictment of Ajax to his defense, Sophocles gradually rehabilitates the warrior in anticipation of his final victory, the awarding of burial to his corpse. Whereas the prologue presents Ajax's madness as a moral flaw and punishment for immoderate behavior, by the end of the tragedy he seems a victim of the arbitrary exercise of divine power. Although Ajax is initially isolated from his society, his "insane isolation . . . is finally transformed into a stirring evocation of his unique lonely stance as defender" (Rose 1995, 69).

In the poet's attempts "to square the logic of the myth with the logic of [the] *apologia*" Rose identifies silences that point to contradictions in Athens itself. Sophocles' association of Ajax with "both the human rootedness of Hector and the absolutist isolation of Achilles" (64) draws the audience back toward the mythic world of Homer. At the same time, his command of sailors would have reminded the fifth-century audience of themselves and of the great aristocratic generals responsible for repelling the Persians and for the prosperity that the expansion of the empire brought their city. In the last third of the play, Sophocles blurs the tension between

the *dēmos* and aristocracy by emphasizing the meanness and tyrannical behavior of the Atreidae in contrast to Ajax. "Big" men, such as Ajax, after all, are needed to protect the "little" (158–59) from the likes of Agamemnon and Menelaus. At the end of the play Ajax – or rather the idea of Ajax – inspires his illegitimate half-brother Teucer to imitate his behavior and defy the Atreidae. Thus Sophocles offers "a process of the democratization of an aristocratic ideal" (Rose 1995, 77).

The Early Years of the Peloponnesian War

When the war began most Greeks thought that it would last no more than three years and that the Athenians would quickly give in (Thucydides 5.14.3, 7.28.3). Instead it took four years for the fighting merely to reach its peak. By then the usual pattern was for the Spartans to invade Attica each spring, while the Athenians sent a fleet to harass the Peloponnese.

Frustrations grew as the war dragged on. In addition to watching the Spartans ravage their crops each year, soon after the war began the Athenians suffered repeated attacks of the plague; siege operations in Chalcidice were depleting their treasury. A rebellion of the cities on Lesbos (428), led by the Mytileneans, tried them further. The Athenians put down the revolt, but their initial decision to condemn all the Mytilenean men to death and sell the women and children into slavery reflects the seriousness of the rebellion's threat. But hostilities had yet to escalate to the point that the Athenians were blind to the savagery of their initial decision, which they quickly rescinded (Thucydides 3.49).

So, too, by the first Olympic festival of the war (428), the Peloponnesian League showed signs of strain. Although the allies who had convened at the festival agreed to a double invasion of Athens by land and sea, many of them failed to muster at the isthmus. Thucydides explains that they were "both in the middle of harvesting and tired of campaigning" (3.15.2). That the Spartans were willing to send a fleet to Lesbos to help with the rebellion the next spring further suggests that frustration – and perhaps fear of losing their grip on their alliance – was driving them toward more daring undertakings.

At around the same time, the Athenians began to act more aggressively. Before the outbreak of war Pericles asked the Athenians to think of themselves as islanders (Thucydides 1.143.5) and warned them not to try to acquire more or voluntarily undertake additional risks while they were waging war (1.144.1); he adhered to this advice even after the plague struck Athens (2.61.2). In 427, however, the Athenians captured the island of Minoa, off the coast of Megara. In the following year the general Demosthenes defeated troops consisting of Peloponnesians and their allies in Amphilochia and discredited the Spartans there by allowing important Peloponnesians to depart in secret, deserting the rest of the troops (3.109.2). The Spartans may have responded to increased pressure on their periphery by establishing a colony outside the Peloponnese, Heracleia Trachinia (Thucydides 3.92–93).

