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**“AND WHATEVER IT IS, IT IS YOU”:
THE AUTOCHTHONOUS SELF IN AESCHYLUS’S
*SEVEN AGAINST THEBES*¹**

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The Athenians were splendid and imaginative snobs, especially with regard to their origins. For what more creative way to describe their utter uniqueness than to suggest that the place from which they originated was the earth itself? In effect, they were claiming they were from nowhere. For this myth of autochthonous roots entailed being born from the very earth or inhabiting it from time immemorial, a spectacular claim either way you look at it. This Athenian claim to autochthony is paradigmatic, though, because it has provided the model for many nations up to the current day seeking to define their identities. So from the ancient all the way to the modern world, we have been grappling with the question of autochthony, of roots and the identifications they engender. In a way this very question informs the sometimes chilling struggles of peoples the world over that have yet to cease even today—from Ingushetia and Ossetia in the Caucasus to Israel and Palestine in the Middle East.² Everybody, it seems, has a strong claim on the ownership of a place of origin. Because this is the case, autochthony has tended to incite among supporters and critics, those living it and those

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2 Leontis 1995 traces in the modern period of Greece the use of autochthony for the development of what she calls a Hellenic “entopia.” See esp. 103–31.

observing, a telling mix of bemusement, incredulity, and hostility.³ But the Athenians of the classical period were, we might say, the originators of the discourse of origins, the autochthonous critics of autochthony.

The Athenians had their own reservations. Here, in fact, I will argue that Aeschylus posed disquieting questions about autochthony with his *Seven Against Thebes*. Through the struggles of Eteocles and his citizens for the autochthonous city of Thebes against an invasion of Argives, Aeschylus vividly illuminates the centrality of the questions we still face today: how do we make claims on who we are? What must we highlight or suppress to make such assertions? And what are the consequences? In effect Aeschylus's *Seven*, as I will argue, shows up the devastating ambiguity of all identity claims: wherever you turn, something is suppressed, and whatever it is, it is you.⁴ This means that if we are to seek out the meaningful and potentially dangerous implications of autochthony, we must begin with Aeschylus. *Seven* is the essential place to turn.

Let me begin with a discussion of the myth of autochthony.

For the Athenians of the fifth century the myth of autochthony provided both a useful organizing principle for a people seeking to define its sense of civic belonging and a sense of entitlement and exclusion. Autochthony posits a community member's birth from the very soil he inhabits, creating a privileged connection between an individual, his community, and the land. According to one of its myths, Athens imagined the genesis of its forebears as an unconsummated relationship (misconsummated, we might say) between Hephaestus and Athena. Born of the very soil that received Hephaestus's seed, Erechtheus became the primordial father of the Athenians; the "Athenian name" became all the more prestigious because the city's patroness—who acknowledged and nurtured Erechtheus—was virginal and therefore embodied the prestigious principle for which her people stand (genesis from the earth itself).⁵ Descendants of this line share the blood of

3 We needn't look very far back into recent history to find critical engagements with the claims or implications of autochthony. Just a few years ago even Marcel Detienne weighed in with a small monograph tracing the thread connecting, as his subtitle intimates, the "pur Athénien au Français raciné" (2003). Detienne, it should be clear from this phrase, has no illusions about the prejudices that could potentially arise from a myth like autochthony. But his scorn for the myths the Greeks created to account for their ancestors clouds his analysis. See de Benoist 2004.

4 Batstone 2006.20. I develop this idea further below.

5 For the story and sources of Erechtheus, see Loraux 1993.57, with attendant notes. For the "Athenian name," see her excellent essay of the same title (1993.111–43). For the mother as the "figure of non-figuration," see Heiden 2005.256 n. 45.

the city's first children and recognize the earth as their communal womb. As Plato has Socrates say to Menexenus, the ancestors of the Athenians were "children of the soil, really dwelling and having their being in their ancestral home, nourished not, as other peoples are, by a stepmother, but by a mother, the land in which they lived" (237b).⁶

This is a powerful image for establishing the connection an Athenian might feel for his city and his brother citizens,⁷ making him feel toward his city what a son feels toward his mother and toward his fellow citizens what one brother feels for another.⁸ But the flipside of this privilege, it is argued, is a restrictive, sometimes violent, parochialism that bars "others" from access to the city's communal benefits. As many have pointed out, this Athenian desire for civic purity seemingly builds its foundations on exclusions, namely, the exclusion of women and foreigners. Here Socrates is explicit: "That is how firm and sound the high-mindedness and liberality of our city are, how much we are naturally inclined to hate the barbarians, through being purely Greek with no barbarian taint . . . Consequently, our city is imbued with undiluted hatred of foreignness" (245c–d). And further, if the city auto-genetically produces her children, it valorizes the privilege of a non (hetero)sexual union and relegates the functional role of women as childbearers to an unnatural necessity that never quite recaptures the originary production.⁹ As Socrates famously says: "The earth does not mimic woman in conceiving and generating, but woman earth" (238a). Hence the myth of autochthony is problematic, as the reverse face of a perceived unified identity is a denial of women's procreative power. This disavowal simultaneously abrogates their unique difference from men as mothers and prejudicially marks the difference of their children from those of mother earth.

The ambiguity inherent in the myth of autochthony in all likelihood accounts for the ambivalence of its critical reception, as two general positions

6 The translation is Paul Ryan's. It is worth noting, of course, that, in *Menexenus*, Socrates is parodying the institution of funeral orations, putting the exercise on par, in fact, with dancing naked. Heiden 2005.256 n. 45 has a useful, clarifying remark on the sexual figuration of the city: "The 'city' could be figured as either 'father' or 'mother,' according to whether it was conceptualized as a union of strangers in close friendship ('father' / 'home' / 'citizens') or a biological descent group ('mother' / 'earth' / 'earth-borns')."

7 Cf. *ibid.* 239a: the Athenians are "brothers born of a single mother."

8 Cf. *ibid.* 249c: "Quite simply, for the dead [the earth/city] stands as son and heir, for their sons as a father, for their parents as a guardian; she takes complete and perpetual responsibility for all of them."

9 For a critical reading of *Menexenus*, see Loraux 1986a.263–327, esp. 312–27.

emerge: one we might call ideological, the other historicist or materialist. Let me note from the outset that these distinctions are my own and that the positions I have identified are not entirely opposed to one another. Each is critical of the idea of autochthony, only from a different angle.¹⁰

The ideological position is best exemplified by Nicole Loraux. In three valuable books, Loraux develops a critique of Athenian civic discourse (whether tragic, rhetorical, or philosophical) by identifying its breaks, gaps, and inconsistencies—that is, what the text must repress to organize itself—performing in a way a psychoanalysis of what she terms the Athenian “imaginary.”¹¹ Through a series of “symptomatic” readings, Loraux argues that the myth of autochthony, of a pure origin, satisfies a male desire for a society exclusive of the female, a male desire for the reproduction of civic bonds without the messy complication of heterosexual relations (1993.17).¹² In this light, it “dispossesses the women of Athens of their reproductive functions” (1993.9).¹³ She then asks: “If in the civic imaginary the fatherland is self-reproducing, what place remains for women, whose role is negated in just that sphere of fertility to which the city, in practice, confines them?” (1993.122).¹⁴ And later: “We must ask what kind of benefit accrues to a city of men, whose dream is to reproduce themselves, by entrusting the civic earth with the task of avoiding all sexual union, *in extremis*” (1993.124).

On the historicist side of the critical spectrum is Edward Cohen’s *The Athenian Nation* (2000). Cohen is skeptical of “modern scholars’ assumption that autochthony was a fundamental ‘belief’ of the Athenians”

10 The opposition between them emerges from the discourses that each employs (psychoanalysis and historicism, respectively) and, consequently, the limitations each claims for the other’s discourse.

