

DYNASTY AND FAMILY IN THE ATHENIAN CITY STATE: A VIEW FROM ATTIC TRAGEDY

Greek tragedy shows a serious preoccupation with family concerns. Some of these concerns seem beyond the scope of ordinary family experience, particularly in the matter of the behaviour of women. The apparent discrepancy between historical evidence and the literary presentation of women has long been noted and variously explained.¹ I want to suggest that this discrepancy reflects a way of distinguishing between the objectives and behaviour of the great aristocratic clans and of those families which were neither so wealthy nor so politically influential. A dichotomy is thus presented between dynastic interests and the interests of the ordinary family as a well-regulated part of the Athenian city state.

In using the terms *dynasty* and *dynastic* I take a term, *δυναστεία*, that in classical Greek was used to refer to the acquiring and keeping of power. This is the power wielded by a clan that operates as a political entity in its own right, and has interests that are not best served by co-operating with a collectivity of families. The development of the concept of this kind of power² can be seen, for example, in comparing Thucydides 3.62.4 and certain passages in Aristotle's *Politics*; Thucydides is here presenting the separate claims of the Thebans and the Plataeans after the collapse of Plataea. The Thebans excuse their former collaboration with the Persians on the ground that their form of government at that time was not democratic or even oligarchic but 'very close to tyranny, the power of a few men'. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, also sees this behaviour as a dangerous development of oligarchy, but in addition points out the dangers of hereditary power in 1286b23ff., 1292b5–10. From 1292b on he discusses the problems deriving from hereditary wealth and power and the cultivation of influential friends – 'power of this kind is close to monarchy' (1293a32). The term used in these contexts is *δυναστεία*; it should be noted that this

¹ See, for example, Froma I. Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Myth-making in the *Oresteia*', in John Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan (eds), *Women in the Ancient World* (Albany, 1984), 159–94; J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right* (Princeton, 1967), esp. pp. 157–72; Simon Pembroke, 'Women in Charge: the Function of Alternatives in Early Greek Tradition and the Ancient Idea of Matriarchy', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 30 (1967), 1–35; Simon Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: the Oresteia* (Cambridge, 1984); Philip Slater, *The Glory of Hera* (Boston, 1968); George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (London, 1973), especially chapters XV–XVIII; Charles Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986), especially chapters 1, 11; Synnøve des Bouvrie, *Women in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1991); J. Gould, 'Law, Custom, and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens', *JHS* 100 (1980), 38–59, p. 40, who warns that 'demonstrably false assertions are characteristic of this particular field of inquiry'.

With reference to the topic of this paper, see S. C. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London, 1978), pp. 202–3; it is to be noted that Humphreys finds the 'exceptionally important part' played by kinship and family in Attic drama 'unexpected in view of the dominance of public life in Athens'.

² In general, the term refers to the degree of power exercised, and may be opposed to the idea of democracy, as in Aeschines, *Ctes.* 114.9, or likened to tyranny (Demosthenes, *Phil.* 4.4.7). Demosthenes also (*Epit.* 25.3) speaks of *δυναστεία* in connection with a few men, as Thucydides does in the passage cited here.

term and others derived from it do not necessarily refer to the kind of behaviour that forms the object of this study, and must always be considered within their context.

The term *dynasty* has since come to refer specifically to a family which acquires and keeps power by means of marriage and inheritance. It is thus useful as a way to designate the wealthy and powerful families whose career was briefly interrupted by the rise of the Greek city state. The tension between family and state will receive due attention in this discussion, but the point I want to make first is that this tension varies in intensity according to class. A family unit accustomed to wielding enormous power and influence both within and outside the city state, and using its wealth to further its own interests and no others, will hardly have the same priorities and objectives as the family unit which depends on the community for its security and even livelihood. On the other hand, the success of a dynasty depends on the affections and ties that hold any family together – or drive it apart. These ties, as tragedy demonstrates, have a greater effect where the relationship is close, for both great loyalty and great disaffection can produce catastrophic results.

When referring to family interests on the other hand, I have in mind the family strictly as a unit of the city state, not part of the wider network of aristocratic clans. While there is no denying that a clan has the characteristics of a family, when it is a part of a co-operating community certain changes must take place in its structure and internal dynamics. These changes are particularly noticeable in the lives of women. The kind of behaviour that I term 'dynastic' is characterised by a high level of interference by women in the public and private life of the family.

Clan is another term that is useful in this discussion. In referring to an association of family units with common ancestry, it can describe the aristocratic families that dominated Athenian political life until the time of Cleisthenes, or it can refer for my purposes to an international political network based on an extended family unit.³ The term is thus useful in rendering the notion of γένος,⁴ which is certainly the term favoured in tragedy in this kind of context.

In addition to conveying the idea of relatedness, the term *genos* may define or generalise, as in expressions such as τοιοῦτον πᾶν τὸ βάρβαρον γένος, conveying 'how like a barbarian', or 'the gods', 'a woman', etc. In either case the suggestion is of what is inborn or essential. By contrast, the term οἶκος⁵ is used in a material sense. It can refer not only to a family as part of the *polis* but also to the politically entrepreneurial family unit. The *oikos* is frequently seen as the private sphere,⁶ opposed to the public life of the *polis*, but it is not as simple as that. The ideal of the *polis* effectively required the *oikos* to be delimited as a sphere of private concerns, when before the rise of the city state a wealthy and influential family could expect to lead a public life in its own right. Nonetheless, in the time of the city state there was

³ The accounts of early Athenian political history in Herodotus 5, and chs. 66–9 in particular, show the importance of dynastic concerns during the period before and after the foundations of democracy were laid.

⁴ S. C. Humphreys, op. cit. (n. 1), notes (p. 196) that it is generally agreed that *genos* organisation was largely confined to the nobility. A striking objection to the principles embodied by the *genos* is uttered by the Danaides in Aesch. *Supp.* 335: 'I have no wish to become a body slave (δμῳός) to this Egyptian tribe.'

