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ACTORS AND CONSPIRATORS: CIVIC ANXIETY IN LATE ATTIC TRAGEDY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In the year 411 BC, Athens endured a brief but violent political revolution at a moment when the city's fortunes were declining in the late stage of the Peloponnesian War. This "coup of 411" was driven by a relatively small number of oligarchic sympathizers who conspired in secret to overthrow the democratic Athenian government and install themselves at the head of a new oligarchic regime, that, they believed, would secure desperately needed aid from the Persian Empire against their Spartan enemies. For all of the civic turbulence these oligarchic conspirators caused, their government collapsed after only a few months and Athenian citizens were left to reinstall their fragile democracy.

In the aftermath of the coup of 411 (and other conspiracies that preceded it) the citizens of Athens were particularly agitated by the possibility that other conspiracies may have been active in the city, and there is evidence that a sense of mutual suspicion was pervasive. And yet, in spite of the political upheaval many of Athens' civic and cultural institutions remained active – including the annual celebration of the City Dionysia, the festival that served as the venue for the production of Greek tragedy. As a genre, Greek tragedy is keenly sensitive to the civic experiences of its audience, and symbiotically it is informed by and helps its audience process

the political realities in existence outside of the theater. As it happens, three tragedies – Euripides’ *Phoenissae* (410 BC), Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* (409 BC), and Euripides’ *Orestes* (408 BC) – survive from these apprehensive years in Athens, and each depicts the formation and implementation of a conspiracy alongside all of the ethical complexities conspirators raise. After closely examining the language at critical moments in all three plays, I conclude that these dramas helped Athenian citizens contemplate the answers to questions still lingering in the city: namely, how co-conspirators or political allies can make distinctions between trustworthy and untrustworthy citizens, and the efficacy for those engaged in conspiracies to provide safety for those under their protection.

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a thorough and comprehensive study of Sophocles' and Euripides' depiction of mythological figures engaged in conspiracies and secret plots, the civic and political context surrounding the presentation of these figures, and the ways in which tragic poetry articulates and explores the civic anxieties conspiracies create. Tragic poetry, the occasion of the City Dionysia as a whole, and the mythological material contained therein provided an important vehicle for their audiences to reflect upon a variety of tensions arising from life in the πόλις.¹ Indeed, at different points tragic poetry investigates and complicates virtually all of the major points of "civic ideology," and it invites an audience to view them as dynamic and intricate issues: citizenship, aristocracy, rhetoric, education, and beyond. As an expensive, publicly funded, and competitive festival the City Dionysia was an occasion when the Athenian πόλις in its collective unity assessed through mythological exempla the many divisive and polarizing points that contribute to their civic identity.²

Of all the civic anxieties Athenian tragic playwrights treat in their dramas, perhaps the ones best suited for exploration through dramatic plays are those concerned with false speech, deception, and clandestine actions. At its most basic, theatrical level drama as a genre asks its audience to accept actors purposefully misrepresenting themselves as the characters operating within the action on stage, and the quality of an actor or a production is judged by the degree to which he is able to divorce his true self

¹ On the relationship between the performance of tragic poetry and its audience comprised of Athenian citizens, see Goldhill (1990) 97-115, Griffith (2011) 1-7, and the abundant bibliography contained therein.

² On tragedy's use of mythological figures to probe their experiences in civic life, cf. Gould (1995) vii-ix, Goldhill (1986) 57-80, Zeitlin (1996) 1-11, and Allan (2008) 5-7.

from the one appearing before the audience.³ In this sense, a dramatic production functions like a conspiracy: a group of individuals work together to plot in secret a way to achieve an objective through a series of scripted actions or speech acts. In both cases, actors/conspirators play the parts and speak the words assigned to them by a playwright/mastermind before an audience that is at least partially blind to the group's backstage/internal machinations. Of course, the fundamental difference between a conspiracy and a stage production is that the audience of a play expects and takes pleasure in an actor's deceptions; the target of a conspiracy at best does not know that he or she is being deceived until the plot is complete, and at worst lives in constant doubt and dread that they could be victimized by invisible enemies.

It is for these reasons that actors engaged in tragic drama — and especially drama depicting not just actors, but actors engaged in conspiracies who perform deceitful and underhanded actions on stage — offer their audiences such a compelling opportunity to think through and reflect on the great civic mistrust that conspiracies or the potential for conspiracies create. This study focuses on three tragic dramas in particular, each of which in its own way responds to both the real-world circumstances and sociopolitical mood of the time of its production: Euripides' *Phoenissae* (410 BC), Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (409 BC), and Euripides' *Orestes* (408 BC). All three of these dramas have been securely dated to these extremely tumultuous years in Athens, in the immediate wake of the brief but bloody oligarchic coup of 411 BC. All three engage in a unique manner with the uncertainty and mistrust left in the aftermath of these events: each one depicts the

³ On tragedy's use of "otherness" for exploring the psychological constructions of ancient Athens (especially in regard to gendered power dynamics), cf. Zeitlin (1996) 2-5.

formation and operation of conspiracies designed to accomplish a covert objective, and each deals with the language and ethics that make conspiracies effective (or ineffective) as mutually protective and potent (or impotent) collaborations. As has been established, these were sensitive and immediately relevant topics of civic discourse at the time these dramas were produced, in the years during and after the turbulence caused by the oligarchic conspirators described in vivid detail in Book 8 of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. This study's goal at all points is to explore the characteristic ways Sophocles' and Euripides' poetics reflect on, act out, and bring to the fore these very civic undercurrents and apprehensions.

The Study of Civic and Dramatic Performance

At its most basic level, dramatic performance is deception. Actors dedicate years of training and careful practice to developing the ability to cast a convincing illusion to their audience that they *are* someone that they are not.⁴ As modern spectators and consumers of media, we accept this deception without hesitation; if anything, we are more likely to take special notice when an actor or actress buys in wholesale to their own deception through the practice of a number of dramatic techniques known as "method acting."⁵ However, there are many instances wherein which we might imagine ancient Greeks interpreting such deception with a more critical eye. For the moment, two

⁴ For a summary of some prominent contemporary theories and methods of theater acting, see Elam (2001) 3-8.

⁵ "Method acting" is a practice pioneered by the Russian theater director Konstantin Stanislavsky, wherein an actor attempts both internally and externally to diminish the deceptive elements of acting and to live the "truth" of the role they have adopted, allowing them to build an intimate emotional and cognitive understanding of their characters. To take a well-known example, the actor Daniel Day-Lewis widely acclaimed for the depth to which he internalizes the characters he plays on stage and on screen. For instance, to lend authenticity to his performance as Nathaniel Hawkeye in *Last of the Mohicans* (1992) Day-Lewis spent months learning to sustain himself in the only ways available to American Indians of the film's dramatic period: hunting, gathering, fishing, skinning, and trapping.

examples must suffice. The first comes from Hector in Homer's *Iliad*, when he reproaches his brother Paris for the “deception” (ἡπεροπευτὰ, 3.39) of his appearance: as his brother dons his armor and prepares to duel Menelaus in Book 3, he presents himself as a Homeric warrior, but Hector knows that the duel will only reveal Paris' inability to perform like one, and he takes notice of an incongruity between Paris' outward appearance and a martial impotence it masks. In a second instance, Plutarch relates a story in which Solon, in response to witnessing a performance delivered by the original actor, Thespis, issued the stern warning that to hold such dramatic “play” (παιδιά) in high esteem runs the risk that its deceptive elements will seep into the more serious political business of running a πόλις (‘ταχὺ μέντοι τὴν παιδίαν’ ἔφη ‘ταύτην ἐπαινοῦντες οὕτω καὶ τιμῶντες εὐρήσομεν ἐν τοῖς σπουδαίοις,’ *Sol.* 29.7). Duncan has suggested that, somewhat counterintuitively, the recognition of the deception inherent in acting lends insight into the Athenian's deep love of the theater and the immense role it played in civic life, as the exercise of apprehending dramatic spectacle can lead witnesses to contemplate and evaluate the verity of the figures the theater imitates.⁶

It was not until the middle of the 20th century when scholars once again turned a critical eye to the many elements involved in dramatic performance. As a field of study, the discipline of Performance Studies is relatively young. In the mid-1960s entrepreneurial scholars such as Wallace Bacon, Victor Turner, and Richard Schechner sought to study the nature and mechanics of performance in a broad spectrum of contexts — including drama, play, sports, everyday life, ritual, and beyond — that are inextricably

⁶ Duncan (2006) 12. Plato disagrees on this point; in book 2 of the *Republic* (378e-379d) Socrates warns that men should be on their guard against the seductive power of poetry, which is not a fit vehicle for articulating truth (especially concerning the divine).

bound with and influenced by outside social, gender, racial, and class pressures.

Schechner writes, “When texts, architecture, visual arts, or anything else are looked at by performance studies, they are studies ‘as’ performances. That is, they are regarded as practices, events, and behaviors, not as ‘objects’ or things.”⁷ He goes on to note two primary fundamentals of the field of performance studies. First, performance studies is a necessarily relational, dynamic, and processual discipline, so an important first step in using the critical tools performance studies have to offer is coming to terms with its indeterminate and open nature. Second, based upon this very openness and elasticity, performance studies draws upon and synthesizes a wide array of critical approaches: social sciences, gender studies, history, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and popular culture theory are but a few. The result, he concludes, is a field of study that resists any kind of universal theories or comprehensive critical approaches.⁸

One critical lens from the performance studies toolset that will be particularly useful for this study is the concept of “sociosemiotics,” a term coined by Alter. Sociosemiotics examines “the impact of social factors on those features of the theater that involve semiotics: production of fixed verbal signs, transition between text and stage, production of stage signs, codes and references of signs, actors as signs, receptions of signs by the audience, and so on.”⁹ Following the work of Freud, Alter continues, we know that art in general and fiction in particular has the power to unlock latent, subconscious phantasms and to help us formulate and solve unconscious problems.¹⁰

⁷ Schechner (2002) 10.

⁸ Schechner (2002) 12.

⁹ Alter (1991) 13.

¹⁰ For recent work on the ability of physical props on stage to function as a signifier unconscious thought in Greek tragedy, see Mueller (2016) 4-8 and 38-41.

Attic Tragedy as a genre might be said to be especially imbued with the ability to help its audience process and articulate the many sociosemiotics elements that combine to form their civic experience, given that the language, rhetorical practices, and varieties of rhetoricians familiar from life in the πόλις appear on stage. Throughout this study, I examine points in tragic performances where codes and signs from the sociopolitical life of Athens – be they specific words with malleable definitions such as γενναιότης (“nobility”), or broader modes of communication such as sophistic rhetorical practices – have entered into the Theater of Dionysus and the extent to which these instances allow the members of the audience to reflect on the turbulence of their recent history and the disquiet surrounding their unknown future.

The theme of conspiracy is a useful heuristic tool to use in a study such as this one, which is concerned with how conspirators establish trust with one another and strive toward their clandestine objectives, not only because conspiracies were such a point of consternation in the years leading up to and immediately following the coup of 411 BC, but also because the actions of conspiracies require a number of performative elements that have much in common with the production of tragic poetry. Hence, they serve as revealing intermediaries between the fiction of the stage and the reality of civic life. Conspiracies are political theater in the most literal sense.¹¹ Rosenbloom notes that oligarchic revolutionaries in the late fifth century follow a kind of dramatic template in their civic performances: “organized groups (ἐταιρεῖαι) devoted to the subversion of the democracy eliminated demagogues and terrified the population, orators articulated a rationale for oligarchy that included grievances and a plan to improve the moral quality

¹¹ Cf. Ober (1998) 3-13; Rosenbloom (2011) 405-6.

both of the δῆμος and its leadership as well as promises to write laws and institute an ‘ancestral constitution.’”¹² To Rosenbloom’s definition of this template for ἐταιρεῖαι, one might add that in most cases the revolutionary groups depicted in the annals of Greek rhetoricians and historiographers are far more than political advantage seekers: they are calculating strategists with internal leaders who script a series of words and actions for civic performances designed to achieve their ends.

There are some performance theorists who take notions of civic performances to an extreme, pointing out that at a very basic level all actions undertaken or words spoken in public view constitute a kind of performance.¹³ Such a model requires two fundamental features of theatricality: first, that all people consciously or unconsciously play roles distinct from their natural, “pre-social” personality, and second that they make this performance before a public audience that, in stable social conditions, approves (even if it does not actively acknowledge) their acting.¹⁴ In the broadest sense there may be some value in viewing social life from this perspective — one where everyone performs constantly for a public audience that is simultaneously performing as well — but here I wish to draw a sharp and critical distinction between the kind of everyday performances that bring order and structure to a society and the elements of performance undertaken by conspirators: while they may take place in public view, everyday social performances

¹² Rosenbloom (2011) 406.

¹³ For example, in the 1940s Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of “bad faith” roleplaying, which holds that most people adopt certain socially determined models of behavior instead of displaying their more “authentic” nature; the social realm offers prefabricated “bad” roles (e.g., “criminal,” “cheater,” “deadbeat,” etc.) that provide models for what such people’s behavior should and should not look like; for similar conceptions of social performance in a Homeric framework, see Scodel (2008) 7-12.

¹⁴ Alter (1991) 45.

acted out in real life are not typically *directed* at any specific group of spectators.¹⁵ If anything, most everyday social performances are the opposite of theatrical performance, inasmuch as they are undertaken for the purpose of “fitting in” and conforming to the behavioral expectations of one’s peers, thereby not “making a scene.” However, as soon as a person engages in such social performance with the goal of manipulating his audience or advancing an unspoken agenda one might speculate that the performative aspects of the encounter become more pronounced.

In order to avoid detection, conspirators rely heavily upon ordinary and unmarked behaviors. Since all public behavior is in large part driven by the context in which it takes place – an Athenian citizen speaking before a law court or a modern executive addressing a board of trustees makes use of an assemblage of postures, diction, tone, and gestures quite different from those he might use at home or in a more intimate setting – conspirators are often able to operate in secret until they are poised to strike, provided that they do not raise suspicion by acting out of the ordinary. Leading up to the moment when Julius Caesar’s assassins struck him down, it was essential that they mask their anxious anticipation and violent intentions with a dramatic performance of bland, unremarkable senatorial behavior, lest the *Imperator* sense something amiss and foil their plot.¹⁶ Additionally, when the critical moment came and the assassins sprung the trap, they did so according to a plan orchestrated beforehand by the conspiracy’s leaders, possibly Brutus and Cassius; in other words, they acted out the script composed by the plot’s masterminds before an audience of stunned onlookers – all dramatic elements that

¹⁵ Alter (1991) 44 calls these performances “inner-oriented,” inasmuch as their purpose is to perform conformity.

¹⁶ On the assassination of Julius Caesar, see Plutarch *Vita Caesaris* 66.12-3, *Vita Bruti* 17, Suetonius *Divus Iulius* 82, Appian *Civil Wars* 2.16, and Cassius Dio *Historia Romana* 44.19. Cf. Smith (1957) 58-70.

could only have been intensified by virtue of the fact that the performance played out in the shadow of the Theater of Pompey.¹⁷

The conspiracy to assassinate Julius Caesar perfectly illustrates two kinds of dramatic performances conspiracies frequently undertake. The first requires that they “act” normally, without any hint of their violent or revolutionary intentions, as they interact with their targets and fellow citizens. Second, when the time comes to launch the conspiracy into action the conspirators follow a predetermined plan that, if properly executed, will achieve the outcome the group seeks. In other words, both theatrical performances and conspiracies make use of actors. In the case of theatrical performance these actors follow the direction of a playwright, who is the source of their every word and movement. As I will demonstrate below in Chapter 2, a number of conspiracies active in the late fifth century BC operate by a similar structure: a leading conspirator (or a handful of them), out of view from the public eye, devises a scheme to be acted out by his compatriots in order to accomplish a covert objective. Likewise, in the remaining chapters I explore the functions of precisely the same structure in the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes*: in the conspiracies on display in all three there are leaders and agents, and both are required to contribute to the schemes they undertake.

Another fundamental characteristic shared by conspirators and actors is their use of language as a method of disguise masking something they wish to remain unrevealed. In 1934 Bühler produced a detailed study on a variety of critical approaches to the theory of language. Two of his observations are worth noting at the outset of this study. First, in

¹⁷ Plutarch *Vita Caesaris* 66.4 relates that Tillius signaled that the attack was to begin by seizing Caesar’s toga with both hands pulling it down to expose his throat, a point which further suggests a scripted plan of action; on the location of the attack, see 66.1.

the case of an actor on the dramatic stage and the language he utters, he simultaneously is and is not the figure he portrays.¹⁸ For example, when Kenneth Branagh steps out on stage in a modern production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he is the Prince of Denmark in the dramatic context of the play, but at the same time he has not ceased to be the renowned Shakespearian actor Kenneth Branagh. Much of the pleasure an Athenian audience derives from a drama is born from their suspension of disbelief that the figure before them is not only a fellow citizen whom they have seen in the *agora* or with whom they might have shared wine at a symposium, but is simultaneously Oedipus come fully alive and suffering real anguish before them. So too, I propose, with the language of Greek tragedy: many of the words found on the lips of figures portrayed in the Theater of Dionysus are familiar to their audience from a number of other civic settings, but in the tragic context they are imbued with undertones that multiply their meanings, causing them simultaneously to retain their ordinary semantics but also to take on far different ones. For instance, in Euripides' *Hecuba*, Odysseus replies to Hecuba's plea for recompense for the *χάρις* she offered to him when she saw him lurking within the walls of Troy, that, yes, he will offer *χάρις* in return – the favor of offering her daughter Polyxena for sacrifice instead of Hecuba herself.¹⁹ In a typical social context, *χάρις* refers to the gratitude one feels toward a benefactor or perhaps even to a reciprocal favor to be offered in return for a good deed; but in a tragic context, Odysseus has turned the concept on its head and completely reoriented the term's typically positive connotation.

¹⁸ Bühler (2011) 49.

¹⁹ Cf. *Hec.* 273-8 and 299-305, where Odysseus expands the term *χάρις* into personal and civic types and claims to have satisfied both (on which see Buxton [1982] 174 and Conacher [1998] 62-3).

A second important point for our present purposes that Bühler raises is the necessity of recognizing the audience's orientation toward dramatic actors and conspirators. He notes that the real talent an actor possesses is the ability to make something or someone who is absent from the stage present, and to allow the audience to interpret the figures presented to them as a mimesis for someone else.²⁰ In this case, the audience is fully aware that what they are witnessing is actually a mimesis, even if they have suspended their disbelief so that they can take pleasure in the spectacle.²¹ However, in the case of a conspiracy the orientation to the audience is entirely different: even though conspirators perform in many of the same ways actors do, the entire purpose of the performance is to ensure that the audience does *not* recognize that they are witnessing a performance until it is too late and the objective of the conspiracy is achieved. This study will pay careful attention throughout to the relationship between actors and audiences – both internal and external to a stage production or conspiracy – especially at points where actors perform for multiple audiences simultaneously.

Once again, we might take a final example of the malleable boundaries between dramatic and social performance from the Roman world. From sources such as Tacitus in the *Annales*, Suetonius' *Life of Nero*, and from Dio Cassius we hear of Nero's penchant for performing in several different genres before an audience of his citizen subjects. However, given Nero's status and the tremendous disparity of power between the performer and his audience, it was impossible for his audiences' responses to be based on their evaluation of aesthetic criteria alone. Rather, in a reversal of the regular model of

²⁰ Bühler (2011) 142. On μίμησις see Aristot. *Poet.* 1447a-1462b, as well as Halliwell (2002) 37-118.

²¹ Cf. Zarrilli (2002) 146-7 and the notion that the practice of dramatic performance "implies both the performer's as well as the spectators' active *engagement* in the *process* of performing and or/spectating." The emphasis is his.

artistic performance, once Nero stroked his lyre or sang a line of poetry the impetus fell upon the audience to perform – or even exaggerate – approval for their *imperator's* artistry.²² In other words, the moment Nero stepped on stage ostensibly to perform he in reality posits himself as audience to his audience, from whose cheers (authentic or not) he could interpret the grandeur of his art. Nero's audience proved themselves to be adept performers in their own right. For instance, Dio Cassius describes one revealing instance at the Panhellenic games in which Nero entered the competition as an actor and *citharoedus* (63.15.2-3). He notes how keenly watchful Nero remained of the responses of his audience – and the higher ranking members in particular – and the great praise and honor he conferred upon those who cheered the loudest. Those who failed to perform adequately their approval for the emperor were disgraced and punished; those who could endure no more, Dio tells us, provided the most convincing performance of all, as they pretended to faint and played dead (προσποιεῖσθαι τε ἐκθνήσκειν καὶ νεκρῶν δίκην ἐκ τῶν θεάτρων ἐκφέρεισθαι, 63.15.3). Furthermore, Nero ensured that his audience-performers would act appropriately awestruck by appointing directors charged with managing their performance. At the Juvenalia of 59 A.D. Nero assembled a body of men he named the *Augustiani*.²³ These men were scattered throughout the audience and were appointed with two tasks. First, Suetonius (*Nero* 20.3) tells us that they served as professional clappers who directed the volume and type of applause the audience should perform, and Dio (61.20.3-5) adds that they performed exaggerated gestures of joy that

²² Bartsch (1994) 3.

²³ Cf. Bartsch (1994) 209. On the date of the institution of the *Augustiani*, see Tacitus *Ann.* 14.15.5 and Dio 61.20.3, though Suetonius offers the year 64 A.D. instead (*Nero* 20.3, 25.1). It is not known how many men this troupe may have included at first, but later their number was increased to 5,000. There is some confusion in the sources over what citizens were eligible to join the *Augustiani*, though all agree that at least a portion of the body was comprised of soldiers.

fellow audience members were to mime. Second, Tacitus (*Ann.* 16.5.1) tells us that the *Augustiani* punished those who failed to display adequate enthusiasm and clobbered anyone who disturbed the rhythm of cheers.²⁴

Even though there is some disagreement in our sources over how the audience and the *Augustiani* functioned at Nero's performances, these accounts provide us with a fascinating model for civic performance. Here, a group of actors – in this case quite a large one, Nero's entire audience – have been provided with words to cheer and dramatic gestures to perform by stage directors, the *Augustiani*, and like a chorus are expected to perform in cadence with their fellow audience-performers lest they be beaten by their overseers. All the while, from the stage Nero simultaneously performs his song and basks in the fictional ecstasy he witnesses in his subjects. While indeed the function of the *Augustiani* must be treated with some level of skepticism – afterall, our historical sources are eager to portray these as perversions of civic performances befitting a transgressive and tyrannical figure – these accounts provide at least some notion of how ancient authors conceived of the structures of dramatic performance.

The elements of civic performance involved in Roman citizens' response to Nero's recitals and conspirators operating in fifth-century Athens differ in the critical respect that the former is recognized and acknowledged as a performance, while the latter seeks to avoid detection. That point notwithstanding, throughout this study I highlight ways in which their common elements call forth structural similarities for the production of dramatic performance: actions are orchestrated by leading conspirators (or in Nero's

²⁴ The scholarship on Nero as an artist and showman is vast, but a recent work that serves as a good starting place is Barrett (2016) 231-64. See also Fantham (2013) 17-28, and on Nero's relationship with his subjects more generally see Yawetz (1969).

case, the *Augustiani*) the co-conspirators or actors under his direction with words to speak and actions to perform. When conspiracies are undertaken on the tragic stage there are numerous instances where precisely this model is employed, and the result is a miniature play-within-the-play wherein conspirators engage in the performance of a fiction in order to protect the secrecy of their objectives.

φιλία and Conspiracy: Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

In addition to being performative, conspiracies are by definition interpersonal. In this inquiry into both historical and tragic conspiracies it will be crucial to examine carefully the nature of the relationships conspirators form with one another. Afterall, a conspiracy is predicated upon the ability of a group of people with some kind of affinity – be it personal, political, or merely of convenience – to place trust in one another to keep their operations a secret until their objectives are completed. Writing two generations after the coup of 411 and the angst provoked by the conspirators who orchestrated this revolution and others, Aristotle in book two of the *Rhetoric* offers a meticulous and systematic examination of questions that are, as we will see, central to the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes*: namely, what are the obligations that come along with personal or political friendship and what happens when these obligations fail to be satisfied? Aristotle offers several observations on the nature of friendship that serve as useful starting points for answering these questions, but three of them are particularly applicable to the plays under discussion in this study. First, Aristotle remarks that we should resist the temptation to make a distinction between personal (οἰκειότης), familial (συγγένεια), and political (ἐταιρεία) friendships because they are all different species of the same

thing (εἶδη δὲ φιλίας ἑταιρεία οἰκειότης συγγένεια καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα, 1381b.34).²⁵ In the context of democratic Athens, where interpersonal relationships developed within a family or between ἑταῖροι and ἑταιρεῖαι and could easily translate into political alliances, this seems an attractive (if somewhat idealized) notion. As I will examine below, however, each of these kinds of friendship endures tremendous strain in the political turbulence of the late fifth century, and the tragic stage emerges as a crucial venue for contemplating and questioning the uniformity Aristotle posits.

Second, Aristotle suggests two key and interrelated components involved in establishing friendships. On the one hand, friends must use the same set of values in determining what ideas or people are good or bad, thereby forming an accord wherein what is good for one is good for the other, or for all who enjoy the benefits of the friendship (καὶ οἷς δὴ τὰ αὐτὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακά, καὶ οἱ τοῖς αὐτοῖς φίλοι καὶ οἱ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐχθροί· τὰ γὰρ τούτοις βούλεσθαι ἀνάγκη, ὥστε ἅπερ αὐτῷ καὶ ἄλλω βουλόμενος τούτῳ φαίνεται φίλος εἶναι, 1381a.7-10). But on the other hand, the opposite is true as well: those who enjoy a unity of mind in determining what is good draw an explicit distinction between themselves and those who do not agree, which necessarily locates dissenters outside the boundaries of the friendship (1381a.13-9):

καὶ τοὺς τῶν φίλων φίλους καὶ φιλοῦντας οὓς αὐτοὶ φιλοῦσιν. καὶ τοὺς φιλουμένους ὑπὸ τῶν φιλουμένων αὐτοῖς. καὶ τοὺς τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐχθροὺς καὶ μισοῦντας οὓς αὐτοὶ μισοῦσιν, καὶ τοὺς μισουμένους ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτοῖς μισουμένων· πᾶσιν γὰρ τούτοις τὰ αὐτὰ ἀγαθὰ φαίνεται εἶναι καὶ αὐτοῖς, ὥστε βούλεσθαι τὰ αὐτοῖς ἀγαθὰ, ὅπερ ἦν τοῦ φίλου.

[They are friendly] also to the friends of their friends and those kindly disposed to those they themselves like and those liked by those they themselves like. And [they are friendly to] those who have the same enemies they have and who hate those they themselves hate and who are hated

²⁵ On the distinction between personal, familial, and political friendships see also *Nic. Eth.* 1161b 12-6 and cf. Grimaldi (1988) 80 and Konstan (1997) 67-72. All textual citations of the *Rhetoric* are from W.D. Ross (1959). *Aristotelis ars rhetorica*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

by those they hate; for the same things seem good to all these as to themselves, so that they wish the same things as they do, which was the characteristic of a friend.²⁶

A crucial step toward establishing conspiratorial friendship, then, is coming to an agreement on the criteria used to determine whom one may count as his φίλοι and who must remain his ἐχθροί – a process far more complicated in practice than in theory, whose complications we see dramatized in Sophocles’ and Euripides’ late dramas alike.²⁷

Finally (and this is the most pertinent point to the present study), Aristotle comments on the motivating force that compels people to enter into friendships or political alliances. Once a person has found a likeminded person or group with whom he can build a friendship, he may then invest the trust that their comrades will provide personal and political safety to them by protecting their mutual interests: “Further, [men are friendly to those] who are disposed to do good to others regarding their wealth or safety; therefore, they honor free, brave, and just men” (ἔτι τοὺς εὐποητικοὺς εἰς χρήματα καὶ εἰς σωτηρίαν· διὸ τοὺς ἐλευθερίους καὶ ἀνδρείους τιμᾶσι καὶ τοὺς δίκαιους, 1381a.19-21). As Aristotle observes, personal and political friendships are predicated on the notion that φιλία entails not only an exchange of warm sentiments or a sense of belonging to a group, but it also comes with the obligation that people actively work for the physical and financial safety of their φίλοι (and, implicitly, against the interests of their ἐχθροί). Furthermore, those who have the ability to better their interests and live up to these obligations are viewed as free, brave, and just – virtues which several of the

²⁶ Trans. Kennedy (2007) 125.

²⁷ Cf. Konstan (1997) 72-5 on Aristotle’s emphasis on mutual respect for virtue and character as a crucial premise for building a friendship. On the complex role χάρις (gratitude) plays in formulating and maintaining friendships, see Konstan (2006) 156-68.

tragic figures in the plays under discussion profess as a claim to their aristocratic status (γενναιότης).

The elements of friendship that Aristotle examines in the *Rhetoric* are useful for articulating this study's definition of what constitutes a conspiracy: namely, a group of two or more people who, based on the trust they have invested in one another, seek to advance a mutually beneficial agenda against an enemy by means of some clandestine action.²⁸ At some points in the plays under discussion (such as the accord between Eteocles and Polynices in the *Phoenissae*), the components of friendship that Aristotle investigates are conspicuous only in their abject failure to satisfy the requirements of this definition. At other points (such as Orestes' and Pylades' assassination plot in the *Orestes*), the attempted homicide is treated overtly as a conspiracy seeking safety for its sworn conspirators. But whether explicit or implicit, if personal or political friendship is to provide the benefits Aristotle outlines, it requires an unshakable trust between its members; the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* all explore the civic repercussions when such trust is breached.

Terminology and Methodology

This project is predicated upon the notion that a production of Greek tragedy and the immediate history and civic context of its production cannot be understood separately from one another, and that coming to terms with this interdependence is a necessary first

²⁸ For comparison, the modern legal definition of a conspiracy provided by the Cornell Law Dictionary is: "An agreement by two or more people to commit and illegal act, along with an intent to achieve the agreement's goal. Most U.S. jurisdictions also require an overt act toward furthering the agreement...See *Whitfield v. United States*, 453 U.S. 209 (2005)."

step for studying a drama's significance to its original audience. This is a point most recently articulated by Wohl, who writes that,

“[Tragic drama] is neither swallowed by history nor alienated from it, but instead is actively engaged with and in it. *Helen* and *Trojan Women* propose, and *Orestes* illustrates, the active force of tragedy's mimesis: that far from merely recreating a historical reality that exists prior and exterior to it, tragedy *creates* that reality by producing the cognitive and affective conditions necessary for its realization. Its plotlines furnish the meaning of history's narrative arc, providing a structure for understanding and recording historical experience. But they also articulate that experience itself – not after the fact as an object of mimetic re-presentation, but in the lived moment of the performance.²⁹

With an eye to the cognitive and affective conditions Wohl references, this study begins by considering in chapter two the civic context within which the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* were produced. I survey this context in large part by examining the treatment of and the language used to describe the rise and fall of the coup of 411 BC in the two best surviving literary sources on the political atmosphere and specifics of the movement — Thucydides 8.48-98 and Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia* 29.1-32.1 — as well as additional fragmentary and epigraphical evidence.³⁰ One moment worthy of particularly close attention and discussion will be the Oath of Demophantos,³¹ not only for the insight it offers into the contemporary apprehensions of Athenian citizens, but also the intimate connections this public speech act shares with Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Euripides' *Orestes*, and the occasion of the City Dionysia as a whole.

²⁹ Wohl (2015) 131; the emphasis is hers. Cf. Williams (1977) 129-34, who considers the cognitive frameworks for understanding history that tragedy provides in terms of “structures of feeling” containing “all the known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion” of its civic context.

³⁰ See Shear (2011) 42-3 for a survey of the fragmentary evidence for the contemporary turbulent mood in Athens coming from Thrasymachus 85 B1, alongside the more general atmosphere in Greece as described at Thucydides 3.82-4. Epigraphical evidence will be useful for determining what political and logistical steps were taken to restore order after the revolution.

³¹ Our most complete text of the oath comes from its quotation by Andocides' *On the Mysteries* 1.96-8, but it is treated also by Demosthenes at 20.159 and Lycurgus *Leok.* 124 and 126.

A crucial premise upon which this study rests is that a significant portion of the civic discourse and apprehension surrounding real and potential conspiracies in these years was concerned with two points in particular: 1) the terminology that defines the boundaries used to designate civic sameness and difference and to determine the criteria for inclusion and exclusion from partisan groups, and 2) the language used to validate and justify the actions such groups undertake. The figures on stage in all of the dramas under discussion are frequently at pains to draw distinct boundaries between their allies (φίλοι) and enemies (ἐχθροί), primarily through the application of a number of select terms which, I will demonstrate, were both contemporarily prominent and open to multifarious interpretations. Two of these terms in particular are of central concern in the three dramas in question, so their definition and application in each of the texts under consideration will be a key element to this study. The first term in question is the adjective γενναῖος and its cognates. The definition and semantic field of this term offered by the Liddell-Scott-Jones (LSJ) is as follows:

γενν-αῖος, α, ov: -- true to one's birth or descent; hence

- I. 1) of persons: high-born; 2) noble in mind, high-minded; of actions: noble; 3) as a form of polite speech: γενναῖος εἶ, you are very good.
- II. 1) of things: good of their kind, excellent; genuine, intense.

However, on the tragic stage we find that this term is quite a bit more elastic in its usage than the above definition might indicate, as mythological figures' fundamental qualities (whether inherited by birth or fixed by civic station) determine whether they find themselves welcomed into a conspiracy or the target of clandestine action on stage. In addition to γενναῖος, I examine a number of synonymous terms (e.g. εὐγένειος, χρηστός, καλός, etc.) which at certain points carry idiosyncratic nuances as tragic heroes seek to define their own nobility against that of their enemies.

The second term that is key to this study is σωτηρία and its cognates, which the LSJ defines as follows:

σωτηρ-ία:--

- I. 1) deliverance, preservation; 2) a way or means of safety; 3) safe return; 4) salvation;
- II. II. of things: 1) keeping safe, preservation; 2) security, guarantee for safety or safekeeping of; 3) security, safety; 4) security against; 5) bodily health, well-being.

This is a term of crucial importance for this study, as the promise of σωτηρία acquired from the support of Tissaphernes is precisely the way that Pisander, Phrynichus, and Antiphon are able to persuade the Athenian civic body to alter their democracy significantly and attempt to establish an oligarchic regime.³² Of course, the irony that soon became apparent was that by seeking “security” the Athenian δῆμος only further destabilized their city and incurred further drastic political upheaval. Both Sophocles and Euripides show sensitivity to this irony, and this study finds instances in the work of each where the terminology of σωτηρία requires careful consideration.

By studying the language that occurs at significant junctures in the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* as well as in our historical source material, I hope to trace some of the many ethical points with which each engages regarding notions of nobility, protection, and the elements that qualify a person to claim them. I have chosen these terms in particular because they form part of a question that classical Athens struggled with for virtually all of its history, from Draco to Demosthenes: namely, who, either by trained acumen or by inherent noble quality (γενναῖος), is best suited to guide and

³² E.g., Thucydides 8.54.1: ὁ δὲ δῆμος τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀκούων χαλεπῶς ἔφερε τὸ περὶ τῆς ὀλιγαρχίας· σαφῶς δὲ διδασκόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Πεισάνδρου μὴ εἶναι ἄλλην **σωτηρίαν**, δείσας καὶ ἅμα ἐπελπίζων ὥς καὶ μεταβαλεῖται, ἐνέδωκεν. In addition to the instances in which the term σωτηρία actually occurs, I also examine contexts in which this term is obviously a central consideration, even if it is not explicitly mentioned.

preserve the safety and prosperity (σωτηρία) of the civic body? As several figures in the three dramas in question will clearly articulate, the answers to this question are complicated, disparate, and often politically determined.

A crucial methodological note should be made at this point: while this study attempts to tease out the particular nature of the depiction of mythological figures on stage in these dramas, at no point will I suggest that any tragic figure was intended to be or should be interpreted as representative of a specific, contemporary Athenian in any one-to-one way. Instead, I consider how an Athenian audience's experience with certain kinds of rhetoricians and political figures would likely have conditioned their viewing of the figures on stage. Here I follow the methodology advanced by Ann Suter in her treatment of possible connections between the *Trojan Women* and the suppression of Melos; she concludes that, even if there is no direct connection to be found, the play engages and contemplates the same issues Melos raised.³³ For example, I do not suggest that either the Odysseus of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* or the Tyndareus of Euripides' *Orestes* is constructed as a direct reference to the shadowy and dexterous rhetorician Antiphon. Rather, I investigate the ways in which the Athenian audience's living memory of the fear and mistrust sown by an arch-sophist and reticent mastermind such as Antiphon (Thuc. 8.68.2) must have added a dramatic tension not immediately apparent in the text. In other words, while I rely on historical sources like Thucydides and the Oath of Demophantos to establish civic context, I stress at all points that, as literary works, tragic

³³ Suter (2003) 18-22; cf. Mendelsohn (2002).

dramas are productions that explicate all the elements that combine to form “Athenianness,”³⁴ not just ones which are created by them.

On a related note, when engaging with the context within which the three plays were performed I frequently propose ways in which the actions on stage engage with the audiences and the social and civic concerns they brought to the theater. However, at these points I tread with caution; assumptions concerning the audiences’ response can be misleading if they presume a singular, uniform, and constant reaction to a drama, when in reality every audience is a dynamic and heterogeneous collection of individuals, each capable of multiple and not necessarily consistent responses to the on-stage action. As Simon Goldhill writes:

The multiform make-up of a theater audience (on the one hand), especially coupled with the audience’s ability to develop its views in discussion *after* a play as much as in the performance time of a play, create complex and temporally extended tensions which will only be oversimplified by such naïve and univocal idealization of the audience as a single and instant body.³⁵

Indeed, even though an audience’s response cannot be relied upon to be unanimous (and much less, identical to our own), there are pieces of internal evidence which can be relied upon to lend insight into moments in a play that treat topics of keen contemporary interest. For this study in particular, internal assessments of the conspiracies and conspirators appearing on stage is of vital importance.

Context and Scope

³⁴ A term I borrow from Griffith (2011) 5.

³⁵ Goldhill (2012) 40-1 (emphasis his). Cf. Easterling (1997) 24 on the “vagueness” between the contemporary and heroic worlds in tragic performance and the multiple avenues of interpretation that it opens to the audience. Cf. Allan (2008) 5-7 for the notion that this “vagueness” simultaneously questions civic ideology and also reinforces it.

One challenge that will limit this study is the lack of a complete account of the rise and fall of the oligarchic coup of 411 BC that offers multiple perspectives on the major advocates and goals of the movement, as well as its impact upon the war-wearied Athenian civic body. As noted above, our primary sources on the years in question are Thucydides 8.48-98, Pseudo-Xenophon's *Athenaion Politeia*, Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia* 29.1-32.2, and less directly Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, and the Oath of Demophantos. However, each of these texts comes with its own challenges and limitations. For instance, while Thucydides paints a vivid picture of the coup in broad strokes, he speaks only vaguely of the experience of individual members of the Athenian δῆμος, while Aristotle offers keen insight into the methods and goals of the coup but has much less to say about the circumstances leading up to it. Moreover, an additional challenge is presented by the vastly different portraits of the movement that these sources depict, as is largely colored by the political orientation of its author.³⁶ The *Athenaion Politeia* of Pseudo-Xenophon, for instance, remains a valuable resource for the political and legal procedures in Athens, but it is limited by doubts among modern readers arising from both its questionable dating and the strong anti-democratic bias of its author, and as such will need to be handled with caution.

The contemporary productions of Aristophanes and the Oath of Demophantos will need to be treated carefully as well. While each offers a more direct commentary upon specific people and anxieties of their contemporary Athens, all three have objectives quite apart from a historiographical transmission of events. The *Lysistrata* and the

³⁶ Cf. Shear (2011) 40, though we need not select either as more accurately representative of the time, and as often the truth likely rests somewhere in the middle.

Thesmophoriazusae offer caricatures of popular contemporary people or archetypes that may be useful for imaging figures in a broad sense, but taking them at face value as direct sources would be misguided. Likewise, the Oath of Demophantos offers a picture of pro-democratic, ever-vigilant, and homogenous citizen body, but there is little indication of the extent to which the oath accurately reflects the democratic zeal of individual citizens.³⁷

By necessity, this study also takes as an accepted premise correctly stressed by Mark Griffith among others that the influence of the many real-world institutions of Athens can be felt on the stage and in the text of the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes*.³⁸ However, there is also the danger that this perspective can be taken too far. For instance, Vickers has written extensively on the degree to which Sophocles was engrossed in Athenian politics and used the tragic stage to deploy hidden messages and commentaries on contemporary people and events, often with the goal of boosting the popularity of his work among the politically savvy Athenian audience.³⁹ It is perhaps safer and more fruitful to view the dramas not as expressions of a singular voice speaking programmatically, but as multiplicitous collections of voices reflecting on the complexities of the age that produced them. By grounding my study in the language common to both the playwrights and other contemporaneous Athenians, it is my goal to achieve a clearer understanding of the very real civic, social, and political anxieties of the years in question and the ways in which they find expression in tragic poetry.

³⁷ As opposed to, say, citizens still favoring oligarchy but pressured to adhere to the victorious democratic *ethos*.

³⁸ Cf. note 16 above.

³⁹ Vickers (2008), esp. 82-94.

There are several considerations that led me to focus on the period of the coup of 411 BC and the years immediately following. The first of these is practical: since there are simply few other periods where we can securely date a group of dramas — and fewer still which contain at least one play from Sophocles and another from Euripides — the dramas performed in these years offer us a rare opportunity to witness the evolution of the disquiet they express over time. It is advantageous to examine the poetry of both authors so that I may gauge both the different ways in which they work within their civic context, and also, perhaps, ways in which they may have influenced and responded to one another.⁴⁰ Moreover, it is fortuitous that these plays in particular — and the codes of conduct they treat and problematize — have been dated to the years of the coup. As noted above, the coup is treated quite differently by our two historical sources; however, while some may find this discrepancy to be an impediment to a clear understanding of the period, it may actually help disentangle what must have been a complex and confusing situation, even for those who experienced it firsthand. It is my hope that, just as the civic context surrounding these dramas can add a useful dimension for modern readers, these tragedies and the conflicts contained therein can open a new avenue for understanding the tumultuous years of their production. Moreover, a study of the key terms and ethics that I investigate over the entirety of surviving Greek tragedy (or even that of the Sophoclean and Euripidean corpora) would be too broad for a project of this scope; instead, by targeting a period when we know these points and others were a source of discussion and consternation, I shall be better able to investigate their presence on the tragic stage.

⁴⁰ I only make such comparisons when the dates of plays can be relatively certain, and even when direct influence cannot be established with certainty points of direct comparison are often still enlightening.

A Brief History of Tragic Scholarship

This section briefly locates the present study within the contributions scholars have made in the past century and beyond, and also gives an (inevitably simplified and overly succinct) overview of the trends and evolutions in scholarly approaches to tragic poetry which have made our contemporary perspectives possible. The contributions made by these scholars are familiar, and I recapitulate them here not to provide the history for its own sake, but rather to orient the premises and conclusions this study draws in regard to them. In the early part of the 20th century Greek tragedy was studied in mostly aesthetic terms, and while some emphasis was placed on the plays' political implications, little attention was given to the specific contexts within which the dramas were produced. Moreover, little emphasis was placed on the stylistic interactions between multiple plays or sub-genres of plays, or the social context within which their performances took place. Even more recent scholars such as Jasper Griffin have been strongly averse to reading too close a connection between what happens on the tragic stage and the real-life civic experiences of its audience, for fear that any attempt to do so risks reducing tragic poetry to a mere instrument of propaganda.⁴¹ However, the study of Greek tragedy underwent important developments in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. The first was the emergence of the "Paris School" after landmark studies by the movement's founders, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. These and many scholars following them sought an understanding of tragic poetry not as isolated literary texts, but as avenues for articulating, questioning, and reinforcing the many components that combine to form the intellectual self-conception of 5th century Athens, both at the πόλις level and at that of the

⁴¹ Griffin (1998) 39-50.

individual citizen. The advances offered by the Paris School have made it possible for modern scholars to explore not only the civic, political, social, legal, and ethical domains that make up the context in which tragic poetry was performed, but also the ways in which this performance transmutes or galvanizes the elements it assimilates.⁴²

Other important advances have been made, for instance by Simon Goldhill, who urges modern critics to view the City Dionysia and the performances staged therein as venues for communicating Athens' "civic ideologies." These ideologies, however, are rarely straightforward and are constantly in flux.⁴³ More than moral tales warning against the dangers of ethical or religious transgressions, tragic poetry deliberately complicates and questions a variety of social institutions.⁴⁴ Seminal contributions from scholars such as John J. Winkler, Froma Zeitlin, Nicole Loraux, Justina Gregory, and many others assimilated the new perspectives offered by the Paris School and the early works of Simon Goldhill to form what has come to be known as the "Collectivist School." These scholars suggest that we see tragic performance not as a static, isolated spectacle or text, but instead as a performance to be experienced at a particular moment and venue that celebrates the collective unity of the Athenian πόλις. This perspective has opened a variety of critical avenues that allow scholars to approach the texts in new ways, from questions surrounding a performance's ritual context⁴⁵ to the audience's reception of the mythological material on display⁴⁶ and beyond. In addition to sources of cultural data

⁴² Vernant (1988) 29-32.

⁴³ Goldhill (1986) 77-8.

⁴⁴ Goldhill (1986) 74-5; cf. Blundell (1989).

⁴⁵ Goldhill (1990) 97-129 describes in detail the many rituals performed in the theater of Dionysus immediately preceding a tragic performance and argues that a form of collective ideology was an important component of each.

⁴⁶ Easterling (1993) 24-5; Allen (2008) 4-8.

themselves, the dramas have come to be seen as opportunities to “look behind the masks and under the costumes and peer out into the audience, and investigate the various elements that went into a finished performance.”⁴⁷

Recent contributions by Mark Griffith have broadened our modern perspectives of Attic tragedy in its civic context, and he posits the close study of tragic poetry as an outstanding point of entry for exploring the copious cultural data encoded into it. In his summary of the scholarship produced on Greek tragedy in roughly the past twenty-five years, Griffith writes:

A high proportion of the critics who have written in English...have based their interpretations (implicitly or explicitly) on the principle that these plays are centrally concerned with issues of democracy and civic identity: Athenianness (origins, institutions, imperialist policies, etc.), the validation and/or interrogation of democratic values and institutions (as against the ‘old’ values of aristocracy and tyranny), and the gender politics of Athenian public and private life in general.⁴⁸

In response to these critics, Griffith identifies twelve principles for modern critics to keep in mind while reading Greek tragedy. While on the surface each of these twelve principles appears self-contradictory or even mutually exclusive, at their core all twelve expose the intricacies that make tragedy such a complex and dynamic genre, one that reflects on the multifarious culture that produced it. All twelve of Griffith’s principles are valuable for any study dealing with Greek tragedy and its relationship to its political and historical context. Two in particular are worth mentioning at the outset and will serve as a guide throughout this study:

11. Athenian tragedy is BOTH (a) extremely ‘political’ <i.e. all about the polis and the problems of living in a polis> AND (b) highly ‘apolitical’ <in that it often deals with the mythological, divine, or universally human issues that antedate or ignore polis-formation in Greece and seem to have little overt political content>.

⁴⁷ Winkler (1990) 4.

⁴⁸ Griffith (2011) 5.

12: The ‘politics’ of the surviving tragedies <i.e. the explicit and implicit ideologies running through these plays> can appear at times BOTH (a) highly ‘democratic’ AND (b) markedly ‘non-democratic’ (even within the same play).⁴⁹

In other words, all Greek tragedy is naturally embedded in Athenian culture and the lived experiences of its authors and audiences, even when it is not overtly political; when it is overtly political it is not dogmatically democratic, but instead presents us with characters who weigh the merits of a variety of real or potential civic institutions. On this basis, it is possible and necessary to study the political elements of a Greek tragedy without pursuing and misguided attempt at identifying its author’s doctrine(s) or partisan objectives.

With the groundwork laid by these and other scholars, a variety of aspects of Athenian political, social, and intellectual life in the late 5th century and the ways in which the tragic stage reflects upon them have come under investigation. Studies such as these have offered new insight into both broad cultural features and more subtle undercurrents that span the years of the Peloponnesian War. For example, several scholars have investigated the presence and increasingly hostile treatment of sophists and sophistic language on the tragic stage.⁵⁰ Several mythological figures — and Odysseus in particular — are depicted as using language and strike ethical postures that would have been familiar to the audience from their participation in Athens’ many civic institutions.⁵¹ In those cases when dramas can be securely dated, it is possible to a degree to hone in on specific points of anxiety or topics of civic discussion at a particular moment or moments in time. For example, Ruth Scodel has recently studied several plays (and those coming

⁴⁹ Griffith (2011) 3; the emphasis and formatting are his.

⁵⁰ E.g. Rose (1976); Lloyd (1992) 13-7; Conacher (1998) 50-8.

⁵¹ Stanford (1954) 102-17; on the varied characterization of Odysseus in democratic Athens, see Suksi (1999); see Montiglio (2011) 2-12 for a summary of the depictions of Odysseus in all extant plays.

during and after the Sicilian disaster in particular) as instances of a “politics of nostalgia.” She argues that tragic poetry provides a vehicle to the audience, by which they can engage with the difficulties of their present world by invoking figures from the mythological past, and that “if the difference between the miserable present and the glorious past is defined by specific individuals rather than by institutions or practices, it can be reformed.”⁵²

This study is of the latter type. After establishing (to the extent that the surviving sources will allow) some of the specific and prominent sources of apprehension forming the context within which *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* were performed, I conduct a philological investigation into each text that elucidates the ways in which Sophocles and Euripides articulated these points in their dramas, through a close examination of the language each used to address them. Conspiracies and the conspirators who plot them offer a particularly sharp lens through which we can view the rise and fall of the coup of 411 BC, the dread and suspicion to which it gave rise, and the vacuum of civic uncertainty and mistrust it left in its wake.⁵³ In discussing these three dramas in the context of their real-world backdrop, my goal is *not* to seek to pinpoint ways in which Sophocles and Euripides comment upon these political events or the historical conditions they create. Rather, I explore the ways in which the expressions of anxiety treated in these dramas can and must be understood with an eye toward contemporary events and toward certain figures whose ethical stances were open to individual interpretation. A fundamental hallmark of the tragic genre is the polyphony of voices that espouse

⁵² Scodel (2011) 4.

⁵³ As described in particularly vivid terms at Thucydides 8.66.2-5.

disparate and often conflicting ethical viewpoints, inviting the audience to synthesize them through their own lived experience and respond to the topics and tensions enacted before them. A close examination of the conspirators who appeared on stage in the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* will illuminate our understanding of the response on the part of the Athenian δῆμος to the conspiracies they endured in their own civic experience.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Chapter Synopsis: The purpose of the chapter is to establish the political conditions and cultural context within which the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* were performed, with emphasis on instances when real or perceived conspiracies incited a high level of anxiety and mistrust among the Athenian civic body. This inquiry begins with Thucydides' conception of how conspiracies formed and defined themselves in his "στάσις Model" (3.82-4). I next examine the response of Athenian citizens to two factions feared to be working covertly against the interests of the city shortly before the coup of 411: the desecration of the Eleusinian Mysteries (with emphasis on the accusations leveled against Alcibiades) and the mutilation of the herms on the eve of the departure of the disastrous Sicilian Expedition. The account of Andocides of the latter conspiracy lends particular insight into the ways secret associations were organized, operated, and – most importantly – were perceived by the Athenian δῆμος, so that I discuss it in depth. I then turn to our two primary but wildly divergent sources for the constitutional revolution of 411 BC: Book 8 of Thucydides' *Histories* and Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia*. In my discussion of Thucydides' treatment of the coup of 411 I am keenly interested in moments where both the oligarchic conspirators and the citizens they manipulated were engaged in political theater similar to the kind that emerges on the tragic stage in the plays this study examines, and I suggest that (according to Thucydides) the 410s saw a new link between drama and politics because of the performative characteristics of the political culture of this turbulent period. Finally, I compare this to the far more measured reforms we find in Aristotle, wherein the events of 411 are driven by less by upheaval of a coup and more by moderate oligarchs seeking to curb the excesses of a war-torn democracy. In spite of the vastly different pictures these two accounts of 411 BC provide, I conclude that at their core they both explore precisely the same questions as the tragedies I examine in this study: namely, in an age of protracted war how can a citizen body best provide for their own safety (σωτηρία), and what kind of "noble" (γενναῖος) men are best equipped to determine what such safety entails?*

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to locate the productions of the *Phoenissae* (410 BC), *Philoctetes* (409 BC), and *Orestes* (408 BC) in their historical contexts with particular emphasis on a number of conspiracies active in the years leading up to and including the oligarchic coup of 411 BC in Athens. Of these conspiracies some were

more successful in achieving their goals than others.⁵⁴ However, they all share a number of common elements, not the least of which is a reliance upon different kinds of public performance to mask the number of participating members and their subversive intentions. At times, such public performances are formulated upon a structure quite like that of a Greek drama: authors/leading conspirators organize a troop of actors/co-conspirators that, under their direction, speak the words and perform the actions they have scripted. In a number of the instances to be discussed, the distinctions between the dramatic elements involved in the public performance of a conspiracy and the ones more proper to the stage at a festival become obscured, and a number of points of contact between conspiring and acting emerge. As is the case with a dramatic production, these public spectacles require an audience; however, in the case of conspiracies active the fifth century BC there is also a second, internal audience to whom all members must perform complicitly in all clandestine or illegal actions with the goal of creating and maintaining the bonds of trust between participants. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate, either explicitly or implicitly all members of each of the conspiracies under discussion must come to agreement on two basic principles in order for their plots to proceed: first, what qualities or worthiness (terminology of *γενναῖος*) determine who will be allowed into the conspiracy's circle of trust, and second, what steps they should take together in order to promote their vision of safety (*σωτηρία*) and well-being for themselves or their city. In following the chapters I shall examine the ways in which these same questions are addressed on the tragic stage.

⁵⁴ On the pervasiveness of conspiracies in Athens, cf. Roisman (2006) 5-6: "It is hard to imagine that conspiratorial charges could yield these and other benefits unless there was in Athens an *a priori* readiness to believe in the pervasiveness of conspiracies in human affairs, and that both individuals and states had few inhibitions in resorting to them to obtain their goals."

Thucydides 3.82-84: The “στάσις Model”

In the most general terms, Thucydides’ account of the conflicts endured throughout Greece over the grueling years of the Peloponnesian War is a story intimately concerned with στάσις, or, more accurately, a series of episodes of internal strife as continued instability in all corners of the region led to evermore extreme factionalism. The sheer depth of this instability gripping all of Greece in the late 5th century is truly staggering, especially as it far exceeded the boundaries of explicit politics and tainted virtually every aspect of life. According to Thucydides, even the most basic terms of the Greek moral and civic spheres became fundamentally unstable, and the actions associated with these virtues were converted to their very opposites. Indeed, long before the level of anxiety reached its climax in Athens, at 3.82 in connection with the στάσις on Corcyra, Thucydides describes the wave of revolutions spreading from city to city in Greece in the early years of the Peloponnesian War, and what is particularly revealing are the breakdowns occurring at the linguistic level:⁵⁵

ἐστασίαζέ τε οὖν τὰ τῶν πόλεων, καὶ τὰ ἐφυστερίζοντά που πύσται τῶν προγενομένων πολὺ ἐπέφερε τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ καινοῦσθαι τὰς διανοίας τῶν τ' ἐπιχειρήσεων περιτεχνήσει καὶ τῶν τιμωριῶν καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιοῦσαι. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθῆς δειλία εὐπρεπής, τὸ δὲ σῶφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα, καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν ξυνετὸν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἄργον· τὸ δ' ἐμπλήκτως ὅξυ ἀνδρὸς μοίρα προσετέθη, ἀσφαλεία δὲ τὸ ἐπιβουλευσασθαι ἀποτροπῆς πρόφασις εὐλογος. καὶ ὁ μὲν χαλεπαίνων πιστὸς αἰεὶ, ὁ δ' ἀντιλέγων αὐτῷ ὕποπτος. **ἐπιβουλευσας δὲ τις τυχὼν ξυνετὸς καὶ ὑπονοήσας ἔτι δεινότερος· προβουλευσας δὲ ὅπως μὴδὲν αὐτῶν δεήσει, τῆς τε ἐταιρίας διαλυτῆς καὶ τοὺς ἐναντίους ἐκπεπληγμένους.** ἀπλῶς δὲ ὁ φθάσας τὸν μέλλοντα κακὸν τι δρᾶν ἐπηνεῖτο, καὶ ὁ ἐπικελεύσας τὸν μὴ διανοούμενον. καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ ξυγγενὲς τοῦ ἐταιρικοῦ ἄλλοτριώτερον ἐγένετο διὰ τὸ ἐτοιμότερον εἶναι ἀπροφασίστως τολμᾶν· οὐ γὰρ μετὰ τῶν κειμένων νόμων ὠφελίας αἱ τοιαῦται ξύνοδοι, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τοὺς καθεστῶτας πλεονεξία. καὶ τὰς ἐς σφᾶς αὐτοὺς πίστεις οὐ τῷ θεῷ νόμῳ μᾶλλον ἐκρατύνοντο ἢ τῷ κοινῇ τι παρανομήσαι.⁵⁶

Stasis [internal strife] thus ran its course from city to city, and places where it arrived at most recently, from having heard what had been done before, carried to a still greater excess the

⁵⁵ Cf. Plato *Republic* 8.560d-61a on the inversion of values taking place within the soul of the democratic man (“license” becomes “liberty,” “extravagance” becomes “generosity,” “shamelessness” becomes “courage,” etc.).

⁵⁶ All textual citations from Thucydides are from Jones, H. S. and J. E. Powell (1970). *Thucydides Historiae*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

refinement of their inventions, as manifested in the cunning of their enterprises and the atrocity of their reprisals. Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal supporter; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question incapacity to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting a justifiable means of self-defense. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected. **To succeed in a plot was to have a shrewd head, to divine a plot still shrewder; but to try to provide against having to do either was to break up your party and to be afraid of your adversaries.** In short, to forestall an intending criminal, or to suggest the idea of a crime where it was formerly lacking was equally commended, until even blood became a weaker tie than party, from the superior readiness of those united by the latter to dare everything without reserve; for such associations sought not the blessings derivable from established institutions, but were formed by ambition to overthrow them; and the confidence of their members in each other rested less on any religious sanction than upon complicity in crime.

Thucydides 3.82.3-6

Thucydides' vision of what was happening in the civil conflicts underway throughout Greece (3.82.1) is clear:⁵⁷ there was widespread descent into factional infighting as individual citizens were attracted into polarized and opposing *ἐταιρεῖαι*.⁵⁸ Particularly noteworthy in this passage is the emphasis Thucydides places not only on the shifting terminology for acceptable and unacceptable public behavior, but also on how compliance with the new values was a prerequisite for admission into a *ἐταιρεία*. With the conventional uses of even basic moral terminology so radically shifted, those unwilling to embrace the new ethics in such terms and endorse the deeds they describe likely found themselves at a serious disadvantage. For Loraux, disagreements over the semantics of terms such as these and the pursuit of like-minded allies who might be organized to dominate opponents are the first steps toward full-blown *στάσις*. She writes,

⁵⁷ A number of scholarly approaches to these chapters explore notions of *στάσις* as an "illness" infecting the "body politic" and note an abundance of medical vocabulary and parallels. Cf. Hornblower (1991) 480 and the relevant bibliography therein.

⁵⁸ See Cartwright (1997) 158 on the danger of inserting any modern notions of a political party. These *ἐταιρεῖαι* would have had a much less formal structure, no elected leaders, and no published platforms and policies. Instead, they operated in a much more fluid manner. On the instability of language Thucydides describes in this passage, he writes, "The misuse of language is a manifestation of the distortion of those fundamental values on which human social structures are founded. Language is seen to have no moral force; as part of a disintegrating society, it too disintegrates." On the origins and basic internal structures of *ἐταιρεῖαι*, see Calhoun (1913) 27-39.

“*stasis* refers etymologically only to a position; that the position should become a party, that a party should be constituted for the purpose of sedition, that one faction should always call forth another, and that civil war should then rage is a semantic evolution whose interpretation should be sought not in philology, but in Greek society itself.”⁵⁹ She goes on to note that, far more than mere civil war, the truly destabilizing element of στάσις is its erosion of “reassuring certitudes” and unsettling of “established models:” in short, the collapse of the fundamental principles holding a πόλις together.

At the same time, Loraux and others point out an important, subtle qualification for interpreting this critical passage. The point to which Thucydides alludes is not that the actual words themselves changed in meaning, but rather that the actions to which the words refer are attached changed.⁶⁰ This is certainly true, as we do not detect a violent and jarring vocabulary shift in all surviving Greek literature before 427 BC and after. Rather, what Thucydides describes is a conscious, deliberate shift in the values attached to specific actions by both the performers of such actions and by those witnessing them. In other words, there is a performative element at the very heart of this shift that requires a political actor to perform an ordinary action in a way that challenges his civic audience to accept or reject the ethics attached to it. Naturally, as with all audiences, the response may be polymorphous: some will accept and endorse the actor’s interpretation of the action performed, thereby accepting the valuation upon which it is predicated; others will find the performance unconvincing and reject it. The ubiquity and severity of exactly the epidemic of στάσις Thucydides here describes offers persuasive evidence that the

⁵⁹ Loraux (2002) 24, following closely Finley (1981) 94; for a summary of historical inquiry into *stasis*, cf. 25-31.

⁶⁰ Cartwright (1997) 158; Hornblower (2008) 481.

performance of actions with these new values attached to them swiftly divided many cities into factions, and in fact these performances delineate at least a clear boundary that can be drawn between rival segments of a city's population.⁶¹

Alcibiades in Public and Private Life

The seeds of civic tension that eventually gave rise to the coup of 411 BC are easily detected in several episodes in the years leading up to this moment of Athens' constitutional crisis.⁶² The most prominent of these episodes comes in Thucydides' narration of the Sicilian debate (6.9-23) and the role of the Athenian aristocrat Alcibiades in shaping the most crucial decision of the Peloponnesian War. It is here that after heated discussion the Athenians vote in favor of sending a massive force in order gain control of the major cities in Sicily and the copious resources the island produces. Abundantly clear in this passage is a rift in the citizen body between opposing sides for and against the aggressive action proposed. One of the ways Thucydides frames this rift is between the older citizens — perhaps those all-too experienced in the many horrors of war that made the Peace of Nicias necessary — and young, ambitious citizens seeking an opportunity to prove their valor. However, while the factions in conflict may break down in a general way according to age, there are certainly other complex contributing factors as well.