11 For a useful explanation of the “imaginary,” see Loraux 1993.3–22 *passim*.

12 She develops this thesis most thoroughly in her essay “Autochthony: An Athenian Topic” in Loraux 1993 and later in her small monograph *Born of the Earth* (2000).

13 Loraux’s feminist reading of the myths of autochthony developed contemporaneously with the work of Arlene Saxonhouse (1986) that echoed this vein of thinking. See also Dougherty 1996 and Walsh 1978, who makes the connection between autochthony and nobility (*eugeneia*).

14 From reading Loraux, one might get the impression that all authors present autochthony in a positive light. Saxonhouse 1986, however, argues that Euripides’ *Ion* dramatizes the fundamental problems of this exclusive discourse by “forc[ing] us to see the violence at the beginnings of cities, as well as the heterosexual relations (and thus the female and not just the male) that lie there” (259). The specific critique of Creusa, Xuthus, and Ion pertains to the whole discourse of identity and difference in general. It is a discourse, she maintains, that resembles the “almost fanatical attempts to remain pure and enjoy a freedom from the dependence on others” (265), whether female or foreign.

and refuses, in effect, to believe that the Athenians were incapable of rationalizing myths that discernibly contradicted the “secular workings of life” (2000.87–88).¹⁵ Given his interest in the material structure of the city rather than an ideological vision of it (à la Loraux), Athens was in Cohen’s opinion like a nation. In other words, it was entirely capable of accepting “widespread immigration and assimilation” (2000.88). From Cohen we get the picture of a dynamic, living and breathing city, multicultural, ethnically diverse, and fully conscious of, even taking pride in, its sense of openness.¹⁶ Accordingly, “unexamined, the *mythos* of autochthony might promote xenophobic [and, we might add, misogynistic] exclusivity; purified by reason, the *logos* of autochthony offered no insurmountable barrier to assimilation” (2000.90).¹⁷ The problem lies, Cohen contends, in the very definition of autochthony: “Although some scholars tautologically translate the single word *autokhthones* here as ‘having been born from the soil’ (Loraux 1993.66), the seminal meaning of *autokhthones* (‘living in the same land for a long time’) eliminates the otherwise patent contradiction of the Athenians’ ‘acquiring’ (without ousting anyone else) the soil from which they were born” (2000.99).

In sum, for both Loraux and Cohen, autochthony is an imaginary or ideological construct. Cohen stresses the incongruity between the myth and reality, whereas Loraux sees the myth as constitutive of reality. The apparent differences between these two views of autochthony, however, are not as insurmountable as they initially appear. In fact, Cohen and Loraux each gesture in the other’s direction. For Cohen, Athenian “nationalism” was usefully attended by the “noble lies” of myth (specifically myths of origin) and a healthy dose of historical amnesia (2000.103). For Loraux, autochthony’s domain, the imaginary, was more like the “spell of an ideality,” an “institutional illusion” lived as fact. These two clarifications respectively

15 By “rationality” Cohen means the *mythos/logos* dichotomy (cf. 88–90). He appropriates Levi-Strauss’s self-evident assertion that “‘professing to believe in autochthony’ necessarily conflicts with ‘the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman’ (Levi-Strauss [1968.212])” (88 n. 58). Loraux, however, already addressed this very point: “This formulation is not necessarily right, however, and I am more prepared to believe that the effect of the doctrine of autochthony is something like the satisfaction of a desire, rather than a misunderstanding of the laws of reproduction” (1993.17).

16 For example, see chapters 5 (“Wealthy Slaves in a ‘Slave Society’”) and 6 (“The Social Contract: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Profit”).

17 Contrast Loraux on the secondhand treatment myth usually receives in the study of the ancient world (1993.4–5).

acknowledge the problem of exclusive adherence to either conceptualization of autochthony. For it is easy to be seduced by the seeming certainties of the material record or the imaginative literature that came to underwrite and augment that material record.

The virtue of Cohen's materialist approach is that it asks us to acknowledge that there is at least a minimal, irreducible distance between myth and reality. There were, in other words, fully acculturated foreigners and financially successful women in Athens (at least by the fourth century)—not to mention real mothers giving birth to real children—despite the fantasy otherwise expressed in the myth. His rationalistic account, and, more specifically, his polemic against Loraux, however, leave little room ultimately to examine the psychic depth of belief or the inarguable connection, in most cases reciprocal, between the individual imaginary and the social, material world (see de Benoist 2004.23ff.). While Loraux's cultural psychoanalysis may not sufficiently explain how the imaginary affects reality, nevertheless, the psychoanalytic approach is instructive specifically because it seeks the relation of the individual to the social and, consequently, traces the path of the social construction of the self.¹⁸ This has the virtue of granting that an Athenian's relation (or perception thereof) to his community—and its myths—is an important one, a relationship not to be dismissed simply as, or simply because it is, irrational.¹⁹ In Loraux's words: "The Athenian experience of the city cannot be reduced to the empiricism of the political experience so readily attributed to the Greeks; in the polis, as the Athenians of the classical period understood the term, the imaginary occupied

18 Loraux, while one of the prime exponents of the psychoanalytic reading of Greek culture, is nevertheless cautious in her use of it. For example, she dubs Slater's "Oral-Narcissistic Dilemma" (1971.75–122) "dubious" (1993.20 n. 36). More specifically: "It seems to me that the experiences basic to the Greek city, war and politics, should be the starting point for deciphering the fantasies of the Athenian imaginary, not, as certain ill-considered applications of psychoanalysis would urge us to believe, the structure of the Greek family" (1993.17 n. 28).

19 On the criticism that (Freudian) psychoanalysis is not sufficiently materialist, see the instructive remarks of Eagleton 1996.141–42: "This accusation reflects a radical misunderstanding of Freudian theory. There is indeed a problem about how social and historical factors are *related* to the unconscious; but one point of Freud's work is that it makes possible for us to think of the development of the human individual in social and historical terms. What Freud produces, indeed, is no less than a materialist theory of the making of the human subject. We come to be what we are by an interrelation of bodies—by the complex transactions which take place during infancy between our bodies and those which surround us."

a greater place than is usually believed” (1986a.328).²⁰ The advantage of Loraux’s argument is that it does not ask us to make a hard and fast distinction between the reality of autochthony and the fiction of autochthony, theory and material praxis, metaphor and *realia*. In effect, psychoanalysis interrogates the gap between truth and fiction by locating the latter within the realm or experience of the former, making it a constitutive term for the consistency of the symbolic order. Fiction (like myth), in other words, is the unconscious glue that holds together one’s sense of material reality.²¹ Loraux’s alternative to Cohen’s rationalism, then, would be to suggest that we need not consciously or rationally believe in a myth like autochthony, which promises a pure origin, but that does not eliminate the possibility of an unconscious desire for or belief in it. Because myths comprise a “complex cobweb of symbols, images, and attitudes,” they can effectively “overdetermine” one’s experience of the real world (see Žižek 2006). It is entirely possible that an Athenian’s perception of his ties to the city, and likewise his perception of women and foreigners, was colored by myths of autochthony.

I propose here to synthesize Cohen’s historicist interpretation and Loraux’s ideological interpretation via Slavoj Žižek’s conception of “ideological fantasy” (see Žižek 1989.11–53). This approach deploys the strengths of each scholar’s arguments into a broader, cohesive theory of the correlation between myth and reality, the material and the imaginary. I argue we should read the “normative” myth of origin (the desire for distinctiveness) as the underlying organizing principle of the material reality of day-to-day life. As Žižek explains (1989.32–33):

What [those who participate in ideology] overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but they are still doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy* (emphasis in original).