Euripides' *Children of Heracles*

More than half of our surviving tragedies were composed after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. A number of these plays have been mined for specific historical

context – in my view with limited success. Zuntz (1955, 81–88), who discusses direct historical allusions in Euripides, is convinced that Eurystheus' promise at the end of the *Children of Heracles* to protect the Athenians' land from a future invasion by the children of Heracles (1032–36) can only allude to the Spartans' invasion in 430. Spartan kings were the putative descendants of Heracles, and in 431 the invasion led by King Archidamus spared a large part of Attica; afterwards he would show no restraint. Pohle (1994, 6) is rightly skeptical: there is no reason to assume that the predicted invasion had yet taken place or that the play could not have been performed before the outbreak of war. Moreover, to sustain his argument, Zuntz must assign [illegible] irony to the words of Heracles' friend Iolaus (82). After the Athenians have protected Heracles' children from the Argives, he advises them, "Never raise a hostile spear against [the Athenians'] land" (313). As we will see when we turn to *Suppliants*, if there are historical allusions in Euripidean tragedies, they are oblique; features such as anachronisms (Easterling 1985a), touches of sophistic rhetoric, and contemporary character types give the plays their topicality.

Pylos and the Peace

In the spring of 425 the Athenians tried to tighten a circle around their enemy by establishing an outpost on a deserted promontory at Pylos on the west coast of the Peloponnese (Thucydides 4.3–6). Initially Spartan leaders showed little concern, but when the king and his troops in Attica received news of the occupation, they quickly returned from their spring invasion and tried to dislodge the Athenians from their outpost. Due to the failure of the Spartan commanders to seal off Pylos' harbor, Athenian ships trapped 420 of their men on the island of Sphacteria (Thucydides 4.14.2, 38.5). A quick assessment of the situation convinced the Spartans to sue for peace – unilaterally.

The terms of Sparta's proposal were reasonable. In return for the men on the island, they offered peace and friendship. The Spartans expected the Athenians to be willing to make peace (2.59.2), since they had made an earlier offer, which the Spartans had rejected (Thucydides 4.21.1). In the meantime, however, the political environment in Athens had changed. Pericles, who had advised the Athenians to adopt a mostly defensive posture (1.143–44), was dead, and the Athenians had become increasingly aggressive. Demagogues like Cleon wanted more than a return to the conditions of 431, as the Spartans' proposal implied. By insisting on public negotiations, which would expose the degree to which the Spartans were willing to compromise their allies' interests, the Athenians, in effect, rejected the offer of peace.

Attacking Sphacteria proved to be a difficult task. Just as the Athenians were about to abandon their blockade, a strange series of events allowed them to launch a successful attack and surround the soldiers on the island. While admitting a degree of hyperbole, Thucydides likens the situation to the Spartans' stand against the Persians at Thermopylae (on numbers see Wilson 1979, 104–5). At Pylos, however, the Athenians held their fire long enough for the Spartans to consult with their commanders. To the astonishment of the Greek world, when instructed, "On your own decide what to do concerning yourselves, as long as you do not act disgracefully" (4.38.3), the Spartans on Sphacteria surrendered.

The consequences of the surrender were devastating for Sparta. Having already forfeited a significant number of ships, which the Athenians had refused to return following the latest negotiations, as well as the trust of their allies, they now lost both men and territory. The 292 men held prisoner by the Athenians (Thucydides 4.38.5) would effectively prevent the Peloponnesians from invading Attica. Pylos would provide a sanctuary for runaway slaves in the heart of the enemy's homeland and an outpost from which to foment rebellion. Perhaps most important, the Spartans themselves lost their nerve and resolve.

The Athenians were clearly buoyed by their unexpected success. Soon afterwards they invaded Corinthian territory, secured the control of the entrance to the gulf of Corinth, captured the island of Cythera off the south coast of the Peloponnese, and almost took Megara—all the while trying to secure a foothold in Boeotia. During the same summer (424), they planned a daring double-pronged attack on Boeotia. But Athens would not enjoy its good fortune for long. The Spartan general Brasidas quickly forced the Athenians to withdraw from Megara. Then with an army of a thousand mercenaries and seven hundred helots (Thucydides 4.78.1, 80.5) he marched to the northeast toward Thrace to help the Macedonian king Perdiccas and the Athenian allies in Chalcidice in rebellion from the earliest years of the war. Brasidas' daring campaign reversed Sparta's fortunes and pressured the Athenians into a negotiated peace.