⁶¹ That the polarization into extreme factions was more than mere political squabbling and represented a very serious and deeply held civic anxiety is evidenced by Thracymachus' discussion of the civic mood in Athens in the time leading up to the coup of 411 BC in fr. 85 B1.38-50. Here he describes attempts by rivals to define the exact nature of the *πάτριος πολιτεία* in order to propose constitutional reforms politically advantageous to themselves.

⁶² For example, at 6.46.3-5 Thucydides details a conspiracy undertaken by the elite citizens of the Sicilian city of Egesta. In his description of this conspiracy Thucydides describes what is perhaps the most overt use of wide-scale public performance by a conspiracy in his entire history: the aristocrats collude to give a greatly exaggerated sense of the city's overall wealth to a handful of Athenian envoys, who report back to Athens the rich reward they will win if they vote to intercede in local affairs on Egesta's behalf.

Shortly thereafter and before the expedition to Sicily is able to depart, these tensions between competing segments of the Athenian civic body are complicated and exacerbated by religious scandals. First, on a single night in late May the majority of the herms — stone distance markers on the roads featuring the head and phallus of Hermes — were vandalized (6.27-9, 53, 60-1). It is important to note that this vandalization was no mere drunken prank, as it has frequently been treated by scholars in the past;⁶³ rather, it was a calculated attack by an ambitious conspiracy. At this moment, with the mood in Athens already tense and uncertain, the violation of these religious statues gave rise to a two-fold fear: some interpreted the incident as an extremely unfavorable omen on the eve of an incredibly large and dangerous military operation, a fear that for retrospective historians is perfectly valid. Others, however, feared that the statues were damaged by an unknown group of conspirators plotting against the democratic constitution. The sheer depth of the anxiety over even the possibility that men were conspiring against democratic institutions is a strong suggestion that not only were such plots a real possibility, but also that a growing segment of the population was dissatisfied with the status quo.

It was exactly this anxiety over potential antidemocratic conspiracies that prompted the establishment of an inquiry into the private practices of suspicious Athenian citizens, including Alcibiades. Generous public rewards were offered to anyone — citizen, alien, or slave— who provided information leading to the vandals; additionally, it was voted that anyone who knew of any other act of impiety should come forward and

⁶³ Dover (1945) 285-6 makes some suggestion the mutilation was the work of drunken young hoodlums, but far more widely accepted is the position taken by McGlew (2002) 114-5: “The destruction of the herms seems to have required too much planning and organization to have been the work of high-spirited or drunken youth.” Cf. also Furley (1996) 28.

testify without fear of punishment (6.27.2-3).⁶⁴ While Thucydides is able to offer the suggestion in retrospect that the witchhunt itself and the anti-democratic conspiracy it sought to root out was the real destabilizing danger, such an immediate and extreme response to the mutilation of the herms indicates at least some awareness among the voting bodies of Athenian citizens that something nefarious is at hand in the city, even if it is not yet clear what is being whispered and by whom.

Immediately after suggesting that these activities were undertaken by a potential conspiracy, Thucydides describes in much more concrete terms the agenda of Alcibiades' enemies aimed at channeling Athens' fears of antidemocratic activities toward a specific group of citizens, and Alcibiades in particular:

ὧν καὶ τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδην ἐπητιῶντο. καὶ αὐτὰ ὑπολαμβάνοντες οἱ μάλιστα τῷ Ἀλκιβιάδῃ ἀχθόμενοι ἐμποδῶν ὄντι σφίσι μὴ αὐτοῖς τοῦ δήμου βεβαίως προεστάναι, καὶ νομίσαντες, εἰ αὐτὸν ἐξελάσειαν, πρῶτοι ἂν εἶναι, ἐμεγάλυνον καὶ ἐβόων ὥς ἐπὶ δήμου καταλύσει τὰ τε μυστικά καὶ ἡ τῶν Ἑρμῶν περικοπὴ γένοιτο καὶ οὐδὲν εἴη αὐτῶν ὅτι οὐ μετ' ἐκείνου ἐπράχθη, ἐπιλέγοντες τεκμήρια τὴν ἄλλην αὐτοῦ ἐς τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα οὐ δημοτικὴν παρανομίαν.

Among them Alcibiades was implicated in the charge. Those bringing the accusation against Alcibiades were those men especially hostile toward him, as he stood in the way of their own firm leadership of the people, thinking that if they removed him then they themselves would be the first citizens. So they exaggerated his involvement, loudly proclaiming that both the mysteries and the mutilation of the herms were done so as to overthrow the democracy, and that none of the actions had been done without Alcibiades, adding as proof the rest of his habits and undemocratic lawlessness.

Thucydides 6.28.2

Thucydides does not yet name specific members of this agitation,⁶⁵ but their strategy for prosecuting Alcibiades hinges upon their ability to make a spectacle of his un-Athenian (and thus anti-democratic) nature: Thucydides relates that they “magnified” or

⁶⁴ Roisman (2006) 69-70 notes that Thucydides openly refers to these activities as conspiracies (συνωμοσία, 6.27.3), whereas Andocides carefully avoids the language of conspiracy in order to distance himself from the perpetrators.

⁶⁵ Thucydides refrains for the time being from naming any of Alcibiades' accusers specifically, but notes later at 8.65.2 that the demagogue Androkles was among them.

“exaggerated” (ἐμεγάλυνον) his involvement and “loudly proclaimed” (ἐβόων) that both the mockery and the hitherto unassociated mutilation of the herms were performed at his direction with the specific intention of undermining the democracy. Thucydides’ skepticism over the truth behind these charges — or at least the motivations of those bringing them — is also fairly clear, and readers may well sense the political theater involved in this campaign. However, even more relevant to the present study is the notion implicit in the final clause of this passage. As the ultimate proof of Alcibiades’ involvement these crimes, the prosecutors reference Alcibiades’ manifestations of, as they call them, anti-democratic and transgressive habits of life (τεκμήρια τὴν ἄλλην αὐτοῦ ἐξ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα οὐ δημοτικὴν παρανομίαν), an accusation similar to the one Nicias issued in the preceding debate.⁶⁶ While Thucydides does not frame it in quite the same way that Sophocles and Euripides do in the dramas to be discussed below, here the enemies of Alcibiades imply not only that such a thing as proper Athenian personal excellence exists, but also that the failure to meet its expectations publically opens suspicion as to one’s political sentiments. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, the notion that the behavior a person exhibits in public can be taken as a barometer for their true character and motivations is ripe for exploration and interrogation on the tragic stage.

Questions concerning the political value of personal excellence and nobility arise once again in a subsequent passage, although once again in slightly different language. The departure of Alcibiades and the fleet to Sicily did nothing to calm the nerves of the citizens remaining in Athens, and Thucydides describes the litigious frenzy undertaken to

⁶⁶ Cf. 6.12.2 and Thucydides’ interpretation of public opinion at 6.15.4.

identify anyone who could justifiably stand trial for violating the herms and mocking the Eleusinian mysteries:

οἱ γὰρ Ἀθηναῖοι, ἐπειδὴ ἡ στρατιὰ ἀπέπλευσεν, οὐδὲν ἥσσον ζήτησιν ἐποιοῦντο τῶν περὶ τὰ μυστήρια καὶ τῶν περὶ τοὺς Ἑρμᾶς δρασθέντων, καὶ οὐ δοκιμάζοντες τοὺς μηνυτάς, ἀλλὰ πάντα ὑπόπτως ἀποδεχόμενοι, διὰ πονηρῶν ἀνθρώπων πίστιν πάνυ χρηστοὺς τῶν πολιτῶν ξυλλαμβάνοντες κατέδουν, χρησιμώτερον ἡγούμενοι εἶναι βασανίσαι τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ εὑρεῖν ἢ διὰ μηνυτοῦ πονηρίαν τινὰ καὶ χρηστὸν δοκοῦντα εἶναι αἰτιαθέντα ἀνέλεγκτον διαφυγεῖν.

The Athenians, after the army departed, no less continued the investigation into the matters concerning the mysteries and the things done to the herms, and rather than scrutinizing the informers but instead accepting them all in their suspicious temper, they seized and imprisoned some of the most respectable citizens on the evidence of scoundrels, thinking it better to cross examine a more respectable citizen in the matter than on account of some rascality of the informer to allow one accused to escape unquestioned for thinking him respectable.

Thucydides 6.53.2

Perhaps counterintuitively, the suspicious temper (ὑπόπτως) that had taken hold in Athens served not to increase the level of judicial scrutiny and prompt thorough investigations of accusations, but instead cast a shadow of doubt over citizens who under normal circumstances might have been above suspicion – here, the *χρηστοί*.⁶⁷ Trust in the narratives put forth by men considered by these investigators to be “rascals” (πονηρῶν ἀνθρώπων πίστιν) came to be more persuasive than the well-established good character of noble citizens (χρηστοὺς τῶν πολιτῶν). In other words, unscrupulous men were able to obscure the standards for evaluating judicial evidence and citizen value, and familiar standards for establishing credibility become blurred, if not outright inverted. Thucydides gives no indication in this passage that these *πονηροί* were organized into any kind of conspiracy or that there was any conscious effort for one faction of citizens to frame another for these crimes. However, the mass confusion, willingness to take legal action based on unsubstantial evidence, and breakdown of long-established bonds of good faith

⁶⁷ As will be discussed below, the use of the term *χρηστός* to refer to the same values referenced by *γενναϊότης* figures into all three of the tragic productions under discussion in this study and it is featured quite heavily in Euripides *Orestes* (chapter 4) in particular.

are all good indications of the gloomy atmosphere of mutual mistrust that, over the next four years, will condense to the point of constitutional revolution.

Criminal Complicity Establishes Trust: Andocides and the Hermokopidai

At this point Thucydides has little more to say on the continued accusations and the specific proceedings of the subsequent trials.⁶⁸ Fortunately, however, the account is continued in a speech delivered by our other major resource for these crimes, the orator Andocides. As a witness to the formation of the conspiracy accused of violating the herms, he offers in his speech of self-defense *On the Mysteries* a vivid account of the major protagonists and their criminal actions. He paints a picture of Athens as a city in the grip of a profound inner turmoil that, as Thucydides also describes above, is burdened constantly with accusation after accusation with little certainty as to the validity of the charges, to the point that prominent men avoided the public eye entirely on days when the council met for fear of arrest (*de Myst.* 36.6-10).⁶⁹ For scholars such as Murray, the accusations of and anxieties over illicit conspirational activity at work in the mutilation of the herms set the stage for furtive dealings of the oligarchs in the coup of 411, so our investigation of the civic mood in Athens at the time of the production of the plays under discussion must begin here.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ On Thucydides' general reticence on the role of the βουλή in the investigations, cf. Hornblower (1991) 23.

⁶⁹ The most comprehensive scholarly treatment of both the dedication and mutilation of the herms is that of Osborne (1985), in particular 64-7. He concludes that "[t]he mutilation of the Herms could not but embarrass Athenian democratic self-confidence and take the wind from the sails of their war efforts...It was bound to cause Athenians' relations with one another to go out of control."

⁷⁰ Murray (1990) 151 (emphasis his): "(Andocides') account establishes the bridge from aristocratic drunken sacrilege to revolution, by alleging that the mutilation was the work of a *group of hetaireiai*, a wider *synomosia*...It has a prophetic plausibility, since it was precisely such a *synomosia* of *hetaireiai* which organized the street murders four years later, and set up the oligarchy of the four hundred." Cf. Thuc. 8.48.2 and 8.54.4.

One of the most striking aspects to Andocides' narratives of these crimes is the near omnipresence of conspirators and conspiracies, and in his account Andocides touches upon an important issue that Sophocles and Euripides address subsequently in drama: namely, the difficulty of establishing enough trust in someone that will allow them to be absorbed into a conspiracy. He describes the testimony of a man named Diocleides to a special commission of inquiry chaired by the democratic champions (ἐννούστατοι εἶναι τῷ δήμῳ, 36.3),⁷¹ Charicles and Peisander.⁷² Diocleides claims to be able to identify a large portion of those responsible for violating the herms, whose number he puts at roughly 300 participants. He substantiates this claim with the following evidence. On the night in question, he says, he woke early and set out to collect the earnings of one of his slaves working at a silver mine in Laureion. As he passed the gateway of the Theater of Dionysus (τὸ προπύλαιον τοῦ Διονύσου, 38.4)⁷³ – a not incidental location, as discussed below – he saw a large group of men coming down into the orchestra from the Odeum⁷⁴ (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὠδείου καταβαίνοντας εἰς τὴν ὀρχήστραν, 38.5-6). They stood in groups of five, ten, and in some cases twenty, and by the light of the

⁷¹ All textual citations from Andocides are from MacDowell, D. M. (1962). *Andokides: On the Mysteries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁷² Even if both of these men truly are strong proponents of the democratic institutions at this time, their commitment to democracy did not prove to be permanent and both eventually turned coat and joined oligarchic factions. Charicles was an active participant in the war, and commanded 30 ships in a raid of the Peloponnesian coast in 413 (Th. 7.20.26). No records survive on his participation in the coup of 411, though MacDowell (1962) 87 suggests that he sided with Peisander and the 400 because he was exiled (Isocrates 16.32) after their fall. Either way, Lysias 12.55 tells us that he later returned and was one of the harsher members of the Thirty Tyrants. Peisander's antidemocratic activities subsequent to chairing this inquiry are discussed in detail below.

⁷³ MacDowell (1962) 89 notes that the gateway in question is not known and that it may refer not to the gateway to the theater itself, but rather to the gateway to the whole precinct of Dionysus. However, this suggestion seems difficult to reconcile with Diocleides' claim that he spied on the conspirators from behind a bronze statue in the theater (38.8) and that he was close enough to make out individual faces in the moonlight (38.4).

⁷⁴ Maidment (1968) 371 notes that the Odeum of Pericles is a large auditorium adjacent to the orchestra intended for musical performances, but also used occasionally as law courts and for other auxiliary purposes.

moon he was able to recognize many of their faces.⁷⁵ Upon his return to the city the following day, he learned immediately of the mutilation of the herms and the appointment of the commission to investigate. He quickly concluded that the men he witnessed gathering on the previous night must be the culprits, and after consulting with his friend and confidant Euphemus he sought an audience with Andocides himself, whom he identifies as the conspiracy's leader. Here, he was presented with an interesting dilemma: Diocleides claims that in exchange for pledges of trust (πίστιν δὲ τούτων δοῦναί τε καὶ δέξασθαι, 41.10) Andocides offered him two talents of silver⁷⁶ and the opportunity to join their faction if their revolutionary efforts proved successful (ἐὰν δὲ κατάσχωμεν ἡμεῖς ἃ βουλόμεθα, ἓνα αὐτὸν ἡμῶν εἶναι, 41.8-9). MacDowell offers two possible interpretations of this second offer: either "if Diocleides kept our secret, he should become a member of our group," or "if we established an oligarchy, Diocleides should be a member of the oligarchic government."⁷⁷ Either way, this is clearly an attempt to absorb Diocleides into the conspiracy; indeed, Diocleides was willing to keep the secret and would have joined the faction if, for reasons that are not offered, at the last minute the conspirators renege on the deal and withhold the money, prompting Diocleides to come forward with his testimony (42.5-8).

Such is the account of Diocleides, and in treating it scholars must deal with a difficult question: how much (if any) of Diocleides' testimony is reliably true, and how much is pure fiction? Given the sources we possess, there is no certain answer to this

⁷⁵ Plutarch at *Alc.* 20.8 cites this claim as proof that Diocleides' testimony is fictional, since the mutilation of the herms occurred on the last night of the month when there would have been little or no moonlight.

⁷⁶ As opposed to the bounty of 100 minae offered by Peisander and Charicles, cf. 41.6-8.

⁷⁷ MacDowell (1962) 91; here he suggests that at the time the speech was delivered Andocides would more likely avoid even an indirect reference to his alleged oligarchic leanings.

question. There are several reasons why it should be accepted and several others why it might be rejected, but the safest and most likely view is that Diocleides' narrative is not entirely untrue, but that Andocides does not confess the whole truth either.⁷⁸ Each man has an agenda of his own, to which readers must remain sensitive. However, one point that cannot be denied is that Diocleides gave a performance convincing enough to ignite a panic. Andocides describes the city's extreme and distressed response to the exposure of the conspirators: the whole city made preparations to defend itself against an armed assault and guards were placed on high alert throughout Athens and at the Piraeus. Even the Council itself took precautions and spent the night under guard on the Acropolis (44-5).⁷⁹ The 42 conspirators specifically identified (including Andocides, twelve of his relatives, and two members of the Council present at that very meeting) out of the 300 men involved were immediately arrested (43).

Since this is after all a speech in self-defense Andocides is keen to point out that he was in fact innocent and only coerced to confess to the crime by the severity of his situation (51). Now fifteen years later, it is Andocides' present goal to remove as much suspicion of guilt from himself as possible, and it is noteworthy that one of Andocides' primary strategies for doing so is to point out a number of performative elements of

⁷⁸ Cf. Furley (1996) 61-4; briefly, evidence against accepting the testimony as true includes 1) Phrynichus fr. 58 makes it clear that Diocleides was a well-known rogue; 2) The likelihood that Thucydides had Andocides and Diocleides respectively in mind when he notes that in 415 respectable citizens were arrested on the accusation of scoundrels (6.53.2, discussed above); 3) Plutarch's assertion that there was no moonlight on the night in question (*Alc.* 20.5). Points in favor of accepting the testimony as true include 1) Circumstantial detail perhaps difficult to take as pure fiction, such as the encounter with Andocides' father (40-1); and, 2) the severe reaction to the narrative (45) and the hero's reception Diocleides enjoyed at the Prytaneion.

⁷⁹ Thucydides notes at 6.61.2 that these fears were strongly intensified by the presence of a small Spartan force near the isthmus, which was ostensibly there to negotiate with the Boeotians. However, under the circumstances it was feared that instead the army had come on Alcibiades' instigation and was poised assault the city.

Diocleides' narrative of these events that suggest the account is not true. First, he asks his listeners to consider why Diocleides constructed his narrative the way he did. Andocides suggests that the primary reason Diocleides posits himself as an unobserved onlooker to the conspirators is so that he can name virtually anyone he wishes as complicit in the conspiracy (39.1-4). In other words, as the singular audience member to the conspirators' presence in the Theater of Dionysus, his interpretation is the only one available. Second, Andocides urges the jurors to see Diocleides' testimony for the performance it was, delivered by a liar (εἰπεῖν τὰ γενόμενα ὡς τάχιστα καὶ ἐλέγξει Διοκλείδην ψευδάμενον, 60.3-4) and an informer paid by Alcibiades of Phegous⁸⁰ and his associate Amiantus (εὐθὺς ὁμολόγει ψεύδεσθαι, καὶ ἐδεῖτο σῶζεσθαι φράσας τοὺς πείσαντας αὐτὸν λέγειν ταῦτα· εἶναι δὲ Ἀλκιβιάδην τὸν Φηγούσιον καὶ Ἀμίαντον τὸν ἐξ Αἰγίνης, 65.4-7).

In addition to the performative elements of Diocleides' false testimony which Andocides references in his defense, there is another aspect upon which he does not dwell but is particularly relevant to the present study: namely, the conspirators' choice to hold their secret meeting in the Theater of Dionysus itself. On the one hand, the theater makes some sense as a safe place for a group the size of the one described to meet in the middle of the night without attracting much attention. However, on the other hand I suggest quite a different reason why the conspirators chose this location – or, more accurately, why meeting secretly in the theater made sense to Diocleides in contriving the narrative and proved persuasive to the jury. The interworking of the conspiracy Diocleides describes bears striking resemblance to the ones appearing on Sophocles' and Euripides' tragic stage (the details of which I investigate in chapters 3, 4, and 5 below): a

⁸⁰ The cousin and fellow exile of the more famous Alcibiades, cf. Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.13.

ringleader (Andocides, in this case) determines a course of furtive action to be undertaken by his trusted co-conspirators for the purpose of giving the impression that something false is actually true (here, that Athens is under an imminent threat of an oligarchic coup). Moreover, from Diocleides' vantage point the conspirators literally take the tragic stage as they make their way from the Odeion and down into the orchestra (ἀπὸ τοῦ ᾠδείου καταβαίνοντας εἰς τὴν ὀρχήστραν, 38.5-6), thereby occupying the same physical space as actors in a drama. False though Diocleides' conspiracy may be, I suggest that the avid spectation and appreciation of tragic performance informed the civic conception of how conspiracies operate to such an extent that an imaginary conspiracy would naturally hatch its scheme in the Theater of Dionysus, as if it had leapt from the mythological realm into the real lives of Athenian citizens.

This is the defense offered by Andocides for his false admission of guilt in the affair of the herms, and his strategy of highlighting the performative elements of Diocleides accusations is effective: understanding that the game is up, Diocleides readily confesses the truth in the hope that his cooperation will win him leniency from the council. It does not, and he is immediately handed over to the court for execution, allowing for the release and return from exile of Andocides' friends and family. However, before proceeding there are two final performative aspects of the conspiracy charged with the mutilation that are worthy of discussion because they can be extrapolated to offer insight into how conspiracies operate in general. First, the penchant for ἑταῖροι to undertake some sort of subversive or criminal action in order to establish trust among one another is well established. Thucydides' consideration of this point at 3.82.6 (discussed above) is particularly revealing, especially as he highlights the forced

allegiance imposed on members of these political clubs by shared complicity in criminal activities.⁸¹ Andocides himself puts quite a fine rhetorical point on it when he calls Euphiletus' proposal to perform the mass mutilation a “πίστιν τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀπιστοτάτην” (67.5), “one of the most treacherous pledges that men could make,”⁸² here showing sensitivity to the paradox involved in swearing fealty to a cause whose sole purpose is to sew mistrust throughout the city. An interesting question arises when one views such binding crimes as acts of public performance: for what audience exactly are the conspirators performing? One answer must be that the conspirators as a collective body serves as an audience for each individual conspirator. This internal audience simultaneously witnesses and is witnessed by the others committing a crime in which they have equal stake. Indeed, the good faith enjoyed by many conspirators is backed primarily by mutually assured destruction if the conspiracy is exposed.

Andocides makes use of the notion that complicity in criminal activity produces trust in an effort to prove his innocence of the crime he was forced to confess falsely. Shortly before the mutilation took place, he says, he was tossed from a horse and bedridden by a broken collar bone and skull injury (61.5-8); undeterred, Euphiletus deceives the rest of the conspirators and assures them that Andocides remains willing and able to take part in the mutilation; however, when the one herm in the city that remains intact is the one assigned to Andocides to destroy, it is clear that Andocides did not make the required performance and does not belong to the conspiracy's circle of trust (62). The

⁸¹ Furley (1996) 29 points out two other instances where crimes are committed to perform party loyalty. First, the oligarchic coup on Samos in 411 (on which see below) chose as its pledge the assassination of the ostracized democrat Hyperbolos (Thuc. 8.73.3) — a convenient target, since his exile left him largely defenseless and his murder would serve as at least a symbolic blow to democratic stability. Second, he notes Critias' insistence that his fellow oligarchs condemn to death the Eleusinian democrats so that they “will have the same hopes and fear as us,” i.e., the Thirty Tyrants (Xen. *Hel.* 2.4.9).

⁸² Trans. MacDowell.

response of the rest of the conspirators is revealing; they are extremely angry (δαινὰ ἐποίουν, 63.1) at what they consider to be a breach of trust by a man who is now a potential informant, underscoring the necessity that every conspirator perform for the internal audience of fellow co-conspirators. The fact that he did not make the performance necessary to hold the trust of the conspirators is precisely the fulcrum he uses to shift blame away from himself and toward Euphiletus in his defense (64.1-4).

All told, these religious crimes committed in Athens in the spring of 415 proved to be a crucial turning point in Athenian history, not only for the gloom it cast upon the immense expedition preparing to launch and the defection of Alcibiades, but even more so for the ever-increasing level of mistrust and factional strife the subsequent prosecutions exposed and exacerbated.⁸³ Alcibiades' true degree of complicity in the mutilation and in the mockery of the mysteries will likely never be known with certainty, and it remains quite likely that he had little to do with them at all.⁸⁴ However, the downfall of Athens' most prominent citizen from celebrated στρατηγός to disgraced exile and traitor is a strong indication of the depth of the mutual mistrust infecting the city and the nervousness over clandestine conspiracies.⁸⁵ Citizens must have been keenly aware of

⁸³ McGlew (2002) 114 writes that, "the discovery of attacks against Athenian civic religion on the eve of the Athenian expedition to Sicily signaled new and alarming levels of civic discord. Alarm was certainly evident in the reaction of the Athenian assembly, which investigated and prosecuted the two actions with such intensity that, in Thucydides' account of the affair, it became distracted from pressing military business." On the perception of the mutilation of the herms as a bad omen looming over the campaign, see Thuc. 6.27.3, and Nicias' downplaying of his troops' suspicion that their ill fortune is the result of divine anger at 7.77.3.

⁸⁴ MacDowell (1962) 192 concludes that the mutilation had the dual purpose of performing loyalty to the oligarchic conspiracy and preventing the departure of the fleet, as the oligarchs (among other Athenians) preferred that the Peace of Nicias remain intact. Especially considering the latter point, he suggests that Alcibiades had nothing to do with the plot. Rhodes (2011) 48-9 finds it more likely that the mutilation of the herms served as enough of a shock to ignite long-held suspicions and accusations against Alcibiades and others into action.

⁸⁵ MacDowell (1962) 193 asks rhetorically why democrats such as Peisander, Charikles (on whom see above), and Androkles (cf. *de Mys.* 27, *Plu. Alk.* 19.1) would attack Alcibiades in 415 when he is not doing anything openly undemocratic (aside from perhaps some of his more flamboyant lifestyle choices). He

the need for some means for identifying trustworthy men if the city was to stave off constitutional revolution, especially after the failure of the Sicilian expedition and Athens' declining fortunes in the war. Indeed, in these intermittent years the topic of trust — why it is good and necessary, and how it can be established and maintained — was an important and recurring topic of conversation.⁸⁶

The Coup of 411 BC, Part I: Violent Upheaval in Thucydides

In this section and in the one that follows it will be my task to track the ways in which Athenian citizens experienced and perceived the efforts of a relatively small political faction of oligarchic sympathizers to undermine the democratic government in 411 BC and to install a new, more restricted regime. The result of this coup of 411 BC was the brief but extremely disruptive rule of the Four Hundred oligarchs, which after being in place for only a few months fell to a far more moderate and inclusive polity known as the Five Thousand. Scholars face a number of challenges in investigating the events and conditions that made possible the rise to power of the Four Hundred and the Five Thousand, perhaps the most conspicuous of which is not only a stark contrast in the way our two primary sources handle these events, but also the extent to which each is colored by later events and by its author's biases.⁸⁷ On the one hand, Thucydides paints the revolution as a violent upheaval driven by unscrupulous men seeking power for their

answers that, in short, they were jealous of him and his ever-increasing influence and popularity (especially among the Athenian sailors). But even if this was their true motivation, they could not have succeeded in so thoroughly altering public opinion about him at a more stable moment in Athenian history. They must have relied on the power of citizens' fears of oligarchic conspirators already in place in order to have slandered him so thoroughly.

⁸⁶ Cf. Thrasymachus' fragment 85 B1.38-50, notes above.

⁸⁷ On the epigraphic evidence for the 400, see IG I³ 311.35-51, 335.30-2, 357.54-82, and 373; on the 5,000, see [Plut.] *X orat.* 833E-FC, FGrH 324 F5b, IG I³ 312.52-68, 336.44-57, and 374; on both the 400 and the 5,000, see IG I³ 98. Cf also Shear (2011) 32-5; 40.

own ends (8.45-97). In his account, a small number of conspirators work behind the scenes to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and mistrust within the city. Meanwhile, the most publically visual proponent of the movement is Phrynichus,⁸⁸ who in time suffered a violent death much in the tradition of the tyrant Hipparchus at the hands of Harmodius and Aristogeiton.⁸⁹ But on the other hand, Aristotole's *Athenaion Politeia* provides almost the opposite sense: namely, that the oligarchs and the constitutional renovations they sought were an orderly attempt to curb the excesses of a democracy that had become dangerously radical. Here the critical figure is Kleitophon, a moderate oligarch who sought to return to the reforms of Cleisthenes and to find ways that democratic and oligarchic practices and institutions might be blended (*Ath. Pol.* 29.3). While there are significant discrepancies between these two critical sources that offer a number of interpretative difficulties, taken together they offer a sense of just how complex and entangled were the agendas of individuals and factions within the city in this turbulent period. Though in many ways divergent, taken together, they can offer a more complete understanding of the competing individuals and interests at hand.

The coup of 411 BC is the major moment of civic upheaval that looms large in all three of the tragedies to be studied in the following chapters, and, with an eye toward illuminating the points of civic consternation the coup raised and the plays contemplate, I

⁸⁸ Cf. Bowie (1993) 98-9: some scholars hold that Phrynichus' political postures prior to his participation in the coup of 411 would have been closely aligned with Kleon's based on a reference in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1301-2), and there is little to suggest that he would have held oligarchic leanings at the time of the play's production in 422 BC. Six years after the events of 411 in Aristophanes' *Frogs* Phrynichus is referenced once again as the lead organizer and political manipulator of the oligarchs (686-91). On this reference and the demand of the play's chorus that those suspected of oligarchic sympathies be pardoned, cf. MacDowell (1995) 284-8.

⁸⁹ Thuc. 8.92.2. On the associations between the assassinations of Hipparchos and Phrynichus and the language of the Oath of Demophantos, cf. Shear (2011) 137-41. On the assassination as a therapeutic act of violence, cf. Ober (2003) 215.

use the following examination of Thucydides' version of the events to explore two questions: first, how (at least in Thucydides' conception of it) did the internal operations of the oligarchic conspiracy allow its members to build and maintain the trust that made the conspiracy successful, and, second, how did those outside of the conspiracy deal with the knowledge that unseen forces were shaping their city's government without their consent? In Thucydides' account of the coup of 411, the revolutionary oligarchic movement has its origins not in Athens itself; rather, it began with an attempt to overthrow the democratic government of the island of Samos by a segment of the Athenian forces.⁹⁰ The aim of this faction was to gain favor with the exiled Alcibiades and, by way of his favor with the satrap Tissaphernes (8.45.1-47.1), to win Persian aid in defeating Sparta. A handful of Athenians sailed to Alcibiades to discuss what steps should follow; Alcibiades stated in no uncertain terms what the faction must do in order to obtain Persian support:

τῷ τε Ἀλκιβιάδῃ διαβάντες τινὲς ἐκ τῆς Σάμου ἐς λόγους ἦλθον, καὶ ὑποτείνοντος αὐτοῦ Τισσαφέρην μὲν πρῶτον, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ βασιλέα φίλον ποιήσιν, εἰ μὴ δημοκρατοῖντο (οὕτω γὰρ ἂν πιστεῦσαι μᾶλλον βασιλέα), πολλὰς ἐλπίδας εἶχον αὐτοῖ θ' ἑαυτοῖς οἱ δυνατώτατοι τῶν πολιτῶν τὰ πράγματα, οἷπερ καὶ ταλαιπωροῦνται μάλιστα, ἐς ἑαυτοὺς περιποιήσιν καὶ τῶν πολεμίων ἐπικρατήσιν.

Then setting out from Samos some men went to confer with Alcibiades, and he proposed that he will make first Tissaphernes and then also the king their friend, if they would abandon the democracy (for the king would trust them more), and those most powerful individuals (on whom the heaviest burdens are apt to fall) had great hopes for themselves personally of getting the government into their hands, and also of overcoming the enemy.⁹¹

Thucydides 8.48.1-2

⁹⁰ On what some have called a “problematic” shift in the style of Thucydides' narrative in the second half of book 8, cf. Gomme (1981) 94-5 and Hornblower (2008) 884-6. One explanation offered by Wilamowitz *Kl. Schr.* 3.307-10 and Delebecque (1965) 77-8 is that this section of the history was written long after the sections immediately preceding it, perhaps even following an interview with Alcibiades. Whatever the cause for the shift, it forms one component of an overall more literary treatment of the coup of 411 to be discussed below, a treatment that emphasizes the deceptive performances of the movement.

⁹¹ Translated with aid from Hornblower (1991) 894-5, who discusses the difficulties involved in the manuscript reading of *δυνατώτατοι* and in determining exactly to whom the term applies. Hornblower follows Rood (1998) 270 in detecting the political savvy Alcibiades employs in taking a role in the formation of the oligarchic coup but carefully circumscribing culpability for the coup's actions later on.

It is revealing that from the outset of the oligarchs' project not only is earning and maintaining the trust of the Persian king (οὕτω γὰρ ἂν πιστεῦσαι μᾶλλον βασιλέα) the critical objective for their success, but also that the way this trust must be demonstrated is by actively undermining a common enemy: in this case, the Athenian democracy (εἰ μὴ δημοκρατοῖντο). While it true that macro-level diplomatic confidence building such as this involves a slightly different kind of πίστις than does the interpersonal trust conspiracies require, in both cases a demonstration of good faith comes in the form of action to be undertaken and a shared stake in the consequences (much like in the case of the *hermokopidai* discussed above).

Upon the return of the envoys to Samos Phrynichus first distinguished himself and his capacity for anticipating the long-term consequences of the actions that the oligarchs were preparing, and in doing so he demonstrated many of the dangers involved in establishing the trust that makes conspiracies possible. He attempted to dissuade his ἐταῖροι from overestimating the impact their revolution would have on Athens and its allies and speculated — correctly, Thucydides suggests — that Alcibiades and Tissaphernes cared very little what form of government was installed in Athens, so long as each man achieves his ends (8.48.4-7).⁹² In spite of Phrynichus' intense opposition, the oligarchs voted to proceed with the plot to undermine the democratic government and install themselves in its place by means of the promise of Persian support in the war. At this point, Phrynichus found himself in a precarious position because his opposition (sensible as it may have been) exposed him to an accusation of disloyalty to his ἐταῖροι

⁹² Hornblower (1991) 895-6 notes that Phrynichus' speech is particularly valuable to historians because it provides a rather frank perspective on the Athenian Empire from the point of view of an elite Athenian citizen. He draws a comparison between this speech and Nikias' at 7.6.3 (though cautions that we remain sensitive to the rhetorical function of both).

and their goals; even if he had the best interests of his fellows at heart, his failure to demonstrate loyalty called into question the bond of trust he shared with his associates – precisely the same problem facing several mythological figures in Sophocles’ and Euripides’ dramas. Sensing that he will be seen as an opponent to Alcibiades if the oligarchs are successful in their schemes and would likely be made an example of and executed, he attempted to enter independently into a conspiracy with the Spartan admiral Astyochus (8.50.1), and his inability to do so in spite of the fact that the two men shared some common goals demonstrates yet again the difficulties of establishing trust among adversaries and the delicacy with which such a task must be approached – a central concern of the conspiracies appearing in the tragic dramas performed in the immediately subsequent years. Thucydides describes a series of politically theatrical chess moves that follow:⁹³ Astyochus betrayed Phrynichus to Alcibiades and Tissaphernes (8.50.3); Alcibiades denounced Phrynichus to the Athenian force at Samos and ordered his execution (8.50.4); Phrynichus offered to Astyochus the opportunity to destroy the soldiers on Samos, and then finally sensing that Astyochus was playing him false he ordered the soldiers to fortify their position on this island (8.51.1).⁹⁴ It is perhaps by this final action — by demonstrating his concern for the soldier’s safety and fortifying the island — that Phrynichus fended off Alcibiades’ denunciation and remained alive for the time being, though Thucydides offers no comment on this point.

⁹³ The historicity of Phrynichus’ maneuvers in the following sequence is difficult to establish owing in large part to the tendentiousness of Thucydides’ sources. However, factual or not Hornblower (1991) 903 characterizes whatever gamesmanship ensued as “a chess-match between two grandmasters.” If nothing else we might take Thucydides use of the formula at 8.51.1 *τρέπεται ἐπὶ τοιόνδε τι* (“he had recourse to the following device” – cf. 5.45.2 and 8.56.2) as evidence that he is sensitive to the dramatic subterfuge such political theater requires.

⁹⁴ For a comparison between this episode and Sophocles’ depiction of Odysseus’ deceptions in the *Philoctetes*, see Greenwood (2006) 92 and chapter 4 below.

As the aforementioned events were unfolding on Samos, the man selected to take the lead in the oligarchic revolution, Peisander, arrived in Athens with some fellow envoys and put their plot to topple the Athenian democracy into action.⁹⁵ The operative element of the oligarchic operation was the promise of σωτηρία in the ongoing conflict with Sparta. Peisander began by addressing the δῆμος and detailing the aid Tissaphernes promised and the terms for obtaining it (8.53.1). Peisander's proposals faced stiff resistance by a number of citizens who found the proposition preposterous and were eager to rebuke Peisander for suggesting the recall.⁹⁶ To attempt to persuade these critics Peisander undertook a different stratagem: instead of addressing the Athenian citizens en masse, he approached his critics individually and reframed his proposal into a simple question: how can there be any hope of safety for Athens (εἴ τινα ἐλπίδα ἔχει σωτηρίας τῇ πόλει, 8.53.2) when Sparta now has a comparable naval force, a greater number of allies, and the financial security of Persian gold?⁹⁷ The answer offered in reply by all was that there is no hope in the face of such odds, to which Peisander provided the following summary and justification:

‘τοῦτο τοίνυν οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι, εἰ μὴ πολιτεύσομεν τε σωφρονέστερον καὶ ἐς ὀλίγους μᾶλλον τὰς ἀρχὰς ποιήσομεν, ἵνα πιστεύῃ ἡμῖν βασιλεύς, καὶ μὴ περὶ πολιτείας τὸ πλεόν

⁹⁵ On the dispute over the chronology of Peisander's arrival in Athens with reference to the events on Samos, cf. Hornblower (1991) 911. Some, such as Lang (1967) 180-3, propose that Thucydides narrates events out of order, such that Peisander's journey to Athens took place after the events of 8.51-2. Andrewes, on the other hand, argues that Peisander must have left Samos before the “letter” episode of 8.50.4, and thus the lobbying suggested at 8.54.4 spanned several months. While Andrewes' reconstruction more closely preserves Thucydides' narration, Avery (1999) 138 objects on the basis that it would have been impossible for the sailors manning the ship bringing Peisander to Athens to keep a secret for two or three months.

⁹⁶ In particular Thucydides mentions the opposition of the Eumolpidae and Ceryces (8.53.2), the only two families from whom officials overseeing the rites performed Eleusis could be selected. The reference hints at the intensity of the lingering enmity against Alcibiades for his presumed role in the violation of the Mysteries. Cf. *Ath. Pol.* 57.1, below. Cf. Gomme (1981) 124 on these two unlikely allies in their opposition to Alcibiades.

⁹⁷ Cf. Gomme (1981) 125 on Peisander's strong emphasis on σωτηρία, and see also below on *Ath. Pol.* 29.2.

βουλευόμεν ἐν τῷ παρόντι ἢ περὶ σωτηρίας (ὅστερον γὰρ ἐξέσται ἡμῖν καὶ μεταθέσθαι, ἢν μὴ τι ἀρέσκη), Ἀλκιβιάδην τε κατὰξομεν, ὃς μόνος τῶν νῦν οἷός τε τοῦτο κατεργάσασθαι.’

“This we cannot have unless we have a more moderate form of government, and put the offices into fewer hands, and so gain the King’s confidence, and forthwith restore Alcibiades, who is the only man living that can bring this about. The safety of the state, not the form of government, is for the moment the most pressing question, as we can always change afterwards whatever we do not like.”⁹⁸

Thucydides 8.53.3

Here Peisander’s persuasion is operating in two ways. First, by using the term σωτηρία to identify the goal universally sought by all Athenian citizens and demonstrating that it cannot exist without the favor of Tissaphernes, he has implicitly absorbed his potential opponents into the faction he represents; even if they do not approve of the means, they surely approve of their common goal.⁹⁹ With such a common element established, Peisander is able to reshape what σωτηρία for the city actually entails: installing oligarchs in key offices and thereby establishing a more moderate (σωφρονέστερον)¹⁰⁰ form of government. Second, since he sensed that such a conception of σωτηρία might be extremely unpalatable to some, he was quick to stress that when the war is over and Persian support is no longer required it will be a simple matter to reestablish the traditional democratic government if something no longer pleases them (ὅστερον γὰρ ἐξέσται ἡμῖν καὶ μεταθέσθαι, ἢν μὴ τι ἀρέσκη).¹⁰¹ Even if it is unlikely that Peisander had any genuine intentions of reinstalling the pre-existing democracy at a later point, in a very real sense he is suggesting that Athens suppress its democracy at least long enough to earn Tissaphernes’ trust. He suggests that whether or not such a capitulation is a true

⁹⁸ Trans. Strassler (1996) 512. It is noteworthy that this is the only piece of direct speech in the entirety of book 8; on its jarring effect, see Rood (1998) 271 n. 64.

⁹⁹ Cf. below on *Ath. Pol.* 29.2.4, where again the stated, overarching goal is σωτηρία.

¹⁰⁰ On the difficulty of determining Thucydides’ attitude toward the political moderation being proposed, see Gomme (1981) 159-60, who suggests that Thucydides here invokes a notion of σωφροσύνη with some irony.

¹⁰¹ See below on the similarities between Peisander’s argument for uncomfortably extreme measures to be temporarily undertaken until safety is secured and Odysseus’ proposal that Neoptolemus temporarily behave ignobly in order to obtain long-term benefits and praise at *Phil.* 79-85.

reflection of the ideal or preferred form that the Athenian government should take is currently much less important than its continued existence in any form whatsoever.¹⁰²

Such was the message Peisander delivered as he made the rounds to drum up support from both individual citizens and from the political factions already in place (ξυστραφέντες),¹⁰³ all of whom he exhorted to unite in their efforts to overthrow the democracy (ἀπάσας ἐπελθὼν καὶ παρακελευσάμενος ὅπως ξυστραφέντες καὶ κοινῇ βουλευσάμενοι καταλύσουσι τὸν δῆμον, 8.54.4),¹⁰⁴ while he and ten companions set off to confer with Alcibiades and Tissaphernes.

The arrival of the envoys in the court of Tissaphernes placed Alcibiades in a predicament, and, as will be explored at numerous points in the tragedies under discussion in the following chapters, the difficulty of establishing and maintaining trust looms large in the ensuing episode. Alcibiades sensed, correctly, that he was losing the ability to deliver on the guarantees he offered to Peisander and the oligarchs. Once he realized that Tissaphernes no longer had an advantage to gain from negotiating with the Athenians, Thucydides tells us that Alcibiades had recourse to the following deception (τρέπεται ἐπὶ τοιόνδε εἶδος, 8.56.2):¹⁰⁵ rather than being exposed for making promises on

¹⁰² Finley (1975) 35 notes that a contributing factor to Peisander's success in his persuasion was the fact that he was addressing a receptive audience: its ostensibly democratic composition was distorted and skewed by the absence of the large segment of poorer citizens on active naval service or lost in Sicily.

¹⁰³ Cf. the comprehensive note on ξυστραφέντες at Hornblower (2008) 916-21, where he treats the numerous difficulties involved in correctly rendering the term and determining their possible size and scope. Most significantly, he notes (following Gomme [1981] 128) that for the most part ξυστραφέντες may be taken as equivalent to ἐταιρείαι, citing parallels at *Aris. Ath. Pol.* 34.3, *Dem.* 21.20, and (somewhat anachronistically) the language of Cleisthenes at *Hdt.* 5.66.2. On ἐταιρείαι generally, see Cartwright (1997) 287 and Rhodes (2004) 197.

¹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy in this language that, with the benefit of hindsight, Thucydides decodes Peisander's deceitful rhetoric and gets to the heart of the oligarch's project: namely, dissolving the existing democracy (καταλύσουσι τὸν δῆμον).

¹⁰⁵ A scholiast on this line says, "εἶδος· τύπον, μηχανήν," underscoring the duplicity of Alcibiades in this negotiation. Hornblower (1991) 932 notes that the use in this passage of the word φωραθῆν (which is cognate with the Latin word *fur*, thief) is found only here in Thucydides.

which Tissaphernes would never deliver, speaking for Tissaphernes he instead demanded greater and greater concessions from the Athenians, to the point that the Athenians had no choice but to break off the negotiations themselves.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, Thucydides offers one small but noteworthy detail: Tissaphernes was present for these negotiations (ὁ Ἀλκιβιάδης, λέγων αὐτὸς ὑπὲρ παρόντος τοῦ Τισσαφέρνης, 8.56.4), but it is not reported that he raised any objections to the increasingly exorbitant terms Alcibiades offered. If indeed Tissaphernes were as determined not to strike a deal with the oligarchs as Thucydides tells us in 8.56.3,¹⁰⁷ one might speculate that the two men plotted together to sabotage the negotiations by acting as if an alliance was still possible but setting it at an unaffordable price.¹⁰⁸ This plan would have had the advantage of forcing Athens back to the diplomatic drawing board (and ultimately keeping them preoccupied with internal politics) while Tissaphernes proceeded with negotiations to secure a treaty with the Peloponnesians, which he successfully completed in the very same winter and received vast concessions (8.57-8).

When their negotiations with Alcibiades and Tissaphernes did not produce the alliance they had hoped, Peisander and the oligarchs – like Odysseus in the *Philoctetes* or Orestes and Pylades in the *Orestes* – are forced to resort to even more drastic and violent

¹⁰⁶ Cf. 8.56.4: when (seemingly to Alcibiades' surprise) the oligarchs concede to the demand that they surrender all of Ionia and the adjacent islands to Persia without argument, Alcibiades finds the point beyond which they will yield no further when he tells them Tissaphernes demands that Persian ships have free reign over the Ionian coastline. Hornblower (2008) 922 likens Alcibiades' performance in this chapter to a three-handed poker game, in which he holds very low cards yet bluffs the oligarchs into folding.

¹⁰⁷ For another perspective on Tissaphernes' reluctance to accept an alliance with Athens, see Lewis (1977) 101, who suggests that Athens' previous refusal to accept his friendship and their backing of the rebel Amorges would have made the prospect of an alliance at this point an extremely difficult sell.

¹⁰⁸ Alternatively, one might speculate that Alcibiades took responsibility for translating the parley and did so unfaithfully, such that Alcibiades was able to heavily edit any offers to his advantage. If this is the case, it would highlight the deceptive or even performative aspects of Alcibiades' betrayal and perhaps track a comedic plot line.

actions: Peisander and half of his entourage returned to Athens to continue the work of establishing the oligarchy, while the other half set off to do the same in some of the allied cities (8.64.1-5). Peisander arrived in Athens to find that his co-conspirators (τοῖς ἐταίροις, 8.65.2) had been extremely busy in his absence, and Thucydides describes their activities in vivid detail. First, they have assassinated in secret (ἔκρυπτοντες τινὲς τῶν νεωτέρων κρύφα ἀποκτείνουσιν, 8.65.2)¹⁰⁹ a number of obnoxious opponents, including the democratic leader Androkles,¹¹⁰ whom they singled out not only for his staunch defense of democracy in Athens but also for his past enmity toward Alcibiades. Committing these murders in secret had the double effect of allowing the oligarchic conspirators to remove their opponents safely (though illegally), and also of demonstrating the consequences of resistance to their activities. Meanwhile, their more publicly visible conduct had an even stronger component of political theater as they manipulated their fellow citizens into installing the political machinery that would allow them to seize power:

λόγος τε ἐκ τοῦ φανεροῦ προεῖργαστο αὐτοῖς ὥς οὔτε μισθοφορητέον εἴη ἄλλους ἢ τοὺς στρατευομένους οὔτε μεθεκτέον τῶν πραγμάτων πλέοσιν ἢ πεντακισχιλίοις, καὶ τούτοις οἱ ἂν μάλιστα τοῖς τε χρήμασι καὶ τοῖς σώμασιν ὠφελεῖν οἷοί τε ὦσιν. ἦν δὲ τοῦτο εὐπρεπὲς πρὸς τοὺς πλείους, ἐπεὶ ἔξιν γε τὴν πόλιν οἵπερ καὶ μεθίστασαν ἔμελλον. δῆμος μέντοι ὅμως ἔτι καὶ βουλή ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ κυάμου ξυνελέγετο· ἐβούλευον δὲ οὐδὲν ὅτι μὴ τοῖς ξυνεστῶσι δοκοίη, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ λέγοντες ἐκ τούτων ἦσαν καὶ τὰ ῥηθησόμενα πρότερον αὐτοῖς προύσκεπτο.

The public position they had plotted out beforehand among themselves was that no one is to be paid except those engaged in military service, and that not more than five thousand should have a share in the government, along with those who were best able to help the state with their money and with their bodies. But this was a pretext for the multitude, since they themselves were going to possess and change the city. But the assembly and the ‘council from the bean’ still met; however, they discussed nothing that was not approved by the conspirators; rather, they considered carefully beforehand both who among them was going to speak and the things to be said.

Thucydides 8.65.3-66.1

¹⁰⁹ On the double and ambiguous use of the term νεωτέρων, see Hornblower (2008) 943-4. Here he notes the sense it conveys of something “new/revolutionary” and also the “youth” of the participants. He also points out the word’s presence in the context of the mutilation of the herms at 6.27-8, which he calls, “an anticipation, in symbolic and less threatening form, of the present ‘new things’ or *stasis*.”

¹¹⁰ On the possible identities of Androkles, cf. Andoc. 1.27 and Gomme (1981) 161.

Here Thucydides offers a glimpse of the contrast between the reforms the oligarchs offered in public and the machinations at work behind the scenes.¹¹¹ While the stated program was to limit pay to those performing active military service and to limit participation in government to the five thousand men best able to serve the state (plus those few men wealthy and influential enough to bolster the state coffers, i.e., the conspirators themselves), this was in reality a pretext (εὐπρεπὲς) allowing the oligarchs to continue acting in secret and without oversight. In order to ensure a smooth transfer of power from the democratic government to the oligarchic regime the conspirators sought to install there must be a heavily stage-managed appearance of acquiescence within the established institutions; to decrease volatility, the oligarchs allowed the βουλή to continue meeting, though they themselves were in control of any business discussed there.

The oligarchs' control over the βουλή and the scripted performances of the speakers therein offers a clear demonstration of the strong link between conspiring and acting, as both require performative structure discussed above in the Introduction section: masterminds (here, the oligarchic conspirators Peisander left behind in Athens) provide the language (τὰ ῥηθησόμενα) to be delivered to an audience (the δῆμος). Indeed, shortly thereafter Thucydides describes the extent to which this structure governed not only the

¹¹¹ At this point it is prudent to reiterate a point of caution: a number of scholars, such as Gomme (1981) 163, point out that one of the serious problems with Thucydides' depiction of the conspirators' actions is that it gives an impression of oligarchs and democrats as two extreme, monolithic groups. In reality, there must have been more moderate voices present as well, as the subsequent actions of Theramenes suggest. Hornblower (2008) 946 finds the issue less severe and suggests that it be considered alongside the rhetoric of the chapter as a whole and Thucydides' determination to draw parallels between the coup in Athens and the description of στάσις 3.82.2 and 6.24.3-4: "(T)his involves some temporary elision of political nuances, and some simplifications for dramatic effect."

conspirators' work within the βουλή, but also provided the organizing principle for the coup as a whole:

ἦν δὲ ὁ μὲν τὴν γνώμην ταύτην εἰπὼν Πείσανδρος, καὶ τᾶλλα ἐκ τοῦ προφανοῦς προθυμώτατα
 ξυγκαταλύσας τὸν δῆμον· ὁ μέντοι ἅπαν τὸ πρᾶγμα ξυνθεὶς ὅτῳ τρόπῳ κατέστη ἐς τοῦτο καὶ ἐκ
 πλείστου ἐπιμεληθεὶς Ἀντιφῶν ἦν ἀνὴρ Ἀθηναίων τῶν καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀρετῇ τε οὐδενὸς ὕστερος καὶ
 κράτιστος ἐνθυμηθῆναι γενόμενος καὶ ᾧ γνοίῃ εἰπεῖν, καὶ ἐς μὲν δῆμον οὐ παριὼν οὐδ' ἐς ἄλλον
 ἀγῶνα ἐκούσιος οὐδένα, ἀλλ' ὑπόπτως τῷ πλήθει διὰ δόξαν δεινότητος διακείμενος, τοὺς μέντοι
 ἀγωνιζομένους καὶ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ καὶ ἐν δήμῳ πλεῖστα εἰς ἀνὴρ, ὅστις ξυμβουλευσαίτο τι,
 δυνάμενος ὠφελεῖν. καὶ αὐτός τε, ἐπειδὴ † μετέστη ἡ δημοκρατία καὶ ἐς ἀγῶνας κατέστη † τὰ τῶν
 τετρακοσίων ἐν ὑστέρῳ μεταπεσόντα ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου ἐκακοῦτο †, ἄριστα φαίνεται τῶν μέχρι ἐμοῦ
 ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν τούτων αἰτιαθεὶς, ὥς ξυγκατέστησε, θανάτου δίκην ἀπολογησάμενος. παρέσχε δὲ καὶ
 ὁ Φρύνιχος ἑαυτὸν πάντων διαφερόντως προθυμώτατον ἐς τὴν ὀλιγαρχίαν, δεδιὼς τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδην
 καὶ ἐπιστάμενος εἰδότα αὐτὸν ὅσα ἐν τῇ Σάμῳ πρὸς τὸν Ἀστυόχον ἔπραξε, νομίζων οὐκ ἂν ποτε
 αὐτὸν κατὰ τὸ εἶκος ὑπ' ὀλιγαρχίας κατελθεῖν· πολὺ τε πρὸς τὰ δεινὰ, ἐπειδήπερ ὑπέστη,
 φερεγγυώτατος ἐφάνη. καὶ Θηραμένης ὁ τοῦ Ἀγνωνος ἐν τοῖς ξυγκαταλύουσι τὸν δῆμον πρῶτος
 ἦν, ἀνὴρ οὐτε εἰπεῖν οὐτε γνῶναι ἀδύνατος.

It was Peisander who proposed the measure, and to the public eye he was the one most zealously abolishing the democracy. But the real mastermind and architect of the whole affair, who had long been interested in it, was Antiphon, the man among the Athenians both second to none of his contemporaries in excellence; who, with a head to contrive measures and a tongue to recommend them, did not willingly come forward in the Assembly or in any other public scene, but rather he was viewed with suspicion by most people due to his reputation for cleverness.¹¹² He was the one man most able to help those brought to trial either in the law court or before the assembly, whoever he might offer council on a matter. And when later the decisions of the Four Hundred were reversed and were being savaged by the people, he himself was accused of helping to set up this regime, and he delivered the best defense on a capital charge of anyone up to my time.¹¹³ Phrynichus also above all others showed himself to be most zealous for oligarchy; he feared Alcibiades and knew that Alcibiades had knowledge of the things that he did on Samos with Astyochus, but he thought that it was unlikely that he would return under the oligarchy. Once the dangers were very much present, after the coup had been launched, he was considered very dependable. Also Theramenes, the son of Hagnon, was foremost among those toppling the democracy, a man not without ability in speech and thought.

Thucydides 8.68.1-4

Just as in the production of a tragic drama, individual members of the coup had specific roles to play in unfolding the narrative and each was essential to the successful completion of the conspiracy. Thucydides credits Antiphon, like a tragic playwright, as the primary organizer of when and how the coup was to perform and perhaps even the specific language to be spoken; moreover, it is essential that as the mastermind of the performed action he remained safely out of sight and mind, lest the dramatic illusion be

¹¹² This sentence translated with aid from Dent (1910).

¹¹³ This sentence is Hornblower's translation (1991 957); the text of this section is, in his words, "a mess."

shattered.¹¹⁴ Further, just as we would expect in a tragic drama Thucydides here presents three actors in addition to Antiphon, each of whom is motivated by their individual, internal ethics and goals: Peisander is the energetic, strategic prime mover of the coup and the public face of the operation; Phrynichus is the zealous revolutionary eager to inspire others to follow his renunciation of democracy; Theramenes is articulate and moderate, but neither enough to save him from being inculpated for a cause he may not have wholeheartedly endorsed.¹¹⁵

There are, however, two problems with assigning such prominence in the revolution to these four men. First, to suggest that only four men were the driving force behind such abrupt constitutional upheaval must be somewhat of an exaggeration. Ostwald, for one, suggests that the revolution was only possible after widespread and prolonged discussion on the relative merits and shortcomings of democracy and oligarchy (as the debates in *Ath. Pol.* 30-1, on which see below); it is far more likely, he continues, that in an atmosphere of uncertain allegiances it would have been easy for public perception to identify Antiphon, Peisander, Phrynichus, and Theramenes as the movement's "theoreticians" and exaggerate their contributions.¹¹⁶ Second, there remains the very old question of Antiphon's identity: is Thucydides' Antiphon one and the same

¹¹⁴ Fittingly, after the emphasis Thucydides places on Antiphon's contribution here one expects to find him figuring prominently in the action to come, yet he recedes into the background even in the historical account and is mentioned again only briefly at 8.90.1. Hornblower (2008) 1037 suggests the possibility that Thucydides may have had more to say on Antiphon in the unfinished portion of the book, but even if this is true Antiphon's absence from the narrative account of the coup of 411 is conspicuous. On the somewhat unexpected praise Thucydides professes for this subverter of the constitution, see Gomme (1981) 171-2.

¹¹⁵ On Theramenes and his father, the *proboulos* Hagnon (on whom see n.100 below), cf. Hornblower (1991) 958-9, who suggests that Thucydides' relative reticence on Hagnon may be an effort to avoid detracting Theramenes' important role in this revolution and in the one to come: Theramenes remained a prominent voice under the Thirty and played a noteworthy role in the trial following the defeat at Arginousai in 406 BC (cf. Diodorus 13.101.1).

¹¹⁶ Ostwald (1986) 359-60.

as Antiphon the prominent sophist?¹¹⁷ If the two men are the same, there is the possibility that his reputation as a slippery rhetorician would have made it a simple matter to credit him with a greater contribution to the oligarchic movement than he actually made. These two difficulties notwithstanding, the perhaps exaggerated hand in the revolution that Thucydides awards to Antiphon in 8.68.1 exposes the historian's impulse to image the organization of the conspiracy taking a dramatic structure: like the playwright, Antiphon scripts the actions to be undertaken in achieving the desired end and watches his actors unfold the drama in which he has no visible part.

Whatever their actual numbers of its leaders and the true leadership structure of the conspiracy, like the conspiracies Sophocles and Euripides bring to the tragic stage the organization of the Four Hundred reveals the oligarchs' reliance upon bonds of personal trust to help ensure the safety of all its members. As soon as Peisander and his colleagues returned to Athens, they called a meeting of the δῆμος and proposed the election of ten autonomous lawmakers (ξυγγραφέας αὐτοκράτορας, 8.67.1)¹¹⁸ responsible for restructuring the Athenian government. Soon thereafter at a meeting of the *ekklesia* at Kolonos the ten men made two propositions: first, that any citizen should be able to bring a proposal up for discussion without penalty, and second that the usual prohibition against proposing any illegal action should be abolished (8.67.2). With these obstacles

¹¹⁷ Dover (1950) 56-60 sheds some light on the problem of Antiphon's identity by examining the possible dates for his *Tetralogies* (if indeed he wrote them), but concludes that Antiphon the Sophists' works are too fragmentary to positively identify him with Thucydides' Antiphon. On the history of the debate, see Gomme (1981) 170-1 and Avery (1982) 146-57. Cf. Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.6, in which "Antiphon the Sophist," the author of *On Truth* and *On Concord*, argues with Socrates. Cf. Gagarin (1997) 5-7.

¹¹⁸ Gomme (1981) 165 contemplates exactly what such "autonomy" actually entails, considering that Thucydides offers no indication of what restrictions are being lifted. He suggests that it does not refer to much more than the authority to bring proposals before the assembly without first submitting them to the Council.

cleared the conspirators were free to install their oligarchy, participation in which was based mostly on existing personal alliances among the pool of oligarchic sympathizers: five of their members were selected to elect one hundred men, each of whom in turn were to elect three apiece for a total of 400 members.¹¹⁹ This body then had the power to enter the Bouleuterion whenever they wished to govern with full powers in whatever ways they found best, and at their discretion they had the authority to convene the larger body of five thousand citizens for debate (ὄντας ἐς τὸ βουλευτήριον ἄρχειν ὅπῃ ἂν ἄριστα γινώσκωσιν αὐτοκράτορας, καὶ τοὺς πεντακισχιλίους δὲ ξυλλέγειν ὁπόταν αὐτοῖς δοκῇ, 8.67.3).¹²⁰

However, as Thucydides describes in vivid detail, the conspirators did not owe their swift success to the merits of their antidemocratic arguments and certainly not to an overwhelming majority of their numbers; rather, it was the failure of resolve among the citizen body to offer any resistance within the atmosphere of terror and mistrust created by their rhetoric and secret assassinations:¹²¹

ἀντέλεγέ τε οὐδείς ἔτι τῶν ἄλλων, δεδιὼς καὶ ὀρῶν πολὺ τὸ ξυνεστηκός· εἰ δέ τις καὶ ἀντίποι, εὐθὺς ἐκ τρόπου τινὸς ἐπιτηδείου ἐτεθνήκει, καὶ τῶν δρασάντων οὔτε ζήτησις οὔτ' εἰ ὑποπτεύοιτο δικαίωσις ἐγίγνετο, ἀλλ' ἡσυχίαν εἶχεν ὁ δῆμος καὶ κατάπληξιν τοιαύτην ὥστε κέρδος ὁ μὴ πάσχων τι βίαιον, εἰ καὶ σιγῇ ἐνόμιζεν. καὶ τὸ ξυνεστηκός πολὺ πλέον ἡγούμενοι εἶναι ἢ ὅσον ἐτύγχανεν ὃν ἡσῶντο ταῖς γνώμαις, καὶ ἐξευρεῖν αὐτὸ ἀδύνατοι ὄντες διὰ τὸ μέγεθος τῆς πόλεως καὶ διὰ τὴν ἀλλήλων ἀγνωσίαν οὐκ εἶχον [αὐτοὶ ἐξευρεῖν]. κατὰ δὲ ταῦτο τοῦτο καὶ προσολοφύρασθαι τινὶ ἀγανακτήσαντα, ὥστε ἀμύνασθαι ἐπιβουλεύσαντα, ἀδύνατον ἦν· ἢ γὰρ ἀγνώτα ἂν ἦν ἢ ἐρεῖ ἢ γνώριμον ἄπιστον. ἀλλήλοις γὰρ ἅπαντες ὑπόπτως προσῆσαν οἱ τοῦ δήμου, ὥς μετέχοντά τινα τῶν γιγνομένων. ἐνήσαν γὰρ καὶ οὓς οὐκ ἂν ποτέ τις ᾤετο ἐς ὀλιγαρχίαν τραπέσθαι· καὶ τὸ ἄπιστον οὗτοι μέγιστον πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐποίησαν καὶ πλεῖστα ἐς

¹¹⁹ This represents a major point of divergence between the accounts of the constitutional reforms of 411 BC offered by Thucydides and Aristotle (cf. *Ath. Pol.* 29.5, below). Cf. Gomme (1981) 169.