⁵ See S. C. Humphreys, *The Family, Women and Death* (London and Boston, 1983), p. 67. Also D. M. McDowell, 'The *Oikos* in Athenian Law', *CQ* 39 (1989), 10–21, defending the notion that the term must refer to the whole of the property, and making the point that Athenian law did not recognise the rights of families but of persons.

⁶ Lin Foxhall, 'Household, Gender and Property in Classical Athens', *CQ* 39 (1989), 22–44, in discussing this question notes (p. 31) that the head of the household mediated between public and private life, and pays particular attention to ambiguities of language and position, pp. 30–1.

always the possibility that the *oikos* would exploit the public possibilities of its existence as a private unit. This is the cause of the tension between public and private life; the power that is condemned so strongly in tragedy⁷ is the power for which the great dynasties competed and strove.

The ambitions of the oligarchs can hardly have been conducive to the welfare of the city state. I want to suggest in addition that when the power and activity of the city state were at their height one of the ways in which such behaviour could be discouraged was by means of public theatrical performance. I do not intend as a primary objective to contribute to the discussion of the position of women in the ancient world,⁸ but rather to comment on the function of Greek tragedy as a means of reinforcing notions important to the Athenian community. Inevitably, however, due to the nature of the material at hand, the former topic must receive some attention.

Certain values are either supported or condemned in Greek tragedy, and family and dynastic concerns are presented in contrast to one another. Values conducive to family stability include respect of parents and obedience to the father, protection of women, honour of good wives and mothers, the importance of paternal authority and regulation of sexual behaviour.⁹ In direct contrast to dynastic practice, there is emphasis on the dispensability of the female, the importance of masculine power and the undesirability of female influence.

A dynasty, on the other hand, is presented as a noble, powerful and wealthy clan held together solely by the quest for power. In itself it is unstable due to the conflicting interests of various members of the clan; it is a travesty of the well ordered family. Sons are pitted against fathers, brothers against brothers. Dynastic behaviour is marked above all by the incompatibility in certain circumstances of the interests of men and women. In the absence of opportunity to acquire actual power, aristocratic women behave in an aggressive and entrepreneurial way in order to acquire influence. This behaviour may contribute to or even account for conflicts between their male relatives, conflicts indeed which took place in ordinary Athenian life, and are attested in the speeches of the orators.¹⁰

While men of this class are no less active on their own behalf and that of their descendants, and attempts on their part to put their own dynastic interests before those of community and *oikos* are likewise presented as undesirable, tragic drama very frequently concentrates on the conflict of interest that may develop if an aristocratic woman is faced with a choice between her own family and that of her husband.

⁷ Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1986), suggests that the kind of power that is questioned in tragedy is that generated by the civic ideology; my contention is that tragedy is a product of that civic ideology.

⁸ A useful recent summary and bibliography of this work is provided by Gillian Clark, *Women in the Ancient World, Greece and Rome New Surveys in the Classics*, no. 21 (Oxford, 1989). For an excellent analysis of recent work, see Humphreys 1983, ch. 3.

⁹ See K. J. Dover's remarks, subtitled *Resistance*, 'Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behaviour', Peradotto and Sullivan, op. cit., 143–58, pp. 148–9.

¹⁰ One can only guess at the difficulties in the situation of the daughter of Polyeuctus in Demosthenes 41, to be discussed below. Less complex but equally difficult is the situation of the daughter of Diogeiton in Lysias 32. Married to her uncle, she was subsequently compelled to press for her children's rights from one who was at once her father and her brother-in-law, and her children's uncle and grandfather. She appears to have done so with great vigour and effect. For a discussion of Cleobule's situation in Demosthenes 27–9 see Virginia Hunter, 'Women's Authority in Classical Athens', *EMC/Classical Views* 8.1 (1989), 39–48.

THE TRAGEDIES

In discussing a selection of plays, I shall try to establish a distinction between the traditional base upon which each author constructed his plot and that author's own contribution to the material at his disposal. In this way it may be possible to distinguish between the values of different times and places. Athenian tragedy takes for its plots a body of myth and tradition¹¹ that incorporates a variety of elements, which may or may not receive the same emphasis in other works. This may be noted, for example, in the case of Homer, who refrains from attributing dynastic motives to Helen of Troy but is inconsistent in his treatment of Helen's sister, Clytaemestra; in *Od.* 1.35–43 she is a pawn of Aegisthus' ambition, in 4.512–37 she is not mentioned at all, and in 11.405–61 she takes a far more active part in the removal of Agamemnon. It is the last tradition that prevails in Attic tragedy, most notably in the case of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. *Agamemnon* shows the effects of feminine enterprise on an *oikos* already marred by Thyestes' dreadful meal (1096f.), and *Choephoroi* shows the ravages wrought on the second generation.¹² In *Eumenides* the community exerts its own demands on the *oikos*; the female line must give up its claims in favour of the male, and claims of blood kin must be regulated by the community.

From the very beginning of *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus presents the contrast between dynastic and family interests. The watchman's speech contains all the keynotes; it cannot be mere coincidence that the opening lines contain a reference to the stars in terms relating to human aspirations (4–7):

I watch the assembly of stars gathering at night, the bright potentates that bring winter and summer to mortals, stars that know their places in the sky, their rising and their setting.

The stars gather in an assembly – *δμήγυριν*, and those conspicuous – *ἐμπρέποντες* – among them are the 'bright potentates'¹³ – *λαμπροὺς δυνάστας* – who control the seasons, and whose rising and setting take place, like those of the aristocrats, for all to see. In 10–11 the watchman attributes masculine aspirations to Clytaemestra:

Indeed, such is the energy of the woman's provident mind, thinking like a man.

And in 18–19 he expresses concern for the *oikos*:

I weep over what is happening to the household. It grieves me that former happy times have turned to troubles.