Through a combination of military and diplomatic skills, Brasidas very nearly gained control of Chalcidice, an area rich in gold, silver, and timber for shipbuilding. He was also helped by the slow response of the Athenians. Not until they realized that Brasidas had control of the allied city of Amphipolis and was threatening [illegible] did they make a move. If the Athenians lost control of Amphipolis, the path would be open for their enemies to march to the Hellespont (Thucydides 4.108.1). As the final days of the war would demonstrate, if the Spartans could control the Hellespont they could starve Athens into submission.

Despite the successes in Boeotia and Chalcidice, the Spartans in power seem to have been more interested in retrieving the prisoners from Pylos and establishing peace than in defeating the Athenians. In the midst of Brasidas' campaign the two sides negotiated a truce. Brasidas, however, refused to return the town of Scione in accordance with the terms of the new agreement. At the instigation of Cleon, the Athenians voted to kill all the Scioneans, although they did not reduce the city for another two years. The harsh treatment that the Athenians inflicted on Scione reflected the fear that Brasidas' expedition had roused. As we have seen, on the occasion of the revolt in Lesbos, the Athenians had initially voted to kill all the men and sell the women and children into slavery, but on second thought reconsidered the savagery of their decision. By the eleventh year of the war they were no longer as reasonable. When they finally took Scione in the summer of 421, they carried out the punishment that the Mytileneans so narrowly escaped (Thucydides 5.32.1). According to Ducrey (1968, 117–22), the fate of the Scioneans is the first sure example of such severe punishment inflicted by Athenians on a captured Greek city. (On the Thracian elements in *Hecuba* see Gregory 1999, xiii–xxv.)

Euripides' *Suppliants*

The campaign in Boeotia that distracted the Athenians from Brasidas' initiative in Chalcidice ended in their defeat at Delium. Bowie (1997) has revived the argument that the Thebans' refusal to return the Argive dead in Euripides' *Suppliants* (produced around 422) would have reminded an Athenian audience of this battle. Not all

scholars agree (e.g., Mills 1997, 91–97). The return of the dead after battle was undoubtedly an important religious matter throughout antiquity. Aeschylus, in fact, seems to have treated the same subject in *Eleusinians* (Zuntz 1955, 4). Nonetheless, just as mention of civil war in *Eumenides* is likely to have reminded Aeschylus' audience of the political situation after Ephialtes' reforms, so in Euripides' play the refusal of the Thebans to allow burial of their foes could have reminded the Athenians of a similar incident involving Boeotians in the recent past. Bowie concedes that there are differences between the mythical and historical situations, and tries to show how the poet filters contemporary events to complicate the audience's response.

Equally important, as Bowie notes, is the cluster of features in the play that forcefully draw the mythical Athens of *Suppliants* toward its fifth-century counterpart. Although Theseus seems to have monarchical powers, he refers to his city as if it were democratic; he must consult the Athenian people before deciding to help recover the dead; he echoes the language of the assembly (438–39) and refers to magistracies (406–7). In her speech at 297–331 Aethra justifies intervening in the affairs of other states, as was Athens' wont in the fifth century, and speaks of the law of all Hellas (311), referred to as well by speakers in Thucydides (e.g., 4.97.2). The eulogies at the end of the play would have recalled Athenian funeral orations. The most glaring anachronisms are the references to "written laws" (433) and a tripod with an inscription (1201–4; on writing cf. Easterling 1985a, 3–6).