20 On the problem this poses for historians, see Loraux 1986a.336.

21 Cf. Loraux 1986a.328–38. See, however, Žižek 1989.165–69 on the predetermined nature of unconscious thought.

For Loraux, autochthony is an imaginary construct that affects and effects social reality (specifically, but not exclusively, for women); for Cohen, autochthony contradicts historical reality. Both posit a disconnect between the idea of autochthony and Athens' real social structures. But Žižek shows that an unconscious desire can persist in an ideology that seems inexplicable on its surface given its contradiction of reality.²² We know full well we are not really born from the earth, but we act as if we did not know because it captures—not unproblematically—the singularity of who we are.²³

To claim that autochthony is a “fantasy” is to claim that an unconscious belief in the purity of origins may underwrite fifth-century Athenian social discourse and institutions (no matter how much reality may contradict the myth).²⁴ To claim further that the fantasy is “ideological” is to say two things: first, that it pertains (in Žižek's Althusserian model) to the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”; and second, that the fantasy can serve and/or reproduce a particular ideological agenda (e.g., the exclusion of the Other). The presence of contradictory elements, however, does not necessarily undermine the original fantasy. For this reason, we can say that Cohen and Loraux are both right and incomplete at one and the same time: Cohen has no truck with the unconscious desire (or fear) expressed in autochthony as an ideological fantasy (hence the “noble lie”); Loraux conceptualizes the desire but does not explain how it affects reality.

Following Žižek's analysis, then, we might say that, for the Athenians, autochthony was an ideological fantasy enacted alongside a sustained critique of the myths themselves (whether they are “true,” whether they

22 Following Marx, Žižek calls this the “fetishistic illusion.”

23 That is: “They know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still they are doing it” (Žižek 1989.33).

24 Žižek provides the example of German anti-Semitism: even though the German discovers that his Jewish neighbor is *in reality* a decent person, contrary to official propaganda, s/he nevertheless translates the Jew's genial behavior into shiftiness and deceit—further reason to suspect and hate him: “We must confront ourselves with how the ideological figure of the ‘Jew’ is invested with our unconscious desire, with how we have constructed this figure to escape a certain deadlock of our desire . . . The proper answer to anti-Semitism is therefore not ‘Jews are not really like that’ but ‘the anti-Semitic idea of Jew has nothing to do with the Jews; the ideological figure of the Jew is a way to stitch up the inconsistency of our own ideological system’” (1989.48). Likewise for the jealous husband: “Even if all the facts he quotes in support of his jealousy are true, even if his wife really is sleeping around with other men, this does not change one bit the fact that his jealousy is a pathological, paranoid construction” (48).

are normative), as well as of the civic institutions that sustain and embody them. The “myth” of autochthony, with all of its implicit exclusions, stitches together the visible disconnect between the natural difference and the natural similarity of male and female, self and other, autochthon and alien. As an ideological fantasy, autochthony is “true” to the extent that it reinforces the autochthonous citizen’s perception of real life, a fact that complicates the simple process of relieving him of his “false consciousness.”²⁵ For as Žižek states: “The fundamental level of ideology . . . is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself” (1989.33).²⁶ From this perspective, the myth of autochthony is the “fantasy” that structures an Athenian’s perception of everyday social reality, making his connection to the city simultaneously “real” and ideological.²⁷

With Žižek’s theory in mind, I would like to examine how Aeschylus’s *Seven Against Thebes* articulates this dual character of the ideological fantasy, leveling a critique of the notion of autochthony at the same time as it shows up the powerful roots it has planted in the lives of those who live it (Eteocles in particular). Aeschylus, as both *Marathonomachos* and veteran of Salamis, is often considered univocally supportive of Athenian ideology, but my reading of *Seven* will show that he, too, is critical of this central tenet of Athenian civic belief.²⁸ I will argue that Aeschylus’s representation of the war and politics of Eteocles and Thebes throws into relief the perversions and contradictions inherent in a city that believes in a pure,

25 For this reason, rationalizing away the absurdities (à la Cohen) does not necessarily change anything. Cf. de Benoist 2004.23.

26 Cf. also Žižek 2002.19: “The lesson of psychoanalysis here is the opposite one [from the postmodern tenet that ‘reality is a discursive product, a symbolic fiction’]: *we should not mistake reality for fiction*—we should be able to discern, in what we experience as fiction, the hard kernel of the Real which we are able to sustain only if we fictionalize it . . . Much more difficult than to denounce/unmask (what appears as) reality as fiction is to recognize the part of fiction in ‘real’ reality” (emphasis in original).

27 Wohl takes this position as well: “This ideological fantasy *is* reality, and ideological struggle is the struggle to define society’s reality through the medium of fantasy, by arousing and directing the communal libido” (2002.26).

28 Surprisingly, very little has been written about the political or ideological implications of *Seven*. Podlecki 1966 and Petre 1971, the most relevant, try to identify proper historical allusions in the text. Zeitlin 1986 reads Thebes as a theoretical screen for Athenian projections of identity and society. Berman 2007, drawing inter alia on archaeological and iconographical evidence, offers a comprehensive and compelling examination of the play’s relation to its cultural context.

autochthonous origin. Aeschylus's drama turns a critical eye on the idea of civic purity by drawing out autochthony's darker implications; at the same time, it illustrates how the myth unconsciously influences and structures civic consciousness, exposing in the mix the potential danger of its grip on Eteocles and his citizens.

Aeschylus, I argue, stages the drama of communal self-definition by playing out the difficulties of his protagonist Eteocles. As the incestuous son of Oedipus, Eteocles in a way embodies the principle of autochthony in that autochthony and incest share, as we shall see, an undifferentiation in origin. Through him, the ambiguity of the myth is exposed. *Seven* renders clear Aeschylus's convictions about the difficult relationship between autochthony and identity as it pertains specifically to Athenians. And if, as Froma Zeitlin convincingly argues, Thebes represents the "anti-Athens," its "mirror opposite," a *t(r)opos* where "it can play with and discharge the terror of and attraction to the irreconcilable, the inexpiable, and the unredeemable, where it can experiment with the dangerous heights of self-assertion that transgression of fixed boundaries inevitably entails" (1986.117), then *Seven* is a uniquely Athenian play addressing Athenian concerns.²⁹ Following Freud, we ought to listen for the confession echoing behind the denial.

THE CIVIC FORCE OF AUTOCHTHONY

I begin with the very opening of the play, which sets the stage for the action and introduces both the character of Eteocles and the important issue of civic loyalty. In this section, I argue that the ideology of autochthony is affirmed in its positive, productive aspect and shown to be of seminal importance to Eteocles as the city's leader. For it is precisely Thebes' autochthonous roots that anchor his commitment to the city. Eteocles opens the scene by addressing his fellow citizens on duty to one's city in times of crisis—in this case the attack of an Argive army led by his brother Polynices. The speech is paradigmatic of Eteocles' civic piety and his desire to be a virtuous leader (1–20):

Κάδμου πολῖται, χρὴ λέγειν τὰ καίρια
ὅστις φυλάσσει πρᾶγος ἐν πρύμνῃ πόλεως
οἶακα νωμῶν, βλέφαρα μὴ κοιμῶν ὕπνωι.

29 Despite the phantasmatic relation of Thebes to Athens, Zeitlin is cautious about analogizing Theban and Athenian autochthony (1986.122 n. 19).