There are similar references in the first stasimon. The chorus remarks (43–4) that the Atreidae have their power straight from Zeus.¹⁴ On the subject of marriages,

¹¹ On this material see especially Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, 1979); G. S. Kirk, *Myth: its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Cambridge, 1970); Charles Segal, op. cit. (n. 1), ch. 2; Brian Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London, 1973), part 2. Burkert, pp. 6–7, discusses 'those sentimental stories about the mothers of important heroes'. Following Propp, Burkert lists five stages in 'the girl's tragedy'. They are interesting in that they catalogue the risks and rewards of female dynastic enterprise – not, I think, the natural course of events from puberty to childbirth, as Burkert suggests, p. 16. Kirk notes the great dynasties (p. 180), and the 'thematic simplicity, almost shallowness of Greek myth', p. 187. The list pp. 187–9 could be greatly simplified by seeing 3, 5–7, 9–16, 20, 23–4 as aspects and problems of dynastic behaviour. I think there is more to displacement of elders (p. 199) than 'the cruelty and suppressed ruthlessness of human nature and its frustrated resentment of old age itself'.

¹² Note the emphasis in *Cho.* 135–7, 301 etc. on Orestes' claims to his inheritance.

¹³ *Aeschylus: Agamemnon*, ed. J. D. Denniston and Denys Page (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 66.

¹⁴ This is in accordance with the routine dynastic claims in Homer, tracing the origins of a family to a deity.

Helen is described as *πολύανωρ* – much married – in 62. We are reminded that the suffering at Troy took place for the sake of another man's wife (447–9), and 681 is a diatribe against the beauty and seductiveness of Helen. This is the way Aeschylus sets the tone of the trilogy. Agamemnon himself gives full expression to the prejudice of the *polis* in his remarks 914–30, when he rejects his wife's suggestion that he walk on the tapestries. He asks her not to use feminine wiles to make him soft, nor treat him like a foreigner, nor tempt him to behave like a god. The fact that he gives way to her suggests that feminine enterprise was seen as a threat to the political ideology of the *polis*. Prejudice is fostered among the citizens by these allusions to the way non-Greeks ran their affairs, and the results of aspirations to personal power.

The implications of Orestes' deed are that Clytaemestra chose to act through a paramour rather than through a son;¹⁵ the appropriate course of action, to remove the paramour, is described in one of the traditions preserved in the *Odyssey*. The change in the tradition to one implicating Clytaemestra alone reflects, I think, the growing demand that the individual interests of the *oikos* be subject to the collectivity. The kind of conflict of interest caused by divided loyalties to male and female lines is clearly detrimental to community stability. This, however, is not the only point Aeschylus makes in the trilogy. In *Eumenides*, the arbitrary way in which Athena resolves the deadlock between Apollo and the Erinyes is in my view due to the author's desire to assert the interests of the family as part of a commonality. Here, however, he condemns the dynastic behaviour of competing males as a threat to the city state:

As for you, keep your attacks out of my territory; do not ruin the hearts of young men, filling them with blood lust and driving them mad without the help of wine; do not stir them up like fighting cocks, letting war and mutual force between kin take hold in my city. War, which is driven by a terrible longing for glory, should be kept far away. I forbid cock-fights at home.
(*Eum.* 858–66)

δεινὸς εὐκλείας ἔρως, the terrible longing for glory in 865, is usefully ambiguous; if it is the motive for dynastic aspirations it is terrible and dangerous; if, however, it is directed outside the community it is something to be admired rather than dreaded.

In the same way *Seven Against Thebes* shows a community threatened by male dynastic strife, and the women in the play are treated in a positive way. They assert family and community values in opposition to the ambitions of the two brothers; hence the values of the democracy are set against the desires of the wealthy and

¹⁵ For a discussion of the similarity between the stories of Orestes and Alcmaon, see C. Delcourt, *Oreste et Alcmaon* (Paris, 1959). Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *Theseus as Son and Stepson – a Tentative Illustration of the Greek Mythological Mentality* (BICS supplement 40 (1979)), who offers mythological and iconographical evidence to show that in a series of vase paintings of c. 460–440 B.C. Theseus is attempting to kill not Aithra but Medea. Whether or not one accepts the main argument, there is much interesting material here, particularly on the subject of the theme of matricide. The question of feminine enterprise found its way into Roman historiography; for its appearance in the saga of the Etruscan domination of Rome see R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy, Books 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 184ff. Livy, like Herodotus, associates female enterprise with the undesirable aspects of tyrannical behaviour, and adds the stories of the good wife competition and of Lucretia (1.57–8) in appropriate contrast. Like Herodotus, Livy also associates this kind of behaviour with foreigners. Although this method has much in common with that of Greek tragedy, it may well be due not so much to conscious imitation as to similar clashes of interests and values occurring in the early days of the Roman state. Iain McDougall, 'Livy and Etruscan Women', *The Ancient History Bulletin* 4.2 (1990), 24–30, suggests that 'Livy's narrative is more suggestive of certain phenomena in his own contemporary society...' (p. 25).

powerful. In his opening remarks Eteocles presents himself in an appropriate metaphor as a responsible and courageous leader of the state. However, when the chorus arrives it is composed of Theban girls who are preoccupied with the horrors of war and think only of the city, to which they twice (120, 136) refer as the city of Cadmus, rather than Oedipus or Eteocles. Eteocles is hostile and contemptuous toward them. In 181–202 he delivers a tirade against female influence, but the only argument he can summon is that their timorousness spoils his appetite for men's business – war (230–2). In 653–5 he sees the forthcoming combat with his brother as the inevitable fulfilment of his father's curse. The chorus for its part is appalled at the prospect of the shedding of kindred blood (682):

that kind of pollution brings an early death.