¹²⁰ Cf. Lys. 20.13, which also cites the meeting at Kolonos and the passing of these measures. One of the most troubling discrepancies between Thucydides' and Aristotle's accounts is whether the Five Thousand was a real body (as in the *Ath. Pol.*, on which see below) or merely an imaginary public relations tool (as here).

¹²¹ On the secret removal of the oligarchs' political enemies, cf. and 8.65.2 and 8.70.2. Gomme (1981) 164 comments on the somber solemnity of Thucydides' description of Athens at this moment: "In spite of its unfinished look in some places, 65-66 gives us one of Thucydides' most powerful pieces of political description."

τὴν τῶν ὀλίγων ἀσφάλειαν ὠφέλησαν, βέβαιον τὴν ἀπιστίαν τῷ δήμῳ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καταστήσαντες.

None of the other citizens spoke out against them, being afraid and seeing that the conspirators were many; or if any ventured to rise in opposition, he was promptly put to death in some convenient way, and there was neither search for the murderers or justice to be had against them if suspected; but the People held their silence, being so thoroughly cowed that men thought themselves lucky to escape violence, even when they held their tongues. An exaggerated belief in the numbers of the conspirators also demoralized the People, rendered helpless by the magnitude of the city, and by their being uncertain about each other, and being without means of finding out what those numbers really were. For the same reason it was impossible for anyone showing outward signs of grief to vent their feelings to someone and to concert measures to defend himself, as he would have had to speak either to one he did not know, or whom he knew but did not trust. Indeed, all the popular party approached each other with suspicion, each thinking his neighbor involved in what was going on, the conspirators having in their ranks persons whom no one could ever have believed capable of joining an oligarchy; and these it was that made the many so suspicious, and so helped to procure impunity for the few, by confirming the commons in their mistrust for one another.¹²²

Thucydides 8.66.2-5

In the tense civic atmosphere Thucydides here describes there are two ways in which the oligarchs instilled a destabilizing uncertainty into those Athenian citizens not absorbed into the conspiracy. First, as he notes, no small part of the conspirators' success lay in their ability to hide their numbers, leaving the remainder of the δῆμος to struggle to sort out who may potentially be involved versus who was actually involved. One of the ways the oligarchs transformed this uncertainty into aquiescent fear was by way of the secret assassinations, and the threat that unknown agents might take violent action against any one man perceived to be a political obstacle; that the δῆμος was witness not to the murder itself but only to the slaughtered corpse such that no individual perpetrator could be accused of murder is exactly the source of the anxiety that Thucydides describes. However, as conspirators on the tragic stage only in one case undertake an assassination plot – in the *Orestes* – more immediately relevant for this study is the inability for Athenian citizens *not* participating in the conspiracy to know whom to trust. As Thucydides describes, it had become impossible for anyone to speak their mind to a

¹²² Translated with aid from Strassler (1996) 518-9.

neighbor in safety (κατὰ δὲ ταῦτο τοῦτο καὶ προσολοφύρασθαί τινι ἀγανακτήσαντα, ὥστε ἀμύνασθαι ἐπιβουλεύσαντα, ἀδύνατον ἦν, 8.66.4)¹²³ without potentially revealing themselves as an opponent to the oligarchs. The result is a need for individual members of the δῆμος to demonstrate publicly either neutrality or compliance with the oligarchs, regardless of their true political leanings and especially if they can be accused of excessively democratic sympathies (as was Androkles). In other words, as long as the oligarchs were in power, the ability to act — to make a visible display of complicity before one's fellow citizens — was the best means for creating personal σωτηρία. This impulse to costume one's real intentions as a method for providing safety for oneself and one's political allies finds strong expression in the venues where acting is most appropriate (namely, the tragic and comic stages); as such, it forms one of the organizing principles of this study and will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

For all of its meticulous planning and the gloom of anxiety the coup of 411 brought upon the city, the men behind it were not able to retain power for long. One part of the reason the oligarchic model the conspirators imposed proved unsustainable is that it failed to achieve the results upon which it is predicated. First, the oligarchs fail to settle a peace accord with Sparta's King Agis (8.70.1-2), who shortly thereafter camped his army just outside the walls of Athens (8.71.1-3) — a development that could only have exacerbated the citizens' dread. Next, envoys sent by the 400 to allay the fears of the army on Samos found that a counter-revolution had preempted the oligarchy there (8.72.1-73.6). Shortly thereafter, when the oligarch Chaereas suddenly and through no fault of his own found himself outside of the ἐταιρεία's circle of trust (8.74.1-2), he

¹²³ Cf. 3.82.5.

evaded capture and returned to the soldiers on Samos where he greatly exaggerated the harsh conditions imposed by the Four Hundred and the sufferings of the δῆμος (ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον πάντα δεινώσας τὰ ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν, 8.74.3),¹²⁴ including the invented intention of the oligarchs to round up and execute the soldiers' families.¹²⁵ The effect that these false claims had upon the soldiers stationed on Samos was intense and immediate: were it not for the intervention of Alcibiades and other moderating leaders the fleet would have sailed against the city at once. Still, Chaereas' performance successfully convinced the soldiers on Samos to cut diplomatic ties with the Four Hundred and prompted them to swear oaths to restore the democracy in Athens and continue the war with Sparta (8.75.1-3).¹²⁶

Shortly thereafter Thucydides details an episode that displays Alcibiades' own acumen for political theater. Once the democracy on Samos was restored, the army votes to recall Alcibiades in the hope that offering amnesty to him would encourage Tissaphernes to break his alliance with Sparta and join them. Upon his arrival on the island, Thucydides relates that with specific claims and wily promises Alcibiades addressed his new allies, and the key to his success was acting as if he held greater influence over Tissaphernes than he actually did (ὑπερβάλλον ἐμεγάλυνε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ

¹²⁴ Hornblower (1991) 975 notes that this is the only instance of the verb δεινάζω and reads it as an expression of the author's true feelings on the matter: "...although he does not conceal his aversion to the Four Hundred oligarchs and their methods, he censures Chaereas' (inflammatory) exaggerations."

Gomme (1981) 267 notes that the threat that the soldiers' wives are being violated is standard anti-tyrannical rhetoric, citing Herodotus 3.80.5.

¹²⁵ Gomme (1981) 267 notes that the threat that the soldiers' wives are being violated is standard anti-tyrannical rhetoric, citing Herodotus 3.80.5.

¹²⁶ Cf. 8.86.3, in which a second envoy from the 400 arrives in Samos attempting to undo the damage caused by Chaereas' slander.

δύναμιν παρὰ τῷ Τισσαφέρνει, 8.81.2).¹²⁷ Particularly striking in this political maneuvering is the vastness of his intended audience, that, if Thucydides has correctly guessed Alcibiades' political calculations, included a number of listeners not in attendance:

ἵνα οἱ τε οἴκοι τὴν ὀλιγαρχίαν ἔχοντες φοβοῖντο αὐτὸν καὶ μᾶλλον αἱ ξυνωμοσίαι διαλυθεῖεν¹²⁸ καὶ οἱ ἐν τῇ Σάμῳ τιμιώτερόν τε αὐτὸν ἄγοιεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐπὶ πλεον θαρσοῖεν, οἱ τε πολέμιοι τῷ Τισσαφέρνει ὥς μάλιστα διαβάλλοιντο καὶ [ἀπὸ] τῶν ὑπαρχουσῶν ἐλπίδων ἐκπίπτοιεν.

(Alcibiades did this) in order that the men at home handling the oligarchy would fear him, and the sworn associations would fall apart; also, in order that the men on Samos would both hold him more honorable and be more courageous; finally, in order the enemies be prejudiced as strongly as possible against Tissaphernes and that he could dash their existing hopes.

Thucydides 8.81.2

To achieve all of these objectives, Alcibiades promised falsely that Tissaphernes was willing to support the Athenians to his very last coin, and that a Phoenician fleet would sail to reinforce their own, if Athens will but recall him and guarantee his safety. The act proved to be extremely persuasive for all of Alcibiades' intended audiences, as he was immediately elected general and was successful in striking fear into all parties (ξυνέβαινε δὲ τῷ Ἀλκιβιάδῃ τῷ μὲν Τισσαφέρνει τοὺς Ἀθηναίους φοβεῖν, ἐκείνοις δὲ τὸν Τισσαφέρνην, 8.82.3). The authority and access to resources he boasted — or more accurately, the perception of them — allowed Alcibiades to offer what Thucydides refers to as his one and only beneficial service to Athens (8.86.4):¹²⁹ reacting to his soldiers'

¹²⁷ Rood (1998) 269 takes a different perspective on Alcibiades' political calculations in this address, suggesting that Alcibiades is acting out of desperation and is "reduced to trying to seem to have influence with Tissaphernes."

¹²⁸ Gomme (1981) 276 proposes that these must refer to the oligarchic clubs Peisander encouraged before he departed to treat with Tissaphernes and that they be seen as the basis of the conspirators' power. In an ironic twist, these ξυνωμοσίαι were now a major obstacle to Alcibiades' return to Athens even though their assassination of Androcles was undertaken due in part to his opposition to Alcibiades. Gomme accounts for Alcibiades' hostility toward the ξυνωμοσίαι here by noting the favorable opinion his present audience of sailors would have held of Androcles.

¹²⁹ On textual problems with this notion, see Hornblower (2008) 1001: the word πρῶτον appears only in MS B and Delebecque established πρῶτος as the majority reading. However, as Hornblower argues

impulse to sail immediately to the Piraeus to attack their countrymen, Alcibiades tempers their anger and instead demands that the 400 oligarchs step down immediately and that the Council of 500 be reinstated (8.86.6).

Alcibiades' bluffs proved to be extremely effective, and the envoys returning from Samos found that the message they delivered was the beginning of the end for their already fracturing revolution, and the process of the collapse of the Four Hundred provoked an atmosphere of confusion, betrayal, and panic that lingered well into the years in which the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* were produced. While they were away, Thucydides reports that the majority of the oligarchs grew discontent and were actively seeking a way to abandon the party as safely (ἀσφαλῶς, 8.89.1) as they could. Upon hearing Alcibiades' demands, these malcontents banded together and united under the leadership of Theramenes son of Hagnon (one of the central founders of the movement, according to Thucydides) and of Aristocrates in vocal opposition to the oligarchy they helped create. Now, for fear of Alcibiades and the army under his command, these men demanded that the Five Thousand must wield real (and not merely theoretical, as before) political authority in the city and that power must be redistributed on a fairer basis (τὴν πολιτείαν ἰσαιτέραν καθιστάναι, 8.89.2). These demands and the conspirators' collapsing ξυνωμοσίαι prompt Thucydides to offer a critical assessment of oligarchy as a political ethos, in which he notes that it is precisely oligarchy's penchant for acting and for the public performance of untruth that proves to be its inevitably fatal flaw:

following Brunt, there is little historical reason to assume Alcibiades never at least appeared to have rendered some positive service for Athens — for instance, cf. 82.2 where Alcibiades retrained the army on Samos from immediately attacking Athens in their anger.

ἦν δὲ τοῦτο μὲν σχῆμα πολιτικὸν τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῖς, κατ' ἰδίᾳς δὲ φιλοτιμίας¹³⁰ οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ προσέκειντο, ἐν ᾧ περ καὶ μάλιστα ὀλιγαρχία ἐκ δημοκρατίας γενομένη ἀπόλλυται· πάντες γὰρ αὐθημερὸν ἀξιοῦσιν οὐχ ὅπως ἴσοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολὺ πρῶτος αὐτὸς ἕκαστος εἶναι· ἐκ δὲ δημοκρατίας αἰρέσεως γιγνομένης ῥᾶν τὰ ἀποβαίνοντα ὥς οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν ὁμοίων ἐλασσούμενός τις φέρει.

This was the political pretense of their discourse, but many of them were devoted to their personal ambitions, which is especially destructive to an oligarchy born out of democracy. For they all at the very same time think themselves not only to be not equals, but also each one very much desires that he himself be first in rank; while under a democracy a disappointed candidate bears defeat more easily because they feel it does not come from equals.¹³¹

Thucydides 8.89.3

Thucydides here suggests that all oligarchs share a fundamental structural weakness whereby the governments they install are in constant danger of collapse owing to the unquenchable ambitions of the men who comprise it.¹³² Indeed, it seems that the conspirators were not immune to the same doubts surrounding the creation and maintenance of trust and mutual protection their regime imposed upon their fellow citizens.

The betrayal by their once-trusted political allies left the more hardline oligarchs (at least, in the current situation) —Thucydides names Phrynichus, Aristarchus, Peisander, and Antiphon in particular — in a precarious position; immediately they sent an embassy to Sparta to sue for peace, and when this failed they attempted to complete the construction of an oligarchic stronghold at Eetioneia in the Piraeus.¹³³ Meanwhile, a faction hostile to the remainder of the Four Hundred found an opportunity to act and

¹³⁰ On φιλοτιμία as an explicitly anti-democratic trait, see Euripides' treatment of it in the *Phoenissae* in chapter 3 below.

¹³¹ Both Hornblower (1991) 1011 and Rood (1998) 293 point out the somewhat limited number of instances to which Thucydides' criticism is applicable: that is, to oligarchies that topple democracies (of which there are historically few).

¹³² Cartwright (1997) 297 connects Thucydides' remarks on personal ambition here with those offered at 2.65.10, on why Pericles' vision of Athens turned out to be untenable after his death.

¹³³ Cf. 8.90.3 and 8.91.3, where Thucydides notes that according to Theramenes the purpose of the stronghold was not to defend against an attack by Alcibiades and the army on Samos, but rather to serve as an entry point for the enemy army and fleet in the event that the oligarchs felt the need to betray the city. On the politics of physical space in Athens—the Colonos, the Pnyx, the Agora, and the Peireus in particular—cf. Shear (2011) 38-40, 263-85.

commits a secret assassination of its own: Phrynichus is assassinated in the agora by a member of the *peripoloi*, a special military unit of frontier guardsmen comprised primarily of young recruits.¹³⁴ Shear discusses in some detail a number of important implications involved in Thucydides' treatment of the assassination:

This episode is not merely the death of a prominent oligarch because, through his description, Thucydides suggests a parallel between Phrynichus and another Athenian assassinated by two men near the Agora, Hipparchos, the brother of the tyrant Hippias, an event that had already been described in detail earlier in the work...Thucydides' description of Phrynichus' death, accordingly, casts him as a tyrant, the exact opposite of a democrat and a much worse state than being an oligarch...His overall career emphasizes his negative qualities and he very much stands as the ultimate example of the bad oligarch.¹³⁵

While the loss of a prominent member from their ranks itself was not a fatal blow to the Four Hundred, the assassination served to embolden Theramenes, Aristocrates, and some of their associates to organize a force of hoplites stationed in the Piraeus in opposition to the Four Hundred (8.92.2); the need to act urgently was amplified by Theramenes' growing suspicion that a Peloponnesian fleet known to be sailing in the direction of Athens had been invited into the city by the Four Hundred (8.92.3). Amid a general panic and confusion throughout the city (ἦν δὲ θόρυβος πολλὸς καὶ ἐκπληκτικός, 8.92.7), Theramenes encouraged the hoplites to tear down the fortress at Eetioneia, and at this point Thucydides references a different kind of confusion concerning the existence of the Five Thousand:

ἦν δὲ πρὸς τὸν ὄχλον ἡ παράκλησις ὡς χρή, ὅστις τοὺς πεντακισχιλίους βούλεται ἄρχειν ἀντὶ τῶν τετρακοσίων, ἵεναι ἐπὶ τὸ ἔργον. ἐπεκρύπτοντο γὰρ ὅμως ἔτι τῶν πεντακισχιλίων τῷ ὀνόματι, μὴ ἄντικρυς δῆμον ὅστις βούλεται ἄρχειν ὀνομάζειν, φοβούμενοι μὴ τῷ ὄντι ὡς καὶ πρὸς τινα εἰπὼν τίς τι ἀγνοίᾳ σφαλῇ. καὶ οἱ τετρακόσιοι διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἤθελον τοὺς πεντακισχιλίους οὔτε εἶναι

¹³⁴ Cf. Demosthenes' use of *peripoloi* in his surprise assault against Megara at 4.67.2 and also their garrison in Munychia at 8.92.5, from where they are able to offer support to the force of hoplites opposing the Four Hundred. On conflicting accounts of Phrynichus' assassination in Lysias 13.70-2 and Plut. *Alc.* 25, see Cartwright (1997) 298.

¹³⁵ Shear (2011) 28-9; she elaborates on the conflation between Phrynichus and the image of tyrant at a number of other points in the book (cf. 39-40, 60, 66-7) and notes a number of ways his death is a useful symbol for the reestablished democracy. In (2007) 151, she notes the way this assassination helped establish tyranny as the absolute antithesis to democracy and thus why it — and not oligarchy — is denounced in the Oath of Demophantos (on which see below). Cf. Raaflaub (2003) 59.

οὔτε μὴ ὄντας δῆλους εἶναι, τὸ μὲν καταστήσαι μετόχους τοσούτους ἄντικρυς ἂν δῆμον ἡγούμενοι, τὸ δ' αὖ ἄφανές φόβον ἐς ἀλλήλους παρέξειν.

The exhortation to the multitude was that it was necessary for whoever wished that the Five Thousand to rule instead of the Four Hundred, to come to the effort. For they still concealed themselves under the name of the Five Thousand, and did not openly wish to call themselves “whoever wants the People to rule,” fearing that someone in this group might actually exist and that someone speaking in ignorance to someone else might get in trouble. Indeed, on for this reason the Four Hundred wished for the Five Thousand neither to exist nor to be openly known to not exist, thinking on the one hand that so many co-conspirators would be outright democracy, and on the other hand that the mystery would make the people fear one another.

Thucydides 8.92.11

As commentators are quick to point out, there is at least one serious problem with this passage, inasmuch as it must have been largely inferred by Thucydides and it is unlikely he could have known the thought of everyone involved or could have interviewed them all.¹³⁶ However, even if we take it simply as the general mood of the opponents of the Four Hundred, here we find a kind of mass duplicity operating on two levels. First, since the multitude sensed the lingering danger involved in expressing publicly their support for democracy, they disguised their cry for a return to the rule of the δῆμος as support for the Five Thousand; their true objective, Thucydides insinuates, was the restoration of radical democracy, but for the time being in the interest of public safety (σωτηρία seems to be the unstated goal) they were forced to act as if they seek a more moderate solution. Second, what the Four Hundred knew and what the hoplites do not yet know is that the Five Thousand did not actually exist. The oligarchs have only acted as if such a body existed, and in doing so they have given a false impression of a counterbalance to their extremism and at the same time sown mutual mistrust and fear (φόβον ἐς ἀλλήλους) among the δῆμος.

¹³⁶ Gomme (1981) 314-4; Hornblower (2008) 1023; both reference the importance of this passage to de St. Croix (1981) 606, in which he stresses the strong distaste among the hoplites for oligarchy.

The day following the destruction of fort at Eetioneia two assemblies were held — one by the Four Hundred in the Bouleuterion and another by the hoplites in the theater of Dionysus, close to Munychia (8.93.1) — and once cooler heads quelled tempers in both parties they agreed to hold an assembly on an appointed day in the theater of Dionysus where a compromise could be sought and concord (ὁμολοίας, 8.93.3) be reestablished. When this day came and an agreement was on the verge of finally being struck, Theramenes' fears seemed very real: the Peloponnesian fleet appeared off the coast of Salamis that, had they not destroyed Eetioneia, would have had an easy point of entry into the city. With little other option the Athenians assembled a hastily organized, improvised fleet to oppose the enemy navy (8.95.2); when the two fleets engaged in combat off the coast of Eretria, the poorly prepared Athenians were eventually routed and forced onto the shore, where some of the survivors were betrayed by the inhabitants of Eretria and butchered (8.95.5-6). Thucydides tells us that once news of the defeat reached Athens a panic ensued that was greater than any the city had suffered before, one even greater than the one following the defeat in Sicily (8.96.1). Fortunately for the Athenians, the Spartans showed their characteristic sluggishness and failed to press their advantage.¹³⁷ Amid this panic any notions of compromise between the rival constitutional factions in the city vaporized and immediately an assembly was summoned to meet at the Pnyx, where citizens had been accustomed to gather under the previous democracy; here the Four Hundred were formally and legally deposed and power was transferred to the Five Thousand, whose membership was to include all of the soldiers who furnished their own armor (8.97.1-2). Here Thucydides reports that in a series of subsequent assemblies

¹³⁷ Thucydides has much to say on this aspect of the Spartan national character at 8.96.5, calling them for Athens (quite ironically) “the most convenient people of all” (ξυμφορώτατοι).

the new constitution was completed, lawmakers were elected, and a number of proposals were approved — including one recalling Alcibiades and reabsorbing the soldiers on Samos into the Athenian army (8.97.3). The result of these sweeping constitutional adjustments moderately blending the few and the many (μετρία γὰρ ἢ τε ἐς τοὺς ὀλίγους καὶ τοὺς πολλοὺς ξύγκρασις ἐγένετο, 8.97.2) was, in Thucydides' opinion, the best form of government the city ever would in his lifetime (καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα δὴ τὸν πρῶτον χρόνον ἐπὶ γε ἐμοῦ Ἀθηναῖοι φαίνονται εὖ πολιτεύσαντες. 8.97.2).¹³⁸

The Coup of 411 Part II: Orderly Reform in Aristotle's *Atheneion Politeia*

As discussed above, in Aristotle's *Atheneion Politeia* we find a starkly different take on the oligarchic coup of 411 BC than the one offered by Thucydides in his *Histories*. Where the picture painted by Thucydides is one of violent political upheaval shrouded in civic anxiety and political theater, the movement as depicted by Aristotle is a calmer and more thoughtful effort to restrain a democracy that had become too radical.¹³⁹

The text of the Aristotle's *Atheneion Politeia* is difficult to date with precision, but

¹³⁸ The exact meaning of 8.97.2 has been rigorously debated among scholars and a number of opposing interpretations have emerged. One part of the disagreement arises from τὸν πρῶτον χρόνον. Scholars such as Jowett and Andrewes argued that it must mean “in its early days,” citing a parallel at Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.15. However, Ostwald (1986) 395 n. 199 notes that this view critically ignores ἐπὶ γε ἐμοῦ, which makes the observation much more sweeping; he suggests that at the very least Thucydides is comparing the rule of the Five Thousand with the regime of Pericles. Others still, such as Finley and Goodhart, suggest that he adds the note “in my lifetime” in order to make an exception of Solon's constitution. The other major point of disagreement is over the interpretation of the Five Thousand's constitutional philosophy: with so many members, are they to be considered a limited democracy or an extremely large oligarchy? For some, such as de St. Croix, in practice there is very little difference between the Five Thousand and full democracy. For others, such as Rhodes, the fact that the constitution denies participation to the thetes gives it a lingering oligarchic flavor. For complete arguments and bibliography, cf. lengthy notes in Hornblower (1991) 1033-6.

¹³⁹ Aristotle's emphasis on the democratic aspects of the constitutional reform is noteworthy; he only uses the term “oligarchy” once in the entire account (31.1). Also conspicuously absent is Alcibiades and the force on Samos, and Shear (2011) 36 suggests their omission is intentional, as “they are the kind of radical democrats whose mismanagement led to the need for constitutional change.”

Rhodes offers as a *terminus post quem* the description of a compulsory two year ἐφηβεία instituted in 335/4 BC.¹⁴⁰ The papyri containing the text were discovered in two parts. The first – the Berlin Papyrus – was found on two leaves of a codex and was first published by Blass in 1880,¹⁴¹ and the surviving text ranges from a lost beginning up to chapter 41. The second discovery is known as the London Papyrus and it was purchased for the British Museum by A. T. W. Budge in 1888. This papyrus consists of four rolls and contains the complete known text, ranging from the fragmentary beginning of chapter 1 through chapter 69.¹⁴² The first part of the text shows a keen interest in the evolution of the Athenian constitution from (in the surviving text) the murky details of the constitution in place before Draco's reforms up through the restoration of democracy after the reign of the Thirty Tyrants, whereas the second part offers a detailed analysis of the Athenian government at Aristotle's time.¹⁴³ In some concluding remarks on the first part of his study (41.2), Aristotle explains his intentions in writing the *Athenaion Politeia*: to trace the many (he lists eleven) major reforms undergone by the Athenian constitution leading to its contemporary state. In spite of the many differences between Aristotle's and Thucydides' account of the constitutional reforms, one of the elements they have in common is crucial for the present study: namely, the stated objective of obtaining σωτηρία (*Ath. Pol.* 29.2) in both sources by the reformers seeking sweeping constitutional change in 411 BC.

¹⁴⁰ Rhodes (1993) 51-2, where he notes some less certain evidence suggesting a date in the mid-330s, alongside some interpolations that should be treated with caution.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Blass (1880) 366-82. The authorship of the fragment was securely attributed to Aristotle by Bergk (1881) 87-115.

¹⁴² For a detailed account of the discovery and publication of the *Ath. Pol.*, cf Rhodes (1993) 2-5.

¹⁴³ Rhodes (1993) 5-37.

Aristotle's treatment of the events relevant to the present study comes in chapters 29 through 34. Following the series of disasters in Sicily, he begins by citing the alliance between the Spartans and the Persian king¹⁴⁴ as the impetus for an unspecified group of Athenian citizens to overthrow the democracy and establish the *politeia* of the Four Hundred (29.1). Just as in Thucydides' account, the motivating force, organizing principle, and indeed legitimizing slogan is σωτηρία:¹⁴⁵

ἦν δὲ τὸ ψήφισμα τὸ Πυθοδώρου τοιόνδε· τὸν δῆμον ἐλέσθαι μετὰ τῶν προϋπαρχόντων δέκα προβούλων ἄλλους εἴκοσι ἐκ τῶν ὑπὲρ τετταράκοντα ἔτη γεγονότων, οἵτινες ὁμόσαντες ἢ μὴν συγγράψειν ἃ ἂν ἡγῶνται βέλτιστα εἶναι τῇ πόλει, συγγράψουσι περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας.¹⁴⁶

The proposal of Pythodoros was as follows: that along with the ten existing *probouloi* the people choose twenty others from those over forty years of age, and that these men after taking a solemn oath to draft what measures they think best for the city write legislation for public safety.

Aristotle *Ath. Pol.* 29.2

In order to obtain the Persian aid and the safety it affords, Pythodoros offered two proposals: first, that twenty *sungrapheis* be elected in addition to the ten *probouloi* already in place,¹⁴⁷ and that these men draft measures for the constitutional reform; second, that any citizen who so desires may also bring up proposals for consideration (29.2). To these reforms, Cleitophon proposed an addendum further defining what the *sungrapheis* are expected to do. In order to return to a more moderate form of democracy, he moved that they investigate (προσαναζητῆσαι)¹⁴⁸ the ancestral laws (πατρίους νόμους)

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Thuc. 8.58.1-7.

¹⁴⁵ Gomme (1981) 214 reads σωτηρία in this passage as closely akin to Ar. *Ecc.* 396-7: ἔδοξε τοῖς πρυτάνεσι περὶ σωτηρίας γνώμας καθεῖναι τῆς πόλεως ("It seemed good to the Prytanes to set forth their opinions concerning the safety of the city."). Yet, the reference to calm deliberation with σωτηρία as its goal stands in sharp contrast to the desperate, panicked striving for safety which we find in Thucydides' account.

¹⁴⁶ All textual citations from the *Athenaion Politeia* are from Chambers (1986).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Thuc. 8.67.1. Sandys (1971) 124 suggests the opposite — that the *probouloi* are identical with the ten *sungrapheis* noted by Thucydides.

¹⁴⁸ On the dispute over how this verb is best understood, see Rhodes (1993) 375-6: some question the likelihood that Cleisthenes' laws existed in any written form in 411 BC, while others are confident they

established by Cleisthenes when enacting his own democratic reforms, as his notion of democracy was more closely aligned with Solon's constitution than with the present one (29.3).¹⁴⁹

Once elected, the *sungrapheis* issued a proposal aimed at establishing the procedure for proposing reforms to the Athenian polity, and in doing so they took steps to limit the ability for ambitious men to seize this occasion for taking power for themselves:

οἱ δ' αἰρεθέντες πρῶτον μὲν ἔγραψαν ἐπάναγκες εἶναι τοὺς πρυτάνεις ἅπαντα τὰ λεγόμενα περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας ἐπιψηφίζειν, ἔπειτα τὰς τῶν παρανόμων γραφὰς καὶ τὰς εἰσαγγελίας καὶ τὰς προσκλήσεις ἀνεῖλον, ὅπως ἂν οἱ ἐθέλοντες Ἀθηναίων συμβουλευώσι περὶ τῶν προκειμένων. ἐὰν δέ τις τούτων χάριν ἢ ζημιῶν ἢ προσκαλῇται ἢ εἰσάγῃ εἰς δικαστήριον, ἔνδειξιν αὐτοῦ εἶναι καὶ ἀπαγωγὴν πρὸς τοὺς στρατηγούς, τοὺς δὲ στρατηγούς παραδοῦναι τοῖς ἑνδεκα θανάτῳ ζημιῶσαι.

First, those men elected wrote that it be compulsory that the chief magistrates put up for a vote all proposals made for public safety, and then they removed the rules against proposing illegal legislation, impeachment, and summons, so that any one of the Athenians who so desired may propose legislation concerning the questions at hand. And if any anyone on account of this should fine, summon, or bring them to court, he should be indicted and arrested by the generals, who should hand him over to the Eleven to be punished by death.

Aristotle *Ath. Pol.* 29.4

Once again, Aristotle reiterates that the immediate goal of the reforms is σωτηρία.

However, we find in the use of the term here an important difference in sense from its treatment in Thucydides' accounts. Whereas in Thucydides there is a notion that canceling penalties against proposing extreme legislation is a calculated step by the oligarchs for removing a constitutional obstacle, here there is little to suggest this is anything other than a genuine attempt on the part of the *sungrapheis* to offer to all citizens equal access to the reshaping of the constitution.¹⁵⁰ The opportunity for all

would have been well documented and archived. Given the legal confusion leading up to and in the aftermath of the coup of 411, Rhodes finds the former more likely.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Shear (2001) 33-5, who notes that the invocation of Athens' ancestral lawgivers has a great legitimizing effect on the oligarchs' program, since connecting themselves with the city's political past firmly legitimizes them in the present.

¹⁵⁰ Sandys (1971) 125 calls it at the very least a "necessary step" in order for there to be any radical constitutional change. Cf. Dem. *Timocr.* 24.154.

citizens to participate in the process may in large part explain the lack of the widespread atmosphere of fear and mistrust in Aristotle's account that is so pervasive in Thucydides'.¹⁵¹

For all the many ways that the *Athenaion Politeia* differs from Thucydides' account, the fact that in both cases safety is the ultimate goal of these constitutional reforms demonstrates what a sensitive and central issue σωτηρία was at the time. In an effort to maintain as much stability as possible, the *sungrapheis* proposed the following immediate measures: 1) The city's expenditures are only to be spent on the war effort; 2) pay for all office holders is to be abolished, except for the *archons* and the *prutaneis*; 3) until the conclusion of the war the rest of the government is to be handled by the citizens best able to serve the city with their bodies and wealth,¹⁵² numbering five thousand at the very least; 4) the Five Thousand are granted the power to sign treaties; and 5) the Five Thousand are to be enrolled by ten *katalogeis*, one of whom is to be elected by each tribe. Although differing in a number of significant aspects, there is one very important point of contact between the *Athenaion Politeia* and Thucydides' account encapsulated in number 3 above: in both cases, the constitutional reforms are predicated on the assurance that the proposed alterations are impermanent. Their agreement on this point reinforces the notion that the revolution was not driven solely on an ideological basis, but in large part rather by an urgent need to secure σωτηρία by the most expedient means possible.

With the Five Thousand established, their first act was to elect one hundred of their members to draw up two constitutions. The first of these was crafted with an eye to

¹⁵¹ For a detailed discussion comparing the accounts found in *Ath. Pol.* 29.4 and Thuc. 67.2-3, cf. Rhodes (1993) 380-1 and relative bibliography therein.

¹⁵² Cf. Thuc. 8.65.3.

the future (εἰς τὸν μέλλοντα χρόνον ἀνέγραψαν τὴν πολιτείαν, 31.1): it detailed a number of official positions and granted the Council a large degree of autonomy to enact measures necessary for ensuring safety for the state (ὅπως ἂν σῶα ᾖ καὶ εἰς τὸ δέον ἀναλίσκηται, 30.4).¹⁵³ The second constitution that the Five Thousand drew was intended to alleviate the more present crisis (ἐν δὲ τῷ παρόντι καιρῷ τήνδε, 31.1) by nominating four hundred citizens (forty from each tribe) tasked with appointing officials to these positions and crafting the oaths they were to swear.¹⁵⁴ It seems that these four hundred men held a significant amount of power — enough that they were the *de facto* rulers of the city — and just as in Thucydides where the Five Thousand existed more in theory than in practice (οἱ μὲν πεντακισχίλιοι λόγῳ μόνον ἠρέθησαν 32.3). However, there is not the same sense that the Four Hundred were an organized faction of conspirators deliberately counterfeiting or impersonating a body of the Five Thousand with no intentions of establishing it.

Still, a body of four hundred citizens with such great authority certainly required some internal structure and set of organized agendas, and in describing the movement's primary advocates, Aristotle emphasizes the γενναιότης of its leaders. At 32.2 Aristotle provides a list featuring names the familiar *dramatis personae* offered by Thucydides at 8.68:

αἰτίων μάλιστα γενομένων Πεισάνδρου καὶ Ἀντιφῶντος καὶ Θηραμένους, ἀνδρῶν καὶ γεγενημένων εὖ καὶ συνέσει καὶ γνώμῃ δοκούντων διαφέρειν.

Those men primarily responsible (for the revolution) being Peisander, Antiphon, and Thrarmenes, men both of good birth and reputed for their distinction in intelligence and judgement.

Aris. *Ath. Pol.* 32.2

¹⁵³ Rhodes (1991) 395 notes that σῶα appears as a neuter plural alternative form of σωτηρία in a number of Athenian inscriptions.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Sandys (1971) 132-3.

These are three of the four men noted by Thucydides, and the absence of Phrynichus should come as little surprise given that Aristotle has omitted him from his account of the revolution entirely.¹⁵⁵ Even though Aristotle has not used the term and its relatives, here he attributes to these men distinctions that elsewhere are encapsulated in the word *γενναῖος*. He notes that all three come from noble families (*γεγεννημένων εὖ*, a point upon which Thucydides does not touch), and that the visible expression of the good heritage these men have inherited is their extraordinary capacity for thought. The notion that Aristotle has in mind is something roughly equivalent to what is expressed in Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedy as *γενναῖος* — a combination of noble birth and the intelligently virtuous behavior becoming of that station — and not merely that the three hail from old aristocratic families seems confirmed by the fact that among them only Theramenes was born from a particularly noteworthy father (i.e., the general, oecist, and *proboulos* Hagnon).

Writing in the neighborhood of eighty years after the fact, Aristotle's reference to public safety as the goal of the drastic constitutional reforms he is about to describe perhaps supports the notion that in 411 BC *σωτηρία* was an issue of immediate concern and that Athenian citizens saw the necessity for undertaking radical measures to secure it. While Aristotle's account does share some points with the narrative offered by Thucydides — notably, several of the same men primarily responsible for establishing the oligarchy — for the most part they offer contrasting illustrations of the oligarchic reforms of 411 BC. The fear in Athens arising from the clandestine actions of the

¹⁵⁵ On the omission see Rhodes (1993) 408, who suggests that the omission of Phrynichus and that of Critias from his role in the Thirty may be owed to a copyist's error. Gomme (1981) 237 proposes a preferable (in my view) theory: that Aristotle had jettisoned Phrynichus along with all other individual politicians jostling for their own profit — including Alcibiades.

shadowy conspiracy that weighs so heavily in Thucydides is absent in the *Athenaion Politeia*, where instead the shift toward oligarchy is presented as an attempt to recreate a more moderate ancestral polity. As often, the reality likely resides somewhere in the middle, because both accounts are incomplete.¹⁵⁶ The debates and debates involved must have been more numerous and complex than Aristotle or Thucydides could have reconstructed in retrospect and from the outside of the conspiracy looking in; however, taken together the two works offer a sense of how desperately serious the situation in Athens was and the extent to which urgent questions surrounding σωτηρία and the qualifications of those claiming to be able to provide it inevitably seep into other platforms for public discourse, including the tragic and comic stages.

Conclusion

These are the experiences endured by Athenian citizens at the hands of conspirators in the later years of the Peloponnesian War. With the advantage of hindsight, Thucydides looked back over the actions of conspirators in Athens and elsewhere in Greece and sought to deduce the common elements that enabled them and the στάσις they sow to spread like a plague. Later, in Book 6 he moves to smaller but even more anxiety-provoking conspiracies active in Athens, as subversive elements within bodies of citizens (perhaps including Alcibiades, perhaps not) participated in the profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries and sought to make their presence felt by vandalizing the herms. Their efforts to breed fear were extremely successful, as is evidenced by the subsequent trials and convictions of men accused of participating, on which both Thucydides and Andocides provide valuable insight. Andocides in particular sheds some light on how

¹⁵⁶ Rhodes (1993) 380-1.

these conspiracies may have operated, even if the exact truth of his testimony remains difficult to determine.

If we follow Thucydides account of the coup of 411, it was a summer of intense mutual mistrust within the city, where the threat of secret assassinations by unknown assailants forced virtually all citizens to acquiesce in the oligarchic reforms; though brief, the terror preceding the 400 lingered in the city even after the democracy was reestablished in spite of the citizens' best efforts to assuage it.¹⁵⁷ However, from Aristotle we receive a tremendously different sense of this constitutional revolution: he presents the change in polity as a calm, orderly, and organized effort to curb the powers of an extremely radical democracy by reestablishing limits inspired by the more moderate models of the city's ancestors (πατρίους νόμους). As discussed above, the true level of anxiety in the city in these years most likely resides somewhere in the middle of these two accounts and individual citizens surely would have experienced these events in wide variety of ways. And yet, as vastly divergent as these two sources are, there is a common thread running through both which gives a strong indication of a major civic conundrum hanging over all Athenian citizens: after such a devastating loss in Sicily and with the tide of the war turning ever more against them, what kind of elite men (*gennaioi*) are in a position to provide the city with the safety (*soteria*) it requires, and how can citizens ever be sure that those claiming such an ability can be trusted? In Thucydides' version, Pisander insists that Alcibiades – and the aid of Tissaphernes that he will bring – is the man who can deliver Athens from destruction; in Aristotle's version, prudent and thoughtful men urge the city to turn to their moderate democratic forebearers. For

¹⁵⁷ The first attempt to ease lingering civic tensions was the Oath of Demophantos, one which see chapter 3 below.

Sophocles and Euripides, however, this question is so complicated that it defies a singular answer, and both poets in their dramas explore its many complexities – and the consequences for getting it wrong.

CHAPTER 3: EURIPIDES' PHOENISSAE

Chapter Synopsis: Euripides' Phoenissae was performed during the first celebration of the City Dionysia following the political turbulence of the summer of 411 BC. Given Athens' recent experience with the oligarchic regime and the delicate state of its restored democratic government, I argue in this chapter that Euripides' dramatic representation of debates over the responsible distribution of civic authority and the fracturing of personal and political alliances would have resonated strongly with his contemporary audience. After a brief introduction and synopsis of the play's plot, I examine closely the sources and consequences of the quarrel between Polynices and Eteocles, with emphasis on the questions the play raises concerning the nature of γενναιότης. As I examine in this text and as becomes more pronounced still in the Philoctetes and Orestes, competing notions of what characteristics distinguish people as "noble" are used to validate actions undertaken by political factions against their adversaries. Next, I study the lengthy and vitriolic ἀγών between Polynices and Eteocles, in which each man offers a diametrically opposed (and in their own way, fundamentally flawed) perspective on the ethics and obligations of leadership. The ἀγών (and Jocasta's unsuccessful attempts to broker a reasonable compromise) contemplates the value and dangers of several concepts relevant to the maintenance of political safety with which the contemporary audience had experience, including the right to uninhibited free speech (παρρησία), the willful forgetting of past civic conflicts (μὴ μνησικακεῖν), and the dangers of excessive ambition (φιλοτιμία) in political leaders. Finally, I discuss Creon's failed attempt to establish a conspiracy with his son, Menoeceus. As I do in my examination of the subsequent dramas in this study, I use certain key terms as focus points around which I articulate my inquiry: appeals to σωτηρία feature prominently in Creon's propositions that Menoeceus prioritize the safety of their family over that of their fellow citizens, but it is ultimately a course of action that Menoeceus' more ethical γενναιότης cannot allow. Throughout the play, failures of trust either prohibit or abrogate confederacies which, on their surface, have the appearance of stability.

Introduction

Euripides *Phoenissae* was first produced in 410 BC.¹⁵⁸ It was an extremely popular play in antiquity and was included among Euripides' "select" plays (alongside

¹⁵⁸ There is a small amount of controversy surrounding the date of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, but virtually all scholars are in agreement that the production date falls sometime between 411 and 408 BC. For the purposes of this project I follow Mastronarde (1994) 11-4, who posits a possible date of 411 but a more likely date of 410. For a complete bibliography on the controversy cf. Papadopoulou (2014) 454.

the *Hecuba* and *Orestes*) handed down in the “Byzantine Triad,”¹⁵⁹ and the fact that it was parodied by Aristophanes (*Ran.* 1185-6)¹⁶⁰ and Strattis (Ath. 160b., Austin-Kassel 46-53),¹⁶¹ and also quoted by Plato (*Phdr.* 244d)¹⁶² are indicative of the play’s early popularity and broad appeal. The play was restaged on a number of occasions in the decades and centuries after Euripides’ death, resulting in considerable doubt over the authenticity of passages ranging from single lines to entire scenes in the surviving text.¹⁶³ For example, critics as far back as the author of the play’s hypothesis have suspected that Electra’s “teichoscopia scene” (104-201) is entirely interpolated. Therefore, as my analysis of this play proceeds I shall bear in mind the questions critics have expressed over the authenticity of each particular section of the text, and I shall cite their misgivings where necessary.

In spite of the problems surrounding the surviving text, the *Phoenissae* deals with several issues that, I argue, must have resonated with the audience’s recent experience with conspirators in the coup of 411 and the decades of war preceding it. As both the citizens responsible for participating in the politics of the city and the soldiers charged with its defense were present, the dramatization of war, the formation and fracturing of civic alliances, and the debates over the most suitable form of government holds a strong contemporary resonance. Moreover, the play also pointedly dramatizes the effect of civil war on families – and on women in particular – alongside the miseries suffered by those

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Craik (1988) 52. On the manuscript tradition of Euripides’ plays in general, see Barrett (1964) 44-84 and Michelini (1987) 3-5.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the opening of Oedipus’ departure speech at *Phoe.* 1595-9.

¹⁶¹ Strattis quotes *Phoe.* 460 verbatim in his fragmentary *Phoenician Women*, the longest surviving section of which is a series of jokes aimed at the Theban dialect. Cf. Austin (1973) 216.

¹⁶² Cf. *Phoe.* 934, μνημάτων.

¹⁶³ For a full chronology of the known reproductions of the *Phoenissae*, see Papadopoulou (2008) 153-6. See also Diggle (1991).

enduring long-lasting exile and their loved ones at home. In addition to the play's treatment of these contemporary themes, some critics have detected the influence of sophistic ideas and modes of expression throughout the *Phoenissae*. Wordplay abounds and comes in a variety of forms: punning, near-synonyms, alliteration, assonance, and other linguistic flourishes add to the drama's contemporary flavor.¹⁶⁴ As such, the play provides an important point of entry for this study's considerations of the lingering civic mistrust among the audience and its manifestation on the tragic stage.

Before I begin my analysis of individual passages in the *Phoenissae*, a brief review of the play's major plot points is in order, and in tracing this narrative I emphasize points in the text where notions of γενναιότης and σωτηρία are prominent. The *Phoenissae* dramatizes a narrative depicted twice in post-Homeric epic – the *Oedipodea* and *Thebaid*, both lost – and in a fragmentary choral ode attributed to Stesichorus.¹⁶⁵ As is typical for Euripidean drama, the play features numerous innovations in departure from its tragic predecessors, Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (467 BC) and Sophocles' *Antigone* (late 440s BC).¹⁶⁶ Unlike the narrative that Aeschylus and Sophocles offer in their Theban plays, in Euripides' version Jocasta has not committed suicide and delivers the prologue. She begins by recalling the history of Thebes' royal family, beginning with Cadmus' departure from Tyre and his founding of the city. She then outlines the

¹⁶⁴ E.g. 55-8, 528-59, 718-9, 931-59, 1161. Craik (1985) 45 notes also a pervasive punning on the title of the play: Phoinix, Cadmus' brother and founder of the Phoenician city of Tyre, sounds remarkable like φοινίκεος (red, crimson), and it is invoked at points in the play in reference to slaughter, murder, or carnage (e.g. 41-2; 1487).

¹⁶⁵ On the mythology of Thebes and the House of Oedipus, cf. *RE* 1423-1552; *LIMC* VI 26-38 and VII 6-15; Graves (1988) 67.1, 69.1, 105-6; Gantz (1993) 467-530 (and on Polynices and Eteocles in particular, see 502-6).

¹⁶⁶ There is some scholarly debate over the date of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but most are in favor of 441 or 440 BC following a reference in the play's hypothesis that Sophocles served as a general in the Samian expedition shortly before its production. Cf. Fletcher (2015) 1264.

vicissitudes of the fate of Oedipus – his birth and exposure, his patricide and incest, his discovery of the truth and self-mutilation – culminating in the curse he laid upon Eteocles and Polynices and their present impasse. To avert the curse, she explains, the brothers agreed that each should rule Thebes for one year and then yield to the other cyclically, lest they “divide their house with whetted sword” (θηκτῶι σιδήρῳι δῶμα διαλαχεῖν τόδε, 68). However, upon the completion of Eteocles’ year on the throne he refuses to relinquish the kingship and instead banishes Polynices to Argos. There, Polynices is welcomed by King Adrastus, who provides him with his daughter’s hand in marriage and an army with which to reclaim the throne (77-80). Presently, Jocasta has arranged for a temporary truce that will allow Polynices entry into the city so that the brothers can attempt to parley a ceasefire (81-4).

In the following (likely interpolated) scene, Antigone and a servant appear atop the *skênê* to survey the army camped outside the walls (88-201). With their departure the Chorus enters and explains that they are a contingent of women from Phoenician Tyre on their way to serve in the temple of Apollo (203-13). They now find themselves stymied within the walls of their sister city of Thebes by the siege of Polynices (239-49), whom they favor in the conflict (291-300). Following the Chorus’ ode, Polynices enters with his sword drawn in fear of an ambush (261-5). After Polynices’ dolorous reunion with Jocasta (301-442) Eteocles enters and, in a speech laden with sophistic undertones (on which, see page 108), praises tyranny (503-6) and refuses to negotiate an end to the conflict (588-635). The Chorus then returns and sings a more optimistic version of the founding and future of Thebes (638-80) than the one Jocasta offered in the prologue.

Next, Eteocles and Creon meet on stage to discuss both public and private business of the land (λέγων τάδ', ὥς οἰκεῖα καὶ κοινὰ χθονὸς| θέλω πρὸς αὐτὸν συμβαλεῖν βουλευόμενα, 692-3) – that is, matters of state to be determined both in public view and in secret – which will be undertaken to save the city. First, Eteocles (following Creon's counsel) determines that he will select seven captains to defend the seven gates of Thebes against Polynices' champions (748-52), an action clearly visible to all residents of the city. But additionally they add another means for securing the stability of their claim to the throne of Thebes in a second agreement that the public does not witness: in the event of Eteocles' death, Creon is to see to the marriage of Antigone to his son, Haemon (757-65), thereby ensuring a smooth transfer of power to a legitimate heir. As the audience is aware, the first decision will result in the mutual slaying of the brothers and the end of the cursed house of Laius, in favor of the other, nobler strand of Thebes' heritage.¹⁶⁷ The second decision will provide safety and divine favor for the city (τῇ δ' Εὐλαβείαι, χρησιμωτάτῃ θεῶν,| προσευχόμεσθα τήνδε διασῶσαι πόλιν, 782-3) (in spite of Creon's later efforts to subvert them). Finally, before engaging the enemy Eteocles decides that it would be prudent to consult the prophet Tiresias, but insists that Creon deal with him because Tiresias begrudges Eteocles' previous criticisms of his prophecies (766-73).

After the choral ode, Tiresias enters and reveals to Creon that if he wishes to save (σωτηρίαν, 898) the city it will require the sacrifice of his own son, Menoeceus (911-4): the killing of the dragon from whose teeth the pure-bred *Spartoi*, “Sown Men,” of Thebes were sprung has angered Ares, and only the sacrifice of one of those men will appease

¹⁶⁷ The contrast between these two strands of Thebes' noble family are contemplated in the following choral ode (1018-66), and it lays the ultimate blame for the city's woes at the feet of Apollo (1042-6).

him (931-42). While his father is present Menoeceus shares Creon's shocked disbelief and refusal to comply (919), and Creon insists that Menoeceus flee the city for his own safety (σωτηρία, 975) before the public has the opportunity to learn of the prophecy (πρὶν μαθεῖν πᾶσαν πόλιν, 970). Like other real and dramatic conspiracies familiar to the Athenian audience in the late stage of the Peloponnesian War, Creon desires a course of action that will result in σωτηρία for an individual (i.e., Menoeceus), to the detriment of the πόλις he claims to serve. Upon Creon's departure, however, Menoeceus reveals to the Chorus his far different intentions: he will save the city (σώσω πόλιν, 997) by offering himself as the noble sacrifice which his fellow citizens require but which his father lacks the fortitude to provide.

After a choral ode praising Menoeceus' selflessness (1018-66), a Messenger enters to announce to Jocasta the sacrifice of Menoeceus for the safety of Thebes (τῇδε γῆι σωτηρίαν, 1092) and the clash of the seven Theban captains against their Argive counterparts (1114-99). The Messenger tells Jocasta that to this point she is fortunate and her sons remain alive (1209); but her sons intend to separate from their armies and settle the conflict in single combat (1217-20). Jocasta summons Antigone from the house and the two rush to attempt to put a stop to the duel (1270-83); however, a second Messenger enters to reveal that Jocasta and Antigone arrived too late (1335). Eteocles and Polynices have killed one another, he says, and in her grief Jocasta has slain herself atop their corpses (1356-1450). At this point Antigone appears on stage with the bodies of her brothers and mother, and she sings a lamentation beside Oedipus for the fate of their house (1480-1581). Their song is interrupted by Creon, who now claims the throne of Thebes for himself by virtue of Haemon's betrothal to Antigone and immediately exiles

Oedipus (1584-94). Moreover, in punishment for betraying his city, the corpse of Polynices is to be left unburied and cast outside the country's borders; anyone caught attempting to offer funerary rites to the corpse, he adds, will be executed (1627-34). In spite of Antigone's supplication and attempts to reason with him, Creon refuses to yield (1639-80), but does grant her leave to accompany her father. Oedipus foresees that he will wander in exile until he dies in Colonus,¹⁶⁸ near Athens.

As noted above, there is much in the ending of the play that gives commentators and critics pause. The text that has been handed down in the manuscript tradition contains a plot redundancy (Antigone desires both to remain in Thebes to bury her brother and to accompany her father), and there are noteworthy grammatical and stylistic points that suggest a hand other than Euripides'.¹⁶⁹ Mastronarde, for one, argues that line 1736 (in which Antigone laments the loss of her city) is the last line of the play that could possibly be genuine.¹⁷⁰ While such interpolations provide an obstacle for textual critics and editors, their presence is suggestive that the central themes of the play – the difficulty of establishing and maintaining trust and the inability of those lacking a noble moral fiber to provide σωτηρία for those under their protection, for instance – were relevant and compelling.

As is made clear in this brief overview of the plot, the *Phoenissae* is a play deeply concerned with broken bonds of trust and fractured allegiances. In the remainder of this chapter I examine closely each of these failures of allies to live up to the obligations their

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Chapter 2 above on the contemporary importance of Colonus as the locale for the fateful assembly authorizing the 400 in 411 BC.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Mastronarde (1982) 20-31 and Craik (1988) 245-9.

¹⁷⁰ Mastronarde (1980) 19.

counterparts expect and the resulting factional strife. A major contributing factor to the crises playing out on stage, I argue, is a willingness on the part of several figures – and Eteocles in particular – to adopt a sophistic rationale and justification for taking actions that benefit themselves at the expense of harming those they have built a trusting relationship. Whereas some of the play's figures adhere to a more traditional faith in the ability of language to cement trust between people, others take advantage of them by adopting an ethical standpoint that denies the connections between words and the reality that language claims to represent. The mutual destruction of Polynices and Eteocles -- standard bearers for quite irreconcilable ethical standpoints -- suggests that the inflexible principles they represent would have been untenable in the Athenian political context of 410 BC.

Sources of Fraternal Strife

The central conflict of the *Phoenissae* – the civil war between the brothers Polynices and Eteocles over the throne of Thebes – is a direct result of the breakdown of an alliance that had the outward appearance of stability. To begin, by virtue of the fact that the brothers were born into the same accursed family and were forced to endure the same shame when the truth of their parentage was revealed, one expects that they would enjoy from the outset a level of intimacy and shared sympathy that other men entering into pacts (ἔταξαν, 71) cannot.¹⁷¹ Additionally, one might expect that the bond of trust they share is reinforced by their mutual complicity in a conspiracy aimed at dissolving what remains of Oedipus' grip on the throne of Thebes:

¹⁷¹ Craik (1988) 172 suggest that Jocasta's use of the dual (69, 71, 74) in the lines describing her sons' actions following the revelation of their parentage is indicative of their shared plight and common purpose.

ἐπεὶ δὲ τέκνων γένυς ἐμῶν σκιάζεται,
 κλήθροισι ἔκρυψαν πατέρ', ἵν' ἀμνήμων τύχη
 γένοιτο πολλῶν δεομένη σοφισμάτων.
 ζῶν δ' ἔστ' ἐν οἴκοις· πρὸς δὲ τῆς τύχης νοσῶν
 ἄρᾳς ἄρᾳται παισὶν ἀνοσιωτάτας,
 θηκτῶι σιδήρῳι δῶμα διαλαχεῖν τόδε.¹⁷²

But when the chins of my sons were darkened by beards
 they hid their father behind locked doors, so that his fate
 would be forgotten, though it was done with sly artifice.
 Now, he lives in the palace. Made sick by this fate,
 he calls down unholy curses on his sons,
 that they divide this house with the whetted sword.
Phoenissae 63-8

As I examined in chapter 2 in discussion of Thucydides' description of the steps conspirators take in order to establish trust, here too Polynices and Eteocles undertake a complex, deceptive operation (πολλῶν δεομένη σοφισμάτων, 65)¹⁷³ to accomplish an objective that benefits both. Moreover, their decision merely to hide (ἔκρυψαν, 64) Oedipus rather than to send him into exile has a two-fold advantage.¹⁷⁴ First, there is always the possibility that an exiled Oedipus may one day return, thereby recalling the shameful circumstances of his exile and the brothers' polluted heredity. Second, locking Oedipus away in the house clears the way for their ascendance to the throne, but it also leaves open the option of returning Oedipus to public view if their legitimacy for claiming the kingship should ever come into question.¹⁷⁵

In addition to their shared complicity in securing the incarceration of their father, I argue that there is an additional component to Polynices' and Eteocles' consanguinity

¹⁷² All textual citation of the *Phoenissae* are from J. Diggle, *Euripidis fabulae*, vol. 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994: 83-179.

¹⁷³ On the use of σοφισμα to indicate deceptive or underhanded contrivances in Euripides' later plays, cf. *Phoe.* 1408 (on which, see below), *IT* 1031, and *Ba.* 30, 489.

¹⁷⁴ Diod. 4.65.1 claims that Polynices and Eteocles incarcerated Oedipus out of shame alone (τὸν μὲν Οἰδίπου ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἐνδον μένειν ἀναγκασθῆναι διὰ τὴν αἰσχύνην), but here I argue that Euripides' emphasis on the way their actions will be perceived (65) suggests a political motivation as well.

¹⁷⁵ E.g. *Soph. Ant.* 164-74, where Creon first references the loyalty the citizens of Thebes held for the Oedipus and his sons, and then claims legitimate absorption of that loyalty by way of Antigone's betrothal to Haemon.

that should – but ultimately fails to – add an additional layer of trust between the brothers: namely, their mutual condemnation by the curse of Oedipus dooming them to divide their house with whetted sword (θηκτῶι σιδήρῳι δῶμα διαλαχεῖν τόδε, 68). By virtue of the fact that the curse offers no provisions or conditions for bringing on the foretold destruction, I argue that the curse carries the implicit charge that Polynices and Eteocles take an equal stake in forestalling the inevitable disaster they are fated to share. Such cooperation, though, proves to be impossible; the brothers’ mutual destruction is inevitable, and in the pages that follow I examine why the sons of Oedipus fail to broker a lasting trust.

However, before turning to these points, it is worth noting the contemporary resonance of the language Euripides uses to compose Oedipus’ curse, because in a sense it functions as a decree governing the subsequent plot of the play. At the most basic level, the language closely follows that of Aeschylus in his depiction of this narrative in the *Seven Against Thebes*: his chorus also shudders at the sword-wielding hands that will divide the property of Oedipus (καί σφε σιδαρονόμῳ| διὰ χερὶ ποτε λαχεῖν| κτήματα, 788-90),¹⁷⁶ which in turn is thought to be a reference to Stesichorus’ attribution of the curse to Polynices’ and Eteocles’ failure to apportion the finest cuts of sacrificial meat in the *Thebaid*.¹⁷⁷ However, I argue that the reference to the once glorious house of Oedipus being divided (διαλαχεῖν) into rival factions would have carried a politically charged resonance for the Athenian audience of 410 BC. Having so recently endured the division of their city into factions of oligarchs and democrats and being presently in the process of

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Baldock (1989) 70.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Papadopoulou (2008) 34-5; later in the *Phoenissae*, Tiresias makes reference to Oedipus’ “denied prerogatives” (γέρα πατρὶ|οὔτ’ ἔξοδον, 874-5) as a factor contributing to his anger with his sons.

restoring political stability that will culminate with the swearing of the Oath of Demophantos, the disquiet provoked by the depiction of broken allegiances within a fractured city must have struck a raw nerve in the psyche of Athenian citizens.

Following the lengthy and likely interpolated “teichosokpia scene” (88-201), Polynices enters the stage with extreme caution, sensing that in spite of his mother’s promise of truce he is still beset by unseen enemies. With sword drawn and eyes darting in all directions in anticipation of a trap (265-8), Polynices professes with some ambivalence that he simultaneously trusts and mistrusts the safety Jocasta has promised (πέποιθα μέντοι μητρὶ κοῦ πέποιθ’ ἄμα,| ἥτις μ’ ἔπεισε δεῦρ’ ὑπόσπονδον μολεῖν, 272-3).¹⁷⁸ In these words there is the first hint of the crux that will lie at the center of the impasse between Polynices and Eteocles in the coming *agōn*: namely, an inability to come to an agreement on the capacity of language to express truth and not merely be a vehicle for deception.¹⁷⁹ Even before the parlay with Eteocles has begun, Polynices’ uneasy confidence in the truce promised by his mother – whom he has no ostensible reason to mistrust¹⁸⁰ – is evidenced by his cautious entrance. The necessity that all parties entering a treaty be in accord with the terms agreed upon and the language in which they are expressed is found in the very word Jocasta uses to describe the brothers’ failed pact: she relates that they came *together* in an agreement (ξυμβάντ’ ἔταξαν, 71) over how the kingship was to be shared, when in reality their expectations were not as congruent as the

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Jocasta’s own reference to truce at 81-2: ἐγὼ δ’ ἔριν λύουσ’ ὑπόσπονδον μολεῖν| ἔπεισα παιδὶ παῖδα πρὶν ψαῦσαι δορός. Craik (1988) 173 notes in particular the grim note of foreboding in the alliterative effects of line 82.

¹⁷⁹ For a brief summary of earlier scholarship on elements of sophistry in the plays of Euripides, cf. Conacher (1998) 13-7. For a more recent treatment, see Gibert (2015) 607-10.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Polynices’ expression for his deep trust of his mother at 364-5 (ἐν δέ μ’ ὠφελεῖ, |σπονδαί τε καὶ σὴ πίστις), and also Jocasta’s sincere joy in her reunion with her long exiled son in her speech from 310-54.

ξύν- prepositional prefix implies. It is a small wonder, then, why Polynices approaches Jocasta's truce with skepticism.