Bowie's article (52) also raises an important question about the limits assumed to have been imposed on tragedy after Phrynichus was fined for reminding the Athenians of "suffering close to home." Was Euripides treading on dangerous ground? Events in Euripides' tragedy turn out better than they did in real life, where the Athenians were twice defeated by the Boeotians. Nevertheless, by raising the audience's emotional investment, could the powerful contemporary resonances of this and other Euripidean plays have counted against the playwright when it came to awarding first prize at the City Dionysia?

Recoveries and Reversals

Thucydides contends that the treaty of 421 did not bring genuine peace (5.26.2). Powerful members of Sparta's alliance rejected it, and although the Spartans recovered the soldiers captured at Pylos, few of the other terms of the treaty were carried out. But the respite from battle offered both sides a chance to regroup. As early as 419 the impetuous Athenian aristocrat Alcibiades was stirring up trouble in the Peloponnese. The Spartans showed signs of their old selves when they defeated the Argive alliance in a hoplite battle at Mantinea. In 416 the Athenians captured the island of Melos, a Spartan colony, then put to death the adult males and sold the women and children into slavery (5.116.4). In the same year the Athenians voted to send a large expedition to Sicily under the command of Nicias, Alcibiades, and Lamachus. Technically the Peace still held; not until 414 would the Athenians openly break it by sending help to Argive allies under attack by the Spartans (6.105.1).

By 413 the Athenians seemed to be on the brink of defeat. By this time Alcibiades had fled to Sparta after being recalled to stand trial on charges of impiety in Athens (Thucydides 6.61.1) and for two years had been helping the enemy. The Spartans were at Athens' back door; the Attic deme of Decelea had been transformed into an

outpost for the enemy and a haven for runaway slaves (7.27.3–5). The Athenians had suffered the total destruction of their forces in Sicily (7.87) and feared both a direct attack on the city and revolt among their allies. In response to the crisis the Athenians appointed a board of elders, including the poet Sophocles, to govern the city (8.1.3). The following year, Chios, one of the few allies still in possession of its navy, went over to the Spartans (8.14.2).

Over the final seven years of the war the Athenians showed remarkable resilience. Although consistently short of funds, they rebuilt their navy. With the help of Alcibiades, who had shifted his allegiance once again and had been elected general of the fleet stationed at Samos (Thucydides 8.81), the Athenians would go on to win a number of impressive victories in the east.

Alcibiades eventually returned to Athens (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.4), but his recall was a mixed blessing. He furthered the cause of oligarchs in Athens, who overturned the democracy in 411 (Thucydides 8.64–70). Their violent reign was unstable and short-lived. The fleet at Samos swore to remain democratic and to continue to fight the Peloponnesians (8.75). They went so far as to form an assembly and elect their own generals. In effect, they became an Athenian government in exile.

According to Thucydides, internal divisions were the real cause of Athens' defeat (2.65.11), and Xenophon's account of the final years of the war seem to bear him out. After winning naval victories at Cynosema and Cyzicus (Thucydides 8.104–7; Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.1) and regaining control of much of the Hellespont (*Hellenica* 1.3), the Athenians failed to drive home their successes. Without tribute to fund the fleet, commanders had to extort pay for their rowers from cities in Asia Minor and the islands. During one such excursion to raise money, Alcibiades made the mistake of leaving his forces in the hands of a subordinate, who foolishly exposed the fleet to a successful attack by the Spartan commander Lysander (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.5). The Athenians, as Alcibiades well knew, were unlikely to accept his excuses. Rather than risk their wrath he fled to a stronghold he had prepared for himself in the Chersonese (*Hellenica* 1.5).

Despite a resounding naval victory, the Athenian generals at Arginusae (406) were less fortunate than Alcibiades. In the aftermath of battle, a storm prevented them from rescuing rowers who had been swept overboard. When they were brought to trial for neglecting their duty, they felt the full force of the Athenians' anger. Collectively (and therefore illegally) condemned, some fled the city, while others were put to death (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.6–7). Because of the trial the Athenians forfeited the services of some of their most capable commanders, including the younger Pericles (Jameson 1956, 222–24). They also rejected yet another Spartan offer of peace (Aristotle, *Constitution* 34).