These are the objections raised by Athene in Aesch. *Eum.* 858–66 mentioned above. In the concluding scenes of *Seven Against Thebes* Antigone and Ismene mourn the demise of their family and make clear the kind of behaviour that has brought this about:

Your poor fools, mistrustful of friends and indifferent to disaster, you have snatched your inheritance by force to enjoy it in misery.

(875–8)

Poor wretches, you smashed your home and gained a bitter kingship; now cold steel has brought you together.

(880–5)¹⁶

It is generally accepted¹⁷ that the ending of the play (1005ff.) was not written by Aeschylus. It is nevertheless of interest as it indicates a desire to express the concerns that appear in Sophocles' *Antigone*. That is to say, Antigone is faced with divided loyalty as the city proposes to honour one brother and abase the other. It is to be noted that this is not the issue that Aeschylus chooses to address: throughout the genuine portion of *Seven Against Thebes* the women express concern for family and community, and there is no hint of the kind of enterprise that Sophocles later ascribes to Antigone.

Prometheus Bound grimly presents the disadvantages of inherited power; it is a veritable diatribe against dynastic practice.¹⁸ The first scene shows two hired thugs preparing Prometheus for torture (10–11):

So you can learn not to hanker after Zeus' power...

Hephaestus has his own opinion of his father (34–5):

...there is no softening the heart of Zeus; anyone new to power is brutal.

This notion is repeated in line 324.

It is to be noted that Hephaestus has been appointed to carry out his brother's punishment (39); this is the kind of dynastic practice that is directly at variance with

¹⁶ I have followed Murray's numbering, O.C.T. 1955.

¹⁷ Liana Lupas and Zoe Petrie, *Commentaire aux 'Sept contre Thèbes' d'Eschyle* (Bucharest and Paris, 1981), include in their observations on this most contentious topic the observation (p. 282) 'Le jugement ... n'est pas, en fin de compte, une démonstration philologique rigoureuse, il est plutôt un verdict d'ordre esthétique.'

¹⁸ The way in which Aeschylus treats Zeus in this play has caused various scholars to doubt that he is in fact the author. Certainly the attitude to dynastic matters here displayed is consistent with his practice; it may be that he saw an opportunity to condemn the traditional view of Zeus as an old fashioned dynast. For the issue of authenticity, see M. Griffith, *The Authenticity of Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge, 1977).

the interests of the family. Kratos emphasises this point when he points out to Hephaestus that he should respect the edicts of Zeus rather than his relationship with his brother (39–41):

HEPH.

Surely the ties and closeness of kin are binding?

KRAT.

I know; but can there be any way to ignore the commands of our father? Don't you fear that more?

Kratos' argument against defiance is simple:

No one but Zeus is free. (50)

For the purposes of the play, Aeschylus treats mortals as serfs of the immortals. Prometheus is treated as an enemy for easing their plight (28–30, 37–8, 107–13, 123, 213ff., etc.). In 221–2 Prometheus reviles Zeus for the way he has turned on those who helped him to power:

... after the divine despot availed himself of my help, this is the vile reward he gives me. I suppose this is the tyrant's disease – the inability to trust one's friends.

Prometheus' strength lies in his knowledge of the future; he is presented in contrast to Io, who is a victim without choice. Prometheus is able to comfort Io by offering her hope in her progeny, and he knows besides that there is a bride for Zeus who embodies the tyrant's dread and the hero's hope (768):

... she who will bear a son greater than his father.

This is the great fear that forms the background to Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. In attempting to keep his power in the hands of his family, the tyrant makes himself vulnerable to the threat of being supplanted by his son. Whatever the original function of the myth, it has clearly been adapted to stress the interests of the democracy. Sophocles begins his play with the plague afflicting Thebes, and he does not wish us to forget it; a thriving dynasty is a blight upon the community. This play is more than simply a warning against incest; it is more than a warning that no one can escape his destiny. The destiny that Oedipus cannot escape, and against which he rails so bitterly in *Oedipus at Colonus*, is the inevitable fate of the great families. In their quest for power, they pervert the normal ties of affection and kinship and eventually their members devour one another. This is the reason for the great violence of Oedipus' denunciation of Polyneices in *O.C.* 1348ff. In an earlier episode Oedipus insists (960–1013) that he is innocent of any crime because none of the evil events of his life was of his choosing; his sons, on the other hand, have acted wilfully and from choice. Creon also is shown as acting from dynastic motives; in claiming the tomb of Oedipus for Thebes (753–60) he will advance his personal standing. In 784–6 Oedipus shows that he is not deceived:

You come to guide me, not to my home, but to install me at a safe distance, to keep your city safe from attack by this land.

Sophocles' *Antigone* is an instructive example of the kind of material that could be incorporated into a tradition in fifth-century Athens. I have already noted that Antigone's behaviour changes between Aeschylus' version and Sophocles'; there seems little doubt, then, that the version in the tragedies is a product of fifth-century Athens, and it is interesting that in the *Odyssey* no children of Oedipus are mentioned at all. The theme Sophocles is stressing is explored by Herodotus in his story of

Intaphrenes' wife (3.119). In each case a woman chooses the interests of her own blood line over those of her husband's family, which apparently includes any children she may bear, or in Antigone's case the family of her betrothed. Sophocles makes explicit the connection between these stories in Antigone's speech, 904–20. This passage has attracted a great deal of comment, mainly because editors have found it unworthy of Sophocles while finding themselves unable to excise the passage altogether. What is important is that this passage seems to have been intended for the audience of the time, and in my view is best approached as a statement of dynastic values.¹⁹ It makes explicit the ties that married women must have retained with their natal households, ties potentially dangerous in a dynastic context. Nothing could be further removed from the interests of the community, which Creon so powerfully asserts in his turn, particularly in the speech to Haimon, 639ff. His lines 648–54, 677–80 are no mere misogynistic tirade; Creon is asserting values that are important to the city state and condemning the behaviour that marks the great dynasties.