εἰ μὲν γὰρ εὖ πράξαιμεν, αἰτία θεοῦ·
 εἰ δ' αὖθ', ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, συμφορὰ τύχοι,
 Ἑτεοκλῆς ἄν εἷς πολὺς κατὰ πόλιν
 ὑμνοῖθ' ὑπ' ἄστων φροιμίους πολυρρόθοις
 οἰμώγμασιν θ', ὦν Ζεὺς ἀλεξητήριος
 ἐπώνυμος γένοιτο Καδμείων πόλει.
 ὑμᾶς δὲ χρὴ νῦν, καὶ τὸν ἐλλείποντ' ἔτι
 ἥβης ἀκμαίᾳς, καὶ τὸν ἔξηβον χρόνῳ,
 ὥραν τ' ἔχονθ' ἕκαστον, ὥς τι συμπρεπές,
 βλαστημὸν ἀλδαίνοντα σώματος πολύν,
 πόλει τ' ἀρήγειν καὶ θεῶν ἐγχωρίων
 βωμοῖσι, τιμὰς μὴ ἔαλειφθῆναί ποτε,
 τέκνοις τε γῇ τε μητρί, φιλτάτῃ τροφῶι·
 ἢ γὰρ νέους ἔρποντας εὐμενεὶ πέδῳ,
 ἅπαντα πανδοκοῦσα παιδείας ὄτλον,
 ἐθρέψατ' οἰκητῆρας ἀσπιδηφόρους,
 πιστοὶ θ' ὅπως γένοισθε πρὸς χρέος τόδε.³⁰

Citizens of Cadmus, he who watches over the affairs of a city, guiding the oar at the prow, must say the right things at the right time, never letting his eyes rest with sleep. If things turn out well for us, thanks be to god. If—and I pray this doesn't happen—some misfortune may strike, “Eteocles” alone would be sung throughout the city with loud-swelling chants and laments. But may Zeus, true to his name, be the protector for the city of the Cadmeans. But you must come to the defense of the city and the altars of our land's gods, you who are still short of maturity, as well as you who are past your prime, reinforcing the mighty seed of your body. You must never let the gods' honors be erased. Protect also your children and your mother earth, that nurse most dear, for she, receiving the whole weight of your upbringing, reared you from children crawling with kindly foot into settlers of homes and shield-bearers. In return, you must be loyal to her in this time of need.

30 The text follows Page 1972. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

There are two references to Cadmus here in this passage (1, 9) that evoke the antiquity of the city, one of which is the very first word of the play. As Seth Benardete points out (1967), never once in the play is Thebes called “Thebes,” so the fact that the city and its citizens are identified only by the name of its mythical founder is noteworthy. The references to Cadmus emphasize the city’s deep history (his slaying of the dragon, planting its teeth, the generation of the Spartoi), as well as the privilege of its forebears having sprung from the very soil. But as critics have not failed to notice, Eteocles’ invocation of Cadmus cannot refer in an uncomplicated fashion to autochthony because Cadmus was a Phoenician transplant, not an autochthonous Theban. This complication, however, gets simplified by Eteocles’ effective rhetoric: calling his citizens “Cadmeans” while the Argives outside are breathing heavily upon them transforms the threat they as Thebans face into the potential loss of (primordial) territory. Lines 15ff., in particular, make this connection: “Protect also your children and your mother earth, that nurse most dear, for she, receiving the whole weight of your upbringing, reared you from children crawling with kindly foot into settlers of homes and shield-bearers. In return, you must be loyal to her in this time of need.” So the omission (or suppression) of Cadmus’s foreign ancestry ultimately buttresses Eteocles’ claims about the deep history of his city.³¹ In this instance, he uses Cadmus to inspire his citizens to defend Thebes specifically because of this history.

We see from this opening passage that Eteocles imagines Thebes’ autochthonous history as a way to mark the uniqueness of his people. So we might expect that the invocations of autochthony in *Seven* are meant to differentiate between native Thebans and others. This, in fact, is the impression we get from the various other references to it throughout the play. For they, too, assert the productive potential of autochthony as an ideological fantasy. Near the end of his opening monologue, for example, Eteocles encourages his citizens not to get too disturbed by the “crowd of foreigners” (*epēludōn*, 34) clamoring outside the city. And later the chorus exclaims to the gods in prayer: “Do not betray our war-torn city to this

31 Omission does not necessarily entail negation. In fact, the simultaneous presence of both associations for Cadmus will figure in the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices. When I consider the development of that conflict, I will address the fact that Cadmus is a non native, a feature of his story well known to mythology but not mentioned in this play. For the time being, my focus is the ideological force of Eteocles’ rhetoric summoned by his references to Cadmus.

foreign-tongued (*heterophōnōi*) army” (170). Neither of these words seems damning in and of itself. An *epēlys* is, as the lexical etymology makes clear, simply an “incomer” or “stranger.”³² And *heterophōnos*, as G. O. Hutchinson points out (1985.72 ad loc.), can modestly signify dialectal difference (i.e., the Argive invaders would naturally speak a different language). Given the circumstances within the play, however, it is not overreaching to read these descriptions of the Argive army as self-consciously discriminating or ideological rhetoric. Whatever the case may be, though, we can at least say that *epēlys* and *heterophōnos* differentiate native Thebans from “foreign” Argives by marking a contrast between nativity or sited-ness, on the one hand, and dislocation or encroachment, on the other.

In the famous shield scene, Eteocles many times deploys a similar strategy to delineate good and evil by setting an autochthonous Theban warrior against an Argive. Here, for example, is his portrayal of Melanippos (412–16):

σπαρτῶν δ' ἀπ' ἀνδρῶν, ὧν Ἄρης ἐφείσατο,
 ρίζωμ' ἀνεῖται, κάρτα δ' ἔστ' ἐγχώριος,
 Μελάνιππος· ἔργον δ' ἐν κύβοις Ἄρης κρινεῖ.
 Δίκη δ' ὁμαίμων κάρτα νιν προστέλλεται
 εἶργειν τεκούσῃ μητρὶ πολέμιον δόρυ.

His root grows from the race of the Sown Men, those that Ares spared, so surely he is of our soil—Melanippos. Ares, of course, will judge the affair with his dice, but Justice is his blood relative and surely she sends him forth to turn away the enemy spear from the mother who gave him birth.

This passage richly describes Melanippos as a man of autochthonous origin: his “root” (*rizōm'*) shoots forth from the Spartoi; he is fully within the soil (*enchōrios*); Justice is assimilated to his bloodline (*homaimōn*) and becomes herself autochthonous; he will defend his mother earth from the hostile, foreign (*polemion*) spear.

32 LSJ gives in its second gloss “opp. *autochthōn*.” Each of the three instances of the noun form cited (Herodotus 1.78 and 4.197, Aeschylus *Pers.* 243) indicates simply an unmoral contrast between natives and foreigners.

Opposite Eteoclos,³³ whose horse bridles screech a barbarian sound (*syrizousi barbaron bromon*, 463³⁴), Eteocles sets indigenous Megareus (474–79):

Μεγαρεύς, Κρέοντος σπέρμα τοῦ σπαρτῶν γένους,
ὅς οὔτι μάργον ἵππικῶν φρυαγμάτων
βρόμον φοβηθεῖς ἐκ πυλῶν χωρήσεται,
ἀλλ' ἢ θανῶν τροφεῖα πληρώσει χθονὶ
ἢ καὶ δὺ' ἄνδρε καὶ πόλισμ' ἐπ' ἀσπίδος
ἐλὼν λαφύροις δῶμα κοσμήσει πατρός.

He is the son of Creon, of the race of the Sown Men, and will proceed from the gates unafraid of the thundering din of the horses' violent snorting. But either by dying he will pay back his upbringing to the earth; or by capturing both men and the city on [Eteoclos'] shield, he will adorn his father's home with spoils.