Through jealousy, suspicion, or sheer incompetence, in the following year (405), Athenian commanders assigned to the fleet at the Hellespont failed to take to heart a warning from Alcibiades that their position at Aegospotami was vulnerable to attack by the Peloponnesian fleet. The details of the battle of Aegospotami are not clear, but the outcome is. Of the 180 ships in the Athenian fleet, only nine survived. The Athenian general Conon sailed with eight to Cyprus; one ship returned to Athens with the appalling news. Some Athenians escaped overland to Sestos; the rest, perhaps three to four thousand men, were captured and put to death (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.1). Lysander controlled the Hellespont and with it Athens' grain. By

forcing all the Athenians he found in Asia to return to the city, he hastened the famine that eventually forced Athens to submit (*Hellenica* 2.2). By 404 the Athenians had torn down their walls, and with Sparta's blessing the city was ruled by a council of Athenian oligarchs, the so-called Thirty Tyrants.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Euripides' *Orestes*

Soon after the overthrow of democracy in Athens in 411 Sophocles produced *Philoctetes* (409). Bowie (1997) has reexamined the parallels between the protagonist of this play and the historical Alcibiades and concluded that the similarities would have raised in Sophocles' audience religious as well as moral and political questions about Alcibiades' recall. In the play the Greeks need to retrieve Philoctetes to save their forces at Troy; Alcibiades was recalled to the Athenian fleet at Samos in 410 with the hope that his leadership could save Athens. Both figures are under a curse, Philoctetes because he was bitten by a sacred snake when he entered Chryses' grove, Alcibiades because of his role in the desecration of the herms and profanation of the mysteries prior to the Sicilian expedition (Thucydides 6.27–29, 53–61; Andocides, *On the Mysteries*; on the curse see Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 22).

The similarities, however, are outweighed by differences (Jameson 1956, Calder 1971). Philoctetes, in contrast to Alcibiades, is not a master of intrigue. Nor does Philoctetes want to return to Troy, as Alcibiades schemed to return to Athens. Even Bowie concedes that Odysseus as well as Neoptolemus exhibit Alcibiadian features (Jameson 1956); Odysseus, like Alcibiades (Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 23), possesses a chameleon-like ability to adapt and a belief in the power of words (Debnar 2001, 201–20; Podlecki 1966b).

Still, *Philoctetes* is without a doubt colored by contemporary concerns. For Rose (1976) the setting of the play and the introduction of Neoptolemus into the myth highlight the play's engagement with sophistic thought. Philoctetes' isolated life on Lemnos associates him with "primitive" stage in the Sophists' scheme of human progress. His joy at being able to communicate with fellow Greeks, the mutual sympathy felt by Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, and the bonds of friendship that they begin to form represent the second or "social compact" stage. The figure of Odysseus ushers in the Sophists' final stage, "contemporary society," with its developed political, economic, and social institutions.

In Rose's view, Sophocles challenges the Sophists' privileging of culture (*nomos*) over nature (*phusis*). The Sophists' attitude toward culture, education in particular, as Rose explains, was complicated. On the one hand, their value as teachers depended on the premise that "nature" could be changed, a potentially democratic view. Yet they could not dismiss "nature" altogether, since many of their patrons were aristocrats by birth. Instead, they claimed that training could bring out the best in nature, while a good nature could also be corrupted.

The young Neoptolemus has two instructors. Odysseus first convinces him to use deceit by claiming that the good of the Greek army justifies the base means they must use to lure Philoctetes to Troy. The argument of advantage, in other words, trumps that of justice in this play, as it often does in the debates in Thucydides (e.g., 1.32–43). Neoptolemus has learned his rhetoric lessons well: when asked by Philoctetes, "Child, do you not know who it is you look upon?" Neoptolemus

artfully dodges the question: "How could I recognize a man I have never seen?" (249–50).