However, as the reunion scene proceeds, it becomes clear that Polynices' mistrust of language has a deeper philosophical source closely related to notions of γενναιότης than that aggravated by his brother's deceptive annexation of the Theban throne. To lay the groundwork for her upcoming appeal to Polynices' patriotism and sense of alienation in an effort to broker a ceasefire, Jocasta inquires what Polynices has experienced as an exile:

{Io.} [καὶ δὴ σ' ἐρωτῶ πρῶτον ὧν χρήζω τυχεῖν·]
 τί τὸ στέρεσθαι πατρίδος; ἢ κακὸν μέγα;
 {Po.} μέγιστον· ἔργωι δ' ἐστὶ μείζον ἢ λόγῳ.
 {Io.} τίς ὁ τρόπος αὐτοῦ; τί φυγάσιν τὸ δυσχερές;
 {Po.} ἐν μὲν μέγιστον· οὐκ ἔχει παρρησίαν.
 {Io.} δούλου τόδ' εἶπας, μὴ λέγειν ἅ τις φρονεῖ.
 {Po.} τὰς τῶν κρατούντων ἀμαθίας φέρειν χρεών.
 {Io.} καὶ τοῦτο λυπρόν, συνασοφεῖν τοῖς μὴ σοφοῖς.
 {Po.} ἀλλ' ἐς τὸ κέρδος παρὰ φύσιν δουλευτέον.
 {Io.} αἱ δ' ἐλπίδες βόσκουσι φυγάδας, ὥς λόγος.

Jo: And now I ask you the first of the things I desire to know:

What is it like to lose your fatherland? Is it a great evil?

Po: The greatest: in practice it is far worse than in description.

Jo: What is its manner? What is difficult for exiles?

Po: One thing is the most: there is no free speech.

Jo: This is the speech of slaves, not to say that which one thinks.

Po: It is necessary to endure the follies of those in power.

Jo: This also is painful: to join fools in their foolishness.

Po: Yes, in order to attain profit one must enslave his spirit.

Jo: Hopes nourish exiles, as they say.

Phoenissae 388-96

Of all the tribulations Polynices has endured in exile, he says that the greatest one of all is the loss of free speech (οὐκ ἔχει παρρησίαν, 391), or more specifically the inability for a man of his aristocratic standing to interact with other people of his rank on a level commensurate with his noble quality. An Athenian audience would have strong sympathy for Polynices' loss of παρρησία and the unimpeded self-expression it allows because they claimed it as a virtue and a privilege enjoyed by Athenian citizens to a far higher degree

than other Greeks.¹⁸¹ Here it is important to draw a sharp distinction between twenty-first century notions of “free speech” (which in most modern societies is considered a basic human right) and the kinds of limitations Polynices’ exile has imposed upon him. In the introduction to a recent study on *παρρησία*, editors Baltussen and Davis note that the term refers more specifically to “frank speech,” the ability “to say what you think.”¹⁸² As Polynices notes in line 393 (τὰς τῶν κρατούντων ἀμαθίας φέρειν χρεών), the loss of *παρρησία* denies a citizen the ability to speak out in safety against the follies of their rulers without the threat of retaliation.

I propose that, in the passage cited above, Polynices and Jocasta both conceive of *παρρησία* as a significant component of *γενναιότης*. First, Jocasta says that one of the burdens of slavery is to be forbidden to give unfettered voice to one’s thoughts (392), which suggests implicitly that legal freedom carries also the benefit of a freedom of self-expression. In response, Polynices remarks on the political implications of *παρρησία*: those living under a tyrant (or, I argue, under a group of secretive oligarchs such as the ones Thucydides describes as the driving force behind the coup of 411) have no voice with which they can admonish their ruler (393), which again offers implicit support and approval for the polyphony of democracy. For those lacking *παρρησία*, Polynices insists, the only option available for advancing their interests is to suppress their true nature and act as if they were slaves to the potentates above them (ἀλλ’ ἐς τὸ κέρδος παρὰ φύσιν δουλευτέον, 395). In the context of tyranny, Polynices implies that those unable to mask

¹⁸¹ Notions of *παρρησία* appear in a number of Euripides’ works, perhaps most prominently at *Hipp.* 422: ἐλεύθεροι παρρησία θάλλοντες οἰκοῖεν πόλιν κλεινὴν Ἀθηνῶν. Cf. also *Ion* 672, *Ba.* 668, *Ph.* 391, and for non-Euripidean treatments see Aristophanes *Th.* 541, Isocrates 2.28 and 8.14, and Plato *Rep.* 557b. Cf. Mastronarde (1994) 259 and Baltussen & Davis (2015) 4-8.

¹⁸² Baltussen & Davis (2015) 1.

their genuine thoughts and act in ways which placate their sovereigns risk facing the same political exclusion he has. Further, the thought that there is a direct correlation between political efficacy and noble birth is articulated in the lines that follow: Jocasta is dismayed that Polynices' nobility was not an asset in his exile and he remarks that his lineage failed to provide access even to the basic resources necessary for survival (*{Io.}* οὐδ' ἡϋγένειά σ' ἦρεν εἰς ὕψος μέγαν; *{Πο.}* κακὸν τὸ μὴ 'χειν' τὸ γένος οὐκ ἔβοσκε με, 404-5).¹⁸³ In other words, a central component of Polynices' predicament is the failed expectation that his *εὐγένεια* on its own will lead to inclusion in the ruling faction of Thebes and the political safety it provides – a theme which offers something of a polemic against the Athenians' use of exile as the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles comes to a head.

The Fractured Alliance of Polynices and Eteocles

How, then, does the play account for the failure of Polynices' *εὐγένεια* to provide him with the political security he relied on in negotiating the shared kingship of Thebes with his brother? When Eteocles arrives on stage and the brothers' acerbic *agōn* ensues, there emerges a clear and fundamental disagreement over the ethical use of language as a vehicle for articulating and masking truth. Like most tragic *agōn* scenes, this one (443-637) serves less to allow its interlocutors to find reconciliation between two diametrically opposed points of view and more to entrench Polynices and Eteocles in their obstinate positions, thereby locating the headwaters of their eventual mutual destruction in an

¹⁸³ Polynices repeats this sentiment shortly thereafter when he remarks upon the incongruity between aristocracy and nobility, saying that nobility has no value for those in poverty (*πένης γὰρ οὐδὲν εὐγενὴς ἀνὴρ*, 442). However, this section of the text is highly suspicious to textual critics. On similar explanatory gnomic conclusions to a *rhesis* in Euripides, see Johansen (1959) 151-9 and Mastronarde (1993) 270.

ethical discord. Specifically and as noted above, here Polynices enters into a debate one might imagine brewing between conservative Athenian rhetoricians and more progressive ones who enjoy the benefits of a sophistic education. In the past scholars such as Untersteiner, Nestle, and Decharme have studied the many instances of sophistic language and rhetorical practice on the lips of Euripidean figures, and they conclude in general that the playwright took a hostile perspective on the Sophists (as do Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, and others). However, in the following analysis of the *agōn* between Polynices and Eteocles and the ethical standpoints contained therein I propose a more neutral perspective: I suggest that Euripides makes use of these two stridently antithetical points of view not with an eye toward promoting one over the other, but rather because they resonate poignantly with the civic experience of his audience.

Before the brothers' *agōn* begins in earnest, Jocasta offers a piece of gnomic wisdom aimed at producing an amicable negotiation, and it is advice that would have served any Greek *πόλις* well and Athens in particular as it is in the process of recovering from the coup of 411:

παραινέσαι δὲ σφῶν τι βούλομαι σοφόν·
 ὅταν φίλος τις ἀνδρὶ θυμῳθεὶς φίλῳ
 ἐς ἐν συνελθὼν ὄμματ' ὄμμασιν διδῶι,
 ἐφ' οἷσιν ἤκει, ταῦτα χρὴ μόνον σκοπεῖν,
 κακῶν δὲ τῶν πρὶν μηδενὸς μνείαν ἔχειν.

I desire to advise something wise to both of you:
 When one friend is made angry at another friend,
 when going to see him face to face, once he's come
 to this person, it is necessary to discuss (on) this matter
 and to make no mention at all of evils (in the) past.

Phoenissae 460-4

Here Jocasta invokes the political principle of *μὴ μνησικακεῖν*, the decision of a city to collectively and deliberately forget past civic strife in the hope of passing amnesty and

recovering from στάσις.¹⁸⁴ Mastronarde suggests that μὴ μνησικακεῖν would have become increasingly important throughout Greece in the years leading up to the production of the *Phoenissae*, following the widespread outbreak civil strife.¹⁸⁵ To this I add that with the coup of 411 so recently suppressed, and Athens still in the process of restoring constitutional order, Jocasta's appeal for absolution from past strife must have held a strong contemporary, local resonance. Indeed, in staging this scene Euripides shows a keen sensitivity to the difficulty involved in restoring peace between the politically disenfranchised and their usurpers: throughout the scene that follows, Polynices and Eteocles look at one another only askance and with bitter anger (455-9), and in addressing each other they use only the third person (474, 477, 478, 481, 511), just as is the standard practice for opponents in forensic speeches.¹⁸⁶ The kind of μὴ μνησικακεῖν Jocasta urges her sons to accept will remain out of reach because their mutual resentment prohibits them from the direct communication that would make amnesty possible.

Polynices is the first to speak in the ἀγών, and in the opening lines he posits a connection between clear, straightforward language, truth, and the justice he seeks:

ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος τῆς ἀληθείας ἔφν,
 κοῦ ποικίλων δεῖ τᾶνδιχ' ἐρμηνευμάτων·
 ἔχει γὰρ αὐτὰ καιρόν· ὁ δ' ἄδικος λόγος
 νοσῶν ἐν αὐτῷι φαρμάκων δεῖται σοφῶν.

The argument of truth is by nature simple,
 and justice does not need intricate explanations:
 for on its own it has the proper measure. But an unjust
 argument, being diseased in itself, requires shrewd medicines.
Phoenissae 469-73

¹⁸⁴ The concept of μὴ μνησικακεῖν is most famously employed seven years after the production of the *Phoenissae* in the wake of the expulsion of the Thirty (cf. Andoc. *Myst.* 81, Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.43, Arist. *Clouds* 999, *Lys.* 590, and *Wealth* 1146).

¹⁸⁵ Mastronarde (1994) 279.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Craik (1988) 196 and Papadopoulou (2008) 96.

As Mastronarde observes, Polynices' language throughout this passage exemplifies precisely the kind of simplicity (ἀπλοῦς, 469) he praises in these lines, thereby simultaneously expressing and utilizing the assertion he is attempting to make: namely, that clearly articulated truth is the only antidote for sophistic rhetoric.¹⁸⁷ Polynices' comparison of unjust argument to a physical disease (νοσῶν, 73) seems very much in the same vein as Thucydides' similar analogy in his description of the "plague" of στάσις that swept across Greece.¹⁸⁸ Here, Polynices puts his case succinctly and to the point: he held up his end of the accord he struck with his brother and departed Thebes of his own volition (473-7), but Eteocles refuses to abide by the oath they swore before the gods (482-3). He adds that he has no desire to exact a penalty from Eteocles and will send his army away if the original contract is restored. To frame this concise statement of the facts of his case, he reiterates his call for plain, simple rhetoric:

ταῦτ' αὐθ' ἕκαστα, μήτερ, οὐχὶ περιπλοκάς
λόγων ἀθροίσας εἶπον ἀλλὰ καὶ σοφοῖς
καὶ τοῖσι φαύλοις ἔνδιχ', ὥς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ.

I have spoken the precise facts, plain and simple, Mother,
not stringing together intricacies of words but saying what
is just to the wise and to the simple, as it seems to me.

Phoenissae 494-6

Once again, Polynices makes a claim to truth based on his use of wise, frank speech (καὶ σοφοῖς καὶ τοῖσι φαύλοις, 495-6) and not by mustering ornate rhetoric (οὐχὶ περιπλοκάς|λόγων ἀθροίσας εἶπον, 494-5). In other words, simple language is an inherently better vehicle for examining whether statements are true or false because it does not make any

¹⁸⁷ Mastronarde (1993) 280; cf. Conacher (1998) 14.

¹⁸⁸ Thucydides 3.82.3-6; on the comparison between στάσις and a contagious disease, cf. Hornblower (1991) 480. Mastronarde (1993) 281 points out that tragedians use metaphors of illness somewhat regularly, but only here is λόγος itself diseased.

attempt to mask untruth in rhetorical flourish. Indeed, here he posits “simple” (φαύλοις, 496) rhetoricians as a desirable foil for more clever (σοφοῖς, 495) ones. Polynices intimates that unnecessarily ornate or meticulously woven language so muddles a line of argumentation that it becomes an easy task to blur the line between truth and fiction. One suspects that such markedly anti-sophistic sentiments as these would have had much appeal to an Athenian audience who had so recently endured the consequences of silver-tongued oligarchs such as Peisander.¹⁸⁹

Like Polynices, Eteocles exemplifies the very rhetorical ethics he espouses in his reply. His response is opaque, lacking any clear internal logic or identifiable formal structure, and seems composed for the sole purpose of obscuring the fact that he is the one who has broken the oath. He begins with a four-line gnomic statement that references several sophistic hallmarks:

εἰ πᾶσι ταὐτὸν καλὸν ἔφν σοφὸν θ' ἅμα,
οὐκ ἦν ἂν ἀμφίλεκτος ἀνθρώποις ἔρις·
νῦν δ' οὐθ' ὅμοιον οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἴσον βροτοῖς
πλὴν ὀνόμασιν· τὸ δ' ἔργον οὐκ ἔστιν τόδε.

If to all men what is fine and at the same time wise were the same
thing, there would be no quarreling strife among men.
But in actual fact there is nothing that is like or equal among men
Except their use of like words: the reality is not that.

Phoenissae 499-502

As Mastronarde notes, Eteocles' effort to destabilize the foundations that serve as predicates for establishing standards for moral and ethical behavior is reminiscent of Protagorean relativism, Gorgianic skepticism, and sophistic considerations of the νόμος/φύσις dichotomy (i.e., the disunity between name [ὀνόμασιν] and reality [ἔργον]).¹⁹⁰ These words, though, are far more than sophistic rhetorical flourish: by

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Thucydides 8.53.2-3.

¹⁹⁰ Mastronarde (1993) 288, where he notes a handful of other parallels between Eteocles' speech, and Protagoras' *Kataballontes* and the *Dissoi Logoi* of Gorgias.

reducing the ethical basis of the oath he swore with his brother to mere semantics open to individual interpretation, Eteocles not only absolves himself of guilt for violating the oath, but also offers justification for his unabashed longing for tyranny:

ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐδέν, μήτερ, ἀποκρύψας ἐρῶ·
 ἄστρον ἂν ἔλθοιμι' ἥλιου' πρὸς ἀντολὰς
 καὶ γῆς ἐνερθε, δυνατὸς ὦν δρᾶσαι τάδε,
 τὴν θεῶν μεγίστην ὥστ' ἔχειν Τυραννίδα.
 τοῦτ' οὖν τὸ χρηστόν, μήτερ, οὐχὶ βούλομαι
 ἄλλωι παρῆναι μάλλον ἢ σώζειν ἐμοί·
 ἀνανδρία γάρ, τὸ πλέον ὅστις ἀπολέσας
 τοῦλασσον ἔλαβε.

...

εἵπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι
 κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν, τᾶλλα δ' εὐσεβεῖν χρεῶν.

I will speak, Mother, concealing nothing.
 I would go to where the sky's stars rise
 and beneath the earth, were it in my power to do this,
 in order to possess Tyranny, the greatest of the gods.
 Therefore, I do not wish to yield this benefit
 to another man, but rather to preserve it for myself.
 For it is unmanly for someone to give up the greater thing
 and take the lesser.

...

If it is necessary to be unjust, it is best to be unjust
 for the sake of tyranny, being reverent in all other matters.

Phoenissae 503-10; 524-5

Eteocles has turned the tables on the argument Polynices put forth, claiming that it would be unmanly (ἀνανδρία, 509), cowardly (εἰ Μυκηναίου δορὸς| φόβωι παρείην σκῆπτρα τὰμὰ τῷιδ' ἔχειν, 513-4), and shameful (αἰσχύνομαι, 510; ὄνειδος, 513) for him to acquiesce to his brother and voluntarily hand over a portion of his autocracy. It is noteworthy that in embracing his personified Tyranny (506) in the most superlative of terms he references perhaps a two-fold safety (σώζειν, 508): he will preserve authority for himself, but he will also use that authority to protect himself from his enemies (i.e., Polynices). More than his merely keeping Tyranny for his own possession and enjoyment, here I argue that Eteocles gestures toward the same notions of safety that

Euripides treats in the *Orestes* and Sophocles in the *Philoctetes*: namely, that by necessity political safety is likely to be achieved only when one group consciously chooses to include certain individuals and to exclude others. The benefit of tyranny, Eteocles implies, is that true safety is exclusive to a party with his exclusive membership.

Having heard the arguments put forth by both her sons, Jocasta makes one final effort to arbitrate a peaceful solution in one of the longest surviving ἀγών speeches of tragedy. Her ῥῆσις combines the same rational and lucid call for justice as Polynices proposed, but she adopts Eteocles' rhetorical strategy of invoking a divine personification of the virtues she encourages her sons to adopt. To begin, she warns Eteocles that the Tyranny he praises is in fact something else entirely: an unquenchable Ambition (Φιλοτιμία, 532):

τί τῆς κακίστης δαιμόνων ἐφίεσαι
 Φιλοτιμίας, παῖ; μὴ σὺ γ' ἄδικος ἢ θεός·
 πολλοὺς δ' ἐς οἴκους καὶ πόλεις εὐδαίμονας
 ἐσῆλθε κάε' ἤλθ' ἐπ' ὀλέθρῳ τῶν χρωμένων·
 ἐφ' ἧ σὺ μαίνηι.

Why do you long for the worst of the divinities,
 Ambition, my child? Do not do this: she is an unjust goddess.
 She enters into many houses and prosperous cities
 and has departed upon the destruction of those associated with her.
 For her you are going mad.
Phoenissae 531-5

The language and imagery of Jocasta's remarks are suggestive not only of an increasingly pejorative sense of φιλοτιμία at the time of the play's production, but also of the destabilizing effects on a civic body of such ambition in the hearts of aspiring oligarchs. Whereas φιλοτιμία is treated in a far more favorable light in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (655-61) and *Eumenides* (1032-5), authors of the later fifth century view ambitious men with far greater suspicion. Pindar, for instance, warns of the propensity for ambitious men to fracture a city into στάσις (ἄγαν φιλοτιμίαν| μνώμενοι ἐν πόλεσιν ἄνδρες| ἢ στάσιν ἄλγος

ἐμφανές, fr. 210),¹⁹¹ and Herodotus relates that the daughter of Periander, when sent to parley with his son Lycophron the tyrant of Corcyra, calls ambition for power an “ill-omened possession” (Φιλοτιμίη κτῆμα σκαιόν, 3.53.4).

More immediately relevant, however, are two references to φιλοτιμία in Thucydides. First, Thucydides explains that after the death of Pericles numerous disastrous projects were undertaken to satisfy the personal ambitions (τὰς ἰδίας φιλοτιμίας, 2.65.7) of self-serving political leaders, who were eager to increase their prestige by exposing their countrymen to danger. It is precisely this notion of the competitive component of φιλοτιμία that, as Jocasta conceives of it, upends the equilibrium of power in a city and drives those with less access to authority into conflict with those who have more: τὸ γὰρ ἴσον νόμιμον ἀνθρώποις ἔφυ,| τῷι πλέονι δ' αἰεὶ πολέμιον καθίσταται| τοῦλασσον ἐχθρᾶς θ' ἡμέρας κατάρχεται, 538-40. Second, as discussed in chapter 2 above (on the historical context in which the *Phoenissae* is grounded), Thucydides in book 8 conceives of φιλοτιμία as a component of oligarchy which is simultaneously essential and fatal, one which is at the heart of the impulse for elite citizens to lay claim to authority over the δῆμος, but which also fuels a private, competitive drive for each individual oligarch to rise slightly higher than his peers (κατ' ἰδίας δὲ φιλοτιμίας οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν τῷ τοιούτῳ προσέκειντο... πάντες γὰρ αὐθημερὸν ἀξιοῦσιν οὐχ ὅπως ἴσοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολὺν πρῶτος αὐτὸς ἕκαστος εἶναι, 8.89.3). Likewise, Jocasta urges Eteocles to consider precisely the same self-destructive nature of φιλοτιμία, when she asks:

ἄγ', ἦν σ' ἔρωμαι δύο λόγῳ προθεῖς' ἄμα,
πότερα τυραννεῖν ἢ πόλιν σῶσαι θέλεις,

¹⁹¹ Pindar fr. 210 is a subject of debate among textual critics; these are the lines as rendered by Page and Rouse (1915) 608, which follows Plutarch's citation of the lines at *de cohib.* 457b.

ἐρεῖς τυραννεῖν; ἦν δὲ νικήσῃ σ' ὅδε
 Ἀργεῖά τ' ἔγγῃ δόρυ τὸ Καδμείων ἔλῃ;
 [ὄψῃ δαμασθὲν ἄστῃ Θηβαίων τόδε,
 ὄψῃ δὲ πολλὰς αἰχμαλωτίδας κόρας
 βίαι πρὸς ἀνδρῶν πολέμιων πορθουμένας.]
 δαπανηρὸς ἄρ' ὁ πλοῦτος ὃν ζητεῖς ἔχειν
 [γενήσεται Θήβαισι, φιλότιμος δὲ σύ].¹⁹²

Come, if I ask a question setting two arguments forth at once,
 whether you desire to be tyrant or to save the city,
 would you say 'to be tyrant?' But if this man overcomes you,
 and the Argive sword overpowers the Cadmeian spear,
 [you will see this city of Thebes defeated]
 you will see many captive women forcibly
 carried off as booty by the enemy.]
 The wealth that you seek to have
 will be costly for Thebes, since you are ambitious.
Phoenissae 559-67

Here, Jocasta posits tyranny (τυραννεῖν, 561) – the result in the city of unchecked φιλοτιμία, if not an outright synonym for it¹⁹³ – as diametrically opposed to and mutually exclusive with the σωτηρία of a citizen body (πόλιν σῶσαι, 561). To choose tyranny over the safety of peace, as she anticipates Eteocles will, not only would brand him as φιλότιμος (567) but would also make him as culpable for the destruction of Thebes as his brother would be. Combining Euripides' treatment of φιλοτιμία here, in the year following the coup, with Thucydides' treatment of the term (along with the negative

¹⁹² There is some disagreement among textual critics over the authenticity of this section of Jocasta's ῥῆσις. Kovacs (2003) 62-7, for one, feels that the whole central section of the speech (552-8) is interpolated and should be deleted. Part of Kovacs' objection is based on, "the irrelevant pathos of the captive maidens and the lameness of the concluding couplet." Others, such as Dindorf and Valckenaer, are more conservative and delete only a handful of couplets throughout the passage. While almost all critics delete the line 567 (which contains the word φιλότιμος), I maintain that considerations of φιλοτιμία lay at the heart of Jocasta's line of questioning in the passage following the prominence of the term in the earlier, more textually sound section of the ῥῆσις.

¹⁹³ On the equivalence of φιλοτιμία and τυραννίς, cf. *IA* 342 and 385 where each might be taken to mean "supreme power." On the political expediency of substituting the word "tyranny" for "oligarchy" in efforts to restore democratic stability following the coup of 411, see chapter 3 below.

comments from Pindar and Herodotus noted above) leaves the sense that immediately after 411 BC and for some time later, the term recalled the anxieties of fractional strife.¹⁹⁴

In spite of Jocasta's efforts to diffuse the enmity between her sons with reasonable political compromise, the distrust and disdain resulting from their fractured agreement makes acquiescence from either party impossible. The brothers continue to trade insults (e.g. 594-600), accuse one another of hubris (620), and are eager to slay one another (621-2). Finally, Polynices' previous readiness to stand down and send away his forces in exchange for Eteocles' restoration of their accord evaporates; he condemns the House of Oedipus to ruin (ἐρρέτω πρόπας δόμος, 624), and lays the blame for the coming destruction squarely on his brother's intractability (κἄν τί σοι, πόλις, γένηται, μὴ 'μέ, τόνδε δ' αἰτιῶ, 629).

Creon and Menoeceus: When Conspiracies Fail

When Creon comes to the stage midway through the play, there is a notable shift in tone, as the audience's attention zooms away from the uncompromising interpersonal conflict between Polynices and Eteocles and turns toward the devastating implications the fraternal strife will have on Thebes and its citizens. As the brother of Jocasta and thereby simultaneously uncle and great-uncle to Polynices and Eteocles, Creon is in a unique position to do a service to Thebes: by his connection to the royal family, he can legitimately claim authority to act on behalf of the πόλις, but he is also not subject to the maladies of the House of Oedipus. Eteocles references Creon's political and personal

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Hornblower (1987) 119, where notes the re-evaluation by Jocasta of the words φιλοτιμία (532) and ἰσότης (equality, 536). He suggests that the whole section is about πλεονεξία (greed), and is decidedly Thucydidean, especially regarding the "stasis model" of 3.82.8.

standing the moment the latter arrives on stage, saying that he must speak with him about matters both private and public (λέγων τάδ', ὥς οἰκεῖα καὶ κοινὰ χθονὸς| θέλω πρὸς αὐτὸν συμβαλεῖν βουλευόμενα, 692-3), presumably because rule of Thebes will fall to Creon if Eteocles should fall in battle. Indeed, Creon relates that he was actively working for the defense of the city during the brief truce and has even captured an enemy combatant in the meantime, from whom he has learned of Polynices' plan to encircle and lay siege to the city (707-12).

Creon's impulse to protect Thebes' smaller force by taking up a defensive position within the city walls is noteworthy in the ensuing stichomythia, and his prudent calls for careful deliberation counterbalance Eteocles' bloodlust. Creon warns that victory can only be won by way of good council (καὶ μὴν τὸ νικᾶν <γ'> ἐστὶ πᾶν εὐβουλίας, 721), that every option should be explored before taking action ({Ετ.} βούλητι τράπωμαι δῆθ' ὁδοὺς ἄλλας τινάς;| {Κρ.} πάσας γε, πρὶν κίνδυνον εἰσάπαξ μολεῖν, 722-3), and finally that it is best to be on guard against dangers instead of taking them head-on (ἅπαν κάκιον τοῦ φυλάσσεσθαι καλῶς, 731). Ultimately Creon prevails upon Eteocles not to sally forth into battle, but rather to station troops at all seven gates of Thebes, each of which is to be led by a captain of Eteocles' choosing, and in doing so he encapsulates the source of the entire crisis in a simple gnomic statement: "You must share command: one man cannot see all (καὶ ξυστρατήγους <γ'>· εἷς δ' ἀνὴρ οὐ πάνθ' ὁρᾷ, 745)." Indeed, Eteocles' inability to share authority is the literal source of the present conflict – though Polynices culpability can hardly be ignored, as he is the aggressor in the present military standoff. However, Creon's statement and the recommendation that Eteocles select six

men whom he trusts to lead in his place (ξυστρατήγους)¹⁹⁵ suggests a political philosophy that fundamentally mistrusts tyranny. A tyrant, he suggests, is restrained by his own ability and ethical limitations, whereas a group of men with shared authority can combine their strength and wisdom to protect a greater number of people. Euripides' captious presentation of a political philosophy that tacitly endorses oligarchy so soon after the turbulence of the coup of 411 would likely have been unsettling to his audience, and this presentation is an instance of rhetoric that will recur again in the late fifth century¹⁹⁶ wherein Athenians use the term "tyranny" as a byword for any antidemocratic behavior.¹⁹⁷

And yet, for all the virtue of Creon's calls for caution and prudent deliberation, scholars such as Papadopoulou detect a critical flaw in his character: namely, a lack of moral wisdom necessary to guide his resolve to protect Thebes.¹⁹⁸ This deficiency rises to the surface first in Creon's encounter with Teiresias, whom Eteocles has summoned to ask how the city might be saved. The term σωτηρία (and its cognates) is central to the ensuing conversation, occurring 8 times over the course of 79 lines:¹⁹⁹ Creon is desperate to know how σωτηρία might be obtained (e.g. 898), and Teiresias is cautious to maintain σωτηρία for himself as he delivers a prophecy he knows Creon will despair to hear (e.g. 891):

{Τε.} ἄκουε δὴ νυν θεσφάτων ἐμῶν ὁδόν
[ἅ δρῶντες ἂν σώσαιτε Καδμείων πόλιν]·
σφάζαι Μενοικέα τόνδε δεῖ σ' ὑπὲρ πάτρας,
σὸν παῖδ', ἐπειδὴ τὴν τύχην αὐτὸς καλεῖς.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Mastronarde (1993) 358: the term refers to a board of generals and this is a hapax in tragedy. Euripides' choice of a term far outside of the tragic register may suggest his sensitivity to the possibility that this topic remained relevant to his audience so soon after the civic strife caused by the oligarchs.

¹⁹⁶ Most notably in the swearing of the Oath of Demophantos, on which see chapter 3 below.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Raaflaub (2003) 59-60.

¹⁹⁸ Papadopoulou (2008) 63.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. 890, 893, 898, 900, 910, 912, 918, and 952.

{Κρ.} τί φήεις; τίν' εἶπας τόνδε μῦθον, ὃ γέρον;
 {Τε.} ἄπερ πέφηνε, ταῦτα κἀνάγκη σε δρᾶν.
 {Κρ.} ὃ πολλὰ λέξας ἐν βραχεῖ λόγῳ κακά.
 {Τε.} σοί γ', ἀλλὰ πατρίδι μέγала καὶ σωτήρια.
 {Κρ.} οὐκ ἐκλυον, οὐκ ἤκουσα· χαιρέτω πόλις.
 {Τε.} ἀνὴρ ὃδ' οὐκέθ' αὐτός· ἐκνεύει πάλιν.
 {Κρ.} χαίρων ἴθι· οὐ γὰρ σῶν με δεῖ μαντευμάτων.
 {Τε.} ἀπόλωλεν ἀλήθει', ἐπεὶ σὺ δυστυχεῖς;

Te.: Hear now the path of my prophecies
 [by enacting which you might save the city]:
 it is necessary to slaughter Menoeceus, your son,
 on behalf of the city. You yourself called for your fate.
 Cr.: What are you saying? What tale do you speak, old man?
 Te.: The one that has appeared. This you need to do.
 Cr.: Oh, how many woes you spoke in a brief word.
 Te.: Yes, for you, but also great safety for your country.
 Cr.: I've not heard it, I'm not listening. City be damned!
 Te.: This man is no longer the same. He's turned aside a bit.
 Cr.: Farewell then! I have no need for your prophecies.
 Te.: Has the truth been destroyed, since you are suffering?
Phoenissae 911-22

Teiresias' observation that Creon is no longer the same man he was when their conversation began is certainly true, and I would suggest that the drastic change follows directly from his lack of moral wisdom that can make a distinction between personal and public σωτηρία, which, as Tiresias summarizes succinctly, are in this instance diametrically opposed options (ἢ γὰρ παῖδα σῶσον ἢ πόλιν, 953). In this sense, Papadopoulou has made the observation that Creon's response to the prophecy draws him into an ethical parallel with Eteocles (though, I would add, Creon remains the far more rational figure): "Like Eteocles earlier (560), so here Creon faces a dilemma between his private concern and the civic interest, and in the end he chooses the former at the expense of the latter...Creon's phrase, 'let the city go' (919) echoes Eteocles' very similar, 'let the whole house be damned.'²⁰⁰ Indeed, at its most basic level, Creon's refusal to sacrifice Menoeceus stems from a lack of ethical courage and foresight: if the boy is not sacrificed

²⁰⁰ Papadopoulou (2008) 63.

and Thebes falls to Polynices' army, one thinks it well within the realm of possibility that Menoeceus may still be killed in the process.

To an audience of Athenian citizens still dealing with the political fallout from a group of oligarchic conspirators who faced precisely the same dilemma – work in secret toward achieving σωτηρία for themselves as individuals at the expense of their countrymen, or seek an equitable σωτηρία for all Athenian citizens – the choice Creon makes must have powerfully recalled the apprehension and ire the unravelling of the coup of 411 provoked. Without a heartbeat's hesitation Creon chooses σωτηρία for Menoeceus and condemns the citizens of Thebes to destruction. In doing so, I argue, he attempts to form a conspiracy with Menoeceus that, like all other conspiracies on the tragic stage, promises safety through secrecy:

ἀλλ' εἴα, τέκνον, πρὶν μαθεῖν πᾶσαν πόλιν,
 ἀκόλαστ' ἐάσας μάντεων θεσπίσματα,
 φεῦγ' ὥς τάχιστα τῆσδ' ἀπαλλαχθεὶς χθονός.
 [λέξει γὰρ ἀρχαῖς καὶ στρατηλάταις τάδε
 πύλας ἐφ' ἑπτὰ καὶ λοχαγέτας μολών.]
 κἂν μὲν φθάσωμεν, ἔστι σοι σωτηρία·
 ἢν δ' ὑστερήσῃς, οἰχόμεσθα, κατθανήι.

But come, my son, before the whole city learns this,
 do not heed the unbridled prophecies of seers,
 escape from this country having fled as fast as you can.
 [For he will tell these things to the authorities and generals
 going to the seven gates and their captains.]
 If you are quick, there will be safety for you;
 if you delay, we are ruined, you will be killed.
Phoenissae 970-6

As Creon makes clear, this plot to save Menoeceus' life is predicated on swift, secret action; once Tiresias relates his oracle to the rest of the city (973-4),²⁰¹ it will be too late

²⁰¹ Willink deletes 973-4, following Valckenaer and Wecklein, and a scholiast points out that, were Menoeceus to escape the city he would have to pass by the captains guarding the gates anyway (on which, cf. Reeve [1972] 250). If the lines are interpolated then the strong sense of urgency Creon feels can be gleaned from elsewhere in the passage (e.g. 970, 990); if they are genuine, they perhaps underscore the thoughtlessness with which Creon has decided to save Menoeceus.

to prevent the citizens from saving themselves by sacrificing the boy. Indeed, it may be this sense of urgency that allows Menoeceus to persuade Creon to allow a third conspirator into the plot: before departing from the city, Menoeceus insists on saying goodbye to Jocasta, who breastfed him as an infant following the death of his mother (986-9).

Commentators have offered a few suggestions as to the curious and unique detail in this play that Menoeceus' mother died in his infancy, when she is more typically alive to witness the war between Polynices and Eteocles (e.g. Statius *Theb.* 10.793): perhaps the adoption by Jocasta draws her into a closer alliance with Creon and Menoeceus, one that in the House of Oedipus may even hint at an unnatural, incestuous relationship;²⁰² perhaps it serves the dual function of reinforcing the kinship-theme at play throughout the drama while also performing the dramatic function of ending the conversation with Creon.²⁰³ To these suggestions, I will add another as to why Creon so easily (990) allows Menoeceus to reveal the escape plan to Jocasta: in addition to a sense of shared *γενναϊότης* stemming from Jocasta's and Creon's genetic connection as siblings, Jocasta also faces the prospect of losing one (or, as it will happen, two) of her children in the coming battle and has done everything in her power to prevent it. Creon, I argue, trusts that Jocasta will recognize and sympathize with his paternal impulse to protect his child at all costs, and by virtue of this sameness can be depended upon to protect their secret. In other words, Creon responds implicitly here to what will be expressed more explicitly (often in terms of *γενναῖος* and its cognates) in plays in subsequent years: namely, that identifying points of uniformity and unanimity – be they biological, ethical, or political –

²⁰² Craik (1988) 225.

²⁰³ Mastronarde (1993) 426.

is the crucial first step conspirators must undertake if they are to establish a bond of trust.²⁰⁴

And yet, even if Creon's instinct to trust Jocasta might have proven justifiable and safe, his faith in Menoeceus to carry out the plot proves severely miscalculated. The depth to which Creon trusts his son is demonstrated first in his refusal to send Menoeceus away so as not to hear the prophecy of Tiresias. Here, Creon expresses his confidence that Menoeceus can be trusted to keep a secret specifically by virtue of their kinship (ἐμὸς πεφυκὼς παῖς ᾧ δεῖ σιγήσεται, 908). Immediately after, Creon insists again that Menoeceus will strive for what both men desire: namely, σωτηρία (κλύων γὰρ ἂν τέρποιτο τῆς σωτηρίας, 910). Since Creon readily claims both a uniformity of mind with Menoeceus based on their familial relationship and a common goal they must work together toward achieving, I suggest that his words point to the fact that he conceives of the secret project, that of engineering Menoeceus' escape, as a conspiracy. This formula for forming a conspiracy – recognizing uniformity, establishing mutual trust, and working in partnership toward a secret objective that is indifferent or hostile to the public good – is one that figured prominently in Thucydides' treatment of contemporary conspiracies and is exhibited even more explicitly in the *Philoctetes* and *Orestes*.

The failure of Creon's plot to save Menoeceus' life, then, can be traced to a defect he implicitly followed in his conception of the conspiracy: while he is indeed closely related to Menoeceus, we find that they are in fact diametrically opposed in a critical way. Whereas Creon suffers from the ethical deficiency noted above, Menoeceus shares

²⁰⁴ On the formation of conspiracies or political alliances on the basis of shared "noble" qualities, see e.g. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* 49-53, 79-85, and 468-83 (cf. chapter 4 below) and Euripides' *Orestes* 449-55 and 807-18 (cf. chapter 5 below).

his willingness to sacrifice himself for the greater good and the shame his father's plot would have brought upon him:

γυναῖκες, ὥς εἴ πατὴρ ἐξέϊλον φόβον,
κλέψας λόγοισιν, ὥσθ' ἂ βούλομαι τυχεῖν·
ὅς μ' ἐκκομίζει, πόλιν ἀποστερῶν τύχης,
καὶ δειλίας δίδωσι. καὶ συγγνωστὰ μὲν
γέροντι, τοῦ μὲν δ' οὐχὶ συγγνώμην ἔχει,
προδότῃν γενέσθαι πατρίδος ἣ μ' ἐγείνατο.
ὥς οὖν ἂν εἰδῇτ', εἰμὶ καὶ σώσω πόλιν
ψυχὴν τε δώσω τῇσδ' ὑπερθανόνων χθονός.
αἰσχρὸν γάρ· οἱ μὲν θεσφάτων ἐλεύθεροι
κοῦκ εἰς ἀνάγκην δαιμόνων ἀφίγμένοι
στάντες παρ' ἀσπίδ' οὐκ ὀκνήσουσιν θανεῖν,
πύργων πάροιθε μαχόμενοι πάτρας ὕπερ,
ἐγὼ δέ, πατέρα καὶ κασίγνητον προδοὺς
πόλιν τ' ἐμαντοῦ, δειλὸς ὥς ἔξω χθονός
ἄπειμ', ὅπου δ' ἂν ζῶ κακὸς φανήσομαι;

Women, how well I took away my father's fear,
stealing it with words so that the things I desire will happen.
He sends me away, robbing the city of its fortune,
and delivering me to cowardice. For an old man
these things are pardonable, but there is no excuse for me
if I should betray the country that gave life to me.

So know this: I am going to save the city,
and I will give up my life, dying on its behalf.
It would be shameful (not to): (on the one hand,) men free from divine decree
and not confronted with a fate ordained by the gods
do not hesitate to die, standing by their shields,
fighting for their fathers before the city walls.
And (on the other hand), having betrayed my father,
brother, and city, will I leave this country as a coward,
and be revealed as a wretch wherever I might live?

Phoenissae 991-1005

The contrast between the noble spirit Menoeceus expresses here and the less altruistic one of his father is never starker than at the moment of Creon's anagnorsis, wherein he acknowledges that his son possessed a degree of γενναῖος that he himself did not: "My son is dead, perished for his city, having taken a noble name, but a painful one for me. (ἐμός τε γὰρ παῖς γῆς ὅλωλ' ὑπερθανόνων| τοῦνομα λαβὼν γενναῖον, ἀνιαρὸν δ' ἐμοί, 1313-4)." ²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Cf. Tiresias formulation of the prophecy at 918, which directly references σωτηρία: σοί γ', ἀλλὰ πατρίδι μέγала καὶ σωτήρια.

More immediately, however, in the above passage Menoeceus confesses to the chorus that the shame that would be born from cowardice and his failure to save (σώσω, 1005) his city is more than his conscience would be able to bear. He seems to be the only figure in the play willing to put the interests of the city above his own. It is significant that he references the Theban warriors preparing to take up the defense of the city (999-1002), as he conceives of his self-sacrifice as a part of the same effort: one that is in direct contrast to the self-advancing predilection for political and military conflict exhibited by Polynices and Eteocles. Indeed, Menoeceus' suicide and the public safety it will (allegedly) provide is a strikingly democratic action, inasmuch as it promotes the well-being of his fellow citizens over his own. This is perfectly in keeping with the political discourse surrounding the juxtaposition between public and private interests that was prominent in late fifth century political discourse and is treated numerous times in Thucydides – most notably in the Funeral Oration (2.60.2-3).²⁰⁶ To the Athenian audience still recovering from the shock of the coup of 411, Menoeceus is perhaps striking as an idealized democratic citizen who serves as a foil to the recently defeated oligarchs.

Conclusion

As the first tragedy to be produced in the aftermath of the coup of 411, the *Phoenissae* provides a glimpse into the still-simmering civic anxieties that Athenian citizens were forced to endure as they began the process of restoring their fragile democracy. The mythological Thebes of the play is under siege by enemies just as Athens was beset by both external and internal ones, and taken altogether the play posits

²⁰⁶ Cf. Papadopoulou (2008) 66; Wilkins (1990) 180-1. The closing lines of Menoeceus' speech (1013-8) are quite explicitly pro-democratic, but they are almost certainly interpolated.

several sources for the consternation both cities suffer. One of these sources is an intellectual crisis that in part takes the form of questioning the value and dangers of Sophistic rhetoric specifically, but is more generally concerned with determining which qualities are essential for effective, stable leadership. Just as we find in the oligarchs' claims to provide σωτηρία as a means toward annexing the Athenian government, so too the play contemplates the dangers of self-promoting leadership: Polynices and Eteocles would rather see their city destroyed than to see the other on the throne, and Creon is willing to sacrifice countless Theban lives in order to spare himself the emotional trauma of losing Menoeceus. From another perspective, Euripides treats the widespread anguish of war weariness and all that comes with it. Like the Athenian widows and mothers who have lost loved ones in the war, Jocasta begs her sons in vain to yield to prudent wisdom, but can only watch them destroy one another for naught. Likewise, Polynices decries the burdens of those imposed in exile that were currently being endured by a number of prominent Athenians – including Andocides, as discussed in chapter 2 – implicated in the mutilation of the herms. However, most relevant to the present study is the *Phoenissae*'s depiction of the difficulties citizens face in trusting one another. Polynices' and Eteocles' sworn oath to share power and create stability in the wake of their father's downfall is shattered by the seductive allure of true monarchy, and like the democrats and oligarchs in Athens, the brothers spearhead a conflict between those who would share responsibility for the city's government and those who would hoard it for themselves. Finally, in Creon's attempt to initiate a secret plot with Menoeceus we find the first in a series of ineffective conspiracies that will continue to feature prominently into Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Euripides' *Orestes*. As each of the three plays under study

explores with increasing scrutiny, the crucial first step toward organizing any conspiracy is recognizing those in whom trust can be safely invested; as we will see, when such a recognition cannot be made a conspiracy is doomed to fail.

CHAPTER 4: SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES*

Chapter Synopsis: Sophocles' Philoctetes was performed in 409 BC, as Athens was still in the process of restoring its democratic institutions and the civic trust that allowed them to function. After giving a brief summary of the play's major plot points and a comparison between Sophocles' depiction of the Philoctetes mythology and productions of the same narrative staged by Aeschylus and Euripides, I contextualize the civic atmosphere in which the play was performed by discussing the Oath of Demophantos. This compulsory oath was sworn by all Athenian citizens shortly before the City Dionysia in which the Philoctetes was performed, and it addressed some of the same problems and anxieties as arise in the play: how can one recognize a trustworthy citizen and what extreme measures against those who threaten the civic body should be allowed? After this discussion, I compare the two bonds of friendship – in the Aristotelian sense — Sophocles presents in the play, both of which are formulated based on their participants' shared sense of γενναιότης and operate strictly for the purpose of achieving σωτηρία for those who fall under their auspices. And yet, for all of their surface similarities, the internal ethics of the partnerships Odysseus and Philoctetes forge with Neoptolemus are quite different: Odysseus strikes the posture of a sophistic commanding office with the authority to coerce Neoptolemus' mind and body, whereas Philoctetes seeks a more equitable and reciprocal alliance – but one that will bring much suffering to their fellow Greeks at Troy. With these two alliances established, I next discuss several elements of metatheater that the play takes on as Neoptolemus attempts to navigate the obligations Odysseus and Philoctetes impose, and the ways in which the resulting mise-en-scene complicate the boundaries between the actors, chorus, and audience. Finally, I examine the minority but provocative hypothesis that the ex machina appearance of Heracles at the play's end may be understood to be Odysseus in disguise finally completing his subterfuge: while there is much to speak against such a reading, I argue that the mere possibility that ancient and modern audiences might understand the end of the play in this way underscores the deep-seated mistrust that shrouds the figures on stage and lingered in contemporary Athens.

Introduction

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* was produced in 409 BC, shortly after the restoration of Athens' democratic government following the failure of the oligarchic coup of 411 BC. This was a crucial moment of self-reflection for the citizen body as a whole and indeed for each individual citizen of the δῆμος, as the city was forced to reconcile in the wake of the recent turmoil and seek a way forward in collective unity. There were a number of ways in which this reconciliation and unity were sought. Some of these are subtle, as the

very elements that define “Athenianness” and civic responsibility are questioned and explored.²⁰⁷ Others are more conspicuous, as individual citizens are compelled to “perform” civic unity, either in the resumption of their normal and expected civic participation or, even more overtly, in the swearing of the compulsory Oath of Demophantos.²⁰⁸ While all tragic performance superimposes mythological archetypes on the contemporary experience of its Athenian audience, here I argue that Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* invites its audience to sift these issues on a level even closer to the surface than is typical of tragic drama and thereby provides modern readers with an abundance of clues as to what issues it invited its fifth-century audience to explore.

Although Sophocles’ drama is our main surviving source for the *Philoctetes* mythology, the narrative was quite familiar to the play’s original audience in 409 BC and there are elements of the mythological tradition that Sophocles likely would have expected his audience to bring to the theater; as discussed below, the details that Sophocles added and modified gave the play its true contemporary resonance. A brief summary of the play is in order. The plot focuses on the mission to retrieve Philoctetes and the bow of Heracles that he possesses, following a prophecy given by the seer Helenus that the Achaeans will never take Troy without them.²⁰⁹ The Atreidae sent Odysseus and Neoptolemus, the young son of the recently slain Achilles, to complete the task. Once the pair arrives on Lemnos, Odysseus convinces Neoptolemus that because of the hero’s bitter anger over being abandoned and the overwhelming force of his weapon,

²⁰⁷ A term I borrow from Griffith (2011) 5.

²⁰⁸ Cf. And. *de Mys.* 1.96-8. See below on the context and civic significance of the oath, as well as the possible impact the oath and the civic anxieties that made it necessary may have had on the audience’s viewing of Sophocles’ staging of the *Philoctetes* just days later.

²⁰⁹ See below on Odysseus’ (intentional?) misremembering of the requirement that both the man and the bow return.

it will not be possible to persuade Philoctetes by resorting to truthful persuasion (100-5). Despite Neoptolemus' initial objections to this underhanded approach (108), Odysseus persuades him to offer Philoctetes a false account of the events at Troy and presents him with a fabricated reason for being on the island, both intended to facilitate Neoptolemus' obtaining the bow (54-85). Odysseus is to remain behind the scenes, as it were, until the task is complete (124-5). When Philoctetes appears (220) Neoptolemus and the chorus of his fellow sailors are struck by the depth of his decrepitude (215-7), and first the chorus and later Neoptolemus are moved in pity to the point of experiencing an ethical crisis: can they forsake once again their fellow warrior and Greek, even if it comes at great cost to the Achaean war effort? These questions come to a climax when, in a fit of agony that renders him unconscious, Philoctetes willingly entrusts the bow to Neoptolemus (763).²¹⁰ Even though his objective is ostensibly complete, Neoptolemus cannot bring himself to leave Philoctetes on the island yet again, in spite of Odysseus' attempt to intervene toward that end (1055-62). For much of the remainder of the play Neoptolemus implores Philoctetes to come with him to Troy, where his wounds can be healed, and he can play his destined role in bringing an end to the war (1329-42). However, Philoctetes staunchly refuses to aid the people who discarded him in his hour of need and insists that Neoptolemus take him home instead (1367-9). Just as Neoptolemus is about to capitulate (1395-407), the deified Heracles descends upon the island and commands Philoctetes and

²¹⁰ Cf. Mueller (2016) 38-41 on the significance of the Bow of Herakles, both to the internal plot of the drama and as a physical prop on stage. Like a handful of other stage props integral to the plots of other surviving tragedies (such as the sword of Hector in Sophocles' *Ajax*) she designates the bow as a haptic actor – “an artifact whose primary mode of communication is through the medium of touch (39)” – which has a cognitive corollary in the minds of the figures on stage.

Neoptolemus to return together to Troy and perform their divinely mandated roles in the sack of Troy (1408-70).

We are not in possession of many primary sources dealing with the mythology of Philoctetes, which is treated in passing by a few crucial witnesses that predate the appearance of Philoctetes on the tragic stage.²¹¹ However, from these we are able to discern the most important elements that appear in Sophocles' drama. The first of these pre-Sophoclean sources is the *Iliad*, in which Homer reveals in the Catalogue of Ships (2.718-24) the conspicuous absence of Philoctetes; here he gives a brief reference to the significance of Philoctetes' bow, his wounding, his abandonment by the Greeks, and their need for him that will only become apparent later and thus is narrated in the epic tradition outside of the *Iliad* proper. While all of these elements appear in Sophocles' version, Homer makes no mention of the Greeks' motivation for abandoning the hero on Lemnos. Second, Homer also provides two even briefer references in the *Odyssey*: at *Odyssey* 3.190, Nestor relates that Philoctetes returned home safely, and, at 8.219, Odysseus admits that Philoctetes is his superior in archery. Additionally, some details of the events leading up to the narrative of Sophocles' drama and those following it survive in references in the Epic Cycle: a passage from the *Kypria* described the wound Philoctetes received from the water snake, the foul smell emitted by his wound, and his abandonment by the Greek army on Lemnos (Argumentum 41), and the *Little Iliad* spoke of Philoctetes' martial exploits at Troy after his foot is cured (Argumentum 2).²¹² A fifth reference survives in Pindar: to praise the tyrant Hieron for going to war in spite of a

²¹¹ On the Philoctetes mythology, see *RE* 2500-2509; *LIMC* VII 376-85; Graves (1988) 92.10, 145g, 159a, 166a-e, 169m-n; Gantz (1993) 588-90.

²¹² Cf. Bernabé (1996) 81; Davies (2001) 63; West (2003) 120-2.

serious illness, the poet compares him to Philoctetes (*Pyth.* 1.50-1) and stresses the hero's key role in the destruction of Troy. Finally, Proclus' description of the *Little Iliad* in his *Chrestomathia* (206-36) relates that once Odysseus captured the Trojan seer Helenus and learned that only Philoctetes with his bow will capture Troy, Diomedes travels alone to Lemnos to retrieve the marooned warrior.²¹³

In addition to this mythological background that would have been familiar to a fifth-century audience, it is also important to recall that Sophocles' depiction of Philoctetes' isolation and Odysseus' maneuvers for retrieving the bow were not the first appearance of this subject matter in the theater of Dionysus; at least six other tragedies focus either on Philoctetes' wounding, isolation, or cure at Troy.²¹⁴ Both Aeschylus and Euripides produced plays depicting the capture of Philoctetes' bow by Odysseus, leading Dio Chrysostom to compare them to Sophocles' version and critique all three at length in his fifty-second *Discourse*.²¹⁵ It is difficult to know exactly how much previous tragic versions of the Philoctetes mythology may have influenced Sophocles' production,

²¹³ Cf. 212-3 in particular. On the crucial change in cast in the works of fifth-century tragedians – from Diomedes to Odysseus – see below.

²¹⁴ In addition to Aeschylus' and Euripides' versions, these include another by Sophocles in his *Philoctetes at Troy* (*TrGF* 4 fr. 697-703); Achaïos of Eretria in another *Philoctetes* (*TrGF* 1 fr. 37) depicted the hero's healing and slaying of Paris; from an unknown author there survives what may have been another *Philoctetes at Troy* (*TrGF* 2 Adesp. fr. 10 = *P.Oxy.* 3216). Nothing more than the title remains from the *Philoctetes* of the fifth-century tragedian Philokles (*TrGF* 1.24 fr. 1). Finally, the comic playwrights Epicharmos (*PCG* 1 fr. 131, 132), Strattis (*PCG* 7 fr. 44, 45) and Antiphanes (*PCG* 2 fr. 218) all treat the Philoctetes mythology, though it is unclear how (if at all) they relate to Sophocles' tragedy. Later, the fourth century tragedian Phaselis (*TrGF* 1 72 fr. 5b) produced a *Philoctetes* play as well.

²¹⁵ Cf. Aeschylus (*TrGF* 3 fr. 249-57) and Euripides (*TrGF* 5.27 3 fr. 787-803), both of whom treat the same part of the myth as Sophocles. In his critique, Dio compares all three plays as if they were presented in the same year and at the same City Dionysia, even though he says that he knows such a competition (featuring three playwrights dramatizing the same narrative) would not have been possible (52.3-4). Hunter (2009) 39-48 demonstrates that Dio's criticism follows a "classical" trajectory going back to Aristophanes' *Frogs* that finds Sophocles to be a midpoint between the "simple" poetry of Aeschylus and the "complex" poetry of Euripides (cf. Dio 52.15).

especially considering the number of years that passed between them.²¹⁶ However, as Roisman points out, lacking evidence to the contrary we cannot rule out the possibility that theatergoers would have been well aware of Aeschylus' and Euripides' depictions of precisely the same sequence of events, and would have been sensitive to or even surprised by several of Sophocles' innovations.²¹⁷ Very few details are known of Aeschylus' version, but from what can be reconstructed of this production it seems that Aeschylus depicted the Philoctetes mythology in two innovative ways. First, Aeschylus placed great emphasis on Philoctetes' intense physical pain and emotional anguish, a model upon which both Euripides and Sophocles drew later. Second, and perhaps even more significantly, Aeschylus made a major change to the narrative offered by the *Little Iliad* by depicting Odysseus instead of Diomedes as the representative of the Achaean army sent to retrieve Philoctetes and the bow.²¹⁸ This is an innovation that Euripides and Sophocles later adopt as well, leading scholars to consider the elements of Odysseus' character that may have resonated more authentically with a contemporary, fifth-century audience.

Far more is known of Euripides' *Philoctetes*, which was produced in 431 BC in the same tetralogy as his *Medea*, *Diktys*, and the satyr play *Theristai*.²¹⁹ In Euripides' version, Odysseus and Diomedes come together to Lemnos and Philoctetes is only

²¹⁶ Schein (2013) 5 suggests that Aeschylus' *Philoctetes* would have been produced in the first third of the fifth century; on the secure dating of 431 BC for Euripides' *Philoctetes*, see below.

²¹⁷ Roisman (2005) 25-6. On the production dates of Aeschylus and Euripides' versions, see Schein (2013) 4-5.

²¹⁸ Cf. Proclus' *Chrestomathia* 212-3; on what can be reconstructed of Aeschylus' *Philoctetes*, see Müller (2000) 38-64.

²¹⁹ Cf. Müller (2000) 23, 65, and 143, where he cites as evidence the hypothesis of Aristophanes of Byzantium (H 1a), that locates the play in the same tetralogy as Euripides' *Medea*, *Diktys*, and the satyr play *Theristai*.

compelled to return to the Achaean army after the theft of his bow when he falls unconscious after a paroxysm of pain. From what can be gleaned from the surviving fragments and from Dio Chrysostom's summary, the main focus of Euripides' narrative seems to have been more on Odysseus' stratagem and less on Philoctetes' suffering or the heroic *ethos* bound up in his abandonment or staunch refusal to reconcile and cooperate.²²⁰ One particularly noteworthy plot point attributable to Euripides' version is that early in the play Athena alters Odysseus' appearance so that he may approach Philoctetes in relative safety, thereby removing the primary obstacle Odysseus faces in Sophocles' version. This underscores not only the divine endorsement Odysseus enjoys in Euripides' production, but also the lack of an overt authorization in Sophocles' version. Here, the only divine aid Odysseus seeks comes in the form of a two-line prayer to Athena and Nike:

Ἑρμῆς δ' ὁ πέμπων Δόλιος ἡγήσαιο νῶν
Νίκη τ' Ἀθάνα Πολιάς, ἥ σῶζει μ' αἰεί.

May the one sending us, Hermes the Deceiver, lead us on,
and Victory, and Athena Polias, who protects me always.

Philoctetes 133-4²²¹

These differences between the Philoctetes narratives depicted by Sophocles and those offered by his predecessors foregrounds important points of civic tensions that speak to both ancient and modern audiences and are discussed below. One of these is worth mentioning at the outset because in addition to being the most important departure from earlier productions it signals, (perhaps more than any other element in the tragedy)

²²⁰ For analysis of the fragments and Dio's summary of Euripides' Philoctetes, see Collard and Cropp (2008) 368-403 and relevant bibliography therein.

²²¹ All textual citations from the *Philoctetes* are from Dain (1958) volume 3. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

the higher ethical charge of Sophocles' play. This is the absence of Diomedes and the presence of the young and ambitious Neoptolemus in his stead, a figure who is imbued with his father's iconic heroic disposition, but whose moral fortitude remains untested.²²² In choosing to replace Diomedes with an impressionable Neoptolemus, Sophocles turns the island of Lemnos on stage into a kind of testing ground for some of the ethical duties and obligations necessary for creating and maintaining stability in the *polis* at a moment of widespread uncertainty. Jameson famously read a close connection between the models of leadership Sophocles depicts on stage and his audience's experience of public figures over the course of the Peloponnesian War. In particular, Jameson proposes that Neoptolemus – the son of a great man who perished in the prime of his life – would have called to mind the younger Pericles and would have filled the audience with hope that, like Neoptolemus in the drama, the young man might resist the corrupting temptations that plagued leaders who rose in his father's place.²²³

There are, however, a number of challenges that come with Sophocles' choice to insert Neoptolemus in place of Diomedes. While some critics point out both the necessity that Odysseus' companion be impressionable enough to adopt his scheme and allow for the ultimate incompatibility between their personal ethics, it is also worth recalling a number of violent atrocities Neoptolemus commits elsewhere in the epic cycle – including the sacrilegious murder of Priam.²²⁴ Even though he never appears on stage in Euripides' plays, chilling reports of Neoptolemus' cruelty exemplify the Achaeans' harsh

²²² Fulkerson (2006) 49-61 and (2013) 66-79.

²²³ Jameson (1956) 221-4. On the younger Pericles, cf. Xen. *Hell* 1.7.16-33 and *Mem.* 3.5; he likely would have been new to public life at the time of the drama's staging in 409 BC, but by 406 BC he was one of the victorious generals at Arginusae who was subsequently recalled and executed (Plut. *Per.* 37.5).

²²⁴ Cf. Pindar *Paean* 6.104-10, that recalls Neoptolemus' slaughter of Priam and subsequent death; Herakles offers a mindful warning against such impiety at the end of the play (1442-4).

treatment of the surviving Trojans after the fall of their city.²²⁵ From surviving fragments we know that Sophocles treated Neoptolemus in at least six and possibly seven previous dramas, including likely representatives from every stage of Sophocles' literary career.²²⁶

As Fuqua writes,

This abundance of material, incomplete and abundant as it may be, indicates the author's fascination with this character. Perhaps he was attracted by the paradoxical turn in the hero's life, the way in which the glorious young hero, so splendidly described by Odysseus in the *Nekyia* became increasingly associated with tales of violence and finally was 'vindicated' by becoming a cult hero at the most important shrine to the Greeks.

At the very least, the shift in Neoptolemus' character Fuqua which describes and the sacrilegious actions that he later commits make him an apt and captivating figure for treatment in tragic poetry. Moreover, given Sophocles' predilection for cult heroes, it should perhaps come as little surprise that he showed such great interest in one so important and complex.²²⁷

One of the classic ways in which Neoptolemus has been interpreted in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is essentially as a student sent along with Odysseus to earn some much needed field experience on what is ostensibly a straightforward mission.²²⁸ That at the outset Neoptolemus shares this perspective on the task seems clear from the surprise he expresses when he learns that they will achieve their objectives through δόλος and not through simple βία.²²⁹ Odysseus has good cause for choosing this course — as he explains, surely Philoctetes will slaughter him with unerring arrows the moment he

²²⁵ Cf. Polydorus' account of Priam's death (*Hec.* 21-7); Talthybius' description of Neoptolemus' hesitant sacrifice of Polyxena (*Hec.* 518-82); Neoptolemus' selection of Andromache as a war prize (*Tro.* 273, 657-60) and refusal to allow her to perform burial rites for Astyanax before departing for home (*Tro.* 1123-55); the more complex account of Neoptolemus' death at the hands of Orestes (*Andr.* 1085-1165).

²²⁶ For a complete survey of Neoptolemus' appearances or references on the tragic stage and relevant bibliography see Fuqua (1976) 41-8.

²²⁷ Harrison (1989) 173-5.

²²⁸ E.g. Stanford (1954) 108; White (1985) 9-10; Gagarin (2002) 65-8; Schein (2013) 23-4.

²²⁹ Cf. *Phil.* 100-5.

catches sight of him. In explaining his reasoning to Neoptolemus a number of critics have noted both subtle and overt ways that Odysseus would have struck the audience as a sophist. For example, Gagarin notes points throughout the play where questions surrounding the balance of power between *nomos* and *physis* similar to those treated by the sophist Antiphon are explored.²³⁰ Vernant suggests that Odysseus is painted as a sophist both in the language used to describe him throughout the play (*sophisma*, 14; *sophisthēnai*, 77; *technāsthai*, 80) and also in his preference for *technē* over *aretē*.²³¹ White explores Odysseus' manipulation of language to use Neoptolemus as a "means to an end," the goal of any sophistic exercise.²³² In the radical democracy of Athens, where rhetorical power so easily evolved into political power, such training offered obvious advantages; but it also invited suspicion from those not benefiting from a sophist's instruction. Unsurprisingly, then, these perspectives on the sophistry of Odysseus have led to some understandably negative readings of his character; however, with an eye toward the numerous and complex impressions Sophocles' depiction of Odysseus may have made upon his audience, here I propose that we temper the impulse to read Odysseus as a "scoundrel" or as a "sage villain"²³³ and instead take a slightly different and more neutral perspective on his actions and ethics in the *Philoctetes*.