Like Melanippos, Megareus is identified as a genuine autochthon in contrast to the barbarian Eteoclos. Apart from Megareus's connection to the Spartoi, the phrases *plērōsei chthoni* (477) and *kosmēsei patros* (479) are metrically and rhythmically balanced so as to emphasize responsibility to parents and thus necessarily correlate *chthoni* with a mother. Autochthony is what separates a man like Megareus from an Eteoclos and will, therefore, with the help of autochthonous Justice, lead him to prevail.

For the sake of space, I will only briefly mention two other instances where autochthony is invoked productively to define the uniqueness of the Thebans and thus to unify them. The sixth Argive warrior Eteocles' scout describes is Amphiaraus, who, far from being an impious man like the other attackers, in fact takes Polynices to task for “attacking your paternal

33 Hecht and Bacon 1973 suggest that Eteoclos represents “Eteokles Beyond the Walls”: “Here is a representation of Eteokles as his own worst enemy, and, pointedly, he has nothing whatever to say about the character of this attacker. Whereas in every other case he is quick to bring accusations of blasphemy, impiety, and folly, here he moves swiftly to name his chosen defender, and makes unusually brisk work of the matter, turning instantly to the next contender” (1973.1). Cf. Hutchinson 1985.117–18 ad 457–85 on his probable genealogy.

34 Cf. also: “Shouting these things, Tydeus shakes his three overshadowing crests, the plumes of his helmet, and behind his shield the bronze forged bells ring out fear” (384–86).

(*patrōian*) city and the inborn (*engeneis*) gods of the land, hurling an alien (*epakton*) army against it" (582–83). Like *epēlys* above, *epakton* hardly does justice to Aeschylus's lexical imagination, but even if it is lacking in thick description, it does provide a stark contrast to the inclusive and definitive terminology of the previous line (*patrōian*, *engeneis*). Amphiarus chastises Polynices specifically for bringing a foreign force against his native Thebes.³⁵ And opposite Amphiarus Eteocles sets Lasthenes, grimly commended for "loathing foreigners" (*echthroxenon*, 621) (Hutchinson 1985.141 ad loc.).³⁶ Here it should be clear that the ideological force of autochthony as a unifying discourse underwrites the descriptions of these warriors, even turning an ambiguously praised temperament into dynamic energy.

But autochthony is more than just a badge or a cosmetic. More than simply differentiating self and other, it also creates a responsibility for the bearer of its purity. Eteocles thus insists the autochthonous Thebans respond to the city's crisis as if coming to the aid of a mother: *gēi mētri, philtatēi trophōi* (16).³⁷ The family metaphor shores up the strength of the allusions to the autochthonous history of the city (i.e., the use of "Cadmeans" for Thebans) by figuring the relationship between the Thebans and their city as a maternal one. This has the desired purpose of demanding loyalty from Eteocles' people, a metaphor that calls upon the reciprocity his citizens owe to Thebes, "a debt," contends H. D. Cameron, "which they pay by dying in its defense" (1964.4). To Eteocles, the defense of the city (and his identity as its leader) is the defense of that which gave him birth, his mother earth.³⁸ Hence the first and foremost obligation of the Cadmeans is to show their devotion to their principal nourisher.³⁹ This much, in fact,

35 Even the verb Aeschylus uses here for "hurling against" (*embeblēkota* > *emballō*) subtly hints at a type of penetration—not only is Polynices attacking Thebes, he is attempting to embed his foreign army in its autochthonous soil.

36 Just a few lines above (606), however, Eteocles uses the same word to describe the perils facing a just man among the godless and vile. Here again (621), the ideology of autochthony transforms impiety to a virtue.

37 On the semantic range of *trophos*, in particular that it "ne seul désigne la nourrice mais aussi la mère," see Demont 1978, esp. 379.

38 Hence the Thebans will be re-enacting more or less the battle of the Spartoi, for whom the earth is literally mother. See Cameron 1964.7 for a useful explanation of the parallel between the Spartoi and the house of Oedipus.

39 Benardete notes, however, that "Eteocles presents the earth as the sole progenitor of the Thebans, regardless of whether their ancestry warrants it or not; for in listing what has to be defended—city, altars of native gods, children, earth—he does not mention human parents" (1967.28).

the Thebans' mother earth has already prepared them for, having raised them for the very purpose of defending her in times of need (*ethrepsat*'. . . *aspidēphorous*, 19).

Eteocles, however, does not omit himself from this reciprocity. He, too, is intimately committed to his autochthonous city: "As your leader, Cadmean citizens, I am ultimately the one to be blamed if the war does not turn out well" (1–3, 6–8). The *heis* of line 6, in fact, isolates him in his responsibility. Eteocles further signals his devotion when he hears his scout's report of the enemy array outside the walls (39–68). In response to the bleak situation there, Eteocles prays (69–75):

ὦ Ζεῦ τε καὶ Γῇ καὶ πολιissoῦχοι θεοί,
 Ἄρά τ' Ἑρινὺς πατρός ἡ μεγασθενής,
 μή μοι πόλιν γε πρυμνόθεν πανώλεθρον
 ἐκθαμνίσῃτε δηιάλωτον Ἑλλάδος,
 [φθόγγον χέουσας καὶ δόμους ἐφεστίους]
 ἐλευθέραν δὲ γῆν τε καὶ Κάδμου πόλιν
 ζυγοῖσι δουλίῳσι μὴ δῶτε σχεθεῖν·

Zeus and Earth and all you gods who protect our city,
 Fate and mighty Erinys of my father, do not uproot this
 city of Greece, turning it over, delivering it captive to its
 enemies. It pours forth its prayer; these homes, this free
 land, this free city of Cadmus—do not give them over to
 be subjected to slavery.

Greece is a free land, one unworthy of the *zygos doulíos*, and so is the *Kadmou polis*, with the *te kai* maintaining the distinction between the earth and the Theban city at the same time as it preserves the thematic relation between the two (both are to be saved from the threat of subjugation). This reading is strengthened if we take *eleutheran* as the predicate of both *gēn* and *polin*: this earth and this city of Cadmus are free; therefore let them not be subject to the yoke. Apart from this link between Thebes and the earth, there is the telling substance of Eteocles' prayer: "Do not, I pray, uproot *my city* at least" (71–72). The structure of the line emphasizes both *polin* (with *ge*) and *moi* (by word order).⁴⁰ These two passages suggest that, for

40 Dawson 1970.36 ad loc. contends that the postponed position of *ge* throws unusual emphasis on *polin* and therefore gives a "momentary glimpse of [Eteocles'] personal concern" for the city.

Eteocles, the fate of the autochthonous *Kadmou polis* rests first and foremost in his own and his citizens' willingness to defend her, and only second on the gods' favor. He makes Thebans' responsibility to Thebes as citizens antecedent to the gods' responsibility.

In several other passages, we get a similar sense of Eteocles' commitment to the city. At the beginning of his rebuke of the choral women, for example—which I will come to shortly—Eteocles' anger is the product of his desire for solidarity (or fear for its loss). He asks: "Do you think these cries of yours are the best thing for the safety of the city or will bring strength to our besieged army?" (183–84). For their disheveled dread has the negative effect of "flooding" the citizens with panic, which only aids the enemy (192–93). Invoking soon after the value of rationality (as opposed to wild fretting), he asks them: "Would a steersman, whose ship was in danger on the sea's swells, find safety by rushing to the prow?" (208–10). Instead of chaotic prayer, Eteocles enjoins: "Pray that the city can withhold the enemy's spear" (216). Eteocles sees the safety of Thebes as a product of reasoned—not fearful—communality.