Why, then, does Creon come so terribly to grief? Why, for that matter, does Antigone? Is there something shocking in her assertion that the claims of a brother are greater than those of husband and children because he cannot be replaced? The answer to this may perhaps be found by returning to Herodotus, whose words are so faithfully reproduced here. Like so many of Herodotus' anecdotes, the story contributes nothing to the narrative but has a point of its own. It is included as part of the violent tale of Darius' rise to power, his need of his fellow conspirators and his mistrust of them. The words of Intaphrenes' wife meet with the approval of Darius, the uneasy potentate, but the story would surely have more significance for a Greek audience, for whom Aeschylus had written in *The Eumenides* that the blood line is transmitted through the father. In view of the realities of bilateral kinship, this is a striking assertion and surely reflects a bias towards patrilineality. If Antigone is speaking with this principle in mind, her words may well have been shocking to their hearers.

If Antigone's remarks are not in fact intended to justify her behaviour in Athenian eyes, Creon's position becomes clearer. It is to be noted that, although in his important speech 998ff. Teiresias condemns Creon for leaving the dead unburied and for burying the living, and in 1113f. Creon admits his error, there is no explicit support for Antigone's actions. In the same way, the uneasiness of the chorus (278–9) on hearing that Polyneices' corpse has been buried, and the hint of the supernatural (415–21) during the messenger's speech 406ff., merely suggest that the gods are offended by the mistreatment of the dead.

Then it comes about that Creon buries Polyneices before he goes to release Antigone, not only establishing the priorities but also making dramatic time for her suicide. The principles behind Antigone's behaviour are suspect, and her headstrong conduct leads to her destruction and that of Creon's wife and son. The play becomes her story by virtue of the particular conflicts centred upon her character.

In this context Demosthenes 41 is instructive. The case concerns a dowry (προίξ), and the circumstances surrounding it. The first interesting feature of the case is that a certain Polyeuctus had adopted his wife's brother, Leocrates, in the absence of male issue of his own. Presumably to cement the family loyalties, he then married one of

¹⁹ M. Neuburg, 'How Like a Woman: Antigone's "Inconsistency"', *CQ* 40 (1990), 54–76, contrasts the claims of marriage- and blood-ties but fails to explain the conflict between them, only describing this conflict as a theme. It is not so much that Creon has 'rendered... problematic... the universe of social roles and ties around which the play revolves' (p. 75, n. 58), but that this universe is already problematic, being in flux.

his daughters to his brother-in-law/adopted son. For some reason, a quarrel then ensued between Polyeuctus and Leocrates; the reason is asserted to be no concern of ours. As a consequence Polyeuctus took his daughter away from his adopted son and arranged for her to be married to someone else. It should be noted that, although Polyeuctus was able to remove Leocrates' connection with his daughter, he would not have been able to remove the connection with his wife, since Leocrates was her brother. Indeed Polyeuctus' wife, who seems to have been in a position to lend money on her own account (9) and to make some pressing depositions in her will, clearly played an important part in the family arrangements. Furthermore, it seems to have been acceptable for Polyeuctus' daughter to represent her second husband when the family's affairs were being settled; her loyalty to her husband is taken for granted (17). This case is remarkable for the efforts made to control the movement of property by means of adoption and marriage,²⁰ and the complications induced by ordinary human behaviour. The feelings and opinions of the women concerned are not recorded; perhaps the plight of Antigone is some indication.

It is clear, then, that the ways in which families organised themselves were not always compatible with the interests of the city state. Cases such as that described above show that despite the strictures of the law women had capabilities and expectations of their own; the greater these were, the greater the potential for disruption, since questions of power are exacerbated by class.

In *Antigone* Sophocles offers no solutions.²¹ He goes out of his way, however, to smooth the difficulties presented in the story of Electra and Orestes. There is no doubt or madness for Orestes in this play; the accomplishment of his revenge is taken for granted while the drama derives its interest from the attitudes and behaviour of Electra. The passions and sorrows of the whole family seem to find a focus in her character. She nurtures her grief for Agamemnon and the impulse for revenge, she is implacable in hatred for her mother and eloquent in contempt for her sister when Chrysothemis cannot match her passion and rancour. The scenes in which Electra believes her brother dead and then finds him restored to her are the heart of the play. She seems a second Clytaemestra when she screams to Orestes to strike his mother a second time (1415), but it should be noted that she cannot act without her brother, and her energies are plainly directed towards values proper to a family rather than a dynasty.

Electra's vengefulness seems to have been a sufficiently interesting theme for all three dramatists to exploit it. Euripides gives Electra all the credit for devising the stratagem that brings Clytaemestra to Orestes' sword. Euripides also adds some interesting dynastic detail: Aegisthus and Clytaemestra have attempted to deprive Electra of dynastic value and influence by marrying her off to a social inferior (*θανάσιμον γάμον*, *El.* 247). Her peasant husband, however, has shown great astuteness by preserving her one asset, her virginity, remembering that she is of noble birth and that the man who gave Electra to be married was not her rightful *kyrios* and had no right to give her (247–62). Euripides makes use of this character to refer sardonically (253) to the possibility that *πλούτος* is not necessarily *γενναῖος*.²²

²⁰ Foxhall, *CQ* 39 (1989), 22, suggests that 'it is inappropriate to consider property solely as a function of individual ownership'. This case would certainly bear her out, but for a different point of view see D. M. McDowell, *CQ* 39 (1989), 10–21.

²¹ It would be mischievous, and not in accordance with the dramatist's purpose, to suggest that Creon might be well advised to marry Ismene as the surviving *epikleros*.

²² See Denniston's discussion of *πένης ἀνὴρ γενναῖος*, *Euripides, Electra*, ed. with commentary (Oxford, 1939), p. 80.