The Oath of Demophantos: A Call for Vigilance

As discussed in Chapter 2 above, from the "στάσις model" section of Thucydides' *History* (3.82-4) there is a sense that, one by one, Greek *poleis* became infected as if by a

²³⁰ Cf. Gagarin (2002) 65-8 on Antiphon's *On Truth* fr. 44B.

²³¹ Vernant (1988) 171, cf. 460 n. 97.

²³² White (1985) 11-4.

²³³ Stanford (1968) 108-11.

plague of crippling civic strife. In the early years of the Peloponnesian War this was a phenomenon taking place safely outside of Athens; in fact, civic turmoil of the kind suffered in Corcyra seemed far enough away that Aristophanes felt inclined to turn Cleon's warnings of growing anti-democratic conspiracies into material ripe for treatment on the comic stage.²³⁴ However, after the events leading up to and in the aftermath of the Sicilian campaign — many of which, as noted above, were produced by the performative actions of either sworn or *de facto* conspiracies — it was predictable that Athens would endure its own στάσις. The preceding chapter in this study dealt in part with the many difficulties facing ancient commentators in disentangling the network of factional and personal ambitions at play in the summer of 411 BC, and the challenges modern scholars face in interpreting the starkly contrasting accounts of the oligarchic revolution offered by Book 8 of Thucydides and Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia*. Now, it is time to turn to the more immediate question facing the audience of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* in 409 BC: how can Athens possibly be reconciled from a city fractured through the infighting amid conspiracies into a reunited body of citizens prepared to combat its external enemies?

One prerequisite for the formation and execution of any conspiracy is determining what qualities people initiated into the group should possess and, implicitly or explicitly, how these qualities set the members apart from the people or institutions destined to be the target of the group's actions. In the years following the oligarchic coup of 411, when the newly restored democracy was perhaps in its most fragile state, these were topics of immediate relevance as anxiety toward and vigilance for covert factions was extreme.²³⁵

²³⁴ Cf. *Knights* 257 (ξυνωμοτῶν), 451-2 (ξυνωμόται), 475-9 (τὰς συνωμοσίας... καὶ τὰς ξυνόδους τὰς νυκτερινὰς ἐν τῇ πόλει), 626-29 (ξυνωμότας), 860-3 (ξυνωμότας... ξυνιστάμενον); *Wasps* 488-9 (τυραννίς ἐστι καὶ συνωμόται).

²³⁵ Cf. Thrasymachus fr. 85, discussed above in Chapter 2.

Little is known about the process by which democracy was restored or even at what point in 410 the δῆμος regained power.²³⁶ However, as Shear notes, this process could not have been as simple as a single vote and “the restoration of democracy was not simply a matter of throwing out the oligarchs: the community’s trust, ruptured when the δῆμος voted itself out of existence, needed to be restored and the stability of the democracy had to be *demonstrated*.”²³⁷ For the purpose of this study, here I place particular emphasis on the final word of Shear’s pronouncement: the only antidote against secret conspiracies bound by oaths is an even greater oath, one sworn at the *polis*-level, where every citizen governed by the oath witnesses and is witnessed by everyone else accepting the bonds of mutual protection.²³⁸ As in the case of men engaged in conspiracies, the oath establishes specific parameters for determining who is to benefit from the protection that the oath pledges and who is not. However, as will be explored below, this city-wide attempt to identify and root out covert antidemocratic sentiments comes with dangers of its own—many of which may be provoked by inadequate public performance.

The Oath of Demophantos, a *sungrapheus*, is the first recorded attempt of the newly restored democratic government to demonstrate the reestablishment of its stability.²³⁹ This oath was passed by the *boule* in the first prytany of Glaukippos in the spring of 409 and required the entire citizen body — gathered by demes and tribes, their visibly democratic organization—to swear to it as collective whole just a few days before

²³⁶ Hignett (1952) 279-80; Ostwald (1986) 397-8; Munn (2000) 159-60; Shear (2011) 71.

²³⁷ Shear (2007) 148; the emphasis is my own. Cf. also MacDowell (1962) 135: the oath “was intended to ensure that the democracy was not overthrown again.”

²³⁸ Cf. Teegarden (2014) 30-5 and relevant bibliography contained therein.

²³⁹ For a brief survey of scholarship on the Oath of Demophantos, see Teegarden (2012) 447.

the City Dionysia of that year.²⁴⁰ The text of the oath survives only in Andocides' speech *On the Mysteries* (1.96-8), though in the years following 409 it was at points reiterated and was inscribed on a highly visible stele.²⁴¹

κτενῶ καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ καὶ ψήφῳ καὶ τῇ ἑμαυτοῦ χειρὶ, ἂν δυνατὸς ᾦ, ὃς ἂν καταλύσῃ τὴν δημοκρατίαν τὴν Ἀθήνησι. καὶ ἐάν τις ἄρξῃ τιν' ἄρχῃν καταλελυμένης τῆς δημοκρατίας τὸ λοιπόν, καὶ ἐάν τις τυραννεῖν ἐπαναστῇ ἢ τὸν τύραννον συγκαταστήσῃ. Καὶ ἐάν τις ἄλλος ἀποκτείνῃ, ὅσιον αὐτὸν νομιῶ εἶναι καὶ πρὸς θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων, ὡς πολέμιον κτείναντα τὸν Ἀθηναίων, καὶ τὰ κτήματα τοῦ ἀποθανόντος πάντα ἀποδόμενος ἀποδώσω τὰ ἡμίσεα τῷ ἀποκτείναντι, καὶ οὐκ ἀποστερήσω οὐδέν. Ἐάν δέ τις κτείνων τινὰ τούτων ἀποθάνῃ ἢ ἐπιχειρῶν, εὖ ποιήσω αὐτόν τε καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐκείνου καθάπερ Ἀρμόδιόν τε καὶ Ἀριστογείτονα καὶ τοὺς ἀπογόνους αὐτῶν.²⁴²

I will kill by word, deed, vote, and by my own hand, if I should be able, whoever dissolves the democracy in Athens. And if someone enters a civic office when the democracy has been dissolved in the future, and if someone should establish a tyranny or conspire to establish a tyrant. And if someone else kills him, I will consider him without sin before the gods and divinities, as one killing an enemy of the Athenians, and having sold all of the property of that man I will give half to his killer, and I will withhold nothing. If anyone should die while killing some man of this sort or attempting to do so, I will honor him and his children just as Harmodius and Aristogeiton and the descendants of these men.

By swearing this oath, citizens were bound to stop anyone from attempting to overthrow the democracy by any means necessary, and the oath conferred the same benefits enjoyed by Harmodius and Aristogeiton upon anyone who slays a would-be tyrant. In citing the actions and awards of these historical (though perhaps somewhat misremembered)²⁴³ tyrannicides, the oath conspicuously equates tyranny with any non-democratic regime change²⁴⁴ and offers a clear picture of what absolute fealty to the reestablished democracy actually entails. One compelling question that leaps to the fore

²⁴⁰ The dating for the promulgation of the oath is based on *IG I³ 375* 1-3, which states that Klegenes was secretary while Glauippos was archon (i.e. 410/409), and that the Aiantis tribe held the prytany under which the oath was administered. On the oath and its important ramifications, see Shear (2007) 148-60, who quotes the oath in full. On the sense of collectivity the oath provided to the fragile δῆμος, see Loraux (2002) 142.

²⁴¹ This stele was erected in the Agora just in front of the Bouleuterion, where presumably it would have served as a visual reminder of a citizen's obligations to the democracy as he was on his way to conduct public business. On the strong message against tyranny created by this stele and the nearby statues of the Tyrannicides (95 meters away), see McGlew (1993) 185-7, Shear (2007) 152, and Teegarden (2012) 448.

²⁴² Dalmeyda (1966) 17-63.

²⁴³ Cf. Thucydides 6.54.1.

²⁴⁴ Ostwald (1955) 113-4; on the extent to which the oath legitimizes contemporary and future prosecutions of suspected oligarchs, see Shear (2007) 151.

is why the oath makes explicit reference to tyranny as the ethos to be actively rooted out, when the civic upheaval and mistrust the oath seeks to assuage actually arose from an oligarchic coup. Raaflaub offers one explanation: he argues that the concept of tyranny helped the city conceive a definition of what Athens is and what it is not, thereby providing a means for political cohesiveness (or in his terms, an ideological “glue”). Moreover, based on its more broadly negative connotations the term “tyranny” was particularly useful for politicians in consolidating Athenian public opinion upon a rare point on which virtually all could agree (an ideological “stick”).²⁴⁵ In other words, since the goal of the oath is to maintain unity among citizens with both more and less democratic or populist political preferences, tyranny provides a convenient third term upon which can fall the ire of both political tendencies.

Two aspects of the Oath of Demophantos in particular reveal acutely the civic mistrust that made it necessary. The first is the call for vigilance not only for those who would hubristically seek to seize power for themselves, but also for anyone who might consort with them to do so (ἐάν τις τυραννεῖν ἐπαναστῇ ἢ τὸν τύραννον συγκαταστήσῃ, 1.97.7-8). As Athenian citizens learned all too well in the coup of 411, just as dangerous as those who seek sovereignty for themselves are those who make it possible for ambitious men to promote their collective interests above those of their fellow citizens, all the more so if plots to do so are hatched in secret because they could be underway anywhere and at any time. The only possible deterrent for potential conspiracies such as these is the constant threat that plots are being actively sought out and exposed.

²⁴⁵ Raaflaub (2003) 59-60. Here he departs from the view held by many (most notably Connor) that fifth-century Athenians held a more ambivalent view on tyranny.

The second aspect is stated explicitly in the first line of the oath, “I will kill by word, vote, and by my own hand...whoever dissolves the democracy in Athens,” and lingers implicitly throughout the rest: namely that Athenian citizens in all aspects of public life should actively promote — even to the point of violence, and ostensibly without a trial — the needs of the *dēmos* as a whole over the partisanship of any smaller segment of the population and much less a single person. More so than ever before in Athens’ history, in addition to raising the stakes for performing any public actions that even run the risk of being perceived as undemocratic, the oath places an extra impetus upon citizens to demonstrate constantly and to reiterate their commitment to the democratic institutions, lest they fall victim to those on a high state of alert for conspiracies and looking to advance themselves on the rewards the oath promises.²⁴⁶ Further, by opening multiple avenues for prosecuting anyone accused of antidemocratic behavior, the oath lays a heavy responsibility upon all citizens to remain vigilantly dedicated to the definitions in the oath of “good” and “bad” citizens: “good” citizens are thoroughly democratic, to the point that they are ever-vigilant and prepared to take immediate action against any “bad” citizen caught working to promote his own interests over that of the δῆμος. In the acutely watchful atmosphere that the oath established, it became more important than ever to “act” like an Athenian.

In addition to the parameters the oath establishes for the proper behavior involved in acting like a democrat, it should be noted that the act of swearing the oath is itself a public performance. The script of the oath is provided by Demophantos, but the language directs each participant to speak in the first person singular before an audience comprised

²⁴⁶ Cf. McGlew (2012) 93.

of every other Athenian citizen.²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, as everyone speaks identical words and is bound by identical, mutually-protective obligations, the performance of the oath underscores the equality that it is intended to create in a way that would have been less meaningful if it had been sworn individually.²⁴⁸ Moreover, it is important also to keep in mind that the swearing of the oath was but one of several rituals to be performed in the days before the City Dionysia. In each of these rituals, both explicit and implicit democratic elements sought to reinforce a sense of trust and unity that had been lost in the tumultuous years preceding 409 BC.

It is amid this atmosphere of apprehension, extreme vigilance, and in the case of oligarchic sympathizers, reluctant cooperation that Sophocles' *Philoctetes* made its debut. In the remainder of this chapter I explore the ways that the performance of this drama serves as a locus for the expression of underlying, vivid tensions – and, possibly, their resolution – and the mistrust born from the presence of real or potential conspiracies active in the city. To accomplish this, the play stages inquiries around a few important prerequisites for the formation of any conspiracy: namely, how do conspirators define the boundaries between those invited into their plots and trusted with their secrets and those who are not? Based on what authority do conspirators justify enacting in secret actions that cannot be performed in public? And, perhaps most significantly, what qualities are

²⁴⁷ Though it may have been logistically difficult to administer the oath to all Athenians and it remains unclear how it may have been done, the fact that the decree twice explicitly states that it applies to all Athenians (Αθηναίους ἅπαντας, 97.1; Αθηναῖοι πάντες 98.7) indicates that it should be taken literally.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Loraux (2002) 142. On the other hand, Teegarden (2012) 450 finds it extremely unlikely that the oath could have been sworn by all citizens simultaneously, owing to the logistics involved and length of time that would have been required. However, even if his objections are valid and the oath was sworn on a more local level (he suggests that perhaps demes administered the oath on their own), the knowledge that all citizens performed the same words before an audience of their peers could easily have provided the same sense of unity as a single, unanimous swearing would have, if not to the same degree.

used to determine whether a citizen qualifies for inclusion in clandestine action, and what qualities mark others as targets of that action?

The Boundaries of Trust: Competing Notions of γενναῖος and σωτηρία

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* provides us with a particularly keen lens for thinking about the presence and operations of secret conspiracies in the tumultuous years before and after the oligarchic coup of 411. An integral element of the on-stage action is the formation of a pair of alliances, both of which seek to justify their existence and initiate the young Neoptolemus. Both of these affiliations have personal and political (i.e., concerns which impact the well-being of the larger Greek host) components, and both are presented in ways that invite the audience to weigh the merits and pitfalls of each. In typically Sophoclean fashion, neither one of these groups is inherently better than the other, as neither can provide the positive outcome sought by the participants without injuring some portion of the Greek army they seek to serve. Moreover, by exhibiting these two alliances virtually side by side and exploring their many incompatibilities, Sophocles offers to his audience the implicit notion that all bonds of civic trust are not cut from the same cloth, and thus all civic alliances are worthy of close scrutiny.

And yet, upon examining the personal and political bonds Odysseus and Philoctetes establish with Neoptolemus there can be found fundamental differences which complicate our understanding of each. The first difficulty which arises in considering these two alliances is that the term ἑταῖρος nor its cognates appear at any point in the text. The absence of this term is striking, given the prominent role ἑταιρεῖαι play in Thucydides' account of the years leading up to the play's production and in Euripides' *Orestes* (discussed at length in chapter five below). Thus Sophocles is not

focusing on the comradeship of the *ἐταίρεια* of leaders and a group of followers, but on the mentorship of an older exemplar with a younger protégé. Second, while the personal and political friendships Odysseus and Philoctetes attempt to establish with Neoptolemus have certain elements in common – their efforts to build trust with Neoptolemus based on appeals to the ethics he inherited from Achilles, for example – each has a far different internal hierarchy which determines the course of action its members will take. In considering these differences, it is useful to recall Aristotle's contemplation of the complicated boundaries between familial, personal, and political friendships in book two of the *Rhetoric* (1381a.7-b.34, as discussed in the Introduction above): like the friendships he describes there, the particular kinds of alliances Neoptolemus enters into in the play are difficult to categorize neatly, and thus require close examination. In comparing the two, key passages (40-134, 468-506) depict the attempts, first by Odysseus and next by Philoctetes, to initiate Neoptolemus into their own alliance, each of which is defined both by internal ethics and against external *ἐχθροί* that are inherently at odds with them. In each passage the speaker seeks to persuade Neoptolemus to adopt their preferred course of action first by demonstrating that he is indeed a natural or inevitable member of his own alliance, next by defining the treatment proper to those inside and those outside their protective group, and finally by enticing him with the rewards that he will receive for his cooperation. In both passages, the operative term is *γενναῖος*: to be *γενναῖος* is to possess the core attributes/ideals of the sought political friendship and to act accordingly. In addition to this, several points of contact between the two passages should indicate to us that they are crafted in a way that highlights their differences.

In a critical passage early in the *Philoctetes* (40-134), Odysseus successfully persuades Neoptolemus to adopt his preferred strategy for obtaining the bow and completing the task that has brought them to Lemnos. Before Odysseus can persuade Neoptolemus to “give himself” (84) to him, Odysseus must define the boundaries of the political friendship he is offering. He does this with typically Odyssean rhetorical skill and subtlety, first by contrasting what kind of men Philoctetes and Neoptolemus are:

{ΟΔ.} Ἄνῆρ κατοικεῖ τούσδε τοὺς τόπους σαφῶς,
 κᾶσ'τ' οὐχ ἐκάς που· πῶς γὰρ ἂν νοσῶν ἀνὴρ
 κῶλον παλαιᾷ κηρὶ προσβαίῃ μακράν;
 ἀλλ' ἢ 'πὶ φορβῆς νόστον ἐξελήλυθεν,
 ἢ φύλλον εἴ τι νώδυνον κάτοιδ'ε που.
 Τὸν οὖν παρόντα πέμψον εἰς κατασκοπήν,
 μὴ καὶ λάθῃ με προσπεσών· ὥς μᾶλλον ἂν
 ἔλοιτό μ' ἢ τοὺς πάντας Ἀργεῖους λαβεῖν.
 {ΝΕ.} Ἀλλ' ἔρχεται τε καὶ φυλάσσεται στίβος·
 σὺ δ' εἴ τι χρήσεις, φράζε δευτέρῳ λόγῳ.
 {ΟΔ.} Ἀχιλλέως παῖ, δεῖ σ' ἐφ' οἷς ἐλήλυθας
 γενναῖον εἶναι, μὴ μόνον τῷ σώματι,
 ἀλλ' ἦν τι καινὸν ὧν πρὶν οὐκ ἀκήκοας
 κλύης, ὑπουργεῖν, ὥς ὑπηρετής πάρει.

Od.: Clearly that man dwells in this place
 and he is not far away; for how could a man
 plagued by an old wound on his foot walk very far?
 He perhaps has gone in search of food,
 or has gone in search of some soothing plant.
 Send the man here with us as a scout
 so that when he comes back he does not see me;
 for by far he would rather capture me than all the other Argives.
 Ne.: The guard is setting out and he will watch the path.
 If you desire anything else, indicate it with another command.
 Od: Son of Achilles, you must be γενναῖος for the business
 on which you've come, not only in body,
 but if you should hear something strange
 that you have not heard before, you must give assistance,
 since you are here as my attendant.

Philoctetes 40-53

Odysseus has drawn a subtle but significant distinction between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. Philoctetes is alluded to as an unmarked and even unremarkable ἀνὴρ (40, 41; cf. 90) that is not given a patronymic, not oriented within the larger body of the

Achaean host (i.e., not included among the group they are on a mission to benefit), and he is defined only by his sickness (41, 42, 43).²⁴⁹ Moreover, as Schein notes, Odysseus' reference to Philoctetes' food as φορβῆς (43), a term reserved for animal fodder, inserts the implication that his illness has rendered him something less than human.²⁵⁰ By contrast, as the "son of Achilles"²⁵¹ Neoptolemus is an especially remarkable man (or is on his way to becoming one) and is marked as more inherently predisposed to the kind of noble attributes his father epitomized.

With this distinction made, Odysseus shifts to a second, more ethical definition for the alliance he seeks with Neoptolemus. He says that Neoptolemus must show himself to be γενναῖος (51), not only in his body, but also in the event that he should hear something new, unconventional, or outside of his self-conception (τι καινόν, 52) he must remain obedient (κλύης, 53)²⁵² and keep the interests of their present mission at heart. That is, a man who is γενναῖος is under obligation to use his body (and mind, though this is only implied)²⁵³ to benefit (ὑπουργεῖν, 53) the body of people whose interests he serves. In this call to service, Odysseus' notion of a γενναῖος person implicitly privileges serving the needs of the community as a whole over those of oneself or any individual member of it (cf. 52-3), and, as Mills notes, what is morally correct is not based on fixed,

²⁴⁹ Schein (2013) 126: "The use of *keri* for Phil.'s disease contributes to the sense that his abandonment and isolation on Lemnos constitute a virtual death."

²⁵⁰ Schein (2013) 126; on the term *phorbē* cf. fodder for horses (*Il.* 5.202), asses (*Il.* 11.562), or birds of prey (*Ajax* 1065, *Ar. Av.* 348)

²⁵¹ The play reiterates time and time again Neoptolemus' lineage: Cf. *Phil.* 4, 50, 240-2, 260, 542, and 1237.

²⁵² Pucci (2003) 164 notes the notions of obedience embedded in the verb *kluō*: "Anche *klueis* ('se ascolti'), omerico e poetico, è eufemistico per 'se ti ordino.'"

²⁵³ Pucci (2003) 164 suggests that Odysseus' emphasis on Neoptolemus physical obedience puts a positive spin on the deceitful *ti kainon* he is about to suggest: "Il termine opposto a *toi somati* avrebbe dovuto essere *gnomei* o *logois* ('devi essere coraggioso non solo con il corpo, ma anche con l'intelligenza delle cose' o 'con le parole'), ma questa opposizione non è espressa ed è l'infinito 'obbedire' che, diventando parallelo a '(devi) essere coraggioso con il tuo corpo,' ne assume la connotazione positive."

rigid ideology but is malleable enough to conform to the circumstances of any crisis (cf. 1049-52).²⁵⁴ This flexibility is perhaps most explicit in Odysseus' insistence that Neoptolemus consider what is at stake in their endeavor and weigh the tremendous prizes that can be won by deceit, unbecoming as that tactic may be:

Ἐξοῖδα καὶ φύσει σε μὴ πεφυκότα
 τοιαῦτα φωνεῖν μηδὲ τεχνᾶσθαι κακά·
 ἀλλ' ἡδὺ γάρ τοι κτῆμα τῆς νίκης λαβεῖν.
 τόλμα· δίκαιοι δ' αὖθις ἐκφανούμεθα·
 νῦν δ' εἰς ἀναιδὲς ἡμέρας μέρος βραχὺ
 δός μοι σεαυτόν, κᾶτα τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον
 κέκλησο πάντων εὐσεβέστατος βροτῶν.

I know it is not part of your nature
 to tell untruths or to devise evils.
 But to gain victory is a pleasant achievement.
 Bring yourself to do it. We shall prove our honesty later on.
 Now, for a short time, in shame give
 yourself over to me. Then, for the rest of time,
 be called the most god-fearing of all mortals.

Philoctetes 79-85

Odysseus' exhortation hinges on the subtle premise that not only is a person's nature (φύσει, 79) an adaptable entity, but also that it can be altered by will at any time as is necessary or convenient. The point is not that Neoptolemus become immoral, only that he act immorally or unnaturally to himself to achieve a specific goal. As Schein writes, "Odysseus wants Neoptolemus to accept his own ethical position, that justice is not a moral absolute but a name given to a particular kind of behavior or speech, which can change from time to time, and that in the future our way of acting will be shown to be just."²⁵⁵ The character of a true γενναῖος for Odysseus, then, responds to dynamic ethical protocols, not established, monolithic moral mandates. In Odysseus' forcefully imposing (albeit temporarily) his own ethics upon Neoptolemus and seizing an authority which

²⁵⁴ Mills (2012) 34. Cf. Nussbaum (1976) 32, Blundell (1989) 185.

²⁵⁵ Schein (2012) 134.

allows him to take command of the young man's body (51, above), Sophocles posits Odysseus as something of a sophistic mentor who is misusing his seniority and manipulating his protégé toward his own advantage – not unlike the machinations of the leaders of the coup of 411. As noted by Newman, Odysseus speaks with noticeably sophistic stylings throughout the play: the paucity of metrical resolutions – only 10 in 158 lines – offers the sense that his slick words have been carefully chosen and mindfully wrought.²⁵⁶

Neoptolemus' response to Odysseus' proposal that they approach Philoctetes lends further insight into both the ethics of the alliance that Odysseus proposes and into the heroic persona to which the young hero is heir. Neoptolemus' reaction to this exhortation is hostile specifically because it opposes what he considers to be γενναίος. That is, "he *is* a certain kind of person, in part by his birth, and it is his sense of who he is that will be his ethical guide."²⁵⁷ Neoptolemus makes it clear that he finds deceit to be below his station, and that he finds it preferable to fail at his task without compromising his inherited morality than to achieve an underhanded victory:

NE. Τί οὖν μ' ἄνωγας ἄλλο πλὴν ψευδῆ λέγειν;
 ΟΔ. Λέγω σ' ἐγὼ δόλω Φιλοκτήτην λαβεῖν.
 NE. Τί δ' ἐν δόλω δεῖ μᾶλλον ἢ πείσαντ' ἄγειν;
 ΟΔ. Οὐ μὴ πίθηται· πρὸς βίαν δ' οὐκ ἂν λάβοις.²⁵⁸
 ...
 NE. οὐκ αἰσχρὸν ἡγῆ δῆτα τὸ ψευδῆ λέγειν;
 ΟΔ. Οὐκ, εἰ τὸ σωθῆναι γε τὸ ψεῦδος φέρει.
 NE. Πῶς οὖν βλέπων τις ταῦτα τολμήσει λακεῖν;
 ΟΔ. Ὅταν τι δρᾷς εἰς κέρδος, οὐκ ὀκνεῖν πρέπει.
 NE. Κέρδος δ' ἐμοὶ τί τοῦτον ἐς Τροίαν μολεῖν;

²⁵⁶ Newman (1991) 309; he notes further Philoctetes' abundant use of resolutions in his speech (especially at points of physical or emotional distress) and Neoptolemus' increasing use of them as he comes more and more under Philoctetes' influence.

²⁵⁷ White (1985) 9; the emphasis is his.

²⁵⁸ Some critics have read the opposition between *dolos* and *peithō* in these lines is a sign of the sophistic undertones exhibited in Odysseus throughout the play. White (1985) 22, for one, says that the Odysseus of this play represents an "especially destructive and empty version of himself."

ΟΔ. Αἰρεῖ τὰ τόξα ταῦτα τὴν Τροίαν μόνα.
 ΝΕ. Οὐκ ἄρ' ὁ πέρσων, ὡς ἐφάσκετ', εἴμ' ἐγώ;
 ΟΔ. Οὔτ' ἂν σὺ κείνων χωρὶς οὔτ' ἐκεῖνα σοῦ.
 ΝΕ. Θηρατέ' ἄρα γίγνοιτ' ἂν, εἴπερ ὧδ' ἔχει.
 ΟΔ. Ὡς τοῦτό γ' ἔρξας δύο φέρῃ δωρήματα.
 Σοφός τ' ἂν αὐτὸς κάγαθός κεκληῖ' ἄμα.²⁵⁹

Neo: What, then, do you order, nothing but telling lies?
Od: I say you must use deception to trap Philoctetes.
Neo: Why use deception and not persuasion?
Od: He will not be persuaded, nor can you take him by force.
 ...
Neo: Don't you believe that telling lies is truly shameful?
Od: Not if a lie protects the endeavor.
Neo: But how could someone bear to look him in the eye?
Od: If you're looking to gain, you can't have qualms.
Neo: What gain to me is his coming to Troy?
Od: Only his bow can capture Troy.
Neo: You said that I am the man who'll sack it.
Od: Not without them, or they without you.
Neo: If that's the case let the hunt begin.
Od: Exactly. Do this and you would win two prizes...
 They'll call you clever, as well as noble.

Philoctetes 100-3; 108-19

Although we have little reason to doubt Neoptolemus' claim that he would rather fail at his task than achieve an underhanded victory (94-5), he gives in to Odysseus with perhaps surprisingly little resistance. Ruth Scodel suggest that part of the reason for this is Neoptolemus' youth: while it is true that he is heir to all the grandeur, dignity, and stubborn intransigence that combine to form his father's heroic persona, at this point young Neoptolemus mettle has yet to be tested.²⁶⁰ However, an equally important reason for Neoptolemus' compliance is a result of Odysseus' rhetorical virtuosity, as he seamlessly fuses their two separate goals into a single one: success in retrieving the bow will result in victory for the Achaean army (Odysseus' goal), and Neoptolemus' destruction of Troy will win him all the more glory (Neoptolemus' goal) if it is

²⁵⁹ On Odysseus' use of the flexible terms *sophos* and *agathos* see Blundell (1989) 191; she notes also that Philoctetes later uses these same terms to describe Nestor, whom he considers to be his last remaining friend among the Achaeans.

²⁶⁰ Scodel (2008) 245.

compounded by cleverness (σοφός, 119). Here, Odysseus takes advantage of a fundamental defect to Neoptolemus' self-conception: he is equipped with no apparatus with which he can resolve conflicts within the sense of character that functions as his moral compass. That is, Neoptolemus is extremely vulnerable at the point where his self-conception as "the sacker of Troy" might extend beyond the moral territory that his γενναῖος character will allow him to tread.

Critical to our interpretation of this passage is Odysseus' insistence that in matters concerning safety (τὸ σωθῆναί, 109) any and all courses of action should be available, no matter how shameful or drastic. It is possible that the use of this term in particular may have perked the ears of the drama's original audience in 409 BC, given Thucydides' description of Peisander's exhortation that the citizens of Athens abandon their democratic government in a desperate attempt to seek safety in the protection of Tissaphernes (8.54.1-4);²⁶¹ however, within this drama itself σωτηρία and its cognates play a crucial role in defining the objectives each party seeks, as Odysseus and Philoctetes vie to determine what "safety" actually entails. Schein writes:

By gaining 'salvation' (*to sōthēnai*), Odysseus means both gaining control of (Philoctetes and) the bow and a Greek victory at Troy. His pragmatic use of *sōizō* and its cognates clashes throughout the play with the physical salvation for which Philoctetes struggles, in the face of his disease, on the harsh terrain of Lemnos (e.g. 297, 737); with the salvation Philoctetes seeks in his effort to leave the island (e.g. 311, 488, 496, 501); and with the salvation by the gods which Neoptolemus urges on Philoctetes (e.g. 528, 919, 1391, 1396) and which the chorus, in the end (1471), seeks from the sea nymphs. This competition, as it were, to control the meaning of a word is an important feature of Sophoclean tragedy. Cf. the struggle between Kreon and Antigone over the meaning of *philos*.²⁶²

In other words, control over the meaning of the term σωτηρία and its cognates is tantamount to controlling all the ideological appurtenances that accompanies it, including

²⁶¹ Cf. Thucydides 8.54.2: "σαφῶς δὲ διδασκόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Πεισάνδρου μὴ εἶναι ἄλλην σωτηρίαν, δείσας καὶ ἁμαρπελίζων ὥς καὶ μεταβαλεῖται, ἐνέδωκεν."

²⁶² Schein (2012) 140; the passages referenced are discussed in detail below.

determining what measures are permissible to obtain it and what qualities a person must possess to enjoy the many benefits safety offers. In the past, several scholars found the ethical flexibility Odysseus espouses here reminiscent of a number of 5th-century politicians and sophists familiar to Sophocles' audience and suggest that in this passage and throughout the play the term *γενναῖος* is used to make a distinction between innate, noble quality and a new generation of citizens trained to challenge the aristocracy.²⁶³

It follows then that, to Odysseus (40-47), Philoctetes is not in possession of *γενναίότης* which would qualify him to enjoy the protection of political friendship: he implies that Philoctetes is not heir to any noteworthy excellence (though this is certainly not true, given his special relationship with Herakles), but more importantly that he cannot use his body to aid anyone; instead, in his decrepit state he can only serve his own immediate interests (44-5). This means, of course, that Philoctetes cannot live up to Odysseus' requirement that those embodying *γενναίότης* use their excellent qualities to benefit (*ὕπουργεῖν*, 53) the body of people they represent, and would be completely useless to the Greek war effort were it not for the divinely enhanced bow in his possession. It should come as little surprise, then, that to Odysseus Philoctetes is exactly the kind of person whose interests should be trumped by those of the Greek host.

Having adopted this view, Neoptolemus adeptly initiates Odysseus' deception against Philoctetes, who is filled with joy to encounter his Greek peers after so many years in solitude (219-38).²⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that while at first Neoptolemus dutifully

²⁶³ E.g. on Sophocles' invocation through Odysseus of contemporary political figures (and especially sophists) see Stanford (1954) 110; on Sophocles' use of the term to express his "militant affirmation of inherited excellence" Rose (1992) 320.

²⁶⁴ On the very real relief participation in this conversation brings to Philoctetes, cf. Worman (2000) 3-7.

sticks to the script by telling Philoctetes that he is the son of Achilles (239-41) and that he has just now sailed from Troy (245) — both of which happen to be true — he next contrives a lie not specifically ordered by Odysseus: he pretends to have never heard of Philoctetes or of his disastrous fate (247-53). On the theatrical level this improvisation performs the important role of setting up the long *rhēsis* Philoctetes speaks in reply, in which he offers his own account of his abandonment on Lemnos (254-84), his trials while on the island (285-99), and the few other humans he has encountered in the past decade, all of whom refused to help him in spite of their pity (300-16). Furthermore, he frames this account with his vehement hatred for Odysseus and the Atreidae (263-4; 314-5) and his strong desire that they suffer the same calamities he has (275/315-6). This insult to Philoctetes' heroic dignity is a powerful force throughout the remainder of the play and is of course the reason why Odysseus cannot approach him directly in the first place. However, in addition to this more technical dramatic function, Neoptolemus' improvised lie plays an important role in his deceptive plan and in the duplicitous relationship which he establishes with Philoctetes: even though Neoptolemus is a τέκνον (236)²⁶⁵ and a παῖς (240) and is, moreover, a Greek, it is not a foregone conclusion that Neoptolemus will help offer his aid, and Philoctetes is not in a position to make any demands. This, alongside his stench and agonizing cries (cf. 876-81),²⁶⁶ make it necessary that Philoctetes persuade Neoptolemus to enter with him into a mutually beneficial pact.

Like Odysseus, Philoctetes' necessary first step in persuading Neoptolemus to accept his friendship is defining the qualities which will allow the two heroes to trust one

²⁶⁵ On Philoctetes' strategic use of this term, see below.

²⁶⁶ Note in these lines that Philoctetes appeals to Neoptolemus' γενναῖος nature (though in slightly different terms: εὐγενής γὰρ ἢ φύσις κἀξ εὐγενῶν, 874) and calls him τέκνον three times (876, 878, 879) to smooth over the reality of what will surely be an uncomfortable journey.

another. He does so with just as much subtlety and artistry as Odysseus did earlier, and while there is the important difference that Philoctetes must appeal to Neoptolemus' sense of pity where Odysseus was able to invoke his position of authority, both acts of *πείθω* operate by offering a definition of *γενναῖος* and suggesting ways that Neoptolemus matches this definition:

{ΦΙ.} Πρὸς νύν σε πατρός, πρὸς τε μητρός, ὃ τέκνον,
 πρὸς τ' εἴ τί σοι κατ' οἶκόν ἐστι προσφιλές,
 ἰκέτης ἰκνοῦμαι, μὴ λίπης μ' οὔτω μόνον,
 ἔρημον ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖσδ' οἷσις ὄρᾳς
 ὅσοις τ' ἐξήκουσας ἐνναίοντά με·
 ἀλλ' ἐν παρέργῳ τοῦ με. Δυσχέρεια μὲν,
 ἔξοιδα, πολλὴ τοῦδε τοῦ φορήματος·
 ὅμως δὲ τλήθι· **τοῖσι γενναίοισι** τοι
τό τ' αἰσχρὸν ἐχθρὸν καὶ τὸ χρηστὸν εὐκλέες.
 Σοὶ δ', ἐκλιπόντι τοῦτ', ὄνειδος οὐ καλόν,
 δράσαντι δ', ὃ παῖ, πλεῖστον εὐκλείας γέρας,
 ἐὰν μὲν ἔγωγε ζῶν πρὸς Οἰταίαν χθόνα.
 Ἴθ', ἡμέρας τοι μόχθος σὺχ' ὅλης μιᾶς,
 τόλμησον, ἐμβαλοῦ μ' ὅπῃ θέλεις ἄγων,
 εἰς ἀντλίαν, εἰς πρῶραν, εἰς πρύμνην, ὅποι
 ἥκιστα μέλλω τοὺς ξυνόντας ἀλγυνεῖν.
 ...

Νῦν δ', εἰς σὲ γὰρ πομπὸν τε καὶ τὸν ἄγγελον
 ἤκω, **σὺ σῶσον**, σὺ μ' ἐλέησον, εἰσορῶν
 ὥς πάντα δεινὰ κάπικινδύνως βροτοῖς
 κεῖται παθεῖν μὲν εὖ, παθεῖν δὲ θάτερα.
 Χρὴ δ' ἐκτὸς ὄντα πημάτων τὰ δεινὰ ὄραν,
 χῶταν τις εὖ ζῇ, τήνικα ἅτα τὸν βίον
 σκοπεῖν μάλιστα μὴ διαφθαρεῖς λάθῃ.

Phil: By your father, oh child, and by your mother,
 and if there is anything dear to you at home, by that too—
 as a suppliant I implore you, do not leave me alone like this,
 abandoned in the wretched state in which you see
 and you've heard that I live.

Instead, stow me in an auxiliary part of the ship.

I know that the disgust of this burden is great:
 bring yourself to do it just the same. For the *gennaioi*, you see,
what is shameful is hateful and what is noble is glorious.
 For you, forsaking my pleas, there would be shameful rebuke;
 however, for doing as I ask the greatest reward of glory is yours,
 if I should arrive alive in the land of Oita.

Come, the hardship is not one of an entire day;
 endure it, bringing me to the ship throw me wherever you wish,
 in the hold, or in the prow, or in the stern,
 wherever I am going to be least burdensome to your crew.

...
 But now — for in you I come across both guide and a messenger—
save me! Show pity on me, seeing that all things are full of terror
 and dangerously disposed for mortals to fare well or fare the opposite way.
 It is necessary to look out for miseries while still outside of trouble,
 whenever someone is living well, and at that point in life especially to be vigilant,
 lest when it is destroyed it escapes your notice.

Philoctetes 468-83, 500-6

In general, this speech has much in common with more traditional supplication scenes and relies more on pity than more traditional *πείθω* or clearly defined ideology.²⁶⁷ To begin, Philoctetes' invocation of Neoptolemus' father and mother (468) not only underscores his particularly noble birth, but perhaps also offers a plea to Neoptolemus' humanity or human decency. Moreover, Philoctetes further invokes the affections that exist between parents and children by referring to Neoptolemus as "τέκνον" three times (466, 468, and 484). Next, whereas Odysseus oriented himself as Neoptolemus superior/commanding officer in no uncertain terms (note line 53, and the imperatives in following lines), Philoctetes stresses his position as a suppliant (470, 484-6, etc.) and states clearly what he desires (470-3). The operative ideologically definition of being *γενναῖος* here differs strikingly from the one offered by Odysseus: for those possessing *γενναῖος* (475) what is shameful is to be hated/shunned and what is good/useful/honest is glorious. Therefore, if Neoptolemus will be persuaded to help Philoctetes, he will show himself to be *γενναῖος* and worthy of all the benefits contained therein, but if he does not he will only prove himself to be shameful. Those who admit to be without the quality of a *γενναῖος* disclose their inherent vileness and are free to commit any betrayals that benefit them; but to declare oneself to be *γενναῖος* is also to lay claim to all the responsibilities

²⁶⁷ On this rather odd (or at least incomplete) supplication scene, see Kosak (1999) 117-8, Pucci (2003) 216-7, Shein (2012) 202-3, and further discussion below.

that come with it. Philoctetes insinuates that one of these responsibilities is to yield to suppliants.

In short, if the defining characteristic of Odysseus' conception of a γενναῖος is to be useful (53) and win glory (85) from a large body of fellow citizens, for Philoctetes it is more adherent to universal notions of what is shameful and dutiful (475); a γενναῖος man will save and show pity to those in pain (501), even if doing so is inconvenient or harmful to others, and those without this quality will refuse to do so for the sake of their own self-interest (499-500). In the internal logic of the play, these two conceptions of γενναῖος are diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive, and the necessity that Neoptolemus choose one over the other is the source of the drama's ethical crisis. His choosing takes time, and the internal conflict he endures as he weighs the merits and shortcoming of each invites the audience to reflect on the similar questions lingering in the wake of their own tumultuous civic experience. As the polarizing pressures on Neoptolemus build and he attempts to navigate in an increasingly narrow neutral space, the play moves into a phase of complex metatheater, where boundaries between truth and fiction—and indeed between actor and audience—become dangerously blurry.

The Merchant Scene: Metatheater and the Poetics of Conspiracy

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* shows a high degree of self-awareness *qua* drama at the points where Odysseus and Philoctetes offer up diametrically opposite visions of how properly organized conspiracies function. Additionally, there are several other points where the drama displays a keen awareness that the figures on stage are being watched by both internal and external audiences. As discussed in Chapter 2 above, the elements of metatheatricality on the tragic stage appear to be more pronounced at the time of the

play's production, perhaps in connection with the fact that the audience so recently witnessed firsthand a form of political stagecraft off stage, both in the oligarchic conspirators' performances leading up to the coup of 411 and their own performance of the Oath of Demaphontos aimed at assuaging the fear left in the coup's wake.

Metatheater is not a dramatic element isolated to Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. In his study of this complex device in Sophoclean drama Ringer identifies three operative components useful for exploring metatheatrical moments.²⁶⁸ First, he calls "role-playing-within-the-role" those scenes in which a tragic figure consciously or unconsciously takes on another role in addition to their main assignment, wherein a character transforms into an "internal actor" performing a deceptive role as part of an actual role.²⁶⁹ Examples of internal actors are fairly common and can be found in the plots of all three major surviving tragic playwrights. Orestes' claim to be a lowly traveler bearing news of his own death in Aeschylus' *Choēphoroi* and Pentheus' (initially reluctant) donning of the maenadic garb in Euripides' *Bacchae* come to mind as two such examples. In addition to the revelations these double roles offer to specific figures in specific dramas, in general such internal actors also comment upon all role-playing within the theater.

A second prominent metatheatrical phenomenon is the one in which Ringer distinguishes a "playwright/director-within-the-play." These figures also frequently shift to a secondary, deceptive role in addition to their primary one, but they also assume a position from which they manipulate or "script" the actions and words of their fellow

²⁶⁸ Ringer (1998) 8-22 is an excellent starting point for any study of ancient or modern metatheater, and in addition explores metanarrative in other genres, including historiography. Cf. also Hornby (1986).

²⁶⁹ While deception itself is not inherently metatheatrical, "internal actors" are necessarily driven by an impulse to deceive; without it, there would be no need to "act."

actors. It is when actors speak the lines and take the actions directed by this “internal script” that audiences find a fully formed “play-within-the-play.” Once again Aeschylus’ *Chorēphoroi* provides a revealing example: in his detailed explanation of the assassination plot to the chorus of libation bearers, Orestes uses distinctly theatrical language to describe what is about to unfold: it will be a “straightforward plot” (ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος, 554) that includes stage directions for the internal actors to perform as the action unfolds (554, 561-8). Next, he will don the costume of a stranger and ally of the house, and also disguise his voice with a convincing accent (ξένος τε καὶ δορυξενος δόμων,| ἄμφω δὲ φωνὴν ἥσομεν Παρνησίδα,| γλώσσης αὐτὴν Φωκίδος μιμουμένω, 562-4). Finally, he incorporates the chorus into the internal plot as he directs them not only to keep secret his intentions (κρύπτειν τάσδε συνθήκας ἐμάς, 555), but be attentive to points where they should be discreet or speak in his favor (ὕμιν δ’ ἐπαινῶ γλῶσσαν εὖφημον φέρειν,| σιγᾶν θ’ ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν τὰ καίρια, 581-2). This is just one of a number of instances of such “internal scripts,” and I propose that it is within these that we find the closest point of contact between dramatic and real-world conspiracies.

Before exploring instances of “internal scripts” in the *Philoctetes*, the third and final operative component of tragic metatheater that Ringer identifies bears mentioning: an audience-within-the-play, an “internal audience” to the “internal script” described above. Far more than passive viewers of the internal actors, the internal audience is frequently positioned in such a way that not only encourages the external, theatrical audience to view the action on stage through their eyes, but also allows them to serve as a

“barometer” for the external audience’s anticipated response.²⁷⁰ Internal audiences in general and in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* in particular reveal a high degree of awareness that they are participants in a multi-layered dramatic spectacle through their use of overtly performative vocabulary (on which more below), which in turn alerts the external audience to their metatheatrical role as citizen-dancers within the Theater of Dionysus.

Let us try to determine how the figures in the *Philoctetes* fit into Ringer’s scheme. Certainly Odysseus (40-134) and to a lesser extent Philoctetes (468-506) in their own ways act as internal directors as each attempts to guide Neoptolemus, the play’s most prominent actor and occasional internal audience, and try to get him to act and speak in a manner that is in keeping with their chosen plot line.²⁷¹ However, locating the exact internal role of both Neoptolemus and his choral co-conspirators is a far more complex matter, as they oscillate independently between active participants in Odysseus’ scheme and more traditional passive witnesses to Philoctetes’ internal and external anguish and doubt. At many times it is difficult to determine exactly which role the chorus is playing, and there are no distinct boundaries that ever clearly separate their active and passive roles. It is notoriously difficult to pinpoint exactly when Neoptolemus abandons Odysseus’ plot and genuinely sympathizes with Philoctetes.

Perhaps nowhere else in the drama are elements of metatheater more central than the scene in which the so-called “False Merchant” interacts with Neoptolemus, in which the boundaries between actor and internal actor are blurred and much of the language

²⁷⁰ Ringer (1998) 9. Furthermore, he suggests that following their often direct involvement in the internal scripts, we should resist the temptation to take internal audiences as the “ideal audiences” proposed by Schlegel in the fifth of his *Lectures of Dramatic Art and Literature*; cf. Dukore (1974) 502-5.

²⁷¹ On the alternation of Neoptolemus’ role as participant in the action and speaker in the play, see Allen-Hornblower (2015) ch. 4.

simultaneously communicates multiple messages to different audiences.²⁷² More so than at any other point in the dramas under discussion, this scene overtly draws parallels between the performative elements embedded in “conspiring” and “acting,” as the False Merchant’s (internally) scripted speech and Neoptolemus’ response to it add complexity to the deception plot already underway.²⁷³ Though the terms “γενναῖος” and “σωτηρία” do not appear in this passage, I argue that the concepts they entail still clearly loom over the scene. In his parting words to Neoptolemus as the plot to deceive Philoctetes is about to begin (126-31), Odysseus tells him that, if the scheme takes too long or appears to stall, he will send one of his sailors to intervene or offer further instructions. This sailor, he says, will be disguised as a passing merchant in order to preserve the secrecy of the plot (ὥς ἂν ἀγνοία προσῇ, 129) and will tell a tale in which Neoptolemus is to find encoded any information or new orders that Odysseus wishes to convey covertly (δέχου τὰ συμφέροντα τῶν ἀεὶ λόγων, 131). Later, when Neoptolemus does in fact hesitate and there seems to be a danger that the plot is unraveling, this “False Merchant” appears on stage (542) and the drama enters into a complex sequence in which several different levels of performances are acted out simultaneously.²⁷⁴

As do other points in the deception plot, the interaction with the False Merchant forces Neoptolemus to perform under the guise of the persona Odysseus has convinced him to adopt, providing another opportunity for the audience to sense the tension created

²⁷² Lada-Richards (2002) 397-8.

²⁷³ On Neoptolemus’ interaction with the merchant and participation on the internal play, cf. Goldhill (2009) 68, emphasis his: “...Neoptolemus’ apparent sympathy for Philoctetes here needs to be read *both* with regard to his willing continuation of the deception — that is, as false, feigned feeling — *and* as a precursor of his change of heart — that is, as a sign of sincere emotion — and the clash of these two trajectories produced a tension for the audience.”

²⁷⁴ The primary proponents of this view are Errandonea (1955) 122-164 and Lattimore (1964) 43-5, 92 n. 35.

by the difference between his false and true selves, the same tension that earlier in the drama *Odysseus* and *Philoctetes* both addressed in terms of *γενναῖος* terminology.²⁷⁵ Meanwhile, as the harbinger of the imaginary dangers *Philoctetes* will soon face (604-21), through the medium of the False Merchant *Odysseus* proposes a solution that will make *Neoptolemus* and *Philoctetes* take action that is in keeping with his conception of *σωτηρία* and what it entails: namely, a hasty departure from the island (Ἴωμεν ἥ τοι καίριος σπουδή, πόνου/ λήξαντος, ὕπνον κἀνάπαυλαν ἤγαγεν, 637-8) and a return to Troy with the bow of *Herakles*.²⁷⁶ As discussed in Chapter 1, these are two points that are fundamental to the formation of any conspiracy: members must determine what qualities one must possess in order to qualify for inclusion in or exclusion from the group (such as being *γενναῖος*), and they must agree on the mutually beneficial outcome they seek to achieve, which is often expressed in terms of *σωτηρία* (safety). Just as in the coup of 411 – where *Peisander* took aside each of his opponents and, group by group, confronted them with the very real possibility that *Sparta* would soon overwhelm them unless the *Persian King* interceded – the conspiracy aggravates a sense of dread in the target and then its agents propose its preferred solution for returning to *σωτηρία*.²⁷⁷

The language of acting and the use of double entendre come into play shortly after the False Merchant appears on stage at 542. Throughout the scene, the False Merchant

²⁷⁵ Cf. 50-3 and 475-80. On the multidimensional applications of this term ranging from “noble” to “genuine,” see Chapter 1. Cf. also Heath (1987) 151: “...the complexity of the problems which face *Neoptolemus* and *Philoctetes* is allowed to emerge, and must be allowed to emerge. Without some awareness of the ethical complexities of the situation the audience will be unable to appreciate and respond appropriately to the painful contradictions in which the characters find themselves entangled. The emotional impact of the situation is inextricably bound up with its ethical complexity.”

²⁷⁶ Pucci (2003) 236: “*Filotte* incalza con un nuovo invite a salpare (cfr. 635), ma, invece di addurre un motive proprio della situazione in atto, chiude con una massima generale, segnata da *τοί* e dall’*aoristo* gnomico. La metafora medica λήξαντος potrebbe alludere alla scena della malattia che segue (Webster).

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Thuc.* 8.53.2-3 and Chapter 2 above.

shows keen awareness that with the same words he is addressing two audiences: one composite audience, divided between Neoptolemus, the Chorus, and the external spectators, is aware that the False Merchant is delivering a scripted, internal performance, while the other (Philoctetes, who is the main addressee for whom this performance is intended) is not. After claiming to be a solitary sailor returning from Troy who just so happened to be passing by Lemnos, the False Merchant reports,

Οὐδὲν σύ που κάτοισθα τῶν σαυτοῦ πέρι,
 ἃ τοῖσιν Ἀργείοισιν ἀμφὶ σοῦ νέα
 βουλευμάτων' ἐστὶ, κοῦ μόνον βουλευματα,
 ἀλλ' ἔργα δρώμεν', οὐκέτ' ἐξαργούμενα.

You know nothing of your own affairs, it seems,
 the new plans which the Greek have concerning you,
 and not only are they plans, but actions being performed
 and no longer neglected.
Philoctetes 553-6

While at a glance the language the False Merchant chooses to describe the news that he is about to deliver seems strikingly vague, I would like to suggest that his use of words associated specifically with stagecraft (δρώμεν')²⁷⁸ and scripted plots (βουλευματα)²⁷⁹ calls attention to the very performance he is in the process of giving.²⁸⁰ Philoctetes, for one, can take these words and those that follow at face value because he has no reason to think the merchant is being disingenuous, and he knows nothing of the deception at hand (Οὐδὲν σύ που κάτοισθα τῶν σαυτοῦ πέρι, 553). However, Neoptolemus, the Chorus, and the external audience are all aware that the news is false and that they are witnessing the delivery of lines scripted by Odysseus. For them, these words take on a metatheatrical double meaning: they understand that the thing Philoctetes does not know is that he is

²⁷⁸ Especially with reference to its cognate δρᾶμα, used to indicate action specifically taking place on a dramatic stage, cf. *Ar. Ra.* 920, 1021; *Plat. Sym.* 222d; *Aristot. Poet.* 1448a.28; 1460a.31.

²⁷⁹ Cf. *Ar. Av.* 993: “Τί δαὶ σὺ δράσων; Τίς ἰδέα βουλευματος;”

²⁸⁰ Cf. Easterling (1997) 169-73, who calls this an instance of “strong theatrical self-consciousness in the use of a deception scene within a deception scene (169).”

witnessing a performance, one that is itself the new plan (νέα| βουλεύματ', 554-5),²⁸¹ following on the heels of an original one that is in danger of failing. Furthermore, the merchant indicates to them that they are witnessing exactly what the νέα βουλεύματα are: namely, the internal drama he is presently performing (ἔργα δρώμεν', οὐκέτ' ἐξαργούμενα 556).²⁸² His referral to the new plan at 560 (νεώτερον βούλευμ') may be making use of the both the negative (as in “strange,” to Philoctetes) and positive (as in “innovative,” to everyone else) senses of the word νεώτερον.

Once these words are spoken, Neoptolemus finds himself in a difficult position. To avoid compromising the success of the mission, Neoptolemus must remain engaged in his deception and act as if the merchant is telling the truth. The audience knows this, and this knowledge adds a layer of meaning to his words for those audience members on and off stage (i.e., everyone except for Philoctetes) who are aware of the performance underway: when Neoptolemus mentions his gratitude for “the favor of your forethought” (ἡ χάρις μὲν τῆς προμηθείας, 557), these words must sound quite polite to Philoctetes; but to the rest there is a hint of sarcasm in Neoptolemus’ thanking the merchant (and indirectly, Odysseus) for his “forethought/scheme,” in which Neoptolemus is an increasingly reluctant participant.²⁸³ In the lines that follow, Neoptolemus’ reluctance is clearly shifting to something closer to disobedience, a point that once again remains hidden to Philoctetes:

{NE.} Ἐγώ εἰμ' Ἀτρεΐδαις δυσμενής· οὗτος δέ μοι

²⁸¹ Pucci (2003) 229: “Questa correzione potrebbe essere sostenuta da νέα βουλεύματ' del v. 560, se lo si intende, come mi sembra giusto, <<nuovo progetto>>, e non <<strano>> o addirittura <<quasi “rivoluzionario”>> (come suggerisce Webster).

²⁸² Easterling (1997) 170-1 comments on the pleasure audience members witnessing such a multilayered performance may have felt. Cf. Artistot. *Poet.* 1425b33 and 1453a36.

²⁸³ Pucci (2003) 229-30: “Odisseo aveva previsto questo intervento se le cose andavano a rilento (vv. 126-9), e qui il mercante sembra confermare a Neotolemo e al pubblico che lo scopo della sua mascherata è quello di far avanzare lo stratagemma.”

φίλος μέγιστος, οὔνεκ' Ἀτρείδας στυγεῖ.
 εἶ δὴ σ', ἔμοιγ' ἐλθόντα προσφιλεῖ, λόγων
 κρύψαι πρὸς ἡμᾶς μηδέν' ὧν ἀκήκοας.
 {EM.} Ὅρα τί ποιεῖς, παῖ.
 {NE.} Σκοπῶ κάγω πάλαι.
 {EM.} Σὲ θήσομαι τῶνδ' αἵτιον.
 {NE.} Ποιοῦ λέγων.

{NE.} I am an enemy to the Atreidae, and this man
 is my greatest friend because he hates the Atreidae also.
 If you have come kindly disposed toward me, it is necessary
 that you hide from us nothing of the things you've heard.
 {EM.} Mind what you are doing, boy.
 {NE.} I have long considered it.
 {EM.} I will hold you accountable.
 {NE.} Do so, but speak.

Philoctetes 585-90

For Philoctetes, Neoptolemus' reference to him as his "greatest friend" (586) must seem a gratifying and pleasant relief after so many years in isolation. However, for the False Merchant, the Chorus, and the external audience, his words carry the latent threat that they may actually be more truth than fiction and be a sign that he may be abandoning Odysseus' plot. This threat is underscored when Neoptolemus adds that the basis of their new friendship is a mutual hatred of the Atreidae (585-6). Of course, Neoptolemus' fictitious grievances against the Atreidae are the very premise of the deception narrative (343-466); however, the False Merchant seems sensitive to Neoptolemus' growing sympathy toward Philoctetes and hostility toward Odysseus' approach to the problem at hand.

The layers of internal performances and audiences in this scene are complex. Moreover, the unknown status of Neoptolemus' allegiance at this point — the very thing which prompted Odysseus to send the False Merchant in the first place — increases the tension in the encounter, which comes to a head in the exchange of lines 588-90 quoted above. Scholars have long argued about whether this is a coded exchange between co-

conspirators or something more benign, such as a simple piece of theater intended to impress and disarm Philoctetes.²⁸⁴ Schein suggests that there are three levels of communication at work, each of which delivers a different message to a different audience.²⁸⁵ First, when the False Merchant tells Neoptolemus to “watch what he is doing” (“Ὅρα τί ποιεῖς, παῖ, 589) he means not only that Neoptolemus should think carefully about his actions and ethics, but also that he should remember that he is being watched by an unseen audience — namely, Odysseus. Failure to perform the actions Odysseus had dictated, the merchant implies, will locate Neoptolemus outside the boundaries of Odysseus’ protection and leave him vulnerable to exactly the same kind of covert action he is supposed to be applying to Philoctetes. When Philoctetes, a second audience, hears the words “Ὅρα τί ποιεῖς, παῖ” and Neoptolemus’ affirmative reply, he would interpret it as a true message warning of real dangers and understand that Neoptolemus is willing to face them at his side, never suspecting Neoptolemus’ ongoing inner conflict over his participation in Odysseus’ scheme. Finally, the external audience might understand these words to mean that Neoptolemus must watch what he is doing morally or ethically, lest his subsequent actions prove disastrous because of his demonstrated lack of self-knowledge. To this implication the False Merchant adds a subtle reminder that Neoptolemus is to consider himself a subordinate to Odysseus:²⁸⁶ παῖ is exactly the term Odysseus uses throughout the play when addressing Neoptolemus, which, as discussed above, stands in stark opposition to Philoctetes’ more common and

²⁸⁴ This is the view of Jebb (1906) 100, for instance. Cf. Goldhill (2012) 68-9, who finds in Neoptolemus’ use of the term *πάλαι* (590) “the first telling indication of Neoptolemus’ pained self-analysis.”

²⁸⁵ Schein (2013) 217.

²⁸⁶ Cf. 54: “...ὥς ὑπηρέτης πάρει.”

gentler use of the term τέκνον.²⁸⁷ Odysseus' reiteration of his authority through the False Merchant meets with an increasingly imposing response from Neoptolemus. He states in no uncertain terms that he knows what he is doing (Σκοπῶ καὶ γὰρ πάλαι, 589), and the confidence with which he addresses Odysseus' surrogate may suggest to the external audience that some of his uncertainties are vanishing concerning the nature of his own true self (the possession of a γενναῖος nature, and what attributes define a nature as such) — the very quality to which Odysseus appealed in persuading Neoptolemus to adopt the ethics he prefers.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, Neoptolemus' reply holds different meanings for Philoctetes and for the False Merchant: Schein suggests that Philoctetes would hear a confident defiance to the authority the False Merchant claims, while the False Merchant might hear an affirmation that Neoptolemus is adhering to the plan and role which Odysseus crafted for him.

I earlier made mention of the tumultuous historical context and widespread civic mistrust (discussed in chapter 2) that was reflected and codified in the Oath of Demophantos. In light of this context, it is likely that such duplicitous encounters on the tragic stage would have had a particular relevance for the spectators watching them play out. The pervasiveness of the misgivings born from an inability to make distinctions between trustworthy and deceptive public performances is revealed when the Chorus —

²⁸⁷ παῖ e.g. 53; τέκνον e.g. 466, 468, 484. Pucci (2003) 231: “<<Ragazzo, tu mi stai rovinando il gioco>>, con un divertente appellativo diminutivo (παῖ) dopo quello solenne del v. 582.” Schein (2013) 217 notes that, “the FM’s pretended emotion is intensified when he ends his words with the emphatic παῖ at position 6, rhetorically bisecting the trimeter, despite ποιεῖς at the caesura.” Such a careful choice of words suggests that they were carefully crafted by their internal author — namely, Odysseus — for maximum effectiveness.

²⁸⁸ Cf. 806, 906, 913, and 966, all points where Neoptolemus more explicitly confesses that he has been struggling with the pity he feels for Philoctetes “for a long time” (πάλαι). Goldhill (2012) 69 notes that such emphasis on πάλαι “opens a potential narrative of the past, Neoptolemus’ past and ongoing reflection (*skopō*), that will become more and more important as he travels toward his change of heart.”

the genre's foundational and most institutionalized feature²⁸⁹ – finds itself complicit in Odysseus' scheme and forced to reconcile with its consequences. In the following section, I explore the ways the Chorus of the *Philoctetes* invites the audience further to reflect upon civic mistrust.

The Chorus as Actor

An additional complicating factor in this scene and throughout the *Philoctetes* is the voice of the chorus. As virtually every commentator on the play notes, the chorus of this play is anything but typical. Far more than a neutral third party, this chorus repeatedly shows itself to be a thoughtful, independent entity with a vested interest in the outcome of Odysseus' mission, one that, as Pucci notes, is striking in its willingness to give voice to ethical or political differences with Neoptolemus.²⁹⁰ The Chorus is comprised of sailors sent in support of Odysseus' mission; from the moment they appear on stage in the *parados* it is clear that they are perfectly informed concerning the requirements of the task Odysseus has assigned, and they express a willingness to say whatever must be said to accomplish it. There is a particularly noteworthy metatheatrical element to these lines, as if they are a troupe of actors preparing to perform before an audience:

Τί χρή, τί χρή με, δέσποτ', ἐν ξένῳ ξένον
στέγειν, ἢ τί λέγειν πρὸς ἄνδρ' ὑπόπταν;

What must I, what must I conceal, oh master,
Stranger in a strange land? Or what should I say to a suspicious man?

Philoctetes 135-6

²⁸⁹ Murnaghan (2012) 220-1.

²⁹⁰ Pucci (2003) 180: "Questo modo di esprimersi caratterizza, qui e in tutto il dramma, i marinai del Coro non solo come personaggi popolari, ma anche come uomini totalmente privi delle esitazioni etiche, della visione politica e degli ideali dei capi." Cf. also Murnaghan (2012) 229-34.

The enjambed verb στέγειν in these lines places particular emphasis on ἐν ξένῳ ξένον, which, as Goldhill notes, functions as “a standard jingling *polyptoton*, recalling the repeated language and type scenes of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus so often needs concealing language, as a guest before a suspicious host.”²⁹¹ Not only is this Chorus ready and willing to take on the dramatic persona Odysseus’ scheme will require, but they display a predilection for a particularly Odyssean style of dealing with strangers.