Philoctetes offers Neoptolemus competing lessons: claims of friendship and of favor in return for favor outweigh the pursuit of glory and gain. All that Philoctetes asks is to be returned to his family. After witnessing Philoctetes' suffering first-hand Neoptolemus' resolve wavers; he reveals his own duplicity in the hope that candor combined with persuasion can convince his new friend to help the Greeks take Troy. When Odysseus appears, seizes the bow, abandons Philoctetes, and orders Neoptolemus to depart, expedience and deceit seem to have won the day. But Neoptolemus soon returns in defiance, restores the bow to Philoctetes, and finally agrees to escort him home. In short, Rose argues, in the debate between nature and nurture, Sophocles comes down squarely on the side of nature by affirming the nobility of both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus.

In contrast, Calder (1971) contends that Neoptolemus is cleverly deceptive throughout the play. Goldhill (1990) also points out that the ending of the play complicates the picture. The sudden epiphany of the recently apotheosized Heracles sets the story back on its traditional trajectory: both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus are willing to go to Troy after all. At the same time, Heracles' warning to "be pious in matters concerning the gods" is likely to have reminded the audience that after the fall of Troy Neoptolemus murders Priam at his household altar and hurls Astyanax from the walls of Troy. Is nature really stronger than nurture? True, Philoctetes will win glory by killing Paris, but glory is a heroic value that he has forcefully repudiated throughout the play.

Rather than a specific debate about Alcibiades, it is much easier to see in the double-dealing and subterfuge of this play a more general reflection of Athens around the time of the oligarchic revolution of 411 (although the two are, of course, related; Calder 1971). When, for example, Philoctetes entrusts his bow to Neoptolemus, he shows himself unable to distinguish between friends and enemies. Thucydides offers a similar picture of Athens of 411. The authors of the oligarchic revolution promised the people that a council of five thousand would rule the city. No such council was ever formed. But when the Athenians finally resisted and decided to tear down a wall in the Piraeus that would have allowed the Spartans to enter their city, Thucydides says that rather than calling on the people for help, they called out to "whoever wanted the Five Thousand to rule instead of the Four Hundred" because they were afraid that this group might actually exist "and that in speaking to one of them they might make a dangerous mistake through ignorance" (Thucydides 8.92.11). At the same time, as Pelling (2000, 187–88) suggests, the questions raised by *Philoctetes* are far from one-dimensional. The Athenians were in danger of losing the war. Circumstances must have complicated their responses to Neoptolemus' disobedience to Odysseus and to Philoctetes' stubborn refusal to compromise, both of which put the safety of the entire Greek army at stake.

Euripides' *Orestes*, whose plot takes up where Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* ends, is set in an even more troubling world of factions and wavering loyalties. One of the play's outstanding features is the sketches it offers of a wide range of political types. We first encounter members of a faction of young aristocrats, Orestes, Pylades, and Electra (as in Thucydides 8.65.2; Hall 1993, 269–71). Next we meet the noncommittal Menelaus, who pries from Orestes all the information he can get about

which party has the upper hand in Argos; after promising to help his nephew (if only in words), he does not show up at the assembly where Orestes argues his case. The messenger who brings Electra news of Orestes' trial describes four speakers in addition to Orestes. Talthybius (formerly Agamemnon's herald, now "under the power of the strong") only "half-heartedly" praises Agamemnon, while reproaching Orestes for the bad precedent he has set concerning the treatment of parents (887–97). Diomedes receives a mixed response to his proposal that banishment be the punishment (898–902). An Argive of dubious citizenship (902–16) is said to bluster and to rely on outcries from the crowd (see Bers 1985). Orestes has one defender, a manly fellow (*andreios*) who warns that men will refuse to go off to war if they suspect their wives will be unfaithful (917–30). Perhaps recognizing the effectiveness of this man's argument, Orestes adds (if his speech is not an interpolation) that if women like his mother go unpunished, men will be enslaved by their wives (931–42). The argument, however, is less effective coming from Orestes, and he and his friends are condemned to death. The entire trial, as these sketches suggest, is conducted in terms of advantage rather than justice or piety. There is no mention of Apollo's urging Orestes to murder Clytemnestra, although the god's role is mentioned at the beginning of the play and Apollo himself will appear at its end.