In *The Phoenician Women* Euripides makes Jocasta the key figure in the drama. All three of her sons look to her for support and vindication. Polyneices, however, has made an error; he has contracted an exogamous marriage (341ff.).²³ This may seem a strange cause of offence, but Aristotle (*Pol.* 1307a37–40) notes the disadvantages of such practices which, as in the case of the Locrians, may lead one to marry away one's whole state. This raises the question of the dowry; it has been suggested with some justification²⁴ that the dowry principle really encapsulates the conflict of interest between household and community; this does not seem to have been a concern of tragedy, though it features in epic and comedy. There is a passing reference in Aeschylus, *P.V.* 558–9, and more emphatic mention in Euripides' *Andromache*, where the standing of Andromache and Hermione is estimated in terms of their dowries (2, 153, 873).

In *Medea* Euripides presents a woman who has chosen to direct her own life. Since she is a foreigner, it is less offensive to ascribe dynastic behaviour to her, and Euripides spares no pains in her characterisation. She has no resources apart from her cunning and her sexuality; these are augmented by her mysterious magic arts. She has placed Jason under obligation to her by removing the obstacles to his ambition (475ff., 552), and has further provided for her own security by bearing him two sons. Euripides shows his perception of the issues when in 565 he shows Jason's complete failure to understand Medea's position: '...what need have you of children?' Euripides adds an extra dimension to his sinister character by making her kill her children. Her motives are mixed; on the one hand she regards them as an extension of herself and will not see them humiliated (1060–1), and on the other she will show Jason that no one is to be permitted to humiliate her (1354–5):²⁵

Don't think you can despise my love, make me a laughing stock, and live a life of ease.

This she will do whatever the cost to herself (1362):

Hear this; I can bear the grief, if I wipe the smile off your face.

It is to be noted that Medea expresses herself in terms of personal pride and standing. These are considerations that were not only natural but supremely important to a male inhabitant of a Greek city state. In ascribing such motives to a woman Euripides is emphasising the dangers inherent in oriental dynastic systems, where women take themselves, their position, and their influence seriously.

In their separate tirades, Hippolytus and Jason agree that there should be some way of having children that does not require the assistance of women. Their opinion is that women are too interested in sex; Euripides is content with the cliché, also expressed by Aristophanes.²⁶ He does not mention the possibility that it was not sex itself, but

²³ Pearson, *Euripides: Phoenissae* (Cambridge, 1909), p. 102, notes 'the traditional fear of an endogamous tribe', and Elizabeth Craik, *Euripides: Phoenician Women* (London, 1988), observes that 'attitudes of Classical Athens are anachronistically imported'. Euripides, however, is not making a slip.

²⁴ See Foxhall, *CQ* 39 (1989), 40–2.

²⁵ Humiliation, or simply the fear of it, is sufficient motive for drastic action on many occasions. The *Iliad* tells the story of Achilles' response to public humiliation, and this is the motive Sophocles gives for Ajax' suicide. These are only two of the many examples to be found throughout Greek classical literature. For a discussion of the incoherencies of 1021–80 see M. D. Reeve, 'Euripides, *Medea* 1021–1080', *CQ* 22 (1972), 51–61. While condemning 1073–4 he sees no need to reject 1059–71; this seems to be correct, though admittedly he offers a drastic solution to the problem of ἐκεῖ (1058).

²⁶ Most of the humour in *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* derives from the suggestion that women are not too interested, but simply interested, in sex; and this, of course, is what is wrong with Medea in Euripides' play.

the opportunities for influence gained thereby, that would have concerned an enterprising woman. He does, however, put an interesting observation into the mouth of Hippolytus; Cypris can breed a lot more harm in clever women (*Hipp.* 642–3):

τὸ γὰρ κακοῦργον μάλλον ἐντίκτει Κύπρις
ἐν ταῖς σοφαῖσιν

or one might say that clever women know how to make Cypris work for them.

Both Herodotus and Xenophon, in writing about the Persians, note that a way for a son to grasp power was to use the favour and assistance of his mother. Greek tragedy is quite reticent on this particular point; yet there are signs of it in certain plays. Even the Oedipus story may reflect a less complicated dynastic scenario: a mother arranges for her son to be brought up elsewhere; he then returns and kills the unwanted husband and father. Clearly, the objective of such a mother is to rule through her son; if he prove uncooperative the events described in *Choephoroi* may follow. A variation of this may lie behind the plot of *Trachiniae*; a mother and son combine to kill the male parent, whereupon the son rejects his mother and marries the father's concubine. In the Athenian context of family and community, this may be an acceptable alternative to the notion of the mother seizing power through her son. In the case of *Oedipus the King*, the story is overlaid with the horrors of incest.²⁷ What if such a woman were to marry her son? The progeny of such a union would be monsters, a plague upon the city state.

Euripides gives the conflict between father and son the same emphasis in *Hippolytus*. It has not gone unnoticed that the plot repeats the 'Potiphar's wife theme'; what concerns me is the way that Euripides accounts for Phaedra's behaviour. The ideological tussle between the goddesses for the allegiance of Hippolytus obscures two possibilities; either Phaedra was making a bid for power, hoping to win Hippolytus' sexual allegiance and depose Theseus, or she was intent on causing a rift between Hippolytus and his father in order to secure the inheritance for her own sons. The latter motive is more readily understood by the members of a city state,²⁸ and it is that which seems to lie behind Phaedra's desire to destroy Hippolytus as well as kill herself. On the one hand, Phaedra takes the only course open to a woman who has lost her standing as a virtuous wife and mother; on the other hand there is vindictive intent in the way she implicates Hippolytus. This is the only suggestion Euripides makes that Phaedra had dynastic concerns of her own; otherwise he attributes to her the ideals of a virtuous Athenian matron, appalled and bewildered by her own sexuality. In family terms, this is a story of bad sexual management; the honours due to Aphrodite must be paid in the service of the *oikos*. Neither Hippolytus' excessive control nor Phaedra's excessive desire are beneficial to family interests. It is in keeping with the general reticence of Greek tragedy on this particular topic that Euripides' first version, in which Phaedra takes more direct action on her own behalf, was rejected by the community. Any attempt to explain this reticence must be purely speculative; but it is suggestive that such behaviour is so freely ascribed to Persians rather than Greeks.²⁹

²⁷ Cicero takes advantage of such fears when assassinating the character of Sassia in *Pro Cluentio* 12–16, 26–9, 185ff.