The devotion of Eteocles to the city is something the chorus eventually acknowledges. After the report of the mutual death of Eteocles and Polynices near the end of the play, they say: "All the city [lit. towers] groans, the earth that loved this man now groans" (901–02). Speaking further on about the divided loyalties of the brothers, the chorus claims that "having saved the city [for himself] he lost his life" (981).⁴¹ This much the messenger also intimates in his official proclamation about the status of the two brothers: Eteocles will be buried within the city for his devotion (*eunoia*) to the city, having died in its defense, a noble thing for men of his age to die for (1007–12).⁴² And, finally, at the end of the play when the

41 The text of the choral ode here is an utter mess. I follow Page in assuming *sōtheis* in this passage refers to Eteocles, as opposed to *sutheis* for Polynices (from mss. VK; cf. Hutchinson 1985.205 ad loc.). In the *apparatus criticus*, he suggests that "personarum vices incertissimae; easdem atque in 966 seqq. expectasses, sed necesse videtur 978–81 eidem personae tribuere nisi gravius corrupti sunt" (ad loc.).

42 There seems to be a consensus that verses 1005–78 are an interpolation composed after the production of Sophocles' *Antigone* and/or Euripides' *Phoenissae*. Lloyd-Jones 1959 makes a strong case for their potential authenticity. For a succinct overview of the various positions, see Hutchinson 1985.209–11 ad loc., who contends that by ending at line 1004, "in effect, the play will have ended with the emotion of the audience at its highest point." Vidal-Naquet's remarks to the contrary, however, are instructive: "To judge by the texts of the manuscripts, it is indeed a political debate that sets one half of the chorus against the other half, whether or not the two groups are headed by Antigone and Ismene. It is a debate

chorus has split in half to mourn the two brothers, the hemi-chorus speaking on behalf of Eteocles closes with these words of civic praise: “And we for our part will go with Eteocles, as both the city and justice [*to dikaion*] give mutual approval. For after the strength of blessed Zeus, this man most of all saved the city of Cadmus from overturning and being wrecked by a wave of foreign men” (1072–78).

These passages make clear that Eteocles is willing to stand by his devotion to Thebes, a devotion grounded in his city’s deep history. He therefore expects the same commitment from his citizens. Following this, Eteocles’ invocations on behalf of the city are (desperately) inclusive. Consider lines 10–15 again: “But you must come to the defense of the city and the altars of our land’s gods, you who are still short of maturity, as well as you who are past your prime, reinforcing the mighty seed of your body. You must never let the gods’ honors be erased. Protect also your children and your mother earth, that nurse most dear.” Eteocles’ speech calls upon young and old alike to come to the city’s aid, for both are equally responsible for the prosperity of the city. Given the situation he is facing, he is forced to call on men who are properly too young and too old to fight. But the emotional imperative—“Never let the city be destroyed!”—transfigures his desperate invocation into a call to unite youthful vigor with aged experience in a common cause. This is an important implication of Žižek’s position that ideology changes the experience of reality (or at least that is Eteocles’ hope). Eteocles may have no other choice but to enlist as many people as he can muster, but it is important to notice that the present need to defend Thebes dictates that he do away with pretensions of exclusivity: anybody and everybody is to stand in her defense.⁴³ Anybody, that is, except a woman.

This belief in the unifying power of autochthony, we might say, underlies Eteocles’ “misogynist” response to the chorus of women frightened by the prospect of the war.⁴⁴ For their “subversive piety” in this time

that sets in opposition, on the one hand, the changing law of the city and, on the other, the stable law of lineage. Whether or not it is entirely from the hand of Aeschylus himself, the epilogue of the *Seven* is altogether in line with the logic of the play” (1990.282–83).

43 Below I return briefly to this passage to discuss how the rhetoric of autochthony nevertheless makes an exclusive distinction between men and women.

44 Caldwell 1973 presents the most systematic (psycho)analysis of Eteocles’ aversion to the women by locating it in his genealogical background. The traces of such ideas may also be found in Finley 1955 and Bacon 1964.

of crisis directly threatens to undo his carefully constructed evocation of Theban civic loyalty.⁴⁵ Their *parodos* (78–181), which follows Eteocles' first reaction to his spy's report of the enemy array, is a tour de force of fear and anxiety. The imagery they conjure is stunning: dust in the air (81), the clatter of hoofs (83–84), the clang of shields (100), the rattle of "not one spear" (103), horse bridles singing death dirges (122–23), the thud of chariots (151), a hail of stones (158). Their recourse is to beg the gods, each individually by name, for salvation. Eteocles' reaction to the chorus' fearful cries is a tirade about the insufferability of women in general: "You miserable creatures, do you think your agonizing is helping the city or bringing strength to our army? The problem with women is that in neither peace nor wartime are they anything but trouble. If only I could live without them." This is the gist of lines 183–95.⁴⁶

As Anne Burnett suggests (1973), Eteocles' fears concern civic unity, the very thing he has strived so far to encourage in his citizens. And this much he makes clear from the outset of the passage: "Let me ask you something, women, you insufferable creatures: do you think these cries of yours are the best conduct for the safety of the city or will bring strength to our besieged army?" (183–84). The implication is that the women's behavior threatens to *disunite* the city, a possibility he cannot tolerate in dire straits. The end of his speech also highlights his civic perspective: "Outside things are men's business, so don't worry about them. Stay inside and cause us no more harm" (201–02). The whole passage is framed by appeals to the city's well-being, a concern anterior to and likely motivating Eteocles' anger at women in general. His characterization of the female *genos* emerges then from his larger civic sensibility that pays heed, if somewhat aggressively, to the safety of all Thebans first and foremost. The violence of his temperament (which seems out of place in the play and has startled many

45 This pithy oxymoron ("subversive piety") is taken from Zeitlin 1986.

46 Cameron takes Eteocles' ranting reaction to the chorus to be a distinctive hypersensitivity toward the proper use of language in avoiding ill omens. He contends that "[Eteocles' behavior] springs rather from a deep conviction that religious observance is essential, that the gods are powerful, and that speech must be especially guarded when addressing them" (1970.100). This interpretation seems to justify the brutal, almost totalitarian zeal with which Eteocles responds without acknowledging that it goes a bit too far in its generalization. Burnett reorients us toward the pragmatic dimension of the situation: Eteocles is "deprived of any significant choice in his defensive strategy since he is forced to act not against his true enemy, the besieging army, but against panic, the unexpected threat he finds within his walls" (1973.348). See also Foley 2001.46, esp. n. 92.

critics), we might add, is precisely a measure of the force of his civic passion.⁴⁷ Eteocles' demands, ultimately, are simple: "Listen to my vows and raise the sacred cry of victory with good heart, the sacrificial shout known to all Greeks, as inspiration to those we love" (267–70). In his desire for civic unity, he identifies women as the sole site of difference: they are the one thing preventing the total unity he hopes to create. This explains the generalizing nature of his criticism and his allusion to the *genos gynaikōn* theory of women as a separate race from men.

Later I will address the personal, genealogical dimension of Eteocles' reaction to the choral women. For now we have yet another picture of a leader passionately defending his city. Though the terms of his devotion may be myopic and the passion, almost obsession, of his commitment excessive, we are never in a position to doubt the fact or the depth of his devotion or his belief that the maternal relationship of Thebes to her citizens can inspire them in a desperate time. The threat he perceives both from without and within is real to him. The loss of autochthonous Thebes to an army of foreigners (*heterophōnōi stratōi*, 170), therefore, is something he will not tolerate.

A CIVIC INCEST?