The poet seems to have invited his audience to see a reflection of Athens in this play. As Easterling (1997b, 28–33) observes, *Orestes*' Argos is featureless. The lack of specific details about this setting allows the audience to project onto Argos the image of their own city. We can never know for certain how distorted or parodic this reflection may have seemed. In antiquity there were attempts to identify "real" Athenian politicians, like Cleophon or Theramenes, behind the cast of *Orestes* (on Orestes and Antiphon see Hall 1993, 267). As with *Philoctetes*, however, the vagueness of the parallels makes it difficult to see more than types. The fifth-century Athenian audience may have perceived through these types many more men than the few individuals we know about from Thucydides and Xenophon (Pelling 2000, 166).

The striking differences between Euripides' *Orestes* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* may also point to broad changes in the political world of Athens over the course of the fifty years between the two performances. At the very end of Euripides' play, for example, Apollo suddenly appears not only to order Orestes to go to Parrhasia and then to Athens (where he goes in Aeschylus' trilogy), but also to whisk Helen off to the heavens and to arrange marriages between Pylades and Electra as well as between Orestes and Hermione (whom Orestes has just threatened to kill). There is no divine authorization of the Argive council or of human law, as in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, nor is there any sense of an old order being incorporated in the new. The torches of the procession that lead Aeschylus' Semnai to their new abode in *Orestes* become torches about to set fire to the palace (Hall 1993, 281). As in *Eumenides*, violence in *Orestes* is brought to an end, but not by the establishment of a court that will continue beyond the limits of the performance. Rather, it is ended by the delayed intervention of Apollo. Whether this god can be depended on for future help is left open. Several years before the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus' audience had survived one threat of civil war. Euripides' audience was just on the brink of another (see the nuanced discussion of Pelling 2000, 184–88).

Epilogue: 401 and Beyond

The rule of the Thirty Tyrants in Athens lasted only as long as Lysander retained influence in Sparta. In 403 the Spartan king Pausanias negotiated a peace between the democratic exiles, in control of the Piraeus, and the men in the city (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.4). The restoration of democracy and a general amnesty soon followed. The city's remarkable resilience may explain why Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, which celebrates Athens, could be produced five years after it was composed and three years after Athens' defeat. Kirkwood (1986; also Blundell 1993) points to another reason. The play is set, not in the city itself, the seat of bygone imperial power, but in the deme of Colonus, praised in the choral odes for its fertility and bounty. As Kirkwood observes, when Oedipus arrives at Colonus he first asks, "What land have we come to?" and the power Oedipus offers to Theseus in exchange for accepting him as suppliant in the grove of the Eumenides is chthonic power, power in the land itself (1986, 104–9).

The emphasis on the city as a collection of citizens instead of the city as *both* its land and people marked the beginning of Athens' naval hegemony and rise to imperial power. When the Athenians took to their ships under threat of a Persian invasion, they fought for a city that existed only in their "faintest hope" (Thucydides 1.74.4). On the final retreat from Syracuse the Athenian general Nicias tried to instill courage in his soldiers – the remnants of the rowers that manned the fleet – by telling them that men make the city, not walls or ships (7.77.7). When an oligarchy was established in Athens, the fleet in Samos became the democracy in exile (8.75).

At the end of his life Sophocles did not reject the city or its democracy. Rather he saw in Athens something more than the sum of its imperial power. In Theseus' treatment of the suppliant Oedipus we find the return of *epieikeia*, the prized sense of fairness and justice, which the Athenians had forfeited at Melos and Scione (Kirkwood 1986, 100–103). The poet's vision proved correct: the Peloponnesian War did not destroy Athens, or the Athenian democracy, or, for that matter, tragedy. All continued to flourish well into the fourth century.