However, it would be misguided to read this chorus as unequivocally embracing Odysseus’ ethics and plot. Quite the opposite: the chorus at several points struggles alongside Neoptolemus with the dilemma at hand and, like the Athenian δῆμος itself, faces the dual pressures of seeking σωτηρία²⁹² for themselves and their fellow Greeks – in both cases, by seeking a way to end a seemingly endless war – while simultaneously coping with the duplicitous and transgressive leaders and factions claiming to be able to provide it. It is at points such as these that we can detect the closest links between the processes of role-playing and Athenian citizens’ lingering anxieties surrounding factional strife, wherein conspirators engage in one or more public performances that obscure their true intention, always (at least allegedly) for the greater good of the community. One of the complicating factors in viewing the chorus of the *Philoctetes* is a kind of performative ambiguity that leaves both the internal and external audiences uncertain as to when they are “acting” like good conspirators in Odysseus’ plot and when they are expressing sincere pity (or faking it).

²⁹¹ Goldhill (2012) 121.

²⁹² Even if the Chorus does not make use of the term σωτηρία itself, it is important to recall that the safety and preservation of the Greek host is the primary object of the expedition. Cairns (1993) 1-26 takes as a premise to his study of the term *aidōs* itself can be taken as shorthand for the broader concepts such as shame and reverence that the word itself entails; here I suggest that a study of “safety” may be undertaken in a similar way.

While it is true that in this play Sophocles presents us with a far more active and involved chorus than is typical, he utilizes this chorus sparingly and with restraint. In fact, in the long first scene of the drama (up to line 675) the chorus sings only two brief but revealing stanzas. The first of these (391-402) takes the shape of an invocation to Earth the mother of Zeus (Γἄ,| μᾶτερ αὐτοῦ Διός, 391-2) and like a standard prayer recalls a time when they have invoked her previously — however, in this case, the previous invocation the chorus references happens to be entirely fictional, as the *hubris* on the part of the Atreidae which they describe seems designed solely to lend credibility to the false narrative that Neoptolemus has just spun for Philoctetes. A number of scholars have commented on the ethical implications of issuing a false prayer such as this one, especially because it references another, earlier false prayer. Reinhardt finds the prayer indicative of the depth of moral and religious perversion in Odysseus’ deceptive world, where “what should be most holy has become a means of betrayal.”²⁹³ Schein notes that by stopping just short of swearing a false oath by the goddess they have invoked, “they (barely) preserve their conventional authority to interpret the events of the play in choral song, even while their attempt to provide for the present need (τὸ παρὸν θεραπεύειν, 149) shows how such choral song can be manipulated and manipulative.”²⁹⁴ Pucci calls the chorus’ deception an instance of “emotional violence.”²⁹⁵ To all these observations I would add one more: by participating so deeply in Neoptolemus’ dramatization of the *hubris* of the Atreidae and transforming a prayer into a vehicle for

²⁹³ Reinhardt (1979) 171, where he suggests that such corruption is a consequence of the social conditions in Athens in the late years of the Peloponnesian War.

²⁹⁴ Schein (2013) 190.

²⁹⁵ Pucci (2003) 205: “Invece del pezzo lirico attesto, lo <<stasimo>>, il Coro canta e danza un breve brano giambo-docmiaco-- un metro lirico di grande violenza emotiva-- per dichiararsi testimone della scandalosa consegna delle armi a Odisseo.”

manipulation, the chorus makes it impossible for either the internal or external audiences to ever know with certainty if their words are completely genuine. In other words, a chorus comprising of such ruthless and sacrilegious actors make it difficult for both the internal and external audiences to find the boundary between their truth and fiction, making them extremely useful co-conspirators for Odysseus.

The Chorus' demonstrated willingness to resort to extreme means of manipulation and the ambiguity this adds to all of their words makes a later prayer difficult to interpret as well. In the choral interlude following Philoctetes' loss of consciousness, (827-64), the Chorus sings a prayer to personified Sleep that in certain ways draws parallels to a paean.²⁹⁶ On the one hand, their invocation of Sleep and the relief it will bring Philoctetes here seems quite sincere, especially following the lines they sang just before Philoctetes fell ill. In these lines (676-729), the Chorus finds itself alone on stage for the first and only time in the play, and, as they contemplate the workings and implications of the internal drama in which they are taking part, there seems little reason to doubt that the sentiments they express are their true emotions. In these lines they sing of their surprise at the depth of Philoctetes' suffering (ἄλλον δ' οὐτιν' ἔγωγ' οἶδα κλύων οὐδ' ἐσιδὼν μοίρα| τοῦδ' ἐχθίονι συντυχόντα θνατῶν, 680-2) which he has endured so undeservedly (ἀναξίως, 685), and they express pity for the dual agonies of the pain that gnaws on Philoctetes (βαρυβρῶτ', 695) and the absence of anyone to offer aid to him (701-3). The vivid description of Philoctetes' wound can only intensify their own and the audience's sympathies; finally, they anticipate optimistically that, owing to Neoptolemus' γενναῖος

²⁹⁶ On the similarities between this hymn and a paean, see Haldane (1963) 53-6. He notes that Sophocles was widely known to be an author of a number of hymns for the Cult of Asclepius: the *Suda* records *Paiānes*, and his paean to Asclepius was known at least into the second and third centuries A.D.

character (which they express here in terms of his noble lineage: ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν παιδός, 719), he will end Philoctetes' torments and return him home. However, after witnessing first-hand Philoctetes' extreme agony—a spectacle that, if anything, should have fortified their pity — they still urge Neoptolemus to seize the opportunity to abscond with the bow and complete Odysseus' deception plot:

ὦ τέκνον, ὄρα ποῦ στάση,
 ποῖ δὲ βάσῃ, πῶς δέ μοι τάντεῦθεν
 φροντίδος. Ὅρᾳς ἤδη.
 Πρὸς τί μένομεν πράσσειν;
 Καιρός τοι πάντων γνώμαν ἴσχων
 <πολύ τι> πολὺ παρὰ πόδα κράτος ἄρνυται.

Child, consider what position you take,
 and where you will step, and how there should
 be a care for me from this point on. You see him now.
 Why do we hesitate to act?
 The critical moment, the deciding judgment in all things,
 Promptly wins many, many a victory.

Philoctetes 833-8

In reply, Neoptolemus answers emphatically that he will do no such thing. He repudiates both Odysseus' reading of the prophesy of Helenus, which Odysseus interprets as requiring only the bow and not the man to be brought to Troy (840-1), and the victory-at-all-costs ethics he espoused (Κομπεῖν δ' ἔστ' ἀτελῇ σὺν ψεύδεσιν αἰσχρὸν ὄνειδος, 842).²⁹⁷ How are we to reconcile the Chorus' urging here that Neoptolemus put their and the Greeks' needs above those of Philoctetes with the compassion and pity they express at 676-729? Scholars offer a number of interpretations. Pucci urges caution because of both textual and interpretative problems, but points out how much in these lines is communicated by implication;²⁹⁸ such instances of non-verbal communication would

²⁹⁷ Whitman (1951) 176 calls this critical moment Neoptolemus' "first moment of conscious moral action."

²⁹⁸ Pucci (2003) 257: "Testo e senso sono dibattuti. Se si accetta l'idea che il Coro non approvi l'indugio di Neottolemo e il proposito di portare Filottete a Troia (Jebb, Kamerbeek), allora si intenderà: <<dio ci penserà (a come avere Filottete a Troia); rispondendomi parla voce bassa: il sonno dei malati è insonne e ha occhi. Suvvia, fai quella cosa (κεῖνο) di nascosto, quella cosa (κεῖνο: cioè prendiamo l'arco e andiamocene).

seem to indicate the closeness they still feel with Neoptolemus, in spite of their current difference of opinion. Schein detects a note of religious pragmatism, particularly in the Chorus' urging that they and Neoptolemus take what actions seem best for them and trust in the gods to deliver salvation and justice for Philoctetes (Ἀλλά, τέκνον, τάδε μὲν θεὸς ὁψεται, 843).²⁹⁹ Goldhill posits a more subversive tone still, and notes a growing tension as Neoptolemus' authority over them is called into question. He writes,

Their sententiousness is not just a bit of characterization, but also plays a role in their *performative rhetoric*; it's a step toward their working to find a place from which to try to persuade Neoptolemus of what they actually think he should do. Their language continues to be *veiled and cautious* ('You know what/whom I am talking about; if you have the same opinion of this man, it's for the wise to foresee innumerable problems,' [852-4]). This is partly because they are explicitly afraid Philoctetes will come to ('speak quietly...' [845-6]), but also because they are talking around their subordinate position and Neoptolemus' strong expression in hexameters in order to disagree with their leader.³⁰⁰

I believe that Goldhill is correct to point out the kind of rhetorical posturing and delicate choice of words in these lines, but I hesitate to read quite as much friction between the Chorus and Neoptolemus as he suggests. Rather, I suggest that they are wrestling aloud with the same dilemma that Neoptolemus has been internally, and that what reads as insubordination could merely be an articulation of some indecisiveness regarding the serious decision at hand. In addition to this, the Chorus' confidence in Neoptolemus' leadership seems reaffirmed when they twice turn to him to learn his orders on how to proceed: once at 963 (Τί δρῶμεν;)

Tu sai di chi parlo (di Filottete): se hai su di lui l'opinione che mi dici, si possono prevedere guai inestricabili>>. Ciò implica di leggere ὅν al v. 852 (dove Avezzù leggere invece ὄν, seguendo il codice laurenziano: <<tu capisci di che sto parlando>>), e ταύταν al v. 853, ma ταύτα di Dobree (<<se hai la stessa opinione che lui ha>>) dà lo stesso senso."

²⁹⁹ Schein (2013) 252.

³⁰⁰ Goldhill (2012) 126; the emphasis is my own. On 127-8 he suggests that these points where the Chorus looks to Neoptolemus for what are essentially stage directions reinforces their very dramatic role in the drama as actors in their own right.

and again at 1072-3 (Ὅδ' ἐστὶν ἡμῶν ναυκράτωρ ὁ παῖς· ὅς' ἂν| οὗτος λέγῃ σοι, ταῦτά σοι χήμειζ φάμεν).

However one chooses to interpret these lines and the unspoken nuances they contain, with the memories of a number of conspiracies still looming over Athens and especially with the recently sworn Oath of Demophantos fresh in the audience's minds, these lines must have sounded a hauntingly familiar. If nothing else, the play – and the play within the play – offers an area for expressing, performing and watching suspicious behaviors for which all Athenians present were sworn to be vigilant: men speaking in cautious tones, selecting words that appear harmless on the surface but could hold confidential meanings to listeners indoctrinated into secret factions. One result stemming from the unusually autonomous chorus Sophocles included in the *Philoctetes* is that in addition to all the traditional roles the group plays, this chorus actively participates in disturbing and frightening ethical quandaries within the recent collective experience of the audience.

Odysseus and Heracles or Odysseus as Heracles?

Before ending discussion on Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, it is worth mentioning a minority reading that has gained some traction concerning the play's somewhat puzzling conclusion. Many critics and commentators have expressed dissatisfaction with the supposedly “tacked on” final 63 lines of the play, in which Heracles appears and provides the only *deus ex machina* ending in extant Sophoclean drama.³⁰¹ Heracles demands that Philoctetes and Neoptolemus abandon their plan to return the wounded hero to his home

³⁰¹ Goldhill (2012) 120 calls the debate concerning the moral issues raised by the double ending “unresolved and probably unresolvable.”

in Oita and to go immediately to Troy (1421-30), where he will send none other than Asclepius himself to heal Philoctetes' wound (1437-8). Once there, Philoctetes is destined by the plan of Zeus (1415) to follow Heracles' own example and make his life famous (1422); to accomplish this the pair is to "guard one another, just as two lions that feed together" (ἀλλ' ὡς λέοντε συννόμω φυλάσσετον οὔτος σὲ καὶ σὺ τόνδ', 1436-7). The language Heracles uses in this statement is particularly revealing because he not only underscores the necessity and advantage of the mutual protection into which the heroes have entered, but also emphasizes through reference to the lion simile the caliber of the deeds it will allow them to accomplish together.

While this final section of the play does eventuate somewhat suddenly and unexpectedly, the individual elements that comprise it are familiar. Sophocles' depiction of a deity on stage should not give pause to any readers, as audiences would have been well accustomed to the appearance of gods on stage throughout the dramatic corpus of Aeschylus and Euripides; of course, Sophocles himself gave the opening lines of the *Ajax* to Athena without any special contrivance. Furthermore, while the *deus ex machina* staging mechanism is atypical for Sophocles, divine intervention and resolution to otherwise intractable problems may have been present in at least two other fragmentary plays: *Athamas*, once again featuring Heracles, and *Peleus* with Thetis as intervener.³⁰² Of course, readers should also take no issue with the choice of Heracles himself as the god sent to intervene and articulate the plans of Zeus, especially given tradition that the hero was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries and his status as a cult hero in Athens (as

³⁰² Schein (2013) 334. Here Schein also notes that Heracles is the only god in extant tragedy who speaks *ex machina* in anapests, making his appearance even more peculiar.

Alexikakos) and elsewhere (as *Sōtēr*).³⁰³ In addition to the strong associations between Heracles and Philoctetes encapsulated in the physical object of the bow and the act of mercy that brought it into Philoctetes' possession, as a previous sacker of Troy (1439-40), Heracles suggests that his own labors and the immortal *arête* that was his reward (διεξελθὼν πόνους ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν ἔσχον, 1419-20) should serve as a model for Philoctetes to follow in winning fame for himself by way of his own labors (1422). In Heracles' language in these lines Andrea Alessandri detects an unstated premise to both the former and coming sack of Troy at the hands of Philoctetes and the rest of the Greek army, namely that these are "cultural" victories akin to Heracles' labors involving the removal of public menaces such as monsters and antisocial malefactors.³⁰⁴

The most jarring aspect of the appearance and intervention of Heracles, then, seems to be the need for divine intervention at all.³⁰⁵ In a sense, the appearance of the god creates a sort of ethical neutrality following the failure of either the moral calculation championed by Odysseus to claim superiority or that by Philoctetes to adhere to the epic tradition. However, for the majority of readers and commenters, there simply is not any other option.³⁰⁶ Sophocles has taken all of the on-stage action and ethical questions to their logical conclusions: there is no sense that in his bitter and ardent anger Philoctetes could be persuaded by anyone to capitulate, and Neoptolemus' demonstrated ethical inconsistency suggests that he very well could act against the best interests of the civic

³⁰³ On Heracles' reputation and cult status in Athens see Greengard (1987) 90-3; cf. Schein (2011) 335.

³⁰⁴ Alessandri (2009) 120-1.

³⁰⁵ Ringer (1998) 122 notes that, "Aristophanes' parodies of Euripidean uses of the *deus* indicate that many members of an ancient audience might have had as keen an awareness of dramatic absurdity as any of their successors."

³⁰⁶ Whitman (1951) 187 is a noteworthy exception; he suggests that the appearance of Heracles might be interpreted as a dramaturgical expression of Philoctetes true, internal *aretē*.

body as a whole and keep his promise to take Philoctetes home. However, some outside force is still required to put the narrative back on its mandated track. Roisman writes, “Divine intervention not only returns the plot to its traditional course, but also establishes the proper moral hierarchy when values collide. If the play has a message, it is that human beings need the divine to know and to do what is right and to accept the fate that has been given to them.”³⁰⁷ Such a submission to the gods and recognition of their necessary role in creating long-term stability for the world and for all who live in it would certainly be in keeping with the occasion of the City Dionysia as a religious festival, as well as with Sophocles’ reputation for piety and reverence.³⁰⁸

However, as noted above, some scholars have reconsidered this view of the play’s ending and have proposed an innovative – if somewhat controversial – hypothesis. These scholars have proposed that, for a number of reasons, the divine figure speaking appearing at the end of the play should be not be understood to be Heracles himself, but instead Odysseus disguised as Heracles and finally achieving his goals by means of yet another *mise en abyme*.³⁰⁹ Proponents of this reading draw their conclusions from several pieces of evidence. First, at several points in the play where he senses that Neoptolemus’ resolve is wavering Odysseus intervenes into the action on stage. In addition to the appearance of the merchant — a role that some critics also read as Odysseus in disguise³¹⁰ — the hero twice emerges on stage to attempt to shift Neoptolemus’ ethical

³⁰⁷ Roisman (2005) 111.

³⁰⁸ On Sophocles as a reverent poet see Lesky (1983) 118. Plutarch tells us in *Numa* 4 that in about 420 BC Sophocles was awarded the honor of safeguarding a statue of Asclepius in his home while a sanctuary was being built, and as a result he himself was given a hero cult upon his death and received the name Dexion (“the Receiver” or “the Welcomer”).

³⁰⁹ The primary proponents of this view are Errandonea (1955) 122-164; Lattimore (1964) 43-5, 92 n. 35.

³¹⁰ This view is supported most favorably by Errandonea (1955), but this notion is disputed by Craik (1980) 19 n. 8 and O’Higgins (1991) 49 n. 8. Kittmer (1995) 25-6 offers a bit of middle ground between these

momentum back in the direction he favors: this occurs first at 974-5 when Neoptolemus finally gives expression to his dilemma, and then again even more forcefully when Neoptolemus is about to return the bow to Philoctetes (1222-3). These outbursts leave the sense that Odysseus lurks eavesdropping just offstage throughout the whole play, ready to correct his plot where necessary.³¹¹ Since this is the case and especially since his previous interventions were not successful, it is not difficult to imagine Odysseus making this desperate and drastic attempt to protect his endeavor — especially if the outcome will now be even better, as the bow and Philoctetes will now go to Troy.³¹²

Second, proponents of the view that a contemporary audience could have understood Heracles to be Odysseus in disguise point out that, based on the three-actor structure of Greek Tragedy, the actor who plays Odysseus must also play Heracles, as the other two actors are already on stage as Neoptolemus and Philoctetes.³¹³ In other words, on a metatheatrical level the actor who played Odysseus is now literally playing Heracles, and audience members very well may have been able to detect similarities in the vocal tones or motions between the two figures.

Third, references to Odysseus, his wily tricks, or his role in abandoning Philoctetes are conspicuously absent from Heracles' speech. This would be in perfect keeping with an Odysseus disguised as Heracles, given both Odysseus' well known

views, suggesting that even if the Merchant is not Odysseus in disguise he is still one of Odysseus' sailors in disguise and that at the very least the Merchant is a sort of "palimpsest through which we are reminded of Odysseus' control over the plot."

³¹¹ Cf. Taplin (1978) 131-3. Sophocles uses eavesdropping as a plot device in both his *Electra* and the *Ajax*; Aeschylus uses it in the *Libation Bearers*, as does Euripides in his own *Electra*.

³¹² Cf. Odysseus' assertion at 103 that Philoctetes can never be persuaded to come.

³¹³ Errandonea (1955) takes this as evidence that the Merchant is also Odysseus in disguise; cf. n. XX above.

sensitivity to the impact his words will have upon his listeners,³¹⁴ and also the risk of exposure he might incur by bringing his name to mind. Moreover, there is a note of cold practicality in Heracles' words that have an particularly Odyssean flavor, as does the anti-Achillean implication that past slights should be forgotten when there is a need for service for the common good.³¹⁵

Innovative as the hypothesis that Odysseus metatheatrically plays the role of Heracles at the end of the play, this position does need to overcome some basic but critical considerations involved in staging the scene – for instance, does the Heracles/Odysseus figure appear via the *machina*, and if he does not then how is his authority as a divine being established? Determining the viability of this reading against the more traditional (if somewhat ethically unsatisfying) divine intervention at the end of the play lies outside the scope of the present study. However, the very notion that there would be any doubt at all as to the veracity of a divine figure appearing on stage – and indeed one conjured by Sophocles with his well-established reputation for piety – plays well with the atmosphere of mistrust in contemporary Athens. For an audience keenly sensitive to secret agendas and manipulations at the hands of unscrupulous politicians, it is perhaps unsurprising that some may have viewed ordinarily trustworthy interpersonal, civic, and even theatrical conventions with suspicion.

Conclusion

³¹⁴ E.g. Odysseus' careful editing out of Agamemnon's final snub in the offer brought to Achilles by the Embassy in book nine of the *Iliad* (*Il.* 9.237-63.)

³¹⁵ Roisman (2005) 110-11.

At the time of the production of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* in 409 BC, the nerves of Athenian citizens remained extremely sensitive to any suspicion that conspirators continued to undermine secretly the city's democratic institutions. This anxiety is evidenced in part by the swearing of the Oath of Demophantos in the days just before the presentation of the play at the City Dionysia, wherein all Athenians pledged to remain extremely vigilant for any potential subterfuge at work in the city. As discussed in the pages above, the rich rewards the oath promised to anyone able to expose an active conspiracy made it more important than ever that Athenian citizens make a public display of support for the city's democracy, lest they expose themselves to the accusation that they are working to subvert it.

It was amid this atmosphere in which the audience was compelled to make sharp distinctions between those who could be trusted to remain civic allies and those who posed a threat as potential disruptors of the city's stability that the *Philoctetes* was performed. Likewise, in the play we also find a potent impulse among the *dramatis personae* to draw lines carefully between their friends and their foes. First Odysseus overtly and later Philoctetes somewhat more subtlety attempts to draw Neoptolemus into an accord which will allow them to trust one another and accomplish a task which will benefit them both – provided that Neoptolemus consent to the ethical stipulations both men require. It is noteworthy that while there are several similarities in the approaches Odysseus and Philoctetes take in their attempts to persuade Neoptolemus, there is also one important difference: Odysseus is the leader of a bona fide conspiracy comprised of himself, the chorus, the False Merchant (whatever his identity may be) and eventually Neoptolemus, whereas Philoctetes merely attempts to establish the same level of trust

with Neoptolemus which a more robust conspiracy would require. However, while both Odysseus and Philoctetes appeal to Neoptolemus' sense of γενναιότης in their attempts to persuade him, we find critical differences in the specifics of the friendship each man promises. Odysseus is eager to persuade Neoptolemus that obedience to him will eventually win them both glory, but also he does not shirk from invoking the authority he wields as Neoptolemus' elder and commanding officer. The manipulative and unapologetically cavalier treatment Neoptolemus receives from Odysseus may have recalled in the mind of the audience the machinations of the conspirators driving the coup of 411, along with all the apprehension they inspired. The friendship Philoctetes proposes, on the other hand, is one based on a more equitable sense of reciprocal protection and promotion which has more in common with the ἐταίρειαι to which many audience members likely belonged. While the mutually beneficial pact Philoctetes offers seems more appealing on the surface, Neoptolemus must wrestle with the knowledge that aiding Philoctetes in his journey home will lead to greater suffering for his fellow Greeks at Troy. As Neoptolemus navigates and wavers between fealty to Odysseus and to Philoctetes, the play creates a sense of confused allegiances through the use of double entendre and metatheatrical sequences which leaves some doubt in the mind of the audience as to Neoptolemus' trustworthiness. It is precisely this issue of trust – how it can be established, what it takes to maintain it, what are the obligations which come with it and what happens when those obligations fail to be met – that looms large in the *Philoctetes* and is of central importance to Euripides' *Orestes* performed the following year, so it is clear these questions lingered among the Athenian civic body.

CHAPTER 5: EURIPIDES' ORESTES

Chapter Synopsis: Of the three tragedies under examination in this study, the poetics of conspiracy and the contemplation of the trust which makes conspiracies possible figures most prominently into Euripides' Orestes. This chapter begins with a brief synopsis of the mythology surrounding the fall of the House of Atreus, with emphasis on the depiction in several sources of the conspiracy Orestes, Pylades, and Electra devise in the plot to assassinate Clytemnestra. Next, after a summary of the play's major plot points I discuss elements of metatheater at work in the text and I consider the ways in which Euripides' presentation of internal actors and directors complicates our reading of the play as a whole. With this groundwork established, I turn next to the play's complex network of interpersonal relationships. First I examine the bond of trust Orestes and Electra enjoy based both on their shared noble heritage (γενναιότης) and on their complicity in their mother's murder. Then, I discuss Menelaus' refusal to lend support to his nephew and niece in spite of their familial connection, in favor of a more politically expedient course of action urged by Tyndareus. It is after this point in the text that conspiracies come front-and-center on stage, and, in the remainder of the chapter, I explore the three which emerge in depth. First, Orestes and Pylades concoct a plot which seeks to stave off their execution by moving the assembly of Argos to pity for the woes of the House of Atreus. Unfortunately, their efforts are counteracted by a second conspiracy undertaken by Tyndareus: in the so-called "Courtroom Scene" his henchman rises to condemn Orestes by reciting a prosecution authored by Tyndareus himself. Finally, in a last desperate effort to achieve σωτηρία Orestes, Pylades, Electra, and the Chorus formulate a plot to assassinate Helen and come very close to doing so, but for the deus ex machina intervention of Apollo. In all three of these conspiracies I give close scrutiny to the ways in which the participants establish trust among one another and seek σωτηρία for themselves and the people they deem worthy of their protection.

Introduction

Euripides' *Orestes* was a popular play in antiquity. It was first staged in 408 BC, shortly before Euripides' departure from Athens.³¹⁶ However, following the poet's death in 406 BC, the play underwent a numerous revivals throughout the Mediterranean.³¹⁷ The widespread interest the play generated is evidenced by the broad library circulation of its text in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, which is documented in twenty-five papyri

³¹⁶ On the "intellectual exodus" of Euripides, Agathon, Timotheus, Choerilus, and Zeuxis, cf. Aelian *Varia Historia* 14.13. Gregory (2005) 253 follows Easterling (1994) 79-80 in taking this exodus as "indicative of tragedy's undiminished popularity and increasing geographical diffusion" in the late fifth and early fourth centuries.

³¹⁷ The possibility of later actors' interpolations has been much debated by editors. For a summary see Willink (1986) lxii.

dating from the third through sixth centuries AD, in addition to numerous quotations and allusions in subsequent ancient literature.³¹⁸ The *Orestes* was included in a collection of Euripidean works and accompanying scholia gathered at some point in the second century AD, though the most complete manuscript is preserved as part of the five “old” manuscripts dated prior to 1204 AD.³¹⁹ The other plays accompanying the *Orestes* in its tetralogy are unknown, although Müller suggested the possibility that this play was a proto-satyric production following Euripides’ staging of the *Hypsipyle*, *Phoenissae*, and *Antiope*.³²⁰ However, there is more widespread judgement that the play was staged as part of a more traditional tetralogy in the City Dionysia of 408 BC, even if the other plays accompanying it cannot be securely determined.

The plot of Euripides’ *Orestes* provides an innovative conclusion to the well-established mythology surrounding the House of Atreus.³²¹ Let us note a common version of the mythology that seems to serve as background to our play. Generations of religious pollution begin with Tantalus, who attempted to test the omniscience of the gods by serving them the flesh of his own son, Pelops, at a feast. For his impertinence the gods cast Tantalus into Tartarus and blighted him with an eternally unquenchable hunger and thirst. To Pelops and his wife Hippodamia were born Atreus and Thyestes, who came to conflict over possession of a golden lamb and the sovereignty over Argos which the lamb symbolized. Later, upon learning of an adulterous relationship between his wife, Aerope, and Thyestes, Atreus murdered his brother’s children and tricked Thyestes into eating

³¹⁸ Medda (2014) 447.

³¹⁹ We know of manuscripts later than these as well, most notably the “Byzantine Triad” containing the *Orestes*, *Hecuba*, and *Phoenissae*. See Diggle (1991) on the manuscript tradition.

³²⁰ Müller (1984) 67 makes this suggestion based on his reading of the scholiast at *Ar. Ran.* 53a.

³²¹ On the mythology of the Orestes and the House of Atreus, cf. *RE* 2140-43; *LIMC* III 17-28 and VII 68-76; Graves (1988) 106.2, 111-114; Gantz (1993) 545-50.

their cooked flesh. Another of Thyestes' sons, Aegisthus, murdered Atreus in vengeance, but not before Atreus and Aerope produced Agamemnon and Menelaus, who married the daughters of Tyndareus, Clytemnestra and Helen respectively. Upon Helen's abduction to Troy, Agamemnon led the Achaean expedition to lay siege to the city; however, the army became stranded at Aulis by unfavorable winds *en route*. Agamemnon tricked Clytemnestra into bringing their daughter, Iphigeneia, to Aulis, whom he sacrificed to the gods to secure their favor for a safe passage to Troy.

The immediate background of the plot of the *Orestes* is the familiar narrative of Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon upon his return from Troy, eventually followed by her own slaughter at the hands of her son Orestes. This mythological sequence – Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra – is fruitful material for representation in tragic poetry, and is treated by all three of the surviving major tragic playwrights.³²² The action of the *Orestes* picks up at a point following the events depicted by Euripides in his earlier work *Electra*,³²³ in which he treated Orestes' return from Phocis with Pylades, his reunion with Electra, and the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Although the point of departure for the plot of the *Orestes* is this well-established mythology, all of the events that follow in the play are a completely novel invention by Euripides. In the remainder of this section, I will trace the play's basic plot points, which are treated in greater detail later in this chapter.

³²² Cf. Allen-Hornblower (2015) 199-201 on the varying treatment of this mythological episode offered by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as a convenient point of departure for comparing and contrasting the general style of the three poets. However, on the many difficulties involved in determining the definitions of each author's "style," cf. Rutherford (2012) 4-16.

³²³ Cf. Luschnig (2014) 379-80. The dating of Euripides' *Electra* remains a disputed matter, though sometime between 422 and 413 BC is generally accepted and many find the years close to 415 BC most likely.

The action of the *Orestes* opens six days after the murder of Clytemnestra, and the divine aid promised by Apollo has yet to materialize (39-45). Orestes lies unconscious on stage as Electra watches over him, singing of his maladies and their family history; her words inform the audience of the assembly to be held on that day to decide her and her brother's fate, and she hopes urgently that Menelaus will arrive and intervene on their behalf (σωθῶμεν, 70, on which see below). Helen soon arrives (71) and asks Electra to take a lock of hair and a vessel containing funeral libations and offer them at her sister Clytemnestra's tomb. Helen offers persuasive reasons why she cannot go herself — each of which is generated from the shame (αἰσχύνομαι, 98; αἰδῶς, 101) she feels for her role in the Trojan War. Instead, Electra persuades her to send her own daughter, Hermione (107).³²⁴ The *parodos* immediately follows, and the chorus of Argive women loudly inquires of Orestes' health as Electra beseeches them to let her brother sleep in peace (145-6, 170-3).

When Orestes awakens (211) Electra informs him of Menelaus' impending arrival; however, this conversation is interrupted as Orestes succumbs to a fit of madness induced by the Erinyes who appear to him (255-75), whom he drives off with a (real or imaginary) bow.³²⁵ After the Chorus sings a prayer to the Erinyes in the First Stasimon (316-47) the second scene opens with the arrival of Menelaus (348). Orestes rises from his couch and supplicates him (382), and after a long stichomythia in which Orestes

³²⁴ On this characteristically Euripidean "second scene" of the prologue, see Willink (1989) 93-4 and below.

³²⁵ On the textual and interpretive controversies surrounding Orestes' use of the bow and whether the actor would have had a physical prop or would have pantomimed the action, see Kovacs (2002) 278-82. Here he offers fairly persuasive evidence that a physical prop would have been used, a point that makes the scene all the more reminiscent of the one in the *Philoctetes* (cf. 730-81 in particular). Conversely, Mueller (2016) 85 suggests that "the bow remains of figment of Orestes' diseased imagination."

describes his crime, his condition, and the upcoming vote to determine his punishment, he attempts to persuade Menelaus to offer his support through repeated appeals to obligations of *φιλία* (on which, see below). Orestes' pleas might well have been successful, but at this point Tyndareus enters (470) and accuses Orestes of sacrilege (*άνόσιον*, 482). Tyndareus declares that it is best for the city if Orestes and Electra are persecuted (*άμυνῶ δ' ὅσονπερ δυνατός εἰμι τῶι νόμῳ,| τὸ θηριῶδες τοῦτο καὶ μαιφόνον| παύων, ὃ καὶ γῆν καὶ πόλεις ὄλλυσ' αἰεί*, 523-5), and warns Menelaus not to harm the city for the sake of helping one man before the eyes of the gods (*τοῖσιν θεοῖς| μὴ πρᾶσσ' ἐναντί', ὠφελεῖν τοῦτον θέλων,| ἔα δ' ὑπ' ἄστῶν καταφονευθῆναι πέτροις*, 534-6). Menelaus claims that even though he should help Orestes (684-5), he does not have the physical (691-2) or persuasive (693-704) ability to do so. Just as Menelaus leaves the stage Pylades arrives, and Orestes quickly comprehends the advantages of combining their efforts to save his and Electra's lives by forming a conspiracy (e.g. {Op.} *εἶέν· ἐς κοινὸν λέγειν χρή*, 774) with his former accomplice.

Following the Third Stasimon in which Electra and the chorus lament the sufferings of the house of Atreus, a Messenger arrives claiming to have witnessed the proceedings in the assembly. The news he bears is not good: Tyndareus, by way of a co-conspirator he has sent to speak in his stead (915), convinces the council that Orestes and Electra must die, though they are granted the somewhat backhanded concession that they be allowed to commit suicide (947). When Orestes and Pylades return, the brother and sister are prepared to resign themselves to their fates (1035), but Pylades persuades them to conspire in a plot aimed at taking what vengeance they can against Menelaus (*ἐς κοινούς λόγους/ ἔλθωμεν, ὥς ἂν Μενέλεως συνδυστυχῇ*, 1098-9). At first Orestes and

Pylades hatch a plot to take vengeance by murdering Helen (1105), and later Electra — sensing that she is being left out of the conspiracy — suggests that they add a measure of security (σωτηρίαν, 1178) by kidnapping Hermione and holding her hostage. Orestes and Pylades agree to the plan, and Electra incorporates the Chorus into the conspiracy as well (1246-85).

As I shall discuss below, the formation of this conspiracy has much in common with the performance of drama: Orestes and Pylades carefully script the assassination of Helen, and Electra meticulously places members of the chorus in her preferred positions around the stage, instructing what they must sing (1246-65, 1316-20). At an inopportune moment Hermione returns from Clytemnestra's tomb, and her unexpected arrival puts the plan in jeopardy. To preserve the secrecy of the plot underway, Electra offers further stage direction to the chorus members (1313-18) and describes the persona she will adopt in addressing Hermione (1319-20). She persuades Hermione that the cries coming from within the palace are laments for the council's decision that Orestes must die, and Hermione is instantly captured by Orestes and Pylades, as the Chorus sings and stomps its feet (1353-65) to mask the shrieks coming from within. Menelaus returns, saying that he has heard of the violence going on within the palace; when he threatens to force his way inside, Orestes appears upon the roof holding a sword to Hermione's throat (1575). Menelaus attempts to negotiate the release of his daughter and the return of Helen's body; but when this effort fails owing to the inability of the two men to trust one another (ψευδῆς ἔφυς, 1608), Orestes commands Electra to set fire to the palace (1618). At this climactic moment Apollo and Helen appear *ex machina*, and the former orders that the violence cease immediately. He explains that Helen is to be deified (1633-37), Orestes

must go into exile for one year and then stand trial at the Areopagus in Athens, and (in an attempt to put a decisive end to the conflict) Orestes is to marry Hermione³²⁶ while Pylades is to marry Electra (1653-9).

The Metatheatrics of the *Orestes*

There are a handful of noteworthy interpretative approaches that scholars have used in studying the *Orestes*. One avenue of critical approach to the study of the *Orestes* has been a structural one, dividing it into three distinct movements, over the course of which all of the characters (Orestes and Electra in particular) undergo drastic transformations.³²⁷ Other scholars read the play as Euripides' effort to question the value of commonly held virtues (such as *φιλία*) by rendering Orestes as little more than an antisocial maniac: once the action concocted by this conspiracy of three is underway, there is a sense that the negativity which had been building reaches critical mass and bursts upon the stage, and that the attempted murder of Helen is staged as something of a poor reenactment of the murder of Clytemnestra, in this case undertaken without any divine endorsement.³²⁸ Others still have the sense that Euripides has, in an act of "heroic

³²⁶ The more traditional story was that Hermione had been offered to Orestes by Tyndareus prior to the start of the Trojan War, but that while on the expedition Menelaus promised her to Neoptolemus instead. However, once Neoptolemus is dead, Hermione is once again available to marry Orestes. On the variations in the tradition, see Stevens (1984) 1-5. Willink (1986) 355 suggests that Neoptolemus is mentioned here by name (1655) because, "the marriage of Hermione to Neoptolemus was perhaps too widely reported to be ignored altogether; and the recent prominence of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (where he is sympathetically treated) will have been extra reason for reasserting the usual tradition hostile to Neoptolemus."

³²⁷ Cf. Medda (2014) 449.

³²⁸ E.g. Debnar (2005) 19-20, Hartigan (1987) 130-2, Schein (1975) 54-5, and Parry (1969) 340. Cf. also Greenberg (1962) 160: "[T]he murder of Clytemnestra is justified or rationalized solely on the grounds that Apollo commanded it, and yet in the sequel the same trio of agents attempt another murder for which the pointed absence of Apollo from 1098 to 1625 allows no such justification."

inversion,”³²⁹ grafted the world of contemporary Athens upon the world of mythology in order to highlight the contrast between the two.

However, a particularly useful perspective for the present study is the one articulated by critics who note the extent to which the *Orestes* is an extremely self-conscious play which contemplates metatheatrical elements arising from the characters’ shifting identities.³³⁰ Zeitlin, for one, writes that within the play “the repertory of tragedy and epic provides, as it were, a closet of masks for the actors to raid at will, characters in search of an identity, of a part to play.”³³¹ She suggests further that, in the absence of Apollo to guide the action of the narrative, Orestes himself becomes the *de facto* playwright, determining what version of his story the audience will witness. To this notion, I add that one should note the amount and specific kind of guidance Pylades offers Orestes when he arrives on stage. Pylades is, after all, just as complicit by association in the murder of Clytemnestra (thus his exile from Phocis at the hands of his father, 765-7) as is Orestes and Apollo;³³² he promises to alleviate Orestes’ sickness if it should overtake him in public (790-5), just as Apollo otherwise promises to do at Delphi;³³³ and when Orestes stands trial (such as it is, 866-955) Pylades stands by him,

³²⁹ This is a term coined by Allan in his Cambridge introduction to Euripides’ *Helen*. He writes at (2008) 7 that, “it would be more accurate [than Patricia Easterling’s notion of ‘heroic vagueness’] to speak of *heroic inversion*, since in *Orestes*, as elsewhere in tragedy (and not only in Euripides), we are shown repeatedly how fifth-century Athenian norms do not work in a heroic setting — yet the point is not that Athens is a failure, but that the excessive and dangerous figures of heroic myth are the problem.”

³³⁰ E.g. Ringer (1998).

³³¹ Zeitlin (1980) 69.

³³² Cf. Aesch. *Chor.* 269-305, *Eum.* 579-80.

³³³ Cf. Aesch. *Chor.* Even without the specific language of healing in these lines, the emphasis it places on the rehabilitating properties of physical touch between the sick and the healthy ({Ορ.} δυσχερὲς ψάειν νοσοῦντος ἀνδρός. {Πυ.} οὐκ ἔμοιγε σοῦ, 791) is strongly reminiscent of the “sickness scene” (730-843) between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, and thus Pylades can be taken as a similar kind of healing partner offering to Orestes a “therapeutic touch,” as explored in depth by Jennifer Clarke Kosak (cf. 1999 100 in particular).

just as Apollo does in the *Eumenides*.³³⁴ The interpretation that Pylades and Orestes both at certain points seem to have adopted a role in the drama more traditionally belonging to the god only reinforces Zeitlin's reading of the play as a staging of characters whose identities are not rigidly bound to their mythological prototypes. The typically nurturing and nourishing Electra of the play's opening adopts an authority allowing her to marshal the Chorus like a general on a battlefield once the plot she helped mastermind is underway; Orestes abandons his diseased and tormented persona for one vigorous enough to attack the palace of Argos, nearly slaughter Helen, and climb to the roof with Hermione as his hostage; Pylades takes his traditional support of Orestes' actions to a sociopathic extreme, to the extent that he insists upon joining Orestes in death (1091). It is as if these three in forming a conspiracy are simultaneously building a script and casting themselves for a bizarre reproduction of their own *Oresteia*, the events of which they have just recently experienced for themselves. As Greenberg writes, "The central irony of the play, drawn with telling artistry, is that the same killers who claim that the fault is solely Apollo's can bring themselves to commit a most similar murder without that excuse."³³⁵

I argue that staging these figures in the act of conspiring to reenact their murderous vengeance in this way invites members of the audience to find points of similarity between the performances of actors in a drama and the civic contexts and institutions within which conspiracies operate. As Wohl and others have suggested, the political context of 408 BC has a crucial impact on the plot of the *Orestes*: just as civic

³³⁴ Aesch. *Eum.* 580-680.

³³⁵ Cf. Greenberg (1962) 162-3, who develops this notion as first proposed by Perrotta (1928) 89-138.

institutions were eschewed in the turbulent chaos of the coup of 411 BC, in this play the Argive assembly – populated by members eager to adopt the violent counsel of Tyndareus’ puppet demagogue – performs the judiciary function more proper to the Aeschylean Areopagus.³³⁶ The inadequacy of the δῆμος to contemplate the complex issues of culpability in the matricide responsibly is a theme that finds expression at a number of points in the drama (on which, see below), as is their tendency to be persuaded to extreme action by the performance of an orator speaking on behalf of a latent conspiracy.³³⁷ And yet, Orestes, Pylades, and Electra are not merely victims of the ineptitude of the δῆμος – their own extremity and ethical inconsistency certainly exacerbates the dire situation in which they find themselves. In the pages which follow, I examine the ways in which precisely this predilection for zealotry – be that toward violent outbursts or devotion to one another – which binds them to one another as trustworthy co-conspirators.

Orestes and Electra: γενναϊότης and Pity

Having contemplated some of the performative elements at work in the conspiracies depicted in this play, I turn now to the ways in which the conspiracies are formed (or, fail to be formed) and the elements of social performance this process requires. From its very outset, Euripides’ *Orestes* is a play centered upon definitions of nobility and the obligations which must be shouldered by those claiming to possess it. At some points these questions are articulated in terms of γενναϊότης and its cognates (e.g.

³³⁶ Wohl (2015) 119, following Arrowsmith (1963) 47: “...the world of the *Orestes* is indistinguishable from the culture in convulsion described by Thucydides [3.82-3]; point for point, Euripides and Thucydides confirm each other...I am tempted to see in this play Euripides’ apocalyptic vision of the final destruction of Athens and Hellas.” Cf. also Euben (1986) 222, Porter (1994) 1-44, and Medda (2015) 448.

³³⁷ Cf. Rosenbloom (2011) 431 on the challenge the play poses to both the political order of democracy and the authoritative version of the Orestes mythology.

784, 815, 954, 1060 – all discussed below) in precisely the same way in which Sophocles rendered them in the *Philoctetes*; at other points they are considered through different terms (such as strictly εὐγένεια)³³⁸ or simply by way of reference to the tribulations of the House of Atreus. However, there are some surprising elements as well: the first ten lines, for instance, present a mixture of the traditional narrative strands of the mythology of the house of Pelops alongside some of the innovations and topical language which will be present throughout the rest of the play.³³⁹ It is revealing that the very first line, in which Electra begins her contemplation on her noble lineage, contains the word δεινὸν because the play does indeed have in store for the audience a number of “shocking” moments.³⁴⁰ More revealing, however, is the language Electra uses to describe her ancestor Tantalus. She tells us that, owing to the excellence with which Tantalus was engendered, he was “godlike” (ὁ γὰρ μακάριος (κοῦκ ὀνειδίζω τύχας)| Διὸς πεφυκώς, ὡς λέγουσι, Τάνταλος, 4-5),³⁴¹ and he was of an equal rank with the gods at their shared table (ὅτι θεοῖς ἄνθρωπος ὢν,| κοινῇ τραπέζῃς ἄξιωμ' ἔχων ἴσον, 8-9). She turns then to their present generation, and she draws a strong parallel between Tantalus and Orestes: like his ancestor, wretched Orestes (τλήμων Ὀρέστης, 35)³⁴² has been infected with a savage

³³⁸ E.g. *Or.* 784, 954, 1676. The *LSJ* notes that εὐγένεια and γενναιότης are virtually synonymous.

³³⁹ In typical Euripidean fashion, the opening lines of the play (1-70) serve a programmatic function of identifying the premises upon which the remainder of the drama draw and articulating some of the themes that are forthcoming. For a classic study of the formal elements of Euripides' *parodoi*, cf. Grube (1941) 63-8. For more recent treatments, cf. Allan (2008) 143-4 (who notes Aristophanes' parody of Euripides' typical *parodos* at *Frogs* 1117-1250 and *Thesm.* 855-68) and Rutherford (2012) 218-19. Cf. Willink (1985) 78.

³⁴⁰ The word δεινὸν and its cognates occur 17 times over the course of the play. On the ambiguity the term creates in lines 1-3, cf. Willink (1985) 78, and, on its applicability to each member of the House of Atreus, cf. West (1987) 179.

³⁴¹ On the forensic color of the parenthetical disclaimer (κοῦκ ὀνειδίζω τύχας) for one publically (cf. 26-7, 85) describing the transgressions of an ancestor, see Willink (1986) 81 and Eur. *Helen* 393. On the somewhat peculiar use of the verb ὀνειδίζω see West (1987) 180.

³⁴² The term τλήμων is a fairly common adjective in tragic poetry, but its thematic force in this play is noteworthy especially given the wide range of meanings it can carry – from “steadfast/stout-hearted” (e.g. *Il.* 10.231) to “reckless” (e.g. Soph. *El.* 275) to “wretched” (e.g. Soph. *Phil.* 161). In this play it is applied

disease (ἀγρία συντακεῖς νόσῳ νοσεῖ, 34)³⁴³ in spite of his (from her perspective) noble and dutiful character.³⁴⁴

Nobility, the play suggests, does not absolve the noble from suffering – but it can serve as a guideline for determining the points of common interest between people which allow them to establish bonds of trust, a crucial step in the formation of any conspiracy. The inherent nobility of Orestes and its incongruity with the misery he suffers (and the actions he undertakes) in the play is a complicated issue. It is a paradox to which the chorus gives voice in the second choral ode (807-43), as it contemplates both the biological and civic components of nobility:

{Χο.} ὁ μέγας ὄλβος ἃ τ' ἀρετὰ
μέγα φρονούσ' ἀν' Ἑλλάδα καὶ
παρὰ Σιμωνντίοις ὀχετοῖς
πάλιν ἀνῆλθ' ἐξ εὐτυχίας Ἀτρείδαις
πάλιν παλαιᾶς ἀπὸ συμφορᾶς δόμων,
ὅποτε χρυσέας ἔρις ἀρ-
νὸς ἱῆλυθεῖ Τανταλίδαις
οἰκτρότατα θοινάματα καὶ
σφάγια **γενναίων τεκέων**
ὄθεν πόνῳ πόνος ἐξαμεί-
βων δι' αἵματος οὐ προλεί-
πει δισσοῖσιν Ἀτρείδαις.

Ch: Great wealth and excellence,
thinking great thoughts throughout Hellas
and by the Simonian streams,
have been reversed from the good fortune for the Atreidae
from the age-old woes of the house,
when strife over a golden lamb
came to the Tantalids,
the most lamentable feasts and
slaughter of **noble children**,

to Orestes six times (35, 74, 293, 845, 947, 1334) and also to Electra (852), Troy (1391), Clytemnestra (1493) and to Helen (1613). Cf. Pucci (1987) 46-9.

³⁴³ On ἀγρία and its connotations of “wildness” as a pervasive theme throughout the play, see Boulter (1962) 102-6.

³⁴⁴ There are notable similarities between the maladies of Orestes and Philoctetes in Sophocles’ play. The afflictions of both are called ἄγριος (*Phil.* 173, *Or.* 34), both pass in and out of consciousness (*Phil.* 820-67, *Or.* 1-211), and neither are able to consume an adequate amount of sustenance to fight the disease (*Phil.* 186, *Or.* 41). There is also the possibility that both are in possession of a bow (*Phil.* 763, *Or.* 268), but whether we should read Orestes’ bow as a real prop or as imaginary remains controversial (on which cf. Kovacs [2002] 278-82).

from which cause woe in exchange for woe
runs without end through the blood
of the twofold House of Atreus.

Orestes 807-18

Here the Chorus gives voice to a question contemplated throughout the play: should nobility and the ethical mandates which accompany it be determined by the loftiness of a person's birth or the virtue of their actions? The opening lines of the ode make reference to the elements of the nobility of the House of Atreus visible in the civic sphere: their great prosperity (μέγας ὄλβος, 807) and reputation for thinking great thoughts (ἄ τ' ἀρετὰ| μέγα φρονοῦσ', 807-8) are a testament to their aristocratic excellence.³⁴⁵ The closing lines of this section reiterate the genealogical strands that connect Agamemnon and Menelaus to the nobility of their ancestor Atreus and the age-old woe that generations of their family have endured (παλαιᾶς ἀπὸ συμφορᾶς δόμων, 811). The Chorus' comment on the fate of the sons of Thyestes (οἰκτρότατα θοινάματα καὶ| σφάγια γενναίων τεκέων, 814-15) could quite easily apply to the paradox of Orestes' nobility: in spite of the aspects of his γενναιότης which elevate him individually to aristocratic status – the relentless drive to seek vengeance for his father, for instance – the γενναιότης of the house into which he was born marks him for inescapable suffering. As we shall see in what follows, this very paradox between the assumed virtues of nobility and the miserly behavior of people who lay claim to them – an incongruity between *being* γενναῖος and failing to act like it – is a central component to all of the conspiracy which arise in the play.

It must be kept in mind that throughout the play the γενναιότης of Electra – a key player in the conspiracy to be formed – is at issue as well, and in this regard Helen serves

³⁴⁵ On μέγα φρονοῦσ' as an expression of ἀρετή, cf. *Il.* 11.296 (αὐτὸς δ' ἐν πρώτοισι μέγα φρονέων ἐβεβήκει), as well as Eur. *Phoen.* 672-3 (σιδαρόφρων...φόνος), and fr. 303 (ὑπέρφρονά τ' ὄλβον).

as a convenient counter-example. The depiction of Helen in this play is a complex issue, especially following Euripides' favorable characterization of her in his *Helen* six years earlier.³⁴⁶ Her treatment is an important element to the plot because, regardless of her culpability for the loss of so many heroes at Troy,³⁴⁷ it is essential that she strike a positive chord (or at least not an entirely negative one)³⁴⁸ with the audience so that Euripides might be able to generate shock and sympathy for her when she faces the murderous violence of Orestes and Pylades, thereby underscoring the viciousness of their assassination plot. In lamenting the death of her sister and the present suffering of her nephew, Helen expresses a plausible neutrality (ὦ μέλεος, ἡ τεκοῦσά θ' ὥς διώλετο, 90), and confesses her shame at appearing in public even for the purpose of performing funerary rites for Clytemnestra (δεῖξαι γὰρ Ἀργείοισι σῶμ' αἰσχύνομαι, 98). By contrast, Electra's unbridled invective offers a glimpse of the aggression that will only intensify by the drama's end. As Hermione departs to pour libations at Clytemnestra's tomb, Electra's curses become particularly scathing:

ὦ φύσις, ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὥς μέγ' εἶ κακόν
 [σωτήριόν τε τοῖς καλῶς κεκτημένοις].
 ἴδετε γὰρ ἄκρας ὥς ἀπέθρισεν τρίχας,
 σώιζουσα κάλλος· ἔστι δ' ἡ πάλαι γυνή.
 θεοί σε μισήσειαν, ὥς μ' ἀπώλεσας
 καὶ τόνδε πᾶσάν θ' Ἑλλάδ'.

Oh human nature, what a great evil you are for men,
 [but a salvation for those having acquired it well].
 for behold how she [Helen] clipped the tips of her hair,
 preserving her beauty. She is the old woman still.
 May the gods hate you, since you have ruined me
 and all of Hellas!

Orestes 126-31

³⁴⁶ Cf. Allan (2008) 18-28.

³⁴⁷ Helen herself blames her transgression on a “god-sent madness” (θεομανεῖ πότμωι, 79).

³⁴⁸ Some critics, such as Greenberg (1962) 162, do not read Helen in a necessarily negative light, but instead find her merely “vain, self-centered, and superficial,” and thereby underserving of an assassination plot. The fact that the play ends with her apotheosis lends credibility to this view.

Line 127 – [σωτήριόν τε τοῖς καλῶς κεκτημένοις] – has troubled textual critics and some have argued that it is likely to be an interpolation.³⁴⁹ Still, if we assume for the moment that the line is genuine then it reiterates one of the points the play contemplates throughout: human nature, Electra insists, can only be a source of great evil among the general population (ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὡς μέγ' εἶ κακόν, 126), but that same nature when in the possession of someone engendered with nobility can be a σωτήριόν (127).³⁵⁰ Determining which citizens have the ability to use their φύσις to provide safety for those who do not is key to designating who should be eligible for entry into any conspiracy's circle of trust.

Furthermore, these lines offer an implicit complication of Electra's seemingly straightforward link between nobility and safety that present a difficult challenge for those hoping to establish trust on the basis of shared nobility. For the occasion of her return from Troy, Helen has enhanced her traditionally exceptional beauty with a new hairstyle in an effort to preserve her beauty (ἴδετε γὰρ ἄκρας ὡς ἀπέθρισεν τρίχας,| σώιζουσα κάλλος, 128-9) and perhaps to deflect the ire of people throughout Greece for the destruction her beauty has caused.³⁵¹ However, Electra is not deluded by Helen's appearance (ἔστι δ' ἡ πάλαι γυνή, 129): Helen may have been born beautiful, but her beauty masks the same evil that brought terrible destruction to the Argives and the

³⁴⁹ Cf. Willink (1986) 102, who approves of motions for excision by Klinkenberg and Di Benedetto. For schemata on this conventional archaic sentiment, cf. Figueira (1995) 47-9.

³⁵⁰ On the theme of salvation in the first episode of the play and its sustained affect throughout see Wohl (2015) 121-2.

³⁵¹ On the difficulty of determining to whom Electra is directing this observation, cf. Croally (1994) 242 and Bain (1975) 19.

Trojans. Electra perceives that Helen remains a καλὸν κακὸν³⁵² figure and implies the necessity of making a distinction between the appearance of nobility and the actual possession of it.

However, questions concerning the noble qualities (both genetic and ethical) of the figures on display in the drama contemplate more than their value for the machinations of conspiracies they may join; they extend to considerations of their value as citizens and as human beings. For instance, later in the play the Messenger reporting the proceedings and verdict of the Argive assembly also makes reference to the same incongruity between the different elements that make Electra noble, though in this case the term εὐγένεια is used to reference her nobility:

ἀλλ' εὐτρέπιζε φάσγαν' ἢ βρόχον δέρηι,
ὥς δεῖ λιπεῖν σε φέγγος· ἡὐγένεια δὲ
οὐδέν σ' ἐπωφέλησεν, οὐδ' ὁ Πύθιον
τρίποδα καθίζων Φοῖβος, ἀλλ' ἀπώλεσεν.

Prepare the sword or the noose for your neck
since it is necessary for you to leave the light. Your nobility
has aided you nothing, nor has Pythian Phoebus
sitting on his tripod, but rather he has destroyed you.

Orestes 953-6

On the one hand, it is unsurprising the Messenger uses the term εὐγένεια in favor of γενναῖος, as the Messenger is perhaps speaking in literal terms of the quality of her lineage. On the other hand, qualifying εὐγένεια as a gendered term fails to account for a point earlier in the play where Pylades applies it to Orestes: as Orestes contemplates attending the Argive assembly to plead his case, he hopes that his presence may arouse pity in some of the assemblymen:

³⁵² On the καλὸν κακὸν archetype, cf. Hesiod *Th.* 585 in reference to Pandora; as applied to Helen cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 680-736 and Blondell (2010) 349-91.

{Op.} καί τις ἄν γέ μ' οἰκτίσειε ... {Pu.} μέγα γὰρ ἡγένηιά σου.
 {Op.} θάνατον ἀσχάλλων πατρῷον. {Pu.} πάντα ταῦτ' ἐν ὄμμασιν.

{Or.} And someone might take pity on me... {Py.} Indeed, your noble birth is great.
 {Or.} ... grieved at my father's death. {Py.} All of this is obvious.³⁵³

Orestes 784-5

Appealing to the citizens' empathy seems a sound strategy, given Menelaus' earlier observation that the assembly – and by extension, the δῆμος a whole – oscillates between anger (ὀργήν, 696) and pity (οἶκτος, 702).³⁵⁴ However, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that in this play nobility and pity are inextricably linked in ways that go far beyond what Menelaus suggests. As the drama progresses and both the obligations and limitations which Orestes' γενναιότης places upon him become ever more pressing, there emerges a sense that nobility and pity are inextricably linked in a way reminiscent of Aristotle's observation that witnessing the fall of "excellent people" to severe misfortune arouses particularly strong emotions of pity (καὶ μάλιστα τὸ σπουδαίους εἶναι ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις καιροῖς ὄντας ἐλεεινόν, *Rh.* 1386b4-5).³⁵⁵ Indeed, the failure of the δῆμος in the assembly to yield to the pity aroused by Orestes' fall from nobility into calamity frustrates the expectation of leniency he expresses in line 784 and exacerbates his homicidal backlash.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ Kovacs (2002) 499 translates the rather peculiar expression πάντα ταῦτ' ἐν ὄμμασιν as "I can see that happening." Willink (1986) 208 comments that the formula seems odd, "since hypothetical thoughts and emotions in other people's minds can scarcely be described, even in exaggerated metaphor, as 'in view,'" though he does cite a parallel at Aesch. *Pers.* 604. Whatever the best way to render the expression may be, for the present purposes Pylades' point seems to be that Orestes' suggestion seems a sound plan: that he try to win over the assembly by appealing to the pity arising from the fall of a man so noble as he.

³⁵⁴ On the antidemocratic sentiments in these lines and elsewhere in the play, see below.

³⁵⁵ On Aristotle's formulation that a misanthropic failure to recognize nobility in other people leads a person to cause indiscriminate injury and harm, cf. *Rh.* 1385b34-86a1.

³⁵⁶ Rosenbloom (2011) 428 suggests that the failure of the δῆμος to yield to their pity is a key factor motivating Orestes' violent response to their verdict. While I do not believe that it can be denied that the treatment Orestes receives in the assembly is a contributing factor, I hesitate to place quite so much emphasis on it because doing so eschews several other equally important factors driving his violent impulses (discussed at length below) – the readiness for bloodshed he displayed in the matricide, his

While this failure of the δῆμος to award him the pity he expects exacerbates his agitation, Orestes' transition from condemned criminal to rampaging assassin is not immediate and direct, and in fact results from his own failure to live up to the expectations of the δῆμος that he will abide by the assembly's decree. In the process of this transition, one of the primary questions the play contemplates comes to the fore: namely, what are the traits which distinguish a person as γενναῖος and what are the obligations which govern a noble person's public behavior? As discussed above at points in both the *Phoenissae* (e.g. 997-1005) and in the *Philoctetes* (e.g. 49-53), here we find another point where a tragic figure is driven to extreme measures by the constraints imposed by their nobility. Orestes is at first resigned to his fate; he states explicitly that he intends to end his life in a way worthy of a γενναῖος man and Agamemnon's house, and he urges Electra to do the same:

οὐδ' ὅμμι' ἔδειξεν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ σκήπτροις ἔχων
 τὴν ἐλπίδ' ἠύλαβεῖτο μὴ **σώιζειν** φίλους.
 ἀλλ' εἴ' ὅπως **γενναῖα** κάγαμέμνονος
 δράσαντε κατθανούμεθ' ἀξιότατα.
 κἀγὼ μὲν **εὐγένειαν** ἀποδείξω πόλει,
 παίσας πρὸς ἥπαρ φασγάνῳ· σὲ δ' αὖ χρεὼν
 ὅμοια πράσσειν τοῖς ἐμοῖς τολμήμασιν.
 Πυλάδῃ, σὺ δ' ἡμῖν τοῦ φόνου γενοῦ βραβεύς,
 καὶ κατθανόντοιν εὖ περίστειλον δέμας
 θάψον τε κοινῇ πρὸς πατρός τύμβον φέρων.
 καὶ χαῖρ'· ἐπ' ἔργον δ', ὥς ὀρᾷς, πορεύομαι.

(Menelaus) did not show his face; instead, having hope
 for his kingship he took care not to save his kin.
 But let us see to it that we perish while performing
 noble deeds worthy of Agamemnon.
 For I will display my nobility to the city
 by striking at my heart with a sword; in turn, it is necessary
 that you do the same as my brave deeds.
 Pylades, you are to be the arbiter of death,
 and when we have died you must shroud our bodies properly
 and taking us to the tomb of our father bury us together.
 Farewell. As you see, I am carrying out the deed.

susceptibility the suggestions of his co-conspirators, his desperation to pay forward the wrongs he feels he has endured, etc.

Orestes 1058-68

Evidently, at this point Orestes is still willing to act in traditional accordance with his γενναῖος status and takes pride in his heroic lineage.³⁵⁷ However, not to be overlooked in this passage is Orestes' impulse to make his suicide a public performance of his γενναϊότης, quite in keeping with his traditionally elite status and ideas of ἀριστεία. Not only are there dramatic undertones to his insistence that they “perform” (δράσαντε, 1058) γενναῖα deeds worthy of Agamemnon, but also he states explicitly that he wishes to make a public demonstration of his nobility (κἀγὼ μὲν εὐγένειαν ἀποδείξω πόλει, 1062) by way of his suicide. In these lines the audience finds Orestes playing his familiar role of internal director and actor:³⁵⁸ but in this case the internal performance is to be interrupted before it can begin, as Pylades proposes a shocking alternative to noble suicide (on which, see below).