²⁸ W. S. Barrett, *Euripides: Hippolytus* (Oxford, 1964), p. 3, notes that the *Theseis* may have originated during Pisistratan times, and that Theseus does not appear on vases till the last quarter of the sixth century B.C.

²⁹ Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Exit Atossa: Images of Women in Greek Historiography on Persia', in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (eds), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London, 1983), notes that the idea of Persian women thus transmitted was a useful means of pointing up undesirable aspects of Persian culture. In particular, Sancisi-Weerdenburg observes that although

SOME CONCLUSIONS

In Greek tragedy³⁰ there is abundant evidence of tension between family and dynastic values. This tension tends to be expressed in the repeated theme of the collapse of a great house. This may be described as something pre-ordained and ineluctable or it may be the result of wilful choice. In general, men are more likely than women to act under divine constraint. Much is made, for instance, of the predicament of Agamemnon or Oedipus, whereas women are more likely to express their determination or desire for a particular act than to cite an oracle or the instructions of a god. This may be a way of suggesting that female aspirations are unworthy.

While certain plays condemn dynastic behaviour, others offer a paradigm of conduct favourable to family stability. Sons who seek power for themselves at the expense of their fathers are condemned; so are brothers who destroy one another for the sake of an inheritance. On the other hand a pious wife, faced with the loss of her family's honour or her own, may destroy herself; young women may sacrifice themselves for the sake of family and community and may express horror at the prospect of the shedding of kindred blood.

A significant proportion of the complete tragedies remaining to us deals with the tribulations of two clans,³¹ the Atreids and the Labdacids, associated with Argos and Thebes respectively. Other clans mentioned are the Cadmeids, also associated with Thebes, and the Heraclids, associated with Argos and Corinth. I have already had cause to mention that Thucydides found it necessary to portray the Thebans explaining their old dynastic connections with Persia, and Argos' policies and practice during the Persian wars need no further discussion. While I do not pretend to find specific political allusions in the dialogue of the plays,³² I am not prepared to overlook the association of so much dynastic calamity with these two places.

It looks as though the traditional material, first adapted to enhance the reputations of the great clans, was subsequently further adapted to condemn their objectives and

Herodotus' account of Atossa's career seems correct she is not mentioned in Persian documents, nor do any women appear on the reliefs at Persepolis. Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford, 1989), in introducing her argument notes that 'the polarisation of barbarian and Hellene became a popular rhetorical topos in tragedy' (p. 11) and effectively pursues the notion that tragedy was a means by which this prejudice could be reinforced in the community. I would add that this prejudice was extended to those whose class and resources enabled them to form alliances with other great clans, including the Persian ruling dynasties.

³⁰ I have discussed a selection of examples which merited examination in some detail. A few points may be made concerning some of the remaining plays, and some general remarks made about each playwright. Aeschylus' *Suppliants* depicts the daughters of Danaus choosing to obey their father rather than transfer their loyalties to another clan. *The Persians* revels in the collapse of the scarcely concealed hopes of the matriarch Atossa. Sophocles is inclined to show the stresses brought to bear by the community on the individual; *Philoctetes* is certainly no exception. Euripides for his part, and Aeschylus to a lesser extent, incorporate a tendency to resolve disputes by divine arbitration resulting in one or more imposed marriages, as in *Orestes* and *Electra*. Territories are allocated, and women are comforted in their afflictions by hope in their progeny, as for example in *Andromache* and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*.

³¹ Certain individuals receive attention in their own right; but even Theseus, who generally receives favourable portrayal, cannot escape the tragedy that befalls the great. Odysseus is an exception to this trend; yet the remark of Dio Chrysostom, in his 52nd discourse, that the character of Odysseus in the Sophocles play is so much more gentle and frank than Euripides depicts him, seems to indicate that the character of the self-reliant entrepreneur received less favourable portrayal during the era of the city state.

³² For a discussion with full notes of this problem see A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplikes – Play and Trilogy* (Cambridge, 1969), ch. IV. The notion that theatre may function as propaganda is persuasively supported by Sourvinou-Inwood, op. cit.

practice. In examining other works incorporating traditional material, mainly composed earlier than tragedy, I have come to the conclusion that the attitudes conveyed by tragedy were developed over a period of time – the time which saw the development of the hoplite state. These attitudes are ambivalent at first and then settle into disapproval and suspicion.

I have mentioned the variations in attitude to Helen and Clytaemestra that are found in Homer. There are contradictions in the Hesiodic corpus, too. I do not wish to enter the discussion about authorship, but to note first that the dynastic tensions on Olympus, only hinted at in Homer, are given full rein in *Theogony*. The first mortal dynastic link with Zeus is Harmonia (937), who marries Cadmus of Thebes – an appropriate tribute from a Boeotian poet. Zeus further cements his links with the Cadmean line by impregnating his own granddaughter, Semele (940). This is not, however, the world of the *basilēes*, a term used less vaguely in Hesiod than it is in Homer,³³ in that Hesiod can identify the people to whom he is referring, even if we cannot. Even so, there is a considerable contrast between the fawning description of *basilēes* in *Theogony* 80–103 and the bitter remarks in *Works and Days* 37–41, 248–64. These are enlivened by the sardonic repetition of the term *bribe-guzzling* (δωροφάγος) in 39, 221, and 264, and the little story of the nightingale and the hawk (202–12). I find *Works and Days* notable also for the plea for co-operation in the community (238–47, 342–60). There are distinct signs here of conflict of interest between the notables and the rest of the community.