FURTHER READING

On the relationship of tragedy to fifth-century history, two valuable collections of essays are Goff 1995a and Pelling 1997c. Goff's introduction (1995b) and Pelling's conclusion (1997b) are especially important. The care that Rose 1995 takes to articulate his theoretical assumptions and methodology is exemplary. Bowie 1997 offers a useful catalogue of candidates for historical tragedies (including fragments).

Pelling 2000 is a more broad-ranging study by a single author and complements the collections above, especially in its discussions of the reactions of the fifth-century Athenians to tragedy. Since we know so little about these reactions, much of what Pelling says is speculative, but he exposes many unspoken assumptions that modern readers bring to ancient texts. On a possible change in fifth-century audiences see Sommerstein 1997.

Interest in the ancient audience is connected to what scholars think tragic poets were doing (or thought they were doing) when they produced their plays. For an overview of different

perceptions of tragedy's political and social roles see Conraidie (1981) and Saïd (1998). In response to Winkler and Zeitlin 1990 and to Sommerstein et al. 1993, see Griffin 1998. Meier 1993 assumes an essential tie between tragedy and democracy; Boedeker and Raaflaub 1998 question and explore this assumption.

The revised edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* is addressed to a more advanced audience than the general public to which the earlier edition was directed. Contributors provide numerous references and draw attention to areas of disagreement. On sources and chronology see Rhodes 1992a and 1992b, and Lewis 1992a and 1992b. Gomme's section "Sources other than Thucydides" (1: 29–84) in his introduction to Gomme 1945–56 is still useful and should be read in conjunction with Hornblower 1996, 1–19: "General remarks: the relation of this commentary to *HCT*." For a quick list of sources, see the succinct notes at the end of each section in Sealey 1976. On the Athenian empire, see Meiggs 1972; for a more basic introduction, Rhodes 1985. On the chronology of the Pentecontaetia in addition to Rhodes (above) see Unz 1986 and Badian 1993c.

CHAPTER TWO

Tragedy and Religion: The Problem of Origins

Scott Scullion

This chapter deals with the origins of tragedy and, in that context, considers whether and to what extent tragic drama was a religious phenomenon. Opinion on these matters rests on painstaking interpretation of brief and often obscure ancient texts, and the scholarly literature is correspondingly vast and controversial. I here analyze much of the primary ancient evidence with a minimum of doxographical detail, referring to influential studies written or available in English where further bibliographical guidance can be found. We must evaluate as best we can what evidence we have for the origins of tragedy before hazarding any conclusions about its religious or ritual nature; this may seem obvious, but the assumption that tragedy is by origin a religious phenomenon is so common and ingrained that the question is often begged.

Aristotle on Origins

Modern discussion of the issue of origins is in large part an extended commentary on Aristotle's brief treatment in the *Poetics*. The key passages are these:

> Coming into being from an improvisational beginning – both it [tragedy] and comedy, the former from those leading the dithyramb, the latter from those leading the phallic songs, which even at the present day are still a customary practice in many cities – it was enhanced little by little as they developed each element of it that became manifest, and after passing through many changes tragedy ceased to change, since it had attained its own nature. Aeschylus first increased the number of actors from one to two, diminished the choral elements, and made speech play the leading role; Sophocles introduced three actors and scene-painting. And then, with respect to grandeur, because it changed from being satyric [*dia to ek saturikou metabalein*] it was late that tragedy left behind simple plots and humorous diction and became dignified. In addition its meter became the iambic trimeter instead of the trochaic tetrameter; at first they used the tetrameter because the poetry was satyric and more closely connected with dance . . . (1449a9–23)

> . . . As for the number of episodes and the other elements, how they are said to have been embellished, let us take all these things as read, for it would perhaps be a big task to go through them one by one. (1449a28–31)