Whom to Trust and How: Menelaus and Tyndareus

As noted above, in the *Orestes* Euripides depicts two major conspiracies. In this section I examine not only their formation and operation, but also I suggest ways their depiction may have coalesced with the political experience of Euripides' audience. Just as Sophocles did in the *Philoctetes*, Euripides treats in this play the complexities of determining how and with whom bonds of trust can be established. The first of these conspiracies is masterminded by Tyndareus and it culminates in the so-called “Courtroom Scene” (852-956). This scene lends crucial insight into the anxieties over conspiracies still lingering in Athens, even after the restoration of the democracy and the

³⁵⁷ Cf. Willink (1986) 264: “the three-word line (883) suits the bravura of the sentiment.”

³⁵⁸ On Orestes' role as internal director and actor in Aeschylus' *Chor*, Sophocles' *El.*, and Euripides *El.* see note 263 in Chapter 4 above.

civic stability efforts such as the Oath of Demophantos attempted to recreate. On the scene's treatment of contemporary political attitudes, Medda writes,

...the political context plays a decisive role in Euripides' dramatic project. The Aeschylean Areopagus is replaced with an assembly conditioned by local and individual interests whose members are eager to accept the violent arguments of the demagogue Tyndareus, ignoring the moderate proposal of Diomedes as well as the honest countryman's defense of Orestes. The low moral standard of this corrupt political body makes it unable to face the thorny ethical issues raised by the matricide; it reacts with more violence (this was a particularly current theme for the spectators of 408 BC, who easily recognized in the fictional Argos many traits of the political corruption of contemporary Athenian society).³⁵⁹

While I believe Medda has very accurately described the kinds of politicians Euripides portrays in the scene, as always I believe it would be a mistake to read the scene as a direct critique on the contemporary political activity of 408 BC. Rather, the point is to construct an image of a thoroughly broken political entity that is self-serving to the point of crisis.³⁶⁰ Many of the figures depicted in the scene are indeed thoroughly corrupt, inasmuch as they implicitly claim to serve the interests of Argos but in reality promote the interests of an unseen demagogue (Tyndareus, in this case). Following the violent upheaval of 411 BC, it comes as little surprise that the short-sighted political body Euripides conjures bears resemblance to the one Thucydides describes driving the oligarchic revolution in Book 8 (e.g., 8.65.2-66.1). Since this is the case, the ways in which the conspirators of the *Orestes* define their factions, establish trust, and undertake clandestine action is worthy of close examination. Throughout the scene Euripides demonstrates the interwoven nature of the very same elements discussed above at work in the conspiracies of the *Phoenissae* and the *Philoctetes*: namely, metatheater, persuasion, and considerations of trustworthiness.

³⁵⁹ Medda (2015) 448.

³⁶⁰ Cf. Allan (2008) 7.

However, before exploring the Courtroom Scene in depth it is necessary to examine the alliances and divisions which predicate it, and the mutual protection Orestes and Electra owe to one another in particular. As Wohl observes, by casting the siblings as victims of the corruption infecting the litigants of the Courtroom Scene, Euripides implicitly links the survival of Orestes and Electra – and the values they represent – with the endurance of society itself, so exploring the nature of their affinity is essential.³⁶¹ Just as Aristotle will observe two or so generations after the production of the *Orestes*, Electra and Orestes perfectly embody the sense of mutual protection upon which *φιλία* is predicated.³⁶² When Orestes regains his senses after the brief but ferocious flaring of his sickness (255-79), he sees the effect his malady has had on Electra. To soothe her anxiety and stop her weeping, Orestes makes reference to the bond of mutual protection that exists between them not only because they are siblings (σύγγονε, 280), but also because they were co-conspirators in the assassination of Clytemnestra – though Orestes is swift to insist that the bulk of the culpability for the crime belongs to him (σὺ μὲν γὰρ ἐπένευσας τάδ', εἴργασται δ' ἐμοὶ|μητρῷον αἶμα, 284-5). He expresses his gratitude for her care in his weakened state and assures her that it is necessary for him to reciprocate her support when she is in distress because it is the behavior proper to true friendship (ἐπικουρία γὰρ αἶδε τοῖς φίλοις καλαί, 300).³⁶³ Furthermore, their shared complicity as co-conspirators in the murder is reinforced by Orestes' reference to the project's mastermind, Apollo, upon whom he is now prepared to shift the blame for their present

³⁶¹ Wohl (2015) 122.

³⁶² Cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 2.4 (and 2.4.2 in particular: φίλος δέ ἐστιν ὁ φιλῶν καὶ ἀντιφιλούμενος· οἶονται δὲ φίλοι εἶναι οἱ οὕτως ἔχειν οἰόμενοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους).

³⁶³ This sentiment contrasts sharply with the notions of “false” *φιλία* later in the play, on which cf. Willink (1986) 135 and Introduction section F i.5.

misfortune (Λοξίαι δὲ μέφομαι,| ὅστις μ' ἐπάρας †ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον†| τοῖς μὲν λόγοις ἠϋφρανε τοῖς δ' ἔργοισιν οὐ, 285-7).³⁶⁴ Having been apparently forsaken by Apollo and awaiting the punishment that will be determined by his fellow citizens, Orestes senses that in Electra he can find a final refuge for mutual dependence and protection: as soon as he regains himself he urges her to retreat indoors (301) where she can find food and rest (302), and look to the kind of hygiene that will prevent her from becoming sick as well. Orestes places such emphasis on the need for Electra to care for herself physically, I believe, because in doing so she also extends protection to himself through the symbiotic bond they share, and likewise the destruction of one will lead inescapably to the destruction of the other.³⁶⁵ Orestes tells her, “If you abandon me or acquire some sickness from nursing me, I am ruined (οἰχόμεσθα). For I have you as my only ally, since I am deserted by all others, as you see (304-6).”³⁶⁶ Here it is important to note an implicit equation in Orestes’ words: the union that the siblings and co-conspirators share is their only source of σωτηρία, and its loss can only result in destruction (οἰχόμεσθα, 305). As elsewhere, we find in Orestes’ summary of their dire situation not only that σῶζω and οἰχομαι represent polar opposites³⁶⁷ and mutually exclusive ends of the same spectrum, but also that the presence or absence of bonds of trust and mutual protection is the factor determining their fate.

³⁶⁴ Cf. 1666-7 on Apollo’s vindication of this blame. On the potential doubt that this sentiment casts on the authority of Apollo, see Porter (1994) 282. Willink (1986) 133 takes the accusation as evidence that the bow Orestes wielded in his fit of madness must have been imaginary and not a physical stage prop. On the high emotional register of the scene and the strong bond between brother and sister, see Schein (1975) 58.

³⁶⁵ Cf. West (1987) 202, who suggests that Electra might succumb to exhaustion in treating Orestes, not that Orestes’ νόσος is in any way contagious.

³⁶⁶ For the similar, thematic sentiment in Sophocles’ *Electra*, see 1168-9: “καὶ νῦν ποθῶ| τοῦ σοῦ θανούσα μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι τάφου.”

³⁶⁷ On σῶζω and οἰχομαι as balancing opposites, cf. Soph. *El.* 85 (ἡνίκ' ἡ σεσώσμεθα| κείνου βίον σώσαντος, ἡ οἰχόμεσθ' ἄμα;) and *Aj.* 1128 ({ME.} Θεὸς γὰρ ἐκσώζει με, τῷδε δ' οἰχομαι.).

Likewise, Electra posits her own future as one destined for either salvation or destruction: she asks rhetorically, “How will I, alone without a brother, father, or friend, find safety?” (πῶς μόνη σωθήσομαι,| ἀνάδελφος ἀπάτωρ ἄφιλος;, 309-10). This sentiment establishes and qualifies the bond of trust Orestes and Electra will rely upon as they seek σωτηρία, but Electra’s rhetorical question also hints at an aspect of their alliance that is less immediately clear: namely, are they bound to protect one another because of their blood relationship as siblings, or have they become fused together by their shared culpability in the slaughter of Clytemnestra? This question is one that arises at several other points in the tragedy to be discussed below, and, while it is impossible to determine if one of them is the contributing factor to the exclusion of the other, in what follows I will argue that the drama places greater emphasis on the latter: alliances forged on the basis of shared goals and culpability in crime (e.g. 735) rather than on the obligations between blood relatives (e.g. 449-54), in part because a shared stake in illegal activity has broader civic implications everything from basic politics to legitimacy of rule.³⁶⁸ Still, the anxieties involved in determining and recognizing the people that can and cannot be trusted to offer uncompromised protection can already be detected in Electra’s tricolon at 309-10. Willink argues here that, as often, the third adjective (ἄφιλος) of the tricolon qualifies the first two (ἀνάδελφος ἀπάτωρ).³⁶⁹ It is fairly obvious to whom she refers when she pictures herself bereft of a father (Agamemnon) or brother (Orestes), but according to her rationale who else could qualify as her φίλος? Their blood relationship notwithstanding, she seems to discount the possibility (correctly, in the end)

³⁶⁸ One thinks of the conspiracy and later political alliance established between Otanes, Megabyzus, and Darius at Herodotus 3.70.1-3.88.3.

³⁶⁹ Willink (1986) 136, following Fraenkel on Aesch. *Ag.* 412, 769; Soph. *Ant.* 876; and Eur. *An.* 491 and *Hec.* 669.

that Menelaus will provide her with any protection, but she also excludes Pylades, who shares culpability with her in the murder. How, then, with her and her brother's fate hanging in the balance, is she making the distinction between a person whom she can trust for protection and one whom she cannot?

The subsequent exchange between Menelaus and Orestes – and the intercession of Tyndareus – takes a different approach to the question of how determinations of trust and mistrust can be made by examining it at both an interpersonal level and at the πόλις level. Prior to Menelaus' appearance on stage at 356, Orestes and Electra have already expressed a cautious optimism that their uncle will be obligated to protect them to the best of his ability: Electra eagerly awaits the safety he can provide (Μενέλαον ἤκονθ'· ὥς τά γ' ἄλλ' ἐπ' ἀσθενοῦς| ῥώμης ὀχούμεθ', ἦν τι μὴ κείνου πάρα| σωθῶμεν, 68-70) and Orestes makes explicit reference to the bond of gratitude that Menelaus owes to their father (ἦκει φῶς ἐμοῖς καὶ σοῖς κακοῖς| ἀνὴρ ὁμογενὴς καὶ χάριτας ἔχων πατρός;, 243-4).³⁷⁰ However, there are hints early on that the siblings have overestimated the depth of gratitude that Menelaus will feel. After recounting the reports he has received of the deaths of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (360-74), Menelaus turns to the chorus and asks them to point out which man is Orestes, since, as he says, he has not seen Orestes since he was a young child in Clytemnestra's arms and could not recognize him by sight.³⁷¹ While there are other instances of a tragic figure first arriving on stage to ask the chorus

³⁷⁰ Cf. Mastronarde (2010) 192 on the elements of "suppliant drama" that Euripides has interwoven into the *Orestes*. On the debt of gratitude Menelaus owes to Agamemnon, cf. also 453. See Schein (1975) 55 on the aid Orestes anticipates from Menelaus.

³⁷¹ It is noteworthy that at 375 Menelaus refers to the matricide as "the unholy slaughter of the child of Tyndareus" (τῆς Τυνδαρείας παιδὸς ἀνόσιον φόνον). While reference to people by the patronymic is extremely common, here it may also hint at the difficult position Menelaus will soon find himself in having to choose between his obligations to the generation older than himself and the one younger (on which, cf. Schein [1975] 66).

for directions or some other form of orientation,³⁷² Menelaus genuinely does not know the face for which he is searching. Furthermore, when he does finally recognize that he is looking at Orestes he can barely believe that he is not looking at the face of a corpse (ὦ θεοί, τί λεύσσω; τίνα δέδορκα νερτέρων;, 385). It comes as little surprise, then, that while Menelaus is in part moved by his connections by blood to Orestes and his debt of gratitude to Agamemnon, he shows little eagerness to aid a man he does not know in any meaningful way, and one who has committed a murder so horrendous (ἀνόσιον φόνον, 374).

Though stricken by sickness and looking nearly dead, Orestes musters the strength for a lengthy supplication to Menelaus (382-544) wherein he carefully outlines several points underscoring their familial obligations.³⁷³ Orestes begins his supplication with an explicit plea for σωτηρία. “Save me from evils,” he says, “for you have come at just the right time,” (σῶσόν μ' ἀφιῆσαι δ' αὐτὸν ἐξ καιρὸν κακῶν, 384).³⁷⁴ When Menelaus expresses shock at the suppliant’s cadaverous face (385) and squalid hair (387), Orestes immediately turns Menelaus’ attention away from his physical condition (388) and toward the specific kind of salvation Menelaus can help him attain: namely, political protection from the litigious retribution of the citizens of Argos. Most importantly, Orestes explains that even though his physical body is in a state of ruin, his name remains

³⁷² For a close comparandum cf. *Hec.* 484-7, where Talthybius asks the chorus they have seen Hecuba and they reply that she lay on the ground before him.

³⁷³ Willink (1986) calls the following stichomythia, “among the most ‘intellectual’ and intellectually demanding in Greek tragedy,” and notes the sympathetic and “rationally inquisitorial” attitude Menelaus exhibits throughout. His willingness to hear out and perhaps even help to heal (ιάσιμος, 399) in certain ways lends credibility to his ultimate decision not to do so: he spurns Orestes not out of malevolence but because Tyndareus proves more persuasive (on which, see below).

³⁷⁴ Wohl (2015) 122 notes that Orestes’ supplication of Menelaus adds a religious dimension to his pleas for salvation that increases the audience’s sympathy with Orestes and Electra and invites it to accompany them on the quest for σωτηρία. Cf. also Trédé (1992) 39-40.

the same (τὸ σῶμα φροῦδον, τὸ δ' ὄνομ' οὐ λέλοιπέ με, 390). In other words, although he is blighted with divine sickness as punishment for truly reprehensible crimes, as the son and legitimate heir of Agamemnon he remains Menelaus' nephew and is worthy of the obligations their shared blood imposes on his father's brother. The features of the argument Orestes is in the process of constructing are familiar from other instances wherein Orestes lays claim to the benefits of his noble (often γενναῖος) status – he remains noble by birth, and from Apollo's perspective his deeds are a reflection of his noble character as well – and Menelaus' shared noble birth makes him compatible for entering into the kind of mutually protective pact he shares with Electra.³⁷⁵

In the lines that follow, Orestes qualifies the bonds of φιλία even further. For reasons easy to comprehend, Orestes' predicament has led to a rather pessimistic perception of the divine. He compares the power of mortals relative to the gods to that of a slave in relation to his master, and the discrepancy leads him to cast doubt over the very nature of the gods (418).³⁷⁶ The most that Orestes can say with certainty is that it is the nature of the gods to act slowly (μέλλει· τὸ θεῖον δ' ἐστὶ τοιοῦτον φύσει, 420),³⁷⁷ and just as he did earlier at 285-7 he blames his present condition squarely on Apollo's failure to live up to his obligations as an instigator in the slaughter of Clytemnestra (415-7).³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Cf. the notions of the obligations of those in possession of a γενναῖος status by both Odysseus (40-53) and Philoctetes (468-83) in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, as discussed in four above.

³⁷⁶ Cf. Mastronarde (2010) 190-2. Orestes' doubt surrounding Apollo's moral sanity figures prominently into Euripides' other major treatment of the Orestes mythology, the *Electra*: cf. 971-81 (on which, see Allen-Hornblower [2015] 229-30).

³⁷⁷ On the theme of the "slow but sure" divine retribution, cf. Dodds (1960) 188 on *Ba.* 882-7.

³⁷⁸ There are a few serious problems in these lines arising from textual corruption or dislocation. Most textual critics follow Kirchhoff's suggestion that a lacuna follows line 423, and in this place Kovacs posits the line "ταχὺν πιθέσθαι γ'· ὃ δε θεὸς σῶσαι βραδύς." While not widely accepted, this suggestion both reinforces Orestes' accusations against Apollo to play his role in the conspiracy and also serves as a reminder of what that role actually entails: namely, providing the very safety (σῶσαι) that Orestes presently seeks from Menelaus. On the efforts to reconstruct this section of the text and the grounds for the suggested emendation, see Kovacs (2003) 83-4.

However, far more than a petulant complaint against the god, Orestes offers this point as a piece of gnomic wisdom for Menelaus' careful consideration when he insists that the wise do not act unfaithfully toward their friends (οὐ σοφός, ἀληθῆς δ' ἐς φίλους ἔφους κακός, 424).³⁷⁹ Soon thereafter, Orestes reiterates this point with stronger emphasis:

ἐς σ' ἐλπὶς ἢ μὴ καταφυγὰς ἔχει κακῶν.
 ἀλλ' ἀθλίως πράσσουσιν εὐτυχῆς μολῶν
 μετάδος φίλοισι σοῖσι σῆς εὐπραξίας,
 καὶ μὴ μόνος τὸ χρηστὸν ἀπολαβὼν ἔχε,
 ἀλλ' ἀντιλάζου καὶ πόνων ἐν τῷ μέρει,
 χάριτας πατρώιας ἐκτίνων ἐς οὓς σε δεῖ.
 ὄνομα γάρ, ἔργον δ' οὐκ ἔχουσιν οἱ φίλοι
 οἱ μὴ 'πὶ ταῖσι συμφοραῖς ὄντες φίλοι.

In you there is hope for escape from my troubles.
 But since you are coming in good fortune upon those doing miserably
 give a portion of your prosperity to your kinsmen,
 and do not keep only for yourself the benefit you possess,
 but also take a share of evils in turn,
 repaying the favors of my father to those whom you must.
 For friends who have merely the name and not the deed
 in times of misfortunes are not friends at all.

Orestes 449-55

These lines encapsulate the very close association between friendship and salvation (here expressed by the more litotic καταφυγὰς...κακῶν, 448, as opposed to σωτηρία), and the obligations for friends to share their prosperity (τὸ χρηστὸν, 451) when necessary.³⁸⁰ He also reiterates the debt of gratitude (χάρις) Menelaus owes to Agamemnon and urges him to take this opportunity to repay it. Throughout these lines Orestes speaks of τὸ χρηστὸν as if it is a very tangible thing that must be actively exchanged (μετάδος, 450; ἀπολαβὼν ἔχε, 451; ἀντιλάζου, 452), as opposed to more

³⁷⁹ Line 424 is also corrupt and there are a number of scholarly opinions on how exactly the line should be rendered. Cf. Willink (1986) 156-7, who rejects this rendering (first suggested by Brunck) in favor of one offered by Jackson: οὐ σοφός, ἀληθῆς δ' ἐς φίλους ἔφυν φίλος. However, in either case the core of the sentiment remains the same: wise men recognize that the benefits of friendship come with certain obligations, including not acting contrary to the interests of a "true friend."

³⁸⁰ Cf. Parry (1969) 339, Blundell (1989) 31-3, Konstan (1997) 56-8, and Wohl (2015) 122-3.

passive benevolence or graciousness.³⁸¹ Indeed, the final lines of Orestes' supplication draws this exact point to the fore: "Those who are not friends in misfortune have only the name of friendship, not its reality (ὄνομα γάρ, ἔργον δ' οὐκ ἔχουσιν οἱ φίλοι| οἱ μὴ 'πὶ ταῖσι συμφοραῖς ὄντες φίλοι, 454-5),³⁸² a *sententia* which qualifies the kind of "true" friendship Orestes spoke of at 424.³⁸³ Indeed, according to the argument Orestes has presented, if Menelaus is to treat him and Electra the way a proper friend must, then they must be able to rely on him to work actively in their favor, which in this case entails speaking on their behalf in the upcoming assembly. Should Menelaus fail to do so he will not only reveal that he is inherently unwise (οὐ σοφός) but he will publicly renege on the debt of gratitude he owes to Agamemnon. Orestes has not only extended an invitation to Menelaus to join him and Electra in a familial alliance seeking their salvation, but he has provided an ethical theorem explaining why it is correct and necessary that he do so.³⁸⁴

In Menelaus' consideration of his options and ultimate decision to spurn Orestes and Electra we find one of the play's major ethical intricacies. Menelaus gives some indication that he is sympathetic to Orestes' argument: he pities the depth to which Orestes' deeds have plunged him (ὦ μέλεος, ἦ κεις συμφορᾷς ἐξ τοῦσχατον, 447), and he insists that it is proper to be conversing with Orestes because the boy is the son of his

³⁸¹ On these expectations that obligations of *φιλία* extend beyond well-wishes and anticipate mutual assistance in all areas of civic life – both in this play and in the experience of its audience – cf. Konstan (1997) 58-67.

³⁸² Trans. Kovacs.

³⁸³ West (1987) 213-4 points out that the theme of the unreliability of friendship in times of misfortune is quite common, citing Thgn. 79-82, 299, 697, 857-60, 929; Democr. *DK* 68 B 101, 106; and Eur. *Med.* 561, *El.* 605-7, 1131, and *HF* 57-9. The notion of "true" friendship discussed here assumes that Jackson's reading of 424 is correct. However, even if Brunck's reading is preferable I argue that the point remains valid: in this case, the unwillingness of a friend to actively work for the prosperity of his so-called friends reveals that he is not wise (οὐ σοφός), but in fact truly wretched (ἀληθῆς...κακός).

³⁸⁴ On a similar treatment of the reciprocal anticipation of *σωτηρία* between friends, cf. Soph. *El.* 129-35, 924-46, and Blundell (1989) 149-52.

dear brother (φίλου μοι πατρός ἐστὶν ἔκγονος, 482), especially given the Greek custom to always honor blood relatives (Ἑλληνικόν τοι τὸν ὁμόθεν τιμᾶν αἰεὶ, 486). And yet, for all of Orestes' persuasive rhetoric, Menelaus fails to make the ethically sound choice in favor of Tyndareus' more politically expedient one (on which, see below). And yet, Menelaus' ethical character – especially at the critical point in the drama where he must choose his allegiance – is complex. While it may be a simple matter for the audience to cast aspersions on Menelaus' lack of pity, one must recall that the case Tyndareus is going to bring against Orestes has strong merit: after all, he will seek to honor the *φιλία* of his own family by persecuting the murderers of his daughter. Unlike Tyndareus, however, Menelaus is willing to remain neutral enough to approach Orestes and hear his account of the matricide, and he even acknowledges that he is under precisely the obligations that Orestes has been urging – to help a kinsman in distress (πέφυκεν· εἰ δὲ δυστυχεῖ, τιμητέος, 484). To attempt to absorb Menelaus into their protective groups, Tyndareus and Orestes each perform a forensic speech in a miniature adjudication in which Menelaus will play the role of judge. The operative element in both speeches – and indeed the justification each offers for their deeds – is the claim to be acting in support of Menelaus' personal and political *σωτηρία*.

The moment that Tyndareus steps on to the stage the play's political elements are brought into sharper focus. For the first time in this drama the audience is able to catch a glimpse of Orestes' crimes within the full civic context of mythological Argos, which Euripides has dramatized into forms directly relevant to contemporary Athens. Members of the audience who were experienced with the proceedings of the assembly would be

familiar with the arguments and the prosecutorial strategy Tyndareus employs.³⁸⁵

Tyndareus does not wax philosophical on the detestable nature of Orestes' crimes (which are largely self-evident in the first place), nor does he refer to the unknowable machinations of the divine and impossibility for mortals to defy them; instead, Tyndareus focuses on Orestes' violation of the law and his failure to pursue vengeance for the murder of Agamemnon through juridical avenues. Near the beginning of the encounter he accuses Menelaus of thinking himself above the law for speaking to Orestes (καὶ τῶν νόμων γε μὴ πρότερον εἶναι θέλειν, 487), and soon thereafter demonstrates that he finds the law the only viable pathway toward true justice:

εἰ τὰ καλὰ πᾶσι φανερά καὶ τὰ μὴ καλὰ,
τούτου τίς ἀνδρῶν ἐγένετ' ἀσυνετώτερος;
ὅστις τὸ μὲν δίκαιον οὐκ ἐσκέψατο
οὐδ' ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὸν κοινὸν Ἑλλήνων νόμον.
ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἐξέπνευσεν Ἀγαμέμνων βίον,
κάρα θυγατρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς πληγείς ὕπο,
αἷσχιστον ἔργον (οὐ γὰρ αἰνέσω ποτέ),
χρῆν αὐτὸν ἐπιθεῖναι μὲν αἵματος δίκην
ὁσίαν διώκοντ', ἐκβαλεῖν τε δωμάτων
μητέρα· τὸ σῶφρόν τ' ἔλαβ' ἂν ἀντὶ συμφορᾶς
καὶ τοῦ νόμου τ' ἂν εἶχετ' εὐσεβῆς τ' ἂν ἦν.
νῦν δ' ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν δαίμον' ἦλθε μητέρι·
κακὴν γὰρ αὐτὴν ἐνδίκῳς ἡγοῦμενος,
αὐτὸς κακίων μητέρ' ἐγένετο κτανών.

If what is good and what is not good is manifest in all things,
who among men was born more foolish than this man?
Whoever does not carefully consider justice nor
consult the law common among Hellenes.
For when Agamemnon exhaled his life,
after the blow on the head from my daughter,
a most shameful deed (for I will never approve it),
it was necessary for him to bring a charge of murder
like a prosecutor, and to drive out his mother from his household.
He would have obtained wisdom instead of misfortunes
and would have been adhering to the law and would have been pious.
But as it is he has come to the same fate as his mother:
Correctly considering her evil, in killing her
he himself became more evil than his mother.

³⁸⁵ Porter (1994) 127-8 calls Tyndareus' speech a Euripidean *coup de théâtre* in which the "world of contemporary Athenian *Realpolitik*" has invaded the dramatic space. He cites this invasion of the contemporary world as a major contributing factor for Orestes' subsequent violent outburst.

Orestes 492-506

For Tyndareus, obedience to the law is not only crucial for avoiding punishment at the hands of one's fellow citizens; it is also a public expression of a man's good sense (491-5),³⁸⁶ piety (ὀσίαν διώκοντ', 501), temperance (σῶφρόν, 502), and reverence (εὐσεβής, 503). He later closes his speech by warning Menelaus not to break their ancestral laws (512-8) by lending aid to Orestes, because doing so would be working contrary to the will of the gods (Μενέλεως, τοῖσιν θεοῖς| μὴ πρᾶσσ' ἐναντί', ὠφελεῖν τοῦτον θέλων, 534-5). It is perhaps unsurprising that a shrewd litigant such as Tyndareus would seek to fuse so scrupulously the will and laws of the gods with the legislature crafted by mortal assemblies, the drafting of which he can himself influence and control. Some critics, such as Lloyd, read Tyndareus as a highly hypocritical figure, one whose claims to be working toward the greater good of the city ring false and who is motivated by little more than vindictiveness.³⁸⁷ However, as self-serving as Tyndareus' insistence on the divine endorsement of human law may seem, his motivation for taking that position does carry some degree of political merit that not only complicates Euripides' characterization of him, but also, I believe, contributes to Orestes' frustration and subsequent violent outburst. First, he reminds Menelaus why the ancestral homicide laws are in place to begin with:

καλῶς ἔθεντο ταῦτα πατέρες οἱ πάλαι·
 ἐς ὁμμάτων μὲν ὄψιν οὐκ εἶων περᾶν
 οὐδ' εἰς ἀπάντημ' ὅστις αἶμ' ἔχων κυροῖ,
 φυγαῖσι δ' ὀσιοῦν, ἀνταποκτείνειν δὲ μή.
 αἰ γὰρ εἰς ἔμελλ' ἐνέξεσθαι φόνωι,

³⁸⁶ Dover (1994) 146-50 discusses the common Athenian legal practice of citing intellectual deficiencies by prosecutors in criminal trials – the opposite of the strategy used by advocates defending their clients in a modern courtroom.

³⁸⁷ Lloyd (1992) 115-7 draws a comparison between Tyndareus and the Hecuba of the *Troades*, since both figures, “put forward an argument which combines traditional and advanced ideas in a superficially attractive way, but which are also in some respects inadequate to the strongly defined mythological world of the play.”

τὸ λοῖσθιον μῖασμα λαμβάνων χερσὶν.

Our ancient ancestors ordered this well:
they did not allow any one with blood on his hands
to appear in their sight or to cross their path,
rather they exiled them, and did not kill them in return.
For there is always going to be someone liable to murder,
receiving the pollution most recently on his hands.

Orestes 512-17

Here, Tyndareus addresses the question that any recitation of the mythology surrounding the House of Atreus must: once such a cycle of bloodshed has begun, how can it ever be stopped? The ancestors of Argos found the solution in imposing a legalized exile which, by removing the condemned from the community but not ending his life permanently, provided satisfaction for the blood guilt at least in part and provided safety for anyone else in the community who might have fallen into the scope of the vendetta.³⁸⁸ For Tyndareus, guaranteeing the safety that the law provides and the check against endless, *polis*-consuming violence is a tremendous responsibility that falls to men like him.

In his apology to Tyndareus' accusations, Orestes claims that although his actions were conducted outside the laws established by Argos, his goal was to protect the city from a kind of domestic conspiracy that is a threat to every household throughout the Greek world. Orestes readily acknowledges his sacrilege (ἀνόσιός, 546) for slaughtering his mother, but maintains that he remains holy (ὅσιος, 547) for avenging his father.³⁸⁹ In defense of his actions, Orestes offers precisely the same reasoning Apollo professed in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: his father is the one who truly engendered him, and his mother

³⁸⁸ West (1987) follows Parker (1983) 121 in noting that the ὀσιόων in 515 conveys the idea common to Attic authors that exile itself is a form of purification that restores "religious normality." Cf. Dem. 23.73, τὸ τὸν κατιόντα ὀσιόων καὶ καθαίρεσθαι.

³⁸⁹ Willink (1986) 174 points out that Orestes' assignment of different names for the same thing (ἔτερον ὄνομα, 547) was a strategy employed by contemporary sophists. Cf. Guthrie (1971) 316 on *Antiope* fr. 21

was merely the plough land that nurtured the seed (552-3).³⁹⁰ Lines 545-6 are deleted by Nauck, Paley, Reeve, and Willink, but they seem to have been interpolated to drive home Orestes' point that without the seed of the father there cannot be a child, and thus fathers enjoy a primacy that for mothers simply does not exist. However, here Orestes takes his argument one crucial step further by redirecting attention to the domestic crimes of his mother, who, he explains, was involved in a domestic conspiracy to overthrow his father:

[Αἰγισθος ἦν ὁ κρυπτὸς ἐν δόμοις πόσις.]³⁹¹
 τοῦτον κατέκτειν', ἐπὶ δ' ἔθυσσα μητέρα,
 ἀνόσια μὲν δρῶν, ἀλλὰ τιμωρῶν πατρί.
 ἐφ' οἷς δ' ἀπειλεῖς ὡς πετρωθῆναί με χρή,
 ἄκουσον ὡς ἄπασαν Ἑλλάδ' ὠφελῶ.
 εἰ γὰρ γυναῖκες ἐς τόδ' ἤξουσιν θράσους,
 ἄνδρας φονεύειν, καταφυγὰς ποιούμεναι
 ἐς τέκνα, μαστοῖς τὸν ἔλεον θηρώμεναι,
 παρ' οὐδὲν αὐταῖς ἦν ἂν ὀλλύναι πόσεις,
 ἐπὶ κλημ' ἐχούσαις ὅτι τύχοι. δράσας δ' ἐγὼ
 δεῖν', ὡς σὺ κομπεῖς, τόνδ' ἔπαυσα τὸν νόμον.

[Aegisthus was her secret husband in the house.]
 I killed him, and then I sacrificed my mother,
 committing an unholy act, but avenging my father.
 As to the deeds for which you say it is necessary that I be stoned,
 listen how I have done a service for all of Greece.
 If women reach the point where they are brazen enough
 to kill their husbands, taking refuge in their children,
 seeking pity in showing their breasts,
 it would be nothing for them to kill their husbands for
 for any grievance there happens to be. But I, doing
 terrible deeds, as you call them, put a stop to this practice.

Orestes 561-71

³⁹⁰ Cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 658-66 and also *Sept.* 753, Soph. *OT* 1211, 1257, Eur. *Ph.* 18. West (1987) 221, following Gomme-Sandbach (1973) 531, demonstrates that such a defense goes far beyond a mere literary reference to Aeschylus. The same trope is a centerpiece of Attic betrothal formulae, i.e. Men. *Pk.* 1010: ταύτην γνησίῳ παίδων ἐπ' ἀρότῳ σοι δίδωμι. Cf. also Hippon DK 38A13, Anaxagoras DK 59A107, Diog. *Apoll.* DK 64A27, and Pl. *Tim.* 91d.

³⁹¹ Line 561 has troubled a number of textual critics. Kovacs (2003) 87 follows Reeve in deleting the line entirely: both adopt Nauck's rendering of ὁ as οἱ, but insist that there are no plausible examples elsewhere in Euripides for the reflexive or anaphoric dative οἱ. However, Willink (1986) 176 finds the definite article with κρυπτὸς...πόσις possible (though somewhat difficult to interpret), and also suggests the possibility that οἱ = αὐτῇ, citing Denniston on *El.* 924.

Orestes' argument here posits first that the slaughter of Aegisthus was perfectly legal, just as the killing of an adulterer caught with a man's mother (or any other woman protected under the aegis of his οἶκος) is legal under Attic law.³⁹² However, his justification for killing his mother as well hinges upon the point that she had entered into a secret – and thereby illegal and unholy – marriage with his uncle in the house belonging to his then-living father (ὁ κρυπτός ἐν δόμοις πόσις, 561). If Clytemnestra was capable of not only plotting the murder of her husband in his own home but also absorbing her children into complicity by seeking refuge with them, then Orestes claims to have stopped the spread of such a dreadful practice throughout Greece by a process reminiscent of Thucydides' depiction of the epidemic of στάσις at 3.82 (565-71). Further, Orestes poignantly counters the assertion that he broke the law by demonstrating that he put a stop to a terrible practice (δεῖν', ὥς σὺ κομπεῖς, τόνδ' ἔπαυσα τὸν νόμον, 571) which, if left unchecked, would have undermined the very laws he champions.³⁹³

Orestes' defensive strategy operates along two fault lines: first, by demonstrating that he opposed (by extreme measures) the conspiratorial φιλία binding Clytemnestra and Aegisthus by refusing the quarter he references in 567; and second, by exposing the grave danger that uninhibited conspiracies can pose to the safety of men like Tyndareus and Menelaus if those factions seek to redefine the laws and punishments (thereby implicitly indicating the great service he has performed for Greece by neutralizing one such threat). Ultimately, Menelaus is not persuaded to provide Orestes with the aid he so desperately

³⁹² Cf. Lys. 1.30 and Dem. 23.53. West (1987) 221 notes that in Aesch. *Lib.* 989-1000 no justification is offered or seems required for the killing of Aegisthus, and Orestes receives no criticism for the murder.

³⁹³ Porter (1994) 150 finds a close parallel for Orestes' claim to have deterred future violations of the law in Lysias' conclusion to his speech against Eratosthenes (1.47-8): "The argument presented at 564-71 is neither vicious or facetious but represents a rhetorical commonplace, particularly suited to displaying the speaker's outraged innocence and calculated to induce the audience to share in this sense of outrage."

seeks. Critics have suggested a number of reasons why Orestes is unsuccessful, ranging from some inherent weakness in his argument (most notably his failure to justify murder as preferable to Tyndareus' suggested forced exile),³⁹⁴ to his attempting an excessively longwinded defense instead of one good one,³⁹⁵ to the inability of the mythology and the play's plot to allow so simple a solution.³⁹⁶ Whatever the cause of Orestes' failure, as Tyndareus exits the stage in victory he fires two parting shots: one, notably, condemning Electra for conspiring with Orestes against their mother to the ruin of their house (615-21),³⁹⁷ and a second one to Menelaus reminding him of the very real political stakes hanging in the balance. Tyndareus warns him not to protect Orestes from death in defiance of the gods' will (μὴ τῶιδ' ἀμύνειν φόνον, ἐναντίον θεοῖς, 624); if he does offer protection, Tyndareus vows that he will remove Menelaus from his own seat of power in Sparta (ἢ μὴ 'πίβαινε Σπαρτιάτιδος χθονός, 626), leaving Menelaus in a position not much better than the one Orestes presently finds himself.³⁹⁸ Menelaus is quite obviously of two minds about the dilemma, and Orestes tells us that the man now paces the stage lost in thought (Μενέλαε, ποῖ σὸν πόδ' ἐπὶ συννοίαι κυκλεῖς,| διπλῆς μερίμνης διπτύχους ἰὼν ὁδοῦς;, 632-3). Orestes makes a final appeal to his uncle: he reiterates the debt of gratitude Menelaus owes to Agamemnon (ἀπότεισον, 655) and begs that Menelaus himself now stand as a savior (σωτήριος στάς, 657) and grant the gift of safety sought

³⁹⁴ Cf. Willink (1986) 177; Blaiklock (1952) 185.

³⁹⁵ Cf. Mastronarde (2010) 242.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Porter (1994) 151-3.

³⁹⁷ On Electra's aptitude as a conspirator, see below.

³⁹⁸ One assumes that especially with no viable βασιλεύς currently sitting on the throne of Argos it is possible for Tyndareus to enforce his threat to exile Menelaus from Sparta. It begs the question whether Menelaus' decision to shun Orestes and Electra is the best outcome for Tyndareus, who otherwise would have had a legitimate claim to both Sparta and Argos. Hence, we might imagine that Tyndareus' decision to prosecute Orestes and Electra is not motivated purely by self-interest.

instinctually by men and beasts alike (τὴν σωτηρίαν| θηρῶν, ὃ πάντες κοῦκ ἐγὼ ζητῶ μόνος, 678-9).

In his response, Menelaus charts the political mathematics which compel him to betray not only his kinsmen, but also the lofty ethical principles of the χρηστοὶ in favor of the more pragmatic and self-preserving principles of the πονηροί. He readily admits that people related by blood should endure one another's misfortunes, but he skirts culpability for his failure to do so by proposing that the strength to shoulder such a burden can only come from the gods (καὶ χρὴ γὰρ οὕτω τῶν ὀμαιμόνων κακὰ| συνεκκομίζειν, δύναμιν ἣν διδῶι θεός, 684-5), and he frames the recognition of his own mortal limitations as a sort of perverse piety (τοῦ δ' αὖ δύνασθαι πρὸς θεῶν χρήζω τυχεῖν, 687). Additionally, his grueling homeward journey has eroded his own allies and destroyed any hope of an armed resistance (688-90), leaving only the slender hope of placating the assembly with soothing words (an aptitude for which Menelaus is notoriously lacking). Here Menelaus summarizes what Willink calls “a topically charged manifesto” for members of the Athenian aristocracy forced to endure an energetic backlash from the δῆμος:³⁹⁹

ὅταν γὰρ ἡβᾷ δῆμος εἰς ὀργὴν πεσὼν,
ὅμοιον ὥστε πῦρ κατασβέσαι λάβρον·
εἰ δ' ἡσύχως τις αὐτὸν ἐντείνοντι μὲν
χαλῶν ὑπεῖκοι καιρὸν εὐλαβούμενος,
ἴσως ἂν ἐκπνεύσειεν· ἣν δ' ἀνῆι πνοάς,
τύχοις ἂν αὐτοῦ ραιδίως ὅσον θέλεις.
[ἔνεστι δ' οἶκτος, ἔνι δὲ καὶ θυμὸς μέγας,
καταδοκοῦντι κτήμα τιμώτατον.]
ἐλθὼν δ' ἐγὼ σοι Τυνδάρεων πειράσομαι
πόλιν τε πεῖσαι τῷ λίαν χρῆσθαι καλῶς.
[καὶ ναῦς γὰρ ἐνταθεῖσα πρὸς βίαν ποδὶ
ἔβαπεν, ἔστι δ' αὖθις ἣν χαλᾷ πόδα.]
μισεῖ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰς ἄγαν προθυμίας,
μισοῦσι δ' ἄστοί· δεῖ δέ μ' (οὐκ ἄλλως λέγω)
σώζειν σε σοφίαι, μὴ βίαι τῶν κρείσσονων.

³⁹⁹ Willink (1986) 195 summarizes the policy Menelaus is urging as one of ἡσυχία, εὐλάβεια, and καταδοκεῖν, one that appears elsewhere in Euripides as well (cf. Collard on *Su.* 324-5 and Bond on *HF* 166).

For when the people in their vigor fall wrath,
 It is the same as extinguishing a furious fire.
 But if someone quietly slackens oneself and gives way,
 awaiting the proper moment,
 it may well blow itself out; when the storm abates
 you can easily obtain from them whatever you wish.
 [There is pity there, and great vigor in it,
 A most valuable prize for a patient man.]
 I am going to attempt to persuade both Tyndareus
 and the city to use their excess well.
 [For likewise a ship goes down when strung too tight,
 but if slackened it once again rights itself.]
 For the god hates excessive rage,
 and the citizens do too. It is necessary that I save you
 (I do not deny it) by clever speech, not by force against stronger men.

Orestes 696-710

On the surface, Menelaus' political calculations appear quite prudent, and indeed one might even speculate that Orestes' predicament has provided him with a welcome opportunity to exhaust the city's anger before it falls upon his wife upon her return from the calamities she activated at Troy. However, Menelaus has also touched upon a political reality immediately relevant to actual civic life in the Athens of the playwright's day. In a democracy that has become extreme, men like Menelaus do not possess the luxury of being guided by personal ethics; instead, a wise man must defer to the demands of fate and politics (νῦν δ' ἀναγκαίως ἔχει| δούλοισιν εἶναι τοῖς σοφοῖσι τῆς τύχης, 715-6).

Forming the Conspiracy: Orestes and Pylades

When Menelaus forsakes Orestes and Electra and it becomes clear that the obligations of kinship will not extend to the protection the siblings require, Orestes returns to his woebegone lament for safety (οἶμοι, προδέδομαι, κούκέτ' εἰσὶν ἐλπίδες| ὅππῃ τραπόμενος θάνατον Ἀργείων φύγω'| οὗτος γὰρ ἦν μοι καταφυγὴ σωτηρίας, 722-4).⁴⁰⁰ However, at just the moment when Orestes' despair has reached its greatest depth,

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. 448, 567, 677-9.

Pylades emerges on stage, and Orestes' mood –and indeed the entire atmosphere or the drama – takes on an increasingly brisk and vigorous momentum that eventually careens into bloodshed. Pylades runs onto the stage from Phocis (δρόμωι στείχοντα Φωκέων ἄπο, 726; θᾶσσον ἢ μ' ἐχρῆν προβαίνων ἰκόμην, 729) and tells Orestes that he has come as fast as possible upon hearing the news that the assembly is meeting on this very day.⁴⁰¹

It is clear from the moment Pylades steps on stage that he will make an ideal co-conspirator for Orestes, and as the remainder of the drama unfolds the audience finds that in large part this is because of the young men's many shared personal qualities. Indeed, in Pylades Orestes finds precisely the kind of ally that he sought in Menelaus, though one lacking the high degree of political clout that his uncle could have provided.⁴⁰² Virtually the moment he is able to catch his breath Pylades addresses Orestes with terms that reveal the depth of his devotion: he calls Orestes the dearest of all his agemates (ἡλίκων, 733), friends (φίλων, 734), and (most revealing of all), his kinsmen (συγγενείας, 734). This third term of the tricolon may at first strike the audience as somewhat out of place following Orestes' failure to secure aid from Menelaus based on their familial ties. Orestes and Pylades are cousins, but while they are indeed technically related by blood it seems that Pylades references a more specific kind of relationship in his use of the term συγγενείας, which notably is not a term Orestes applies to Menelaus at any point in his supplication.⁴⁰³ Perhaps the point toward which Pylades gestures with συγγενείας is that

⁴⁰¹ The lengthy passage in trochaic tetrameters that follows (729-806) certainly contributes to the scene's increasing momentum. Willink (1986) 201 points out that the *Orestes* contains more lines in this meter than any other extant Euripides play, save *Iphigeneia at Aulis*.

⁴⁰² Cf. Parry (1969) 342-3 on Pylades' sincere but ultimately reckless devotion.

⁴⁰³ Pylades again uses the term to address the shade of Agamemnon at 1233, as he prays that the slain hero protect (ἔκσωσον) his children (on which, see below). The word does not appear regularly in Euripides, only at *Tro.* 754, *Phoe.* 291, and *IA* 492, 510.

he and Orestes were not only born into the same family, but were born the same *kind* of people in a way that makes them better suited to support and trust one another. As this study has explored elsewhere, those who are about to enter into a conspiracy with others take special care to articulate the equality which grants the trust being invested in one another, be it through reference to their shared elements of ethical or biological nobility contained in the multivalent term γενναῖος, or, as here, recognition of shared birth qualities. Moreover, Pylades and Orestes are bound by another effective method for establishing trust: namely, complicity in previous crimes. Orestes refers to Pylades as his accomplice to his mother's murder (ὁ συνδρῶν αἷμα καὶ μητρὸς φόνον, 406), and it becomes ever more apparent as the drama unfolds that their shared guilt has intertwined their fates.⁴⁰⁴ Friendship, as Pylades conceives of it, involves sharing even the worst of circumstances (συγκατασκάπτοις ἂν ἡμᾶς· κοινὰ γὰρ τὰ τῶν φίλων, 735) with one's fellows – a burden he proves eager to accept.

Apart from his heartfelt devotion to Orestes and his cause, Pylades mentions in passing an additional, practical reason that he will make an advantageous co-conspirator to Orestes: Pylades claims that, as a citizen of Phocis, he falls outside of the jurisdiction of the Argive assembly and is therefore immune from prosecution for any crimes ({Ορ.} οὐ φοβῆι μή σ' Ἄργος ὥσπερ κάμ' ἀποκτεῖναι θέλῃ;| {Πυ.} οὐ προσήκομεν κολάζειν τοῖσδε, Φωκέων δὲ γῆι, 770-1). Since there is little reason to believe that in Greek life criminals were only liable for prosecution in their home cities, this detail has been somewhat puzzling for commentators. Willink and West both attribute the inclusion of

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. also 777, where Pylades relates the reason for his exile from Phocis (ὅτι συνηράμην φόνον σοι μητρός, ἀνόσιον λέγων).

this detail to Euripides' expertise as a crafter of narratives because it simultaneously characterizes Pylades as naively dismissive of the depth of his peril (and thus more likely to take extreme actions), and also anticipates potential problems in the minds of audience members questioning why the assembly does not address Pylades' role in the matricide.⁴⁰⁵ But to these points I add that Pylades' claim to immunity also adds a crucial layer of trust to the partnership he is in the process of reaffirming with Orestes. Unlike Menelaus, whom Tyndareus coerced out of offering aid by threatening legal action (622-8), Pylades insinuates that he will not similarly betray Orestes because no one outside of Phocis possesses any judicial leverage to use against him, thus insinuating that he will make an ideal co-conspirator.

With their mutual trust now firmly established, Orestes and Pylades formally enter into a conspiracy designed to determine how Orestes can best make a public performance of his personal nobility (ἡγένηιá, 783) to the assembly with the goal of obtaining safety from execution (σωτηρίαν, 778). To begin, the language Orestes uses to describe their plotting, as well as the ebullient form of their subsequent stichomythia, is reminiscent of the etymological origin of the English word "conspiracy." The word is derived from the Latin *cōnspīrāre*, meaning literally to "breathe together," but figuratively to huddle close together and speak secretly in a way that implies

⁴⁰⁵ Willink (1986) 202, West (1987) 235. In the two lines that follow (772-3) Orestes expresses a hint of doubt over Pylades' assessment of his legal situation and he warns his friend to be cautious in facing a citizen assembly that is under the influence of mischievous leaders (κακούργους...προστάτας, 772); in reply, Pylades offers the more optimistic and pro-democratic counterpoint that when the leaders are noble they offer noble counsel (χρηστοὺς...χρηστὰ βουλευούσ' αἰεὶ, 773). While these lines balance nicely with the notions of the *χρηστοί* and *πονηροί*, some (including Willink, following Herwerden [1894] 79) find them highly suspicious both for their incongruity with Pylades' attitude toward the *δῆμος* elsewhere and also for their similarity to the interpolated lines 909-11. If they are to be accepted, the lines at the very least provide a transition from a section of the dialogue focused on establishing trust to one in which the characters contemplate what to do with it. Cf. Rosenbloom (2011) 421.

unanimity.⁴⁰⁶ Orestes tells Pylades that the time has come for them to speak to their common purpose (εἶέν· ἐς κοινὸν λέγειν χρή, 774),⁴⁰⁷ which formally designates their goals as separate from those of their enemies.⁴⁰⁸ Additionally, in the long section of divided tetrameters which follows (774-98) the two contemplate their options for proceeding with the plot in rapid harmony, at times literally finishing one another's sentences in hemistichomythia (e.g. {Op.} εἰ λέγοιμ' ἄστοῖσιν ἐλθὼν ... {Pyl.} ὥς ἔδρασας ἔνδικα ... {Op.} πατρὶ τιμωρῶν ἐμαντοῦ;, 775-6).⁴⁰⁹ Pylades' role in the plot, it seems, will be quite a supportive one: he will be present in the assembly physically to uphold Orestes in his weakened state (791-4), but more immediately he functions as an interlocutor helping Orestes to formulate and articulate the script to be performed. While he will not be “unseen” during the performance in the strict sense, as the silent partner his participation prefigures the role of a more traditional mastermind which he will take on when their first plot fails and there is need for a second, more extreme one.

Orestes and Pylades quickly establish that if σωτηρία is the goal of their conspiracy, standing idle is not an option ({Op.} πῶς ἂν οὖν δρώιην; {Pyl.} ἔχεις τιν', ἣν μένηις, σωτηρίαν;| {Op.} οὐκ ἔχω. {Pyl.} μολόντι δ' ἐλπίς ἐστι σωθῆναι κακῶν;, 778-9). Instead, the plot they contrive will be to go to the assembly to make a performance of Orestes' nobility (ἡνυγένειά, 784) – primarily as the son of Agamemnon (785), but also as one seeking a noble death (θανῶν γοῦν ὧδε κάλλιον θανῆι, 781) – in the hope that the

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. “conspire” (419), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Combined ed. Edited by P. G. W. Glare. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Pylades' similar formula for initiating a plot at 1098.

⁴⁰⁸ At *IT* 673 Orestes uses similar language when speaking in confidence with Pylades: τίν'; ἐς τὸ κοινὸν δοὺς ἄμεινον ἂν μάθοις. Cf. also the formula “κοινὸν λέγειν” to describe entry into a secret plot at *HF* 85-6 (ἦντιν' οὖν γνώμην ἔχεις| λέγ' ἐς τὸ κοινόν, μὴ θανεῖν ἔτοιμον ἦι).

⁴⁰⁹ West (1987) 236 says that “the division of a single proposition between two speakers now gives the effect of both minds running along in close harmony.”

decline of so lofty an aristocrat as he to such a disastrous fate will arouse pity in enough of the assemblymen to spare his life ({Op.} καί τις ἄν γέ μ' οἰκτίσειε ... {Πυ.} μέγα γὰρ ἡϋγένειά σου.| {Op.} θάνατον ἀσχάλλων πατρῷον. {Πυ.} πάντα ταῦτ' ἐν ὄμμασιν, 784-5). It seems that the lesson Orestes has learned following his interaction with Menelaus and his failure to present an argument stronger than the political pressures constraining his uncle is that in a democratic setting appearance matters just as much as reality, if not more so ({Op.} καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα γ' ἔνδικόν μοι. {Πυ.} τοῦ δοκεῖν ἔχου μόνον, 782). In other words, if the assembly does not see that Orestes is in possession of the masculine, heroic virtues possessed by his father, his possession of them will not advance his cause (786).⁴¹⁰

However, the importance of making a performance of virtue in a democratic setting is not the only lesson Orestes has learned to this point. Able now to contrast the unconditional *φιλία* Pylades offers with the tepid and ultimately ineffectual well wishes of Menelaus, Orestes summarizes the only kind of friendship which he finds useful:⁴¹¹

τοῦτ' ἐκεῖνο· κτᾶσθ' ἐταίρους, μὴ τὸ συγγενὲς μόνον·
ὥς ἀνὴρ ὅστις τρόποισι συντακῇ, θυραῖος ὢν,
μυρίων κρείσσων ὁμαίμων ἀνδρὶ κεκτῆσθαι φίλος.

That's it! One must obtain comrades, and not only kinsmen.
Any man from outside the home whose character fuses to yours
is a better friend for a man to have than innumerable blood relations.

Orestes 804-6

With this piece of practical, gnomic wisdom Orestes neatly condenses not only a crucial political reality in the context of the play's plot, but also one of which the citizens of any

⁴¹⁰ On “unmanliness” (ἄνανδρον) as a particularly bitter reproach, see Dover (1994) 100 citing Menelaus' contemplation of abandoning Helen to save himself at *Hel.* 808 as a parallel.

⁴¹¹ On Euripides' characterization of Pylades' friendship as a foil for Menelaus, see Porter (1994) 79.

extreme democracy were keenly aware.⁴¹² Outnumbered by the non-elite citizens of the δῆμος, the noble classes had little option but to band together if they hoped to effectively promote their shared interests, and such political mathematics would require that aristocratic families join in alliances not only within their own ranks but also between one another.⁴¹³ While it is difficult to determine when precisely the notion of ἐταιρεῖαι took on the sinister undertones found in Thucydides' treatment of them at 3.82,⁴¹⁴ it is not difficult to imagine that audience members would view the kind of comradeship that Orestes champions here as destabilizing to the security of the democracy following the revolution of 411 BC.⁴¹⁵ That notions of ἐταιρεία could be interpreted as undemocratic is, I believe, suggested further by the oligarchic logic upon which Orestes' sentiment operates. In a purely democratic context, it would actually be more beneficial for a citizen to have countless relatives (μυρίων...ὁμαίμων, 806) to call upon, provided their interests are aligned. However, for Orestes the situation is reversed: since his personal interests are at odds with the democratic will of the city the only hope for resistance lies in partnering with men of similar noble quality.⁴¹⁶

Orestes and Pylades depart for the Argive assembly, where they will seek to arouse pity in enough citizens to stave off execution. Following a choral ode which calls

⁴¹² Cf. Thucydides' similar sentiment at 3.82.6: καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ ξυγγενὲς τοῦ ἐταιρικοῦ ἄλλοτριώτερον ἐγένετο διὰ τὸ ἐτοιμότερον εἶναι ἀπροφασίστως τολμᾶν.

⁴¹³ Cf. Longo (1975) 266-7 on φιλία with people outside of one's own family as an important prerequisite for establishing ἐταιρεία. He writes that Orestes and Pylades enjoy a proverbially exceptional friendship that forms a natural foundation for ἐταιρεία (proverbiale di un rapporto di tipo eterico).

⁴¹⁴ On which, see Gomme (1986) 128-31.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Wohl (2015) 126-7, following the similar observation of Pelling (2000) 185-7.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Antiphon 2.4.9 on the advantage wealthy men enjoy when they enter into ἐταιρεῖαι: Τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἀτυχοῦσι ἐταιρίζειν συμφέρει, following the reading proposed by Aldus and accepted by most editors (cf. Gagarin [1997] 143). On the similar sentiment concerning the benefits of entering into reciprocating relationships with trustworthy men, cf. Soph. *Phil.* 671-4.

freshly to mind the many woes of the House of Atreus (808-43), Electra returns to the stage and learns not only that Pylades has persuaded Orestes to rise to action, but also that she has been excluded from the plot. The knowledge that Orestes and Pylades are operating in secret without her will prove a crucial factor in her participation in the subsequent conspiracy, but presently the Messenger appears to offer the narrative of the trial scene. From the outset of his speech the Messenger displays an eagerness to ensure Electra that he remains loyal to her and her house, and hence his account of the trial is trustworthy. He begins with the detail that he lives outside of the city and has come only to learn the state of their house (ἐτύγχανον μὲν ἀγρόθεν πυλῶν ἔσω|βαίνων, πυθέσθαι δεόμενος τά τ' ἀμφὶ σοῦ|τά τ' ἀμφ' Ὀρέστου, 866-8), implying that unlike the residents of the city he does not attend the debates of the assembly regularly and is thus posed to offer an detached account of the proceedings.⁴¹⁷ Moreover, he insists that in spite of his lowly status he recognizes the sustenance Electra's house has provided him and remains devoted to it even in its embattled state. Though impoverished in situation, the Messenger claims a nobility of character by virtue of being γενναῖος to his friends (πένητα μὲν, χρῆσθαι δὲ γενναῖον φίλοις, 870). However, as elsewhere, in designating himself as γενναῖος the Messenger professes an ethical superiority which he and Electra share over those seeking to prosecute her and her brother, which establishes an equivalence with her that transcends class and status. The most significant aspect to the lofty ethics they share is precisely what Menelaus and the self-interested denizens of the Argive assembly lack: an unwavering allegiance to established bonds of obligation between trusted allies.

⁴¹⁷ Euripides' depiction of such "feudal" types is fairly conventional and at times offer a caricature of conservatism. As Dover (1994) 113 points out, "The countryman, blunt and brutal in his speech, is honest, upright, a pillar of conservative values, whereas a townsman has the gift of gab." Cf. Eur. *Ba.* 717, *El.* 253, *Ar. Peace* 223, 254, 508-11, 582-600.

Given the conservative ethical γενναιότης and loyalty of the rustic Messenger, it is unsurprising that the only other voice than his own which rises to speak in favor of Orestes in the assembly is also a countryman (αὐτουργός, 920). Rather than punishing Orestes, this αὐτουργός proposes a reward the assembly should approve for Orestes as a benefactor to the city:

ἄλλος δ' ἀναστὰς ἔλεγε τῷδ' ἐναντία,
μορφῇ μὲν οὐκ εὐωπός, ἀνδρεῖος δ' ἀνὴρ,
ὀλιγάκις ἄστὺ κάγορᾶς χραίνων κύκλον,
αὐτουργός, οἵπερ καὶ μόνοι σώιζουσι γῆν,
ξυνετὸς δέ, χωρεῖν ὁμόσε τοῖς λόγοις θέλων,
ἀκέραιον ἀνεπίληκτον ἡσκηκῶς βίον·
ὃς εἶπ' Ὀρέστην παῖδα τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονος
στεφανοῦν, ὃς ἠθέλησε τιμωρεῖν πατρί,
κακὴν γυναιῖκα κᾶθεον κατακτανών,
ἢ κεῖν' ἀφήρει, μήθ' ὀπλίζεσθαι χέρα
μήτε στρατεύειν ἐκλιπόντα δώματα,
εἰ τᾶνδον οἰκουρήμαθ' οἱ λελειμμένοι
φθεροῦσιν, ἀνδρῶν εὐνίδας λωβώμενοι.
καὶ τοῖς γε χρηστοῖς εὖ λέγειν ἐφαίνετο.

Then rising up another man said the opposite of these things,
and he was not handsome in appearance, but a brave man;
he seldom visits the city or the circle of the marketplace.
He farms his own land, like men who alone protect the earth,
Yet clever enough to grapple with words when he so chooses.
He conducts his life with integrity and is above reproach.
This man proposed that Orestes, son of Agamemnon,
be awarded a garland, he who in vengeance for his father
was willing to destroy a wicked and godless woman.
For this woman deprived us from arming our hands,
from leaving home to go on campaign,
if the men left behind for keeping up our homes
will destroy them, spoiling the wives of men.
And to the noble men he seemed to speak well.

Orestes 917-30

Rewarding those working toward the good of the city with hortatory wreaths was a prospect familiar to Euripides' audience from the tribulations of 411 BC, as precisely the same στεφάνωσις was granted to the assassins of Phrynichus⁴¹⁸ and similar privileges

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Plut. *Alc.* 25.10 and Burkert (1974) 107: "Der Mörder des Phrynichos erhielt Bürgerrecht und goldenen Kranz -- die Ehrenstele ist 409 errichtet, kurz von der Aufführung des <Orestes> --. Einsichtigere suchten in den <Gesetzen der Väter> den Weg, den Teufelskreis der Gewalt zu überwinden. Kommissionen

were promised to the slayers of would-be tyrants in the Oath of Demophantos. Like the men who defeated the oligarchs seeking to revolutionize the Athenian constitution, the αὐτουργός paints Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as the justified execution of usurpers whose criminality was set to spread to other cities throughout Greece (926-8), a defense similar to the one Orestes offered for himself at 564-71. Perhaps most revealing, however, is that the Messenger relates that the proposal of the αὐτουργός was approved by the better sort of men (χρηστοῖς, 930) and implicitly rejected by the worse. This remark suggests precisely the same dichotomy between the χρηστοὶ and the πονηροί as figured into the political calculations which lead Menelaus to abandon his nephew. His implication is that better men are able to see that the noble virtues Orestes possesses – the courage to avenge the unjustified murder of his father (924) and the ability to recognize and thwart threats to public safety (925) – are key to maintaining σωτηρία in the long term.⁴¹⁹ Conversely, if the πονηροί allow Clytemnestra's actions to inspire other Greek women, then men will never again be able to go to war or participate in any activity which would remove them from their home for extended periods of time, lest their homes become corrupted with their wives' adultery – a defense that Orestes echoes when he speaks on his own behalf (εἰ γὰρ ἀρσένων φόνος| ἔσται γυναιξὶν ὅσιος, οὐ φθάνοιτ' ἔτ' ἄν| θνήσκοντες, ἢ γυναιξὶ δουλεύειν χρεών, 935-8).⁴²⁰ In essence,

wurden bestellt, diese Texte zu veröffentlichen, und als erstes hat man die Gesetze Drakons über die Mordsühne auf einer Stele vor der Königsstoa auf dem Markplatz ausgestellt. Dies geschah unter eben dem Archon Diokles, der den <Orestes> des Euripides zur Aufführung angenommen hat. Daß die Rechtspflege der demokratischen Polis nicht genügt, dem Morden zu steuern, zeigt freilich eben dieses Drama."

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Rosenbloom (2011) 426 on the similar line of reasoning offered by Euryptolemus in support of the generals on trial for abandoning the soldiers at Arginusae (Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.35).

⁴²⁰ One point that is conspicuously absent from Orestes' address to the assembly is an attempt to appeal to them emotionally, which was the plan formulated at 782-6. The Messenger mentions Orestes' decrepit posture 881-3, but no other reference is made to an arousal of pity. It might be argued that his reliance upon speaking sense to the crowd (943) instead led to his failure to be persuasive, especially since the tactic worked well in Andocides acquittal (*de. Mys.* 1.149).

condemnation of Orestes and the noble ethics he embodies is tantamount to the destruction of the public trust that allows a man's οἶκος to exist without constant vigilance and defense against revolt from within or annexation from without.