Thus far we have seen how Aeschylus imagines the productive possibilities of the myth of autochthony. Through the vision of his protagonist Eteocles, autochthony becomes the cohesive argument uniting all Thebans in defense of the city. It is the feature of their unique identity and the principle for which they stand, especially in this life-or-death situation. But Aeschylus is never so single-minded. In fact, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that there are more problematic aspects to his representation of the war and politics of Eteocles and Thebes than not. For every step we advance in our judgment of the character of Eteocles (his inspiration, his desire to be a good leader), we face a critical obstacle: Eteocles is the son of the incestuous union of Oedipus and Jocasta.⁴⁸ The complication I would like to explore here is the connection between autochthony and the incest

47 Foley notes that "the force of Eteocles' intervention is heightened by the fact that the characters do not generally respond directly to choral odes" (2001.45, with reference to Hutchinson 1985.75).

48 There are eighteen references to the house of Oedipus in the play: 70 (*patros*), 203, 372, 654, 677, 695 (*patros*), 709, 725, 752, 775, 801, 807, 833, 885, 926–32, 976, 987, 1055.

of the Labdacid line, a connection, I suggest, that problematizes Eteocles' image of, and relation to, his city.

Seven in no way hides his genealogy. The choral ode that follows his departure to face Polynices lays out the history (743–56):

παλαιγενῇ γὰρ λέγω
 παρβασίαν ὠκύποινον, αἰῶνα δ' ἐς τρίτον
 μένειν, Ἀπόλλωνος εὔτε Λάιος
 Βίαι τρὶς εἰπόντος ἐν
 μεσομφάλοις Πυθικοῖς
 χρηστηρίοις θνάισκοντα γέν-
 νας ἄτερ σώιζειν πόλιν,
 κρατηθεῖς ἐκ φιλᾶν ἀβουλιᾶν
 ἐγείνατο μὲν μόρον αὐτῷ,
 πατροκτόνον Οἰδιπόδαν, ὅστε ματρὸς ἀγνὰν
 σπείρας ἄρουραν ἔν' ἐτράφη
 ῥίζαν αἱματόεσσαν
 ἔτλα·

I speak of a transgression born long ago, one that brought swift punishment and now remains in the third generation. Then Laius disobeyed Apollo, who told him three times at the Pythian oracle's navel that he would save his city if he died without children.

But conquered by a passionate lack of forethought, he gave birth to his own undoing, the patricide Oedipus, who sowed the forbidden [*hagnan*] field of his mother in which he grew and bore the fatal root of his act.

Following the death of the two brothers, the chorus reiterates the issue (926–32):

δυσδαίμων σφιν ἅ τεκοῦσα
 πρὸ πασᾶν γυναικῶν
 ὀπόσαι τεκνογόνοι κέκληνται·
 παῖδα τὸν αὐτᾶς πόσιν αὐ-
 τᾷ θεμένα τούσδ' ἔτεχ', οἱ δ'
 ᾧδ' ἐτελεύτασαν ὑπ' ἀλλαλοφόνοις
 χερσὶν ὁμοσπόροισιν.

She was unfortunate the mother of these men, above and beyond all women who are called mothers. For taking her own son as her husband, she bore them—these men here who died by each others' hands, hands that grew out of the same seed.

The infamous myth of the Labdacid line sets the groundwork for the trilogy as a whole and has considerable thematic resonance within *Seven* itself.⁴⁹ As early as line 70, Eteocles reveals his genealogical self-awareness, acknowledging in response to his scout's report of the enemy array the influence of "the all-powerful Curse and Erinyes of my father." And the very first time the chorus addresses him they call him "child of Oedipus" (203).

These allusions to Eteocles' incestuous genealogy complicate his identity as a character. The individual he wants to be—a good leader for his people—cannot erase the mark of his family history, a fact that forces him into the strange position of embodying both legitimacy and illegitimacy. Eteocles is both a *gnēsios* (legitimate heir) and a *nothos* (bastard). He shoulders by no fault of his own the figurative "lameness" of his family line, a disability handed down to him by his cursed predecessors.⁵⁰ It is this disability that ultimately disrupts his actions as the leader of Thebes, as he embodies the "unnatural contradiction of *genos* and *polis*."⁵¹

Froma Zeitlin suggests in two formidable studies that autochthony and incest are thematically connected by an undifferentiation in origin. Speaking of the homology between Thebes and the house of Oedipus, she argues that "a hidden analogy connects family and city, since each reproductive model (autochthony, incest) looks back to a single undifferentiated ori-

49 On the trilogy, see Hutchinson 1985.xvii–xxx.

50 The term "lameness" I have borrowed from Vernant 1990a, who, when describing the structural similarities between the three generations of Labdacids, means "lame" quite literally, as all three had physical limps. My use of the term, it goes without saying, is more figurative. See further Detienne and Vernant 1991.259–75, "The Feet of Hephaestus."

51 Zeitlin 1982.29. Bacon puts it well: "There is a danger 'outside' which must not be let in, and a danger 'inside' which must not be let out . . . The problem is to know who really is the stranger, the outsider, the enemy. This ambiguity about who is really an enemy and an outsider, and about where he is, is the ambiguity of the house of Laius itself. The homeless stranger who slew Laius, solved the riddle of the sphinx, and so won the kingdom of Thebes with the hand of the queen, was in reality the son of the king he slew and the queen he married, and the legitimate heir to the throne, [*philos*—a blood relative, and an insider in every sense . . . They are all too close in blood. But they are also, for three generations, enemies and strangers to each other" (1964.30).

gin and each holds out the ideal of a self-referential autonomy” (1986.122). Whereas autochthony envisions an *imaginary* pure origin (so Loraux), incest *literally* guarantees the purity of one’s stock.⁵² But the seed uncontaminated by foreign blood in the Labdacid line produces a contamination—and a curse—all its own. From this perspective, Eteocles’ identification with the autochthons of Thebes’ myth/history runs the risk of “transpos[ing] the pattern from one domain to the other . . . and contaminating the city’s myth of solidarity with the negative import of his own story” (Zeitlin 1982.31). This transposition has the effect of posing autochthony as the *civic* model of a defective genealogy (a civic incest), making its implications for the city and its citizens more haunting than perhaps Eteocles—with the positive spin he puts on autochthony—is aware. For Zeitlin, this means that Eteocles “will function as the bridge between a defective model of city and a defective model of family; he will serve as a negative mediator between the two” (1982.36).⁵³ I would suggest further that the double association casts a shadow over the positive, patriotic tenor of Eteocles’ civic, autochthonous rhetoric. We have had up to this point the picture of Eteocles as a devoted leader demanding a civic and personal attachment from his citizens based on the city’s autochthonous origins. But if Eteocles is the product of an incestuous union, what light does his unusual genealogy cast upon the glorious ancestry of the city he represents?