Another Boeotian poet, Pindar, writes for those whose interests were very different from those of the city state. He frankly asserts (*P.* 2.95 etc.), like Theognis before him (27–38, 61–8), that it is important to please great men. Since this is his motive and the source of his fee (*P.* 11.42), he incorporates the material current in his time but seems to employ some tact. Agamemnon is mentioned but not Thyestes, the story of Oedipus omits any mention of incest (*O.* 2.34ff.), and Medea is clever rather than wicked in *P.* 4. I have found, however, that Clytaemestra is not spared at all in *P.* 11, which seems to have been written for a person of less substance than other clients of Pindar, and in which Pindar states that in his opinion those who have the middle rank in the city are most fortunate (52–3).

It has been noted in various contexts³⁴ that the writing of tragedy coincides with the transformation of myth and legend from oral to written form. When the above material is taken into account this notion will not work, but if indeed the changes in the handling of the traditional material had a purpose which arose from the needs of a changing community, it becomes easier to see why tragedy took the form that it did. The notion that art was thus pressed into the service of the state makes more attractive the possibility that the first Homeric texts were written down at the time that tragedy was first performed, during the time of the Pisistratids.³⁵ It may seem that

³³ A. G. Geddes 'Who's Who in Homer', *CQ* 34 (1984), 36.

³⁴ Burkert, for instance, *op. cit.* (n. 11), p. 18, remarks: 'tale structures, as sequences of motifemes, are founded on basic biological or cultural programs of action ... the pre-established structure of myth is a convenient tool for dealing with new facts, with the unknown.' My comment is that historical change of programme made its own impact. J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et Tragédie en Grèce Ancienne* (Sussex, 1981), discern, on a psychological and sociological basis, a historical change of mentality, and find that tragedy expresses the triumph of the collective values imposed by the city state. Segal, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pays particular attention to the implications of the change from the oral to the literate mode of narration.

³⁵ Scholarly opinion varies concerning the 'Pisistratean Recension'; Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958), p. 74, rejects the remarks of Cicero, *De Orat.* 34.137 as written 'nearly half a millenium after the event', but concedes, pp. 74–5, that Athenian

active promotion of such material was scarcely in the interests of a tyrant but it should be remembered that the tyrants first came to power by publicly opposing themselves to the interests of the aristocracy.³⁶ After the overthrow of the tyrants in Athens the conflict of interest between the community and the great families found an outlet in such practices as ostracism and a focus in the repeated themes of tragedy; it should not be overlooked that tragedy and the practice of ostracism flourished at the same time.

It seems likely, then, that the Greek city states developed their alliances and conducted their political manoeuvrings in a milieu that had long been dominated by great families, and in which powerful individuals and families still expected to exert influence.³⁷ This consideration may have been one of the reasons for Pericles' citizenship law of 451. The one great threat to the stability and success of the city state was entrepreneurial enterprise on the part of a resourceful family; worse still if such enterprise should be shown by an aggressive woman.

The preoccupations betrayed by the themes of Greek tragedy show that the changing requirements of the city state radically affected the status of women³⁸ within both family and community. I suggest that the attitudes displayed towards women in Greek tragedy are a sign, not of a wilfully misogynistic social structure, or even necessarily that 'male attitudes to women... are marked by tension, anxiety, and fear',³⁹ but of violent and pressing political change. The principles I have described should be seen not as the particular dramatic purpose of any individual, but as the expression of the needs of a new kind of community. In this community, existing in fierce competition with others like it, it was essential to achieve co-operation between the state and the wealthy families which had grown accustomed to the acquisition and wielding of power. Entrepreneurial behaviour on the part of these families, and

requirements may have imposed a certain form and order on the Homeric corpus. Rufus Bellamy, 'Bellerophon's Tablet', *CJ* 84 (1989), 289–307, uses the principle of 'long by position' to suggest that hexameters cannot be composed without familiarity with an alphabet. While I am not altogether convinced by the argument, it does have the merit of bringing the composition of the epics nearer in time to their compilation.

³⁶ For a discussion of this and other topics related to the emergence of the hoplite state, see W. G. Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy* (London, 1966), and the comments of G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London, 1981), pp. 281–2.

³⁷ J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families 600–300 BC* (Oxford, 1971), makes it clear in his introduction that dynastic practice, influence and aspirations did not simply become a thing of the past in 580 B.C. In his observations throughout the work he shows the difficulties encountered in substantiating genealogical claims, e.g. in the case of Solon and Critias pp. 322–6, and in the process of explanation cites Ferguson's remark, *Hellenistic Athens* (London, 1911), p. 17, that one such claim at least was 'politically programmatic'.

³⁸ A sign of this process is the law against undue female influence, which Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 35, notes was repealed by the Thirty during their programme to restore oligarchy. Another occasion for female prominence is that of mourning; in a most interesting paper delivered in 1990 at the conference 'Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis', Nottingham University, Helene Foley found a link between female lamentation and clan vendetta, noting that female lamentation may even be actively discouraged, as by the pedagogue in Sophocles' *Electra*. Foxhall, *CQ* 39 (1989), questions whether households were necessarily male-dominated simply because women could not own property, noting (p. 23) that if gender is the most vigorous expression of polarity, 'the household embodies the unification of the male/female opposition'. It may be that seclusion of women by the upper classes was a tacit means of avoiding reproach for oligarchic tendencies: in writing of another time Barbara Levick, *Claudius* (London, 1990), p. 46, notes 'the prominence of women in the principates of Gaius and Claudius shows how much progress had been made towards making the supreme position virtually the hereditary possession of a single family'.

³⁹ Gould, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 57.

particularly on the part of women aware of their own political importance, was seen as a threat to the community and was publicly condemned.⁴⁰

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