Naturally, Orestes' enemies in the assembly argue quite the opposite. Talthybius is the first to speak against Orestes, and while the figure of Talthybius is admired for his dutiful service to the house of Atreus elsewhere in mythology and tragedy, here Euripides depicts him somewhat less favorably as a political opportunist.⁴²¹ Although he aided Agamemnon in the destruction of the Trojans (888), the Messenger relates that he did so simply because he remains subservient to whomever is presently in power (ὕπὸ τοῖς δυναμένοισιν ὧν αἰεί, 889), and he is quick to form new bonds of friendship as their patrons rise and fall from prosperity (ἐπὶ τὸν εὐτυχῇ| πηδῶσ' αἰεὶ κήρυκες· ὅδε δ' αὐτοῖς φίλος,| ὅς ἂν δύνηται πόλεος ἐν τ' ἀρχαῖσιν ἦι, 895-7).⁴²² Particularly noteworthy for the present study, however, is the emphasis the Messenger places on the readily apparent duplicity of Talthybius' speech. Even a political naïf such as the Messenger was able to detect the doublespeak (διχόμυθα, 890) in which he “whirled to-and-fro words at once fair-seeming and bad” (καλοὺς κακοὺς| λόγους ἐλίσσων, 891-2).⁴²³ As he does so, Talthybius is anxious to discern how his speech is registering with the new ruling faction in Argos – the friends of the deceased Aegisthus – and he keeps a close eye on their reaction to his words (τὸ δ' ὅμμ' αἰεὶ| φαιδρωπὸν ἐδίδου τοῖσιν Αἰγίσθου φίλοις, 893-4).

⁴²¹ Cf. *Il.* 1.320; Eur. *Hec.* 484-584, *Tr.* 235-423; Hdt. 7.134-7 mentions a temple dedicated to him and a Spartan family – the Talthybiadae – who claim descent from Talthybius and who alone hold the office of herald in Sparta. He also appears in the depiction of Orestes' vengeance on Attic vases, on which see Farnell (1921) 327.

⁴²² There is some disagreement over the authenticity of 895-7. Dindorf argues for deletion, but Willink finds it to be a perfectly appropriate context for fairly typical abuse of κήρυκες.

⁴²³ This is the only appearance of the word διχόμυθα in extant tragedy. On the idiom καλοὺς κακοὺς λόγους ἐλίσσων, cf. *IT* 559 and *IA* 378.

Talhybius is here engaged in a performance aimed at demonstrating to a subsection of the audience that he is sympathetic to their position and would therefore make an apt and serviceable member of their faction. In his condemnation of Orestes, he pounces upon the opportunity to secure his own safety as the balance of power within the city shifts.

Next, Diomedes rises to offer a brief and largely unpersuasive defense of Orestes, arguing that exile will satisfy justice and that execution is too excessive. The Messenger tells Electra that some men found it to be good advice and others disapproved; however, not to be lost in Diomedes' proposal is the course he prefers is the one that would be in better keeping with Orestes' traditional mythology and its depiction in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, in which Orestes wanders for a period before arriving at Athens to stand trial. By presenting this traditional course that the subsequent plot of the play could take on the lips of a traditionally epic hero, Euripides here hints at how astonishingly off mythological script his drama is going to run, until Apollo descends to restore order.

The next speaker is crucial for this study and provides an opportunity to reflect upon the kinds of speech and the performance of speakers which gave rise to the coup of 411 BC. There has been some suspicion and debate over the authenticity of the lines characterizing this unnamed mob-agitator as a demagogue, but the critical detail that it was Tyndareus who scripted the words his co-conspirator will speak remains secure:⁴²⁴

καπὶ τῷδ' ἀνίσταται

⁴²⁴ Hartung deletes 904-13 in its entirety; Beck, Valckenaer, and Hermn excise only 904 and 913; Kirchoff and Kovacs delete 907-13; Willink (1986) 232 acknowledges the difficulty, but argues that all ten lines are secure enough to be spared and proceeds to detail the advantages of doing so. On tyranny and demagoguery as themes that are quite common in interpolations, see Kovacs (1982) 31-50 and 32-4 on this passage in particular, in which he detects, "post-Euripidean political reflection, perhaps slightly influenced by Platonic metaphor." Even if the majority of these lines are interpolated as he suggests, this would only emphasize the significance of the lines that are secure and the interpolator's impulse to flush them out by adding detail.

ἀνὴρ τις ἀθυρόγλωσσος, ἰσχύων θράσει·
 [Ἀργεῖος οὐκ Ἀργεῖος, ἠναγκασμένος,
 θορύβῳ τε πίσυνος κάμαθεϊ παρρησίαι,
 πιθανὸς ἔτ' αὐτοῦς περιβαλεῖν κακῶι τι.
 ὅταν γὰρ ἡδὺς τις λόγοις φρονῶν κακῶς
 πείθῃ τὸ πλῆθος, τῇ πόλει κακὸν μέγα·
 ὅσοι δὲ σὺν νῶι χρηστὰ βουλευούσ' αἰεὶ,
 καὶ μὴ παραυτίκ', αὖθις εἰσι χρήσιμοι
 πόλει. θεᾶσθαι δ' ὧδε χρὴ τὸν προστάτην
 ἰδόνθ'· ὅμοιον γὰρ τὸ χρῆμα γίγνεται
 τῶι τοῦς λόγους λέγοντι καὶ τιμωμένῳ.]
 ὃς εἶπ' Ὀρέστην καὶ σ' ἀποκτεῖναι πέτροις
 βάλλοντας, ὑπὸ δ' ἔτεινε Τυνδάρεως λόγους
 [τῶι σφῶ κατακτείνοντι τοιοῦτους λέγειν].

And then there stood
 some ceaselessly babbling man, strong in his insolence.
 He was an Argive but not an Argive, suborned,
 relying on the clamor of the crowd and his brute frankness,
 persuasive enough to involve them in some evil.
 Whenever some pleasing man being finely trained in words
 persuades the people, there is great calamity for the city.
 But those who always give useful council with wisdom,
 even if not immediately, in turn they are serviceable men
 for the city. One must view the leader this way: the same need
 exists for those speaking words and those holding offices.
 It was he who proposed killing Orestes and you by stoning.
 But Tyndareus directed words of this sort
 for the man slaying you to speak.

Orestes 902-16

Assuming for the moment that lines 906-13 were in fact written by Euripides, it is noteworthy that part and parcel to the speaker's assertion that his council is trustworthy and wise is a redefinition of what it means to be *χρηστός* (909-10). For Tyndareus' henchman – as well as for Tyndareus himself and the extreme democratic pragmatism he embodies – men are *χρήσιμοι* based not on the nobility of their birth, but by their ability to offer prudent, long-term counsel to the city. Just as elsewhere I have proposed that tragic figures employ the term *γενναῖος* to lay claim to a nobility (either by birth or ethical character) that distinguishes their faction from their enemies', here too Tyndareus via his abettor locates Orestes outside the circle of the city's benefactors by invoking a

notion of *χρηστός* determined only by a man's contributions to the prosperity of the city and not by aristocratic birth.⁴²⁵

Once again, even to the politically inexperienced Messenger the behind-the-scenes political machinations which drive the mob-agitator's performance are quite apparent. I argue that the notion that this speech was in reality scripted by Tyndareus and is being performed by his co-conspirator recalls in the mind of the audience members their own experience with suspicious orators sending more trustworthy men to deliver speeches in their stead. The most prominent comparandum is Antiphon. As Thucydides reports (8.68.1-2), although Antiphon was the mastermind responsible for engineering the overthrow of the democracy, his reputation for cleverness inspired suspicion in his audience even before he opened his mouth to speak. Therefore, as here, Antiphon orchestrates outside of public view the speeches calling for the resolutions he seeks to be performed by his surrogates. A few critics have felt the temptation to draw parallels between Tyndareus and other real world rhetoricians who adopted a similar tactic: Morwood,⁴²⁶ for example, wonders if Euripides references Cleon or (more likely) Cleophon. However, I propose an ultimately more profitable position that Tyndareus' role as an unseen architect of Orestes' condemnation – a successful one, as the assembly approved the execution that his mob-agitator proposes – is a gambit that with some

⁴²⁵ Cf. Rosenbloom (2004) 63-6 on the semantics of *χρηστός* and the ways in which the term is employed to create a stark antithesis between a city's hegemonic group and their political adversaries. He suggests that, "because hegemony is a moral position, the hegemonic group is not the rich; *chrēstoi* can be poor." He proposes that the primary benefit *χρήσιμοι* citizens provide for a city is the production of food: "Hegemony is figured as an alliance between large and small landholders – *chrēstoi*, *metrioi*, *autourgoi* – and constructed around the exclusion of the producers and sellers of non-food commodities."

⁴²⁶ Cf. Rosenbloom (2011) 422 on a scholiast's claim at 772 and 903-16 that the line alludes directly to Cleophon. See also Morwood (2002) 65, where he acknowledges that the effort to determine a specific referent is ultimately reductive, and that the more likely point is that this is a fully functioning democratic assembly featuring a number of typical elements.

frequency may have been suspected or may actually have been actively employed in the βουλή, whenever a known associate of the leader of one of the factions operating in the city came forward to speak. In this case, Euripides' inclusion of the detail that the mob-agitator speaks only as Tyndareus' mouthpiece serves more to recall one of the more obnoxious practices of the democratic assembly than to conjure any specific rhetorician.⁴²⁷

The political facets of Tyndareus' condemnation via the mob agitator aside, here I emphasize once again the parallels between the operation of the conspiracy and the performance of a drama. Like a playwright, Tyndareus has scripted the words that the mob-agitator will perform at great length (ἀνὴρ τις ἀθυρόγλωσσος, 903) and with great force (ἰσχύων θράσει, 903) before an audience of his fellow assemblymen who are pleased by the performance in spite of their lack of good sense (ἡδύς τις λόγοις φρονῶν κακῶς| πείθῃ τὸ πλῆθος, τῇ πόλει κακὸν μέγα, 907-8). Viewing this section of the text with an eye to its performative elements offers one possible solution to a detail that has puzzled a number of critics: how are we to interpret the somewhat cryptic detail that the mob-agitator is “an Argive, but no Argive (Ἀργεῖος οὐκ Ἀργεῖος, 904)?”⁴²⁸ One way the line might be taken is literally – that, like Tyndareus, the man is not a citizen of Argos at all, but a political imposter seeking to influence the assembly's decision toward

⁴²⁷ On the practice of speakers in the assembly rising to speak words that they no to be unwise or false in exchange for money, cf. Thuc. 3.38.1-2 and 42.3-5.

⁴²⁸ Willink (1986) 232 notes that such a “positive-negative juxtaposition” is quite common in Euripides, but struggles to interpret the sense; perhaps he does not possess a true Argive moral fiber because he has been suborned by Tyndareus? West (1986) 246 cites scholiast comparing the notion to the irregular citizenship status of Cleophon, who had a Thracian mother and was perhaps an “Athenian non Athenian;” Rosenbloom (2011) 422 proposes that the man is a foreigner who has taken advantage of the recent political disturbances in Argos to force his way into citizenship. Schein (1975) 60 suggests that the man is characterized specifically as an Athenian demagogue through the use of terms such as θορύβοι and παρησία (905).

his (i.e., his master's) advantage. To do so, he has adopted the mannerisms necessary to convincingly act the part of a true Argive and address the assembly – a deception Tyndareus could never accomplish on his own as a well-known Spartan. Moreover, it is not difficult to discern why Tyndareus might seek a surrogate to propose the extreme measure of executing his kinsman. To this end, his success in persuading the Argive council has the unintended consequence of strengthening the bonds of trust that Orestes, Electra, and Pylades share, to the extent that they are emboldened to take their defense to an even greater extreme.

The Poetics of Affinity

Ultimately, the Messenger reports that the Argive assembly is persuaded by Tyndareus' proposal and votes that Orestes and Electra must face execution; however, they are moved to a small measure of pity by Orestes' sensible self-defense (943) and agree that they should be allowed to take their own lives (946-9). Though emotionally and physically dejected by the verdict, Orestes still enjoys an advantage that, for the moment, Electra does not: the incorruptible friendship he shares with Pylades, whom he trusts as if they were brothers related by blood (ὅ τε πιστότατος πάντων Πυλάδης,| ἰσάδελφος ἀνὴρ, 1014-15). However, one of the particularly striking elements in this section of the text is the extent to which Electra is excluded from the *ἐταιρεία* Orestes and Pylades have formed, in spite of the fact that she faces the same penalty for the same crime. When they formed their conspiracy before approaching the assembly Orestes briefly considers including Electra in the plot, but Pylades argues against doing so because the tears she will surely shed will be an omen of woe (788) and, besides, saying nothing will save them time (789). However, when Orestes and Pylades return from the assembly, something has drastically changed: more than a portent of bad luck or

an inconvenience, the sister that Orestes earlier called his last remaining lifeline (300, 305-6), is treated as a burden and told to fend for herself. Orestes tells her to hold her womanish laments (τοὺς γυναικείους γόους, 1022) in silence, not to pile her woes (1028) and cowardice (ἀνανδρίαν, 1031) on top of the ones he already bears, tells her she is boring him to death with her wailing (1027),⁴²⁹ and finally he refuses to do her the service of killing her (ἐγὼ δέ σ' οὐ κτενῶ,| ἀλλ' αὐτόχειρι θνήισχ' ὅτῳ βούλῃ τρόπῳ, 1039-40). Orestes' repeated reference to Electra's femininity (including his suggestion that she prepare a noose (1035), the tragic woman's typical method for suicide)⁴³⁰ suggests that perhaps her gender excludes her from the benefits his ἐταιρεία provides. Whatever the reason, Orestes has taken the conclusion at which he arrived after dealing with Menelaus – that ἐταῖροι are far more trustworthy than kinsmen (804-6) – to an extreme degree.

Electra, however, refuses to be abandoned in such dire circumstances, and not for the last time she here shrewdly inserts herself into the ἐταιρεία. Once she acquiesces to Orestes' insistence that she see to her own death, she tells him with a hint of double entendre that she will not be abandoned: οὐδὲν σοῦ ξίφει λελείψομαι (1041) might be taken in a temporal sense (i.e., that she will die after him), but it also might be taken metaphorically to indicate her refusal to be excluded and left behind.⁴³¹ Next, she immediately offers him a loving embrace (ἀλλ' ἀμφιθεῖναι σῇ δέρῃ θέλω χέρας, 1042) and reminds him that, as his sister, she shares with him a biological and spiritual

⁴²⁹ On this colloquial use of ἀπόκτειν' at 1027, cf. Stevens (1977) 11-2.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Loraux (1987) 7-31.

⁴³¹ Cf. LSJ λείπω B. II. 2-3 on the word's sense of "forsaking" or being "left behind." Willink (1986) 262 points out that the metaphor has its origin in the notion of falling behind in a horse race, citing for instance *Il* 23.407.

equivalence that Pylades cannot (ἔχων| †τῆς σῆς ἀδελφῆς ὄνομα† καὶ ψυχὴν μίαν, 1045-6).⁴³² Orestes immediately softens his disposition toward her and takes pleasure and comfort in her embrace (1047-8), and her strategy proves extremely effective; so effective, however, that their closeness approaches an extreme and somewhat disturbing degree. Electra expresses her wish that a single sword would kill them both and that they share a cedar coffin (1052-3), and Orestes finds the sentiment quite appealing (1054, 1067). While there is precedent for lovers sharing a tomb – the slain Patroclus tells Achilles in a dream that one day their bones will share an urn (*Il.* 23.82-6), for example – for a brother and sister to do so hints at something more incestuous.

At this point the play demonstrates the extreme measures some conspirators are willing to take to prove their commitment to a *ἐταιρεία*. Orestes offers Pylades – supposedly his closest ally – instructions for their burial and little more than a curt farewell as he and Electra set off to fulfil their death pact (1065). For Pylades the tables have turned, and he now finds himself the one being excluded, a proposition that he finds unacceptable. He intercedes immediately by insisting that he die alongside them (1069-70).⁴³³ Orestes is quite reasonably shocked that Pylades would go to so great an extreme, and when he presses his friend to explain himself Pylades asks why he would go on living if he could not belong to Orestes' *ἐταιρεία* (τί δὲ ζῆν σῆς ἐταιρίας ἄτερ; 1072).

⁴³² 1046 is a troublesome line and critics find the notion of “having the name of your sister” a tortured metaphor at best. Some follow Tyrwhitt’s suggestion of inserting ὄμμα for ὄνομα, which would underscore their biological sameness. Others, such as Weil, Jackson, and Willink, prefer to insert σῶμα for ὄνομα, especially following a scholiast’s use of exactly the same phrase at line 1192 (on which, see below). Either way, I argue that the point of the line remains the same: Electra is at pains to stress their sameness in an effort to gain inclusion in Orestes’ and Pylades’ *ἐταιρεία* and whatever protection it provides. Cf. Pylades’ similar use of the term at 1088.

⁴³³ On a number of parallels between these lines and the similar exchange at *IT* 674-86, see West (1987) 258.

Here I argue that it is significant that Pylades uses the term *ἐταιρεία* and not simply *φιλία*: while his desire to die with Orestes may in part be sentimental, Pylades recognizes that without the protection that inclusion in the *ἐταιρεία* offers (limited as that may be, at this point) he is likely to be prosecuted and executed at any rate. He reiterates complicity in their crime (1073-4), references his obligations to their family stemming from his betrothal to Electra (1091-2), and anticipates that a man who abandons his friends when disaster strikes them will not be kindly received at Delphi (which he calls the acropolis of his home city of Phocis, 1094).⁴³⁴ Anyone who would do so, he implies, ought to suffer a penalty.

Having laid the groundwork to claim that those who forsake the obligations of friendship are proper for conspiracies to target, Pylades invites Orestes to join him into a plot to force Menelaus to suffer alongside them (*συνδυστυχῆι*, 1099), since surely they will perish either way. To do so, he redeploys the formula employed by Orestes at 774 for deciding upon covert action (*ἐς κοινούς λόγους| ἔλθωμεν*, 1098-9).⁴³⁵ The prospect of doing harm to Menelaus prompts Orestes to immediately abandon any thought of suicide. It is noteworthy that the plot Pylades and Orestes now contrive consists of strong dramatic elements, not unlike the depiction elsewhere of the plot to assassinate Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.⁴³⁶ Pylades explains that they will approach Helen by acting as though they are entering the house to commit suicide (*δῆθεν ὥς θανούμενοι*, 1119),

⁴³⁴ While not technically true that Delphi was the capitol of Phocis in the fifth century, Willink (1986) 267 offers the reminder that in mythology proximity is more relevant political affiliation (“tragedy had its own mythical topography and flexible πόλις-concepts.”). Additionally, it should be kept in mind that in the mid-fifth century Athenians were prepared to accept greater Phocian influence at Delphi as a result of the Second Sacred War.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Orestes’ use of the similar formula at 774.

⁴³⁶ On the dramatic elements involved in Orestes’ plot to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in Aeschylus’ *Chor*, Sophocles’ *El.*, and Euripides’ *El.* see Chapter 4 above.

and when they find Helen they will lament to her the things they have suffered (γόους πρὸς αὐτὴν θησόμεσθ' ἃ πάσχομεν, 1121). While in the present frenzy of their plotting they do not pause to script precisely the words that they will perform in pretending to invoke Helen's pity, I argue that the following lines indicate that they conceive of this portion of the plot as a miniature melodrama. Orestes anticipates the faux compassion Helen will express for them in her typically two-faced manner (ὥστ' ἐκδακρῦσαί γ' ἔνδοθεν κεχαρμένην, 1122),⁴³⁷ and Pylades alludes to the fact that both parties will be performing a fiction for the other (1123). Like many of the conspiracies this study has examined, the success of the plot to murder Helen is contingent upon the conspirators' ability to act as if they are doing one deed when they are in reality doing another.

It must also be noted that in the course of arranging the details of the plot there has been a slight but significant redefinition of the conspiracy's desired outcome. While initially Pylades suggested merely that they repay their own suffering on Menelaus by killing Helen (1099, 1105), he now suggests to Orestes that slaughtering Helen will in fact be the path to their salvation:

νῦν δ' ὑπὲρ ἀπάσης Ἑλλάδος δώσει δίκην,
ὣν πατέρας ἔκτειν', ὣν δ' ἀπώλεσεν τέκνα,
νύμφας τ' ἔθηκεν ὀρφανὰς ξυναόρων.
ὀλολυγμὸς ἔσται, πῦρ τ' ἀνάψουσιν θεοῖς,
σοὶ πολλὰ κάμοι κέδν' ἀρώμενοι τυχεῖν,
κακῆς γυναικὸς οὔνεχ' αἶμ' ἐπράξαμεν.
ὁ μητροφόντης δ' οὐ καλῇ ταύτην κτανών,
ἀλλ' ἀπολιπὼν τοῦτ' ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον πεσῆι,
Ἑλένης λεγόμενος τῆς πολυκτόνου φονεύς.

Now as it is she will pay the penalty for the sake of all Hellas,
whose fathers she killed and whose sons she destroyed,

⁴³⁷ West (1987) 261-2 suggests that perhaps Orestes is being hasty in assuming Helen's hostility: since her return from Troy she has done no harm to anyone, and description of her appearance and behavior in the play come only from hostile sources. Still, he goes on, if Orestes' charge that she has put her seal of possession on the house (ἀποσφραγίζεται, 1108) is true, then she is certainly taking full advantage of Orestes' and Electra's anticipated death.

and she made brides bereft of their husbands.
 There will be ululation, they will light fires for the gods,
 praying that good fortunes meet with you and with me
 because we spilled the blood of the wicked woman.
 Once you've killed her you will not be called "matricide,"
 but instead leaving behind that lot you will fall to something better,
 when you are called "the slayer of murderous Helen."

Orestes 1134-42

Pylades here suggests that since they were not able to obtain σωτηρία in the assembly, perhaps killing Helen and avenging the loss of so many of Argos' fathers and sons at Troy will harness the power of the δῆμος by altering the perceived nature of Orestes' two crimes. He does not go so far as to suggest that killing "murderous Helen" will commute Orestes' death sentence – this point Euripides reserves for Electra to add in the following lines – but at the very least he might take some measure of vengeance in the name of all of Greece. Moreover, in these lines Schein detects a distortion of Orestes' and Pylades' words that is reminiscent of Thucydides' description at 3.82.4: Helen's murder would be a noble deed (καλῶς, 1131) and not a criminal one; slaughtering her would transform him from a mother killer (μητροφόντης, 1140) and earn him instead the title of Helen's slayer (Ἑλένης...φονεύς, 1142). Most significantly, however, is that, while Orestes earlier urged Electra to die a noble death worthy of the children of Agamemnon (1060-1), the qualifications for such a death have transformed from noble suicide to winning κλέος (1151) by saving themselves or dying nobly in the attempt (καλῶς θανόντες ἢ καλῶς σεσωμένοι, 1152). For Schein, this is the crucial ethical turning point in the play, "a paradoxical anticlimax which makes absurd the earlier protestations of meeting death heroically."⁴³⁸

⁴³⁸ Schein (1975) 62.

Orestes finds Pylades' proposal extremely attractive and he is immediately rejuvenated. In reply, he praises the value of friendship as being more profitable than either wealth or kingship (1156),⁴³⁹ and in doing so he qualifies the affection he feels for Pylades in a way that defines the kind of friendship that conspiracies require. Orestes says that there is nothing at all greater than sure, trustworthy friendship (οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν κρεῖσσον ἢ φίλος σαφής, 1155), and that the value of noble friendship is incalculably great (ἀλόγιστον δέ τοι τὸ πλῆθος ἀντάλλαγμα γενναίου φίλου, 1157). The implicit contrast Orestes draws is the *φιλία* he thought he shared with Menelaus, which in the present crisis was revealed to be anything but sure. The *γενναῖος* nature of his friendship with Pylades transcends a lower, more democratic form of friendship based on political convenience or expediency (e.g. that of Menelaus and Tyndareus). By virtue of their noble, absolutely trustworthy *φιλία*, Orestes and Pylades operate as a single unity and not as a collective of individuals, any one of whom has the potential to betray the rest.

Electra: The Conspirator Actress

In recognizing the high degree of trust that they share and forming what will prove to be a rather effective though quite extreme conspiracy, Orestes and Pylades have for the second time in the play constructed a cabal that excludes Electra. In their first plot they purposely left out Electra for practical purposes (787-9), which makes some sense inasmuch as there is little help she could offer as a woman before the assembly. In this second plot it is not explicitly clear that she has been excluded intentionally, but at the very least the conspirators have neglected to assign her a role in their violent scheme. For

⁴³⁹ Cf. Soph. *Phil.* 672-3, where Neoptolemus expresses a similar sentiment: ὅστις γὰρ εὖ δρᾷν εὖ παθὼν ἐπίσταται, παντὸς γένοιτ' ἂν κτήματος κρείσσω φίλος.

Electra, however, exclusion is not an option in this case because even if the conspiracy is successful there is at best no guarantee that she will enjoy any of the benefits Pylades has assured, or at worst no ability to contribute to the retributory violence against Menelaus. In an effort to make room for herself within the conspiracy, Electra very astutely proposes a way that she can provide the very thing that all conspiracies require: the security that will allow them to be successful. Responding to Orestes' wish that he might survive the coming attack (κεῖ ποθεν ἄελπτος παραπέσοι σωτηρία| κτανοῦσι μὴ θανοῦσιν, εὐχομαι τάδε, 1173-4) – which for the moment seems an extremely unlikely prospect – Electra claims to be able not only to provide precisely the σωτηρία he seeks, but also to be able to extend it to herself and Pylades: ἐγώ, κασίγνητ', αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἔχειν δοκῶ,| σωτηρίαν σοι τῶιδέ τ' ἐκ τρίτων τ' ἐμοί, 1177-8).⁴⁴⁰ She begins by insisting that even though she has so far not been included, the three of them going forward should belong to a single, cohesive partnership (πᾶν γὰρ ἐν φίλον τόδε, 1992).⁴⁴¹ She next proposes the measure for safety (τήνδ' ἡμῖν ἔχω| σωτηρίας ἔπαλξιν, 1202-3) that she has in mind: namely, ransoming Hermione's life for their own.

Orestes immediately approves of the idea, and in the lines following Electra takes on a role that I find consistent with the structural similarities I posit between the production of drama and operations of conspiracies. To begin, Orestes praises Electra with language indicating that she has proven herself ethically worthy of inclusion in the conspiracy, her gender notwithstanding (ὃ τὰς φρένας μὲν ἄρσενας κεκτημένη,| τὸ σῶμα

⁴⁴⁰ West (1987) 264 notes that Iphigenia uses similar language when she proposes her stratagem at *IT* 1029: ἔχειν δοκῶ μοι καινὸν ἐξεύρημά τι.

⁴⁴¹ At the end of this section of the text in which the plot is expanded to include Electra, Pylades expresses precisely the same sentiment: τρισσοῖς φίλοις γὰρ εἷς ἄγων, δίκη μία, 1244. Willink (1986) 279 detects in Electra's statement of hint of philosophical language, citing Heraclitus B50: ὁμολογεῖν σοφὸν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα εἶναι.

δ' ἐν γυναιξὶ θηλείαις πρέπον, 1204-5).⁴⁴² Now that she has proven herself, Orestes provides her an active role in the plot in addition to her contribution in the planning stage: she will guard the door of the house and serve as the lookout, lest any hostile reinforcements attempt to intercede (1216-23). However, following the shared elements between directing a play and plotting within a conspiracy for which I advocate in this study, here I argue that Electra functions in the capacity of mastermind-director in a still greater sense. The moment that Orestes and Pylades enter the house, Electra turns to the Chorus and begins to issue stage directions.⁴⁴³ First, she tells them where to stand (στῆθ' αἱ μὲν ὑμῶν τόνδ' ἀμαξήρη τρίβον,| αἱ δ' ἐνθάδ' ἄλλον οἶμον ἐς φρουρὰν δόμων, 1251-2) so that they might help Orestes by preventing anyone from peering into the house (1255-7). Next, she tells them how to position their faces (δόχμιά νυν κόρας διάφερ' ὀμμάτων, 1263) and choreographs their movement so that they glance in all directions (ἐλίσσεται νυν βλέφαρον,| κόρας διάδοτε πάνται διὰ βοστρύχων, 1266-7). Finally, she adjusts some of the chorus members' position a final time in order to gain a better view (ἄλλ' αἱ μὲν ἐνθάδ', αἱ δ' ἐκεῖσε λεύσσετε, 1291). Within the plot of the play, Electra on her own initiative has absorbed the Argive women who compose the Chorus into the plot within the play and has issued orders on where to stand and how to move so as to provide as much safety for Orestes and Pylades as they can; metatheatrically, she has adopted the playwright's role by determining where and how the Chorus dances and sings.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² Cf. Schein (1975) 62-3, who comments on the drastic shift in character (e.g., 264-5) Electra has undergone in the course of the play.

⁴⁴³ Cf. West (1987) 269 on these somewhat non-conventional lines, in which we get a lively lyric dialogue between Electra and the chorus in place of a stasimon. He suggests that this interlude presents "a nice exercise in movement and music," which I believe not only keeps pace with the swift action up to and following this point in the play, but also underscores Electra's role as director in the *mise-en-abyme* she and the chorus are soon to perform.

⁴⁴⁴ On other instances of a divided chorus, cf. *Alc.* 77-135, *Supp.* 271-85, and *Soph. Ajax* 803-14.

The moment that the plot reaches its climax and Helen's shrieks can be heard from within the house (1296, 1301), the chorus detects Hermione returning from Clytemnestra's tomb. Electra immediately gives direction to the chorus as to how they must compose themselves – and describes how she will act as well – as they perform a drama within the drama aimed at tricking Hermione into entering the house for capture:

ὦ φίλταται γυναῖκες, ἐς μέσον φόνον
 ἥδ' Ἑρμιόνη πάρεστι· παύσωμεν βοήν.
 στείχει γὰρ ἐσπαίσουσα δικτύων βρόχους·
 καλὸν τὸ θήραμ', ἦν ἄλῳι, γενήσεται.
 πάλιν κατάστηθ' ἡσύχῳ μὲν ὄμματι,
 χροιάι δ' ἀδήλῳι τῶν δεδραμένων πέρι·
 κάγῳ σκυθρωποῦς ὀμμάτων ἔξω κόρας,
 ὥς δῆθεν οὐκ εἰδυῖα τάξειργασμένα.

Dearest women, Hermione is here in the middle
 of the slaughter. We must cease our shout.
 In a rush she steps into the snares of our nets.
 She will be a fine catch, if she is caught.
 Compose yourselves: make your expression calm,
 and let your complections regarding the matters afoot invisible.
 And I will take on a maidenly gloominess about my eyes
 as though I do not know the deeds at hand.

Orestes 1313-20

As in the case of other conspiracies, a crucial part of the fiction Electra asks the chorus to “sell” is that everything is normal and give no hint that mischief is afoot (1317-18); meanwhile, Electra will adopt a crestfallen look that suggests she is still anticipating being executed. When she addresses Hermione she begins with the truth and reports the assembly's vote (1328). But when Hermione inquires as to the shrieks coming from the house, Electra tells her that it was the voice of Orestes supplicating Helen for mercy (1132, 1334). In counterfeit despair and desperation, Electra begs Hermione to enter the house and intercede on her and Orestes' behalf, calling her with a heavy dose of irony their final hope for salvation (σωτηρίας γὰρ τέρμ' ἔχεις ἡμῖν μόνη, 1342). As in other instances of metatheater (such as the “merchant scene” in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, on

which see chapter 4), σωτηρία is here a multivalent term that holds a different meaning for those within and those without the conspiracy. Without knowing the whole truth of the matter at hand nor what she will find once she enters the house, Hermione hears that she can provide σωτηρία for Orestes and Electra by imploring Helen for mercy, and indeed pledges to do so (σώθηθ' ὅσον γε τοῦπ' ἔμ', 1345). However, the women operating within the conspiracy (and the audience sitting in the theater) understand Electra's more sinister meaning: Hermione is a physical bargaining chip with which the conspirators will leverage their escape, the final step in their plot to achieve σωτηρία. This deception, though, is short lived: as Hermione enters the house Electra drops the façade and orders Orestes and Pylades to seize her. She issues the parting jeer that Hermione has come to provide σωτηρία for the conspirators, not for herself (ἡμῖν γὰρ ἤκεις, οὐχὶ σοί, σωτηρία, 1348).

Conclusion

The remaining action of the drama's plot is well known: the Phrygian witness reports that just as she was about to be slain Helen simply disappeared (1493-7); Orestes, Pylades, and Electra emerge on the roof of the palace with Hermione at sword point, threatening to kill her and raze the house if Menelaus does not persuade the citizens of Argos to overturn the conviction (1610-6);⁴⁴⁵ and finally Apollo descends upon the scene to return the action to its correct mythological trajectory (1625-65). Virtually every critic

⁴⁴⁵ When Menelaus capitulates (on which cf. Kovacs [2003] 111), Orestes insists that he has only himself to blame for the present situation, telling him, "you have defeated yourself, since you have been ignoble" (σαυτὸν σύ γ' ἔλαβες κακὸς γεγώς, 1617). More than a mere parting jab, Orestes here reiterates the conclusion at which he arrived when Menelaus failed to aid him earlier in the play: Menelaus is not endowed with the γενναῖος qualities that give rise to the bonds of friendship and trust which conspiracy requires. If did possess such nobility, he would have found himself in precisely the same situation as he does presently, only he would not have incurred the injuries he believes he has.

who discusses Apollo's appearance comments upon the incredible and unique spectacle the scene brought to the audience, with the chorus in the orchestra, Menelaus and his retinue spread across the fore of the stage, the conspirators and Hermione on top of the house, and the dazzling Apollo and Helen suspended above them all.⁴⁴⁶ In addition to a sensational visual and auditory tableau, the scene also provides the audience with a satisfying intellectual paradox concerning the nature of σωτηρία. As Apollo explains, he has descended to rescue (ἐξέσωσα, 1633) Helen and place her at the side of her brothers where she will live for eternity as "savior of sailors" (ναυτίλοις σωτήριος, 1637).⁴⁴⁷ The paradox resides in the notion that Helen – so often decried as the destroyer of countless husbands and sons – will forevermore provide safe navigation for all the generations of navigators to come.⁴⁴⁸ This revelation gestures toward the inscrutable nature of σωτηρία. A divine figure such as Helen who has the power to destroy men on a grand scale may also have the power to save them, whereas the protection men provide for one another may be inconsistent, unreliable, and untrustworthy.

Throughout this chapter I have explored numerous points where Euripides' *Orestes* is intimately concerned with questions of σωτηρία: how should a city determine who deserves protection, and how can a person recognize which bonds of obligation established between friends will collapse under pressure and which will hold fast? Further, I have argued that a crucial focal point within the play's considerations of

⁴⁴⁶ E.g. Schein (1975) 64-5; Willink (1986) 350-1; West (1987) 290; Porter (1994) 254; Morwood (2002) 68-9; Mastronarde (2010) 194-5.

⁴⁴⁷ Regarding Helen's apotheosis, West (1987) 291 suggests the possibility that the notion has an origin in sailors' superstitions that a pair of St. Elmo's fires is good luck, but a single one portends bad luck.

⁴⁴⁸ Willink (1986) 351: "But the culminating paradox, wholly delightful in its ironical myth-fulfillment (novel, but with echoes of cult-etiology), is the apotheosis of Helen as the 'savior of ships' in association with her stellified Brothers."

σωτηρία is the biological and ethical nobility the figures of the play embody. Orestes and Electra simply cannot attain σωτηρία without the aid of an ally against their prosecutors, and the play explores the qualities possessed by some characters who make excellent ἑταῖροι and others who make extremely poor ones. In the end, the ἑταιρεία of Orestes, Electra, and Pylades achieves success because each member insists and maintains that the qualities that define someone as truly noble are ones that allow for truly unbreakable friendship and trust, even in the direst of circumstances. Moreover, the play examines not only the specific kind of γενναιότης that trustworthy conspirators must possess, but also the potency that conspiracies can possess once they are formed on a solid foundation of trust. It is ultimately the conspirators' refusal to allow Menelaus to prosper on the back of their own despair and willingness to risk everything that achieves their salvation.⁴⁴⁹

The centrality of the theme of σωτηρία in the *Orestes* suggests that the anxieties that gave rise to the oligarchic coup of 411 BC were still quite vital among the audience in 408, even after the failure of the coup and efforts to restore stability such as the swearing of the Oath of Demophantos.⁴⁵⁰ The Argos of the play – like the Athens of its production – is a city in crisis in the wake of turbulent regime change, and both face the question of how to move forward in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion, division, and infighting. In the play, divisions are erased when Apollo restores Orestes to the throne, and even Menelaus acknowledges Orestes' nobility and praises the grandeur of his

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Rosenbloom (2011) 440, who discusses similar considerations on display in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

⁴⁵⁰ Wohl (2015) 127 articulates this point exquisitely: "Arousing divided loyalties within the audience, individually and collectively, *Orestes* leads to an emotional and cognitive impasse that reproduces the tensions of Athens in 411. By the time this play was produced in 408, though, those political tensions had, at least superficially, been resolved. Civil war had been averted; the democracy had been restored and was apparently stronger than ever. And yet the problems underlying the coup of 411 persisted, and their historical necessity, unacknowledged in the wake of that first stasis, proved itself in the second."

marriage to Hermione (1675-6). Unfortunately for Athens, however, the return to the constitutional stability of the past that Argos will enjoy is simply not possible; the reinstitution of the *πάτριος πολιτεία* as advocated by the factions decried by Thrasymachus, or the correction of a democracy that has become too extreme as depicted by Aristotle, seems at best an idle hope.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

My purpose in this study has been to examine the ways in which Sophocles and Euripides depict the formation and execution of conspiracies in their late plays – the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes* – in a period of Athenian history beleaguered by mutual mistrust among members of the Athenian δῆμος. Amid an atmosphere where trust in democratic institutions was in need of restoration, I have suggested that these tragedies were keenly attuned to the elements that allow conspiracies to operate: the measures for distinguishing dependable allies from enemies, the formation (or in some cases, the breach) of trust among co-conspirators, and the political theater involved in furthering a conspiracy’s objectives in a way that avoids detection, to name a few. I began by contemplating how ancient Greeks conceived of different varieties of friendship and the obligations that come along with them, as Aristotle explored in his *Rhetoric*. Considering the great emphasis Aristotle places on the formation of political friendships based on shared ethics and interests, I postulated that any conspiracy’s most fundamental components can be encapsulated in two Greek terms (and their cognates) that figure prominently into all three of the tragedies included in this study: γενναιότης (i.e., the characteristics that determine a person’s noble quality, and thus his value – among other aspects – as a potential co-conspirator) and σωτηρία, the safety that the conspirators in these dramas seek and that comes by necessity at the expense of the conspirators’ targets. In chapter 2, I examined the series of civic crises that resulted in the coup of 411 and the divergent accounts of the coup itself that Thucydides and Aristotle recorded, all with an eye toward establishing the context within which these dramas were performed.

As the tragedy performed most immediately in the aftermath of the coup of 411, it is unsurprising that Euripides' *Phoenissae* is not as explicitly concerned with notions of γενναιότης and σωτηρία as are subsequent dramas. Still, its plot is extremely attentive to the disastrous consequences resulting from broken bonds of trust: Eteocles' betrayal embroils the city in civil war, and Creon's failure to enlist Menoeceus in a scheme to save the boy's life results in his noble self-sacrifice – an act of salvation for the city of Thebes, but one of ruination for the lineage of Theban *Spartoi*. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is far more direct in its contemplation of γενναιότης and σωτηρία. Odysseus and Philoctetes both attempt to absorb Neoptolemus into an alliance based on appeals to his noble lineage and the ethical obligations it imposes upon him, and σωτηρία is the objective of both: Odysseus launches a conspiracy seeking to strip the bow of Heracles from Philoctetes and use it to save the lives of Greek soldiers at Troy, while Philoctetes is in search for rescue from Lemnos and a cure for his wounded foot. Finally, Euripides' *Orestes* depicts the consequences of one conspiracy (the plot to assassinate Clytemnestra) and the formation of another (the plot to assassinate Helen). In the process the audience witnesses the mythological figures on stage navigate the same obstacles human conspirators face, as Orestes' trust in the familial γενναιότης he presumes to enjoy with Menelaus proves fruitless, in favor of one predicated upon the ethics he shares with his age-mate Pylades. All three of these dramas in their own way grapple with the same question lingering in Athens after so much political turmoil: what kind of person is worthy of trust and, when public safety is at stake, how can this person be recognized?

Future Iterations of This Project

The primary way in which this project will continue to develop is by expanding its scope, both in terms of the time period and dramas under consideration. While the coup of 411 and the years immediately following were a particularly discordant period in Athenian history, this is but one episode in the grinding late years of the Peloponnesian War wherein the citizen body endured factional strife. By expanding the breadth of my study both backward and forward in time, it is my hope that considerations of the events endured by the Athenian δῆμος both in the years leading up to the coup and in its later aftermath will both further contextualize the conspiracy of 411 BC and lend insight into the crises culminating in Athens' defeat in the war and the rise of the Thirty Tyrants. This expanded temporal scope will likely begin with the "Sicilian Debate" of 415 BC, wherein Athenian citizens deliberate over the prospect of breaching a largely unprofitable ceasefire with Sparta by launching an unprecedentedly ambitious and aggressive expedition against Spartan interests in Sicily.⁴⁵¹ On one side, Nicias observes that older men such as himself who are experienced in the vicissitudes of war urge caution amid a delicate peace of the present moment, especially because enemies closer to home (such as the rebels in Chalcidice) are waiting for just such an opportunity to attack Athens (Thuc. 6.10.2-5). Conversely, according to Nicias younger and more ambitious men like Alcibiades argue vehemently that Athens must take the initiative and go on the attack against the ostensibly poorly organized and equipped Sicilian forces; indeed, he argues, Athenian interests at home will be protected by their superior navy, and even if they fail to conquer Sicilian territory permanently the expedition would injure their enemies and increase Athens' prestige (Thuc. 6.17.1-18.3). While the two sides of this debate do not

⁴⁵¹ Thucydides 6.6-1 – 6.26.2 is the primary historical source for the debate.

break down in any detectable way on partisan lines between democrats and those with oligarchic leanings, we do find in this moment a strong sense that Athenians found themselves polarizing into large-scale factions amidst considering the ways in which they define themselves and their political allies against their opponents – issues that, I have argued, are crucial considerations in the tragic dramas produced in this period.⁴⁵² This factional mentality is only exacerbated by the events that follow the disastrous Sicilian Expedition — the mutilation of the herms and subsequent trials (on which see chapter 2 above), the coup of 411, and the downturn of Athens’ fortunes in the war resulting in the rise of the Thirty Tyrants – and it will be enlightening to investigate the shifting factions within the city as these events unfold.

As it happens, two other tragic dramas from this extended period survive that, like the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes*, lend insight into the civic experience and contemporary anxieties of their audiences. The first of these tragedies is Euripides’ *Ion*. The production date of the *Ion* has been a point of debate among scholars, but most agree that it was most likely performed between 414 and 412 BC.⁴⁵³ Hence I have reserved it for this discussion rather than a chapter of its own. In this play Creusa, the daughter of

⁴⁵² It may also be worthwhile to consider the similar debate arising shortly thereafter in Syracuse over a potential Athenian invasion (Thuc. 6.32.3-40.2). Here, Hermocrates warns that the Athenians are indeed coming and urges his countrymen to make preparations and shore up their alliances with fellow Sicilians. In response Athenagoras, a prominent democrat, claims that the Athenians are unlikely to undertake so dangerous an expedition and that Hermocrates seeks to incite public alarm for the political purposes of his oligarchic allies (cf. especially 6.38.2-4). The accusations Athenagoras levels in his counterargument maybe be useful for conceiving the ways in which contemporary democrats conceived of oligarchs, albeit in a different political climate than the one in Athens. Cf. Mader (1993) 435-40.

⁴⁵³ On the dating and civic context of Euripides’ production of the *Ion*, cf. Zacharia (2003) 3-7. Based on metrical evidence scholars narrow the production dates to between 418 and 412 BC (most place it close to the *Troades* of 415 BC). Some, including Zacharia (cf. [2003] 4), have argued for 412 BC based on political considerations within the play: “That year, not long after the disastrous Sicilian Expedition and amid fears of general imperial secession, is exactly right, given the marked emphasis on Ionianism at the beginning and end of the play.”

the noble Athenian Erechtheus, was raped by Apollo and in secret gave birth to a child and left it for exposure (10-9). Apollo shows pity on the child and instructs Hermes to take him up and bring him to Delphi, where the boy will serve as an attendant in the temple (28-56). Years later Creusa and her husband Xuthus (a non-Athenian resident who has immigrated to the city) travel to Delphi to consult the oracle regarding their infertility (64-7). While there, Creusa happens to meet and strikes an instant rapport with her son (247-400), and Xuthus learns from the oracle that the first person he meets upon leaving the temple is his son (518-647). This person turns out to be Creusa's son, who (after some skepticism, 520-61) accepts his new identity as Xuthus' son and with it a new name: Ion (661-8).

At this point Creusa returns to the stage with an old, faithful retainer of hers, and she learns from the Chorus that the identity of her son has been revealed: he is the young man with whom she conversed earlier, but the identity of his mother has been falsely reported (752-807). From this point forward, the play becomes deeply concerned with the formation of a conspiracy and its justifications for organizing an assassination plot with Ion as its target. Upon hearing the news of the oracle, the retainer is quick to illustrate the implications of this revelation; he says they have been betrayed (προδεδόμεσθα, 808) by her husband's clever and secret stratagem (μεμηχανημένως, 809; λάθραι, 816) and are to be cast forth from the house Creusa has inherited from Erechtheus (δωμάτων τ' Ἐρεχθέως| ἐκβαλλόμεσθα, 810-11). The Attendant then attempts to reconstruct the steps of Xuthus' assumed betrayal: he speculates that Xuthus begat a son with a slave and in secret sent the boy away from Athens until such time that Xuthus could come and legitimately restore him to the house (817-31). Indeed, the Attendant and the Chorus are

eager to emphasize the secretive nature of Xuthus' machinations (ὅδε δ' ἐψεύσατο| πάλαι τρέφων τὸν παῖδα, κᾶπλεκεν πλοκάς, 825-6; οἴμοι, κακούργους ἄνδρας ὡς ἀεὶ στυγῶ,| οἱ συντιθέντες τᾶδικ' εἶτα μηχαναῖς| κοσμοῦσι, 832-4). In response, Creusa is compelled to reveal to them the truth of her rape by Apollo as she understands it: she became pregnant from the encounter, gave birth in secret, and abandoned him in the vain (she believes) hope that Apollo would save him (941-65). Her true son, she believes is dead (953), and this young Ion is surely a usurper.

Creusa and her Attendant take their victimhood at the hands of a conspiracy as justification for launching a conspiracy of their own, and once again the play lays emphasis on the conspiracy's secretive nature. The Attendant at first suggests that they fall upon Ion with knives in a public place (981-5); however, Creusa prefers a more clandestine approach (καὶ μὴν ἔχω γε δόλια καὶ δραστήρια, 985):⁴⁵⁴ the Attendant is to join as a participant in Xuthus' sacrifice to Apollo and subsequent banquet, where he is to slip a lethal poison into Ion's wine cup (1029-38). If performed correctly, then the Attendant's actions will not be detected and he and Creusa will not be implicated in Ion's death; however, this will require that the Attendant act the part of a celebratory reveler at banquet in such a way that hides his true, murderous intentions from the many witnesses present.⁴⁵⁵ In this regard, the Attendant proves to be a competent conspirator and secretly slips the poison into Ion's cup without detection (1181-6). However, here Apollo

⁴⁵⁴ Though the Chorus does not actively participate in the formation of the conspiracy in this section of the text, they speak as if they are guilty by association by line 1113-4: "Are we taken, then, plotting secret slaughter against the boy? (οὔτι που λελήμεθα| κρυφαῖον ἐς παῖδ' ἐκπορίζουσαι φόνον;)"

⁴⁵⁵ In his description of the unfolding of the plot, the Attendant relates that the entire host of Delphi was in attendance for the celebration (ὡς πάντα Δελφῶν λαὸν ἐς θοίνην καλῶν, 1140). Whether large number of potential witnesses made the murder easier or more difficult to complete is not immediately clear, but the fact that the plot is foiled through no fault of the Attendant's own seems to favor the former.

intervenes as birds who dwell in his halls descend upon the revelry and sip droplets of wine spilled on the ground. One of these birds drinks a drop from the poisoned cup and dies instantly (1201-8), and Ion immediately recognizes the murder plot and correctly identifies both the poisoner and the mastermind (1210-1221). A vote is taken on the spot among the leading men of Delphi, and it is decided that Creusa is to be executed in the same way as a priest of Apollo who is caught plotting murder: she is to be thrown from the top of a precipice (1222-8).⁴⁵⁶ When Ion appears on stage to seize Creusa she takes refuge upon the altar (1258-69), but just as he is considering dragging her away violently the Pythia arrives bearing the cradle in which Ion was abandoned with all of its original contents (1320-4). These items serve as tokens of recognition (1335-54), and just as Ion decides to make certain that he now understands his parentage correctly by asking Apollo himself (1545-7), Athena appears in her chariot above the temple and details the glorious achievements to be won by the descendants of the now restored House of Erechtheus.

In addition to the dramatic representation of an assassination plot, the play's strong emphasis on the keeping and revelation of secrets render it an enlightening point of comparison with the dramas already examined in this study. The language of secrecy abounds in the play,⁴⁵⁷ and it contemplates the difficulty of determining whom and what information to trust in the extremely complex and messy network of interpersonal relationships within a family – as is dramatized by Creusa's and her Attendant's instantaneous mistrust of Xuthus and assumption of his deceptive attempt to legitimize himself and Ion as rightful heirs of Erechtheus – that grow exponentially more

⁴⁵⁶ It will be interesting to compare this detail – that those seeking vengeance take the step of calling for a vote to ensure at least a majority of public support for punishing the accused – with the “Courtroom Scene” on Euripides’ *Orestes* (866-952, on which see chapter 5 above).

⁴⁵⁷ E.g. (in addition to the lines noted above) 1028, 1116, 1216, 1341-2, and 1360-3.

complicated when extended to the πόλις-level. Much like the collapses of confidence on display in all three of the dramas examined here and the sharp distinctions drawn between those with access to a conspiracy's knowledge and those forbidden from it in the *Philoctetes* and the *Orestes*, Euripides' *Ion* dramatizes the ways in which secrets compound the dangers of civic friction.

The second relevant tragedy produced within the years of this study's expanded scope is Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus*. Sophocles composed this drama sometime before his death in 406/5 BC, but the play's second hypothesis records that it was not produced until the City Dionysia of 401 BC.⁴⁵⁸ This play is concerned to a far lesser degree with conspiracies and all that comprises them – establishing and breaking bonds of trust or drawing distinctions between allies to be protected and enemies to be targeted, for example – but it is quite relevant to Athens' arduous final years of the fifth century BC in general and to the coup of 411 in particular (as Colonus was a central gathering place for oligarchic sympathizers, in addition to being Sophocles' home *deme*).⁴⁵⁹ The plot of the *Oedipus at Colonus* follows upon the events depicted previously in his *Oedipus Tyrannus* (c. 429 BC)⁴⁶⁰ and *Antigone* (c. 441 BC).⁴⁶¹ As the play opens, Oedipus and his daughter Antigone are in exile and have inadvertently wandered into a

⁴⁵⁸ Kelly (2015) 1296.

⁴⁵⁹ On the actions of the oligarchs at Colonus cf. Cf. Thuc. 8.67.2. On Sophocles' residence there, see Sommerstein (2002) 41.

⁴⁶⁰ The production date of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not securely known, but most scholars are in agreement that a date between 429 and 425 BC is likely. Some favor 429 BC because the depiction of the Theban plague in the drama would then coincide with the outbreak of the plague in Athens in 430 and infected the city until 426/5. On some textual and historical evidence connecting the plague on stage to the real one, see Esposito (2015) 1306.

⁴⁶¹ The date of the production of the *Antigone* is likewise not known with certainty. The most generally accepted date is based on the play's hypothesis, which indicates that Sophocles serves as a general in the Samian expedition (cf. Thuc. 1.40.5-1.41.3) shortly after the play was produced. If the hypothesis can be trusted, the production date would then be around 442/1 BC. Cf. Fletcher (2015) 1264.

grove sacred to the Eumenides (36-43) near the district of Colonus outside of Athens.

Although a local inhabitant urges Oedipus and Antigone to leave immediately, Oedipus recognizes this as the place he is destined to die and refuses to depart. Shortly thereafter Ismene, Oedipus' other daughter, arrives and reports on the civil war that has broken out between Polynices and Eteocles (333-84).⁴⁶² She also delivers the news that an oracle in Thebes has prophesized that whichever side is able to return Oedipus from exile will be victorious, so Creon is likewise wandering in search of him (391-7). Next Theseus arrives from Athens and instantly recognizes Oedipus, who immediately offers his body and the benefits his warring sons seek to gain from it to Athens instead, in exchange for burial upon his death (551-628). Theseus then departs, having settled Oedipus as a resident of Colonus (636-7; 656-67).

The middle section of the play features a series of failed attempts to persuade Oedipus to convey the final benefits that the prophesy foretold to one of the factions fighting in Thebes, and in the process Sophocles extols the virtues of Athenian justice in the face of men unraveling subversive schemes such as the city saw in the coup of 411. First Creon arrives on stage (728), but when his rhetoric fails to persuade Oedipus he attempts to gain leverage by seizing first Ismene (818-9)⁴⁶³ and then Antigone (826-7). When even this proves ineffective, he threatens to drag Oedipus back to Thebes by force (861-4); but at just this moment Theseus returns (887) and orders the residents of Colonus to hasten to intercept the captors of Ismene and Antigone (897-904). Then, in a speech that lays emphasis on the ubiquity of justice and obedience to the law in Athens

⁴⁶² For Euripides' treatment of this conflict in the *Phoenissae*, see chapter 3 above.

⁴⁶³ The fact that Creon has arrested Ismene before his attempt to persuade Oedipus began emphasizes the duplicity of his rhetoric in the *ἀγών* in retrospect.

(911-9), Theseus insists that gains made by the kind of deception Creon has attempted are only temporary (τὰ γὰρ δόλω| τῷ μὴ δικάϊω κτήματ' οὐχὶ σώζεται, 1026-7), and orders him detained until the girls are returned.

When Antigone and Ismene are returned shortly thereafter, they bring news to Oedipus that an unknown suppliant at a nearby shrine to Poseidon seeks an audience with him (1156-65); when it is revealed that the suppliant is in fact Polynices, Oedipus is persuaded to speak with him only by Antigone's eloquent request (1181-1203). When Polynices arrives he is swift to explain that his legitimate kingship of Thebes was swindled from him: his younger brother Eteocles seized power not by defeating him in an argument nor by a test of strength, but by persuading the city (οὔτε νικήσας λόγῳ,| οὔτ' εἰς ἔλεγχον χειρὸς οὐδ' ἔργου μολών, | πόλιν δὲ πείσας, 1296-8). The regime change Polynices here describes recalls the political turmoil familiar to the experience of Sophocles' audience, and the factional strife he describes remained a source of deep disquiet.

The remainder of the play focuses on the location of Oedipus' final resting place. Sophocles is careful to keep this location squarely indeterminate in the text, as this was secret knowledge held exclusively by the mystery cult established there.⁴⁶⁴ As he departs, Oedipus implores Theseus never to reveal the exact location of his tomb, so that it can never be disturbed and can offer protection to Athens in perpetuity (1523-5); this knowledge, he says, should be kept in secret and passed on hereditarily to whomever is foremost in Athens (1530-2). Oedipus then departs (1555), and a Messenger recounts his

⁴⁶⁴ On the vagueness of the location of Oedipus' tomb in the text, cf. 1520-3, 1590-7, and 1760-3. On the play's combination of cult practices found both locally in Colonus and in other cult sites in Athens, see Kelly (2009) 41-5.

final moments (1586-1666) to which Theseus was the only witness (1656-7). It is in this final third of the play where a theme of secret knowledge similar to that in the *Ion* comes to the fore and we find this play's most direct connection to the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes*. While not conspiratorial in the same sense, Oedipus is forced to consider closely whom he can trust to preserve the secret knowledge that will preserve Athens against its enemies. The fact that he chooses to trust Theseus to the exclusion of all others (including his daughters) is, I believe, of central importance to our understanding of the play. Following the depiction of duplicitous and self-interested leaders in Creon and Polynices, that Oedipus chooses to entrust his burial to Theseus and confer his future protection on Athens gestures toward the prosperity his audience knows the city will enjoy at the height of its power and recalls the city's potential in its weakened state at the time of this play's production. Indeed, the play as a whole carries a strong sense of nostalgia for a time when Athens had little to fear from external enemies, while simultaneously suggesting that the permanent divine favor the city enjoys through the protection of Oedipus means that it will endure its present hardships and return to good fortune.⁴⁶⁵ As the Chorus has it in reply to Oedipus at lines 724-7:

{OI.} ὦ φίλτατοι γέροντες, ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐμοὶ
φαίνοιτ' ἂν ἤδη τέρμα τῆς σωτηρίας.
{XO.} Θάρσει, παρέσται. Καὶ γάρ, εἰ γέρων ἐγώ,
τὸ τῆσδε χώρας οὐ γεγήρακεν σθένος.

{Oi.} Oh dearest elders, may you show to me now
the bounds of my safety.
{Ch.} Be of good courage, it will be there! For even if I am old,
the strength of this land has not grown old.

Final Questions

⁴⁶⁵ On this overall optimistic theme in the play, see Krummen (1993) 193-4. Cf. also Kelly (2015) 1299.

It is incumbent upon any literary-historical inquiry such as this to acknowledge how vastly the information we possess about the people and events of the past is outweighed by information to which we do not or cannot have access. In the chapters that have preceded I have attempted to reconstruct the particular tense and uncertain political atmosphere in Athens in this relatively brief span in its history by examining the ways in which Sophocles and Euripides made contemporary civic anxieties manifest in their tragedies. And yet, the Theater of Dionysus was but one of countless areas of civic life where the angst arising from the turbulence caused by both internal and external enemies may have been felt. While I maintain that tragic drama is an important medium for capturing and articulating the apprehension of the Athenian civic body, it is by no means the only one. Ergo, here at the end of this study one final question must be addressed: what information do we lack that would help complete the picture of what life in Athens was like in the aftermath of the coup of 411, and where would that information come from?

The most important first step in completing this picture would be to get a better sense of the public perception of the coup and the danger it posed. As I discussed in Chapter 2 above, our two primary historical sources of the coup offer notably divergent perspectives on the methods, goals, and primary agents driving the coup: Thucydides characterizes the coup's backroom plotting and secret assassinations as a summer of deep confusion and fear for Athenian citizens (e.g. 8.66.2), whereas Aristotle presents it as not much of a coup at all, but rather an effort by more conservative (or merely risk-averse) politicians to curb the excesses of democracy in order to return to a polity more similar to what they held to be Athens' ancestral constitution. But what was the experience of

ordinary citizens who later comprised the audiences to the *Phoenissae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Orestes*? The necessity for a sweeping public proclamation and demonstration of unity such as the swearing of the Oath of Demophantos seems to indicate some lingering mistrust in the city and suggests to us that the fear that conspiracies were ongoing was severe. And yet, we have no evidence that anyone was ever brought up on charges of plotting against the democracy while the oath was in place⁴⁶⁶ – should that indicate that the Oath of Demophantos was an extremely effective tool for suppressing potential conspiracies, or that it was sworn in a moment of paranoia against imaginary enemies? Perhaps in the future some evidence pertaining to the enforcement of the Oath of Demophantos will emerge that will give some indication of the oath's true effectiveness, but until such time we are left to speculate at the scope and pervasiveness of the fear conspiracies incited.

In addition to questions surrounding the pervasiveness of the fear that conspiracies incited, there is also the question of a contemporary Athenian audiences' perception of the role politics played in their consumption of tragedy as a genre. As I have reiterated in this study (following Griffith, among many others), from our perspective as modern scholars tragedy is simultaneously concerned with elements of mythology and with experiences arising from its audiences' participation in the life of the πόλις. But would those two elements have been distinguishable to contemporary theatergoers, and if so would it have made sense to an Athenian mind to view them as disparate components of the tragic experience? In presenting on stage mythological

⁴⁶⁶ The rewards and punishments the oath authorized were presumably in place from the time it was sworn in 409 BC until the establishment of the Thirty Tyrants in 404 BC. Andocides at *de Myst.* 1.99 relates that at the time he was speaking in 399 BC only laws passed after the archonship of Eucleides in 403/402 BC were enforceable.

figures engaged in the types of schemes that were being actively rooted out beyond the confine of the theater, were Sophocles and Euripides merely offering their audiences a venue for synthesizing their intellectual and emotional responses to the fears conspiracies invoked, or were they in some ways aggravating the emotions that their audiences already held? And what of Sophocles and Euripides themselves – both prominent public figures but also extremely different men – how (if at all) did the perception of them and their participation in other aspects of public life influence their audiences' understanding of their tragic poetry? Did Sophocles' contributions as στρατηγός or as πρόβουλος contribute in any way to his audience's perception of the political elements of his tragedy in ways which Euripides' more apolitical lifestyle did not? Even if there were an answer to each of these questions, there remains the problem that an ancient audience was necessarily polymorphous and multivalent, such that there could not have been a singular, uniform response to any of these factors.

Finally, by its very nature a conspiracy is an endeavor that is predicated upon making a distinction between knowing and not knowing. Conspirators are bound to one another by the secret knowledge they share of their own machinations toward whatever clandestine outcomes they seek; once this knowledge becomes compromised, so too does the conspiracy. Some conspiracies require only that they remain secret up to the point that their objectives are achieved, and beyond that it makes little difference what people outside of the conspiracy know about the conspirators' actions. This is the way most assassination plots function, as do most political coups (including the coup of 411). But there still remains the other kind of conspiracy as well, both in the ancient and modern worlds – the kind of conspiracy that is performed in secret and requires that its

involvement in whatever actions it undertakes remains forever unknown to those outside its circle of trust. How many conspiracies such as these, how large or small, how complex or simple, how successful or futile were active in fifth-century Athens and contributed to historical outcomes in ways which historians will never be able to detect? The answer to this question must remain forever unknown because the most successful conspiracies of all are the ones that complete their objectives without ever being recognized.

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