Like the man in the riddle of the Sphinx, a riddle that encapsulates the compressed temporality of the Labdacids, Eteocles is “the being who is at one and the same time two-, three-, four-footed, the man who, as he advances in age, jumbles up and confuses the social and cosmic order of the generations instead of respecting it.”⁵⁴ Consider the opening speech

52 Recall *hagnan* (752) from the choral ode just cited: it has the sense of both “pure” and “forbidden.”

53 For similar observations, see Edmunds 1981, esp. 235–38.

54 Vernant 1990a.25. Cf. also Cameron 1964.7 and Zeitlin 1986.128: “On the one hand, the riddle suppresses the dimension of time, since the enigma resides in the fact that it makes synchronic the three phases of human life by uniting them under the single form (or voice) that is Man. As such, Oedipus’ unique ability on the intellectual level to solve the riddle is commensurate on the familial level with his singular acts of patricide and incest. On the other hand, the full interpretation of the riddle would seem to require that Man must properly be defined in his diachronic dimension. Man is to be measured by the sum total of his life, which can only be known as he passes through time. Hence, each of his multiple aspects (four-footed, two-footed, and three-footed) will be construed as a sequential phase of orderly human development.”

again. Eteocles calls upon young and old alike to come to the city's aid—"But you must come to the defense of the city and the altars of our land's gods, you who are still short of maturity, as well as you who are past your prime, reinforcing the mighty seed of your body" (10–14). But there must be at least a touch of irony at play here since Eteocles represents both parts of this equation through the double position he occupies in the Labdacid line. The collapsing of different age groups and generations in these lines mirrors the collapsing generations in his own *genos* (son = brother). Young and old are equally responsible for the prosperity of the city, a leveling that unites youthful vigor with aged experience in a common cause. But when that leveling takes place within the family line, the result is not solidarity but division.⁵⁵

As a civic genealogical metaphor, autochthony does not discriminate within the citizen body but between citizens and Others (female and foreign). This is important for two reasons. First, the (female) choral response to this speech—the expression of their fear—provokes Eteocles to make nasty characterizations of women as a race and to exclude them from the public sphere. This exclusion is, as Loraux argues, the ideological effect of autochthony. Second, it deceives him into thinking that his own twin brother Polynices is an alien invader.⁵⁶ Polynices is by all rights the same as Eteocles: a son of the incestuous union of Oedipus and Jocasta, a Theban autochthon, a (displaced) leader. Eteocles' attempts to differentiate between himself and his brother, native Thebans and external invaders, founder on the deeper similarity between the two—a similarity that Eteocles must constantly suppress. One might say that the denial is necessary for the rhetoric of civic purity, but it is nonetheless born of a false logic. For when

55 It is worth noting that the division between Eteocles and Polynices, by the play's logic at least, is the result of Oedipus's curse and so a direct result of their incestuous heredity.

56 Though the play gives only minimal indication of the brothers' relative ages, Sommerstein 1995–96 seeks to distinguish the two, suggesting (rather unconvincingly) that Polynices is to be figured as the elder by virtue of his beard (cf. *Seven* 665) and Eteocles the younger by virtue of being called *teknon* in a few places by the chorus. I follow instead Berman's contention that the play's "studious indeterminacy" of the brothers' ages underwrites their irreconcilable enmity. For this reason, he suggests: "Eteocles and Polynices are . . . figured in the Aeschylean narrative as twins, in fact, since their relative ages are never made clear, and both feel a claim on the kingship of their father, which would naturally go to the eldest of the two" (2007.144). For a good discussion of the meaningful absence of primogeniture in the play, see esp. 134–48. I thank my anonymous reader for bringing these two pieces to my attention.

one's enemy is one's brother (who is himself of the same incestuous stock), there is no difference except that which is insisted upon rhetorically.⁵⁷ "Issue from an incestuous union," Zeitlin claims, "cannot establish any difference between its offspring, but can only produce sons who embody the principle of difference, irreconcilable except through their inevitable identical end" (1982.26). The singularity Eteocles insists upon (*heis*, 6) is haunted by the presence of his brother both in the denial of his twin-ness that it implies and in the adverbial juxtaposition of *polys* of the very same line.⁵⁸

Further, just as the Theban earth has produced from all her nourishment (*philtatēi trophōi*, 16) citizens who perform their roles in affairs both domestic (*oikētēras*, 19) and martial (*aspidēphorous*, 19), so the mother of Eteocles has made him the current leader of the cursed house of Oedipus as well as the shield-bearer against it. The citizens of Cadmus settle homes and face the burden of outside attack, while Eteocles settles into his father's throne and must face the burden of his brother's attack. Eteocles himself made the unity and unanimity of self and city explicit, but behind his program for civic piety echoes the corrupted history of his family.

This dynamic homology between the autochthonous history of Thebes and the incestuous background of the house of Oedipus involves more than just the physical person of Eteocles. In fact, the few other characters we have in this play (the chorus, the scout) seem to elicit in their interactions with him the very thing he struggles with unwittingly—the problem of his genealogy. In a way, they draw out his internal inconsistencies, bridging the gap between who he is as the son of Oedipus and who he wants to be as ruler of Thebes. These characters, I argue, disturb the firm distinction Eteocles tries to establish between his genealogical past and his political future. They highlight the tensions and ambiguities that underlie the mutually informing nature of these commitments.

The scout's report of the enemy array gives voice to the echoes of

57 The chorus makes this point pithily at 829–31: "Indeed, they perished of their own unholy purposes, true to each other's names: [both truly lamentable (*eteokleitōi*)] both full of strife [*polyneikeis*]." I analyze this ode in further detail later. Let me note in the meantime that this ode has many textual problems. I have followed Page in leaving line 830 unreconstructed, but Wecklein, noting the pun suggested by *polyneikeis*, emended the missing part with *eteokleitōi*. Prien proposes *eteon kleinoi*. In either case there is an important auditory echo. For the meaning of "Eteocles" as "truly lamentable," see Hecht and Bacon 1973.14–15, whose argument Zeitlin endorses (1982.39).

58 Cf. Zeitlin 1986.112. For a useful list of forms of doubleness, similarity, and reciprocal compounds, see Zeitlin 1982.41 n. 33.

Eteocles' genealogical troubles behind his civic and autochthonous rhetoric (42–51).

ἄνδρες γὰρ ἑπτά, θούριοι λοχαγέται,
ταυροσφαγῶντες ἐς μελάνδετον σάκος,
καὶ θιγγάνοντες χερσὶ ταυρείου φόνου,
Ἄρην Ἐνυὼ καὶ φιλαίματον Φόβον
ὥρκωμήτησαν, ἥ πόλει κατασκαφὰς
θέντες λαπάξιν ἄστν Καδμείων βίαι,
ἥ γῆν θανόντες τήνδε φυράσειν φόνωι·
μνημεῖά θ' αὐτῶν τοῖς τεκοῦσιν ἐς δόμους
πρὸς ἄρμ' Ἀδράστου χερσὶν ἔστεφον, δάκρυ
λείβοντες, οἶκτος δ' οὔτις ἦν διὰ στόμα·

There are seven men, valiant leaders, slitting a bull's throat over a black-rimmed shield. Dipping their hands in the bull's gore, they swore an oath by Ares, Enyo, and bloodthirsty Fear that they would either bring destruction on the city of the Cadmeans and drain it of its blood by force or, in their death, would mix their gore in this land. They piled tokens of themselves for their parents at home into the chariot of Adrastus, shedding tears, but no cry of pity left their mouths.

The scout had opened by directly addressing Eteocles by his name (39), ironically summoning the very identification Eteocles himself had made in the opening lines between his failure as the city's leader and its subsequent lamentation.⁵⁹ He also repeats the civic and autochthonous reference to the Cadmeans. He informs Eteocles that he has seen the seven Argive leaders swearing oaths over a black shield full of bull's blood (a scene whose gory details signify nothing if not violent destruction and that looks forward to the shield scene later in the play). Polynices, it seems, the leader of this

59 See Foley 2001.49 on the mixture of language for praise and lamentation in the opening of *Seven*. It is of note that there are only four occurrences of Eteocles' name in the play: 6 (his own play on words), 39 (the scout), 999 (the antiphonal lament of Ismene), 1007 (the herald proclaiming Eteocles a hero). Six occurrences for Polynices: 577, 641, 658, 830 (the pun: both brothers were *polyneikeis*), 1013, 1067.

force, has his own claim on autochthonous Thebes and has come to take it back.⁶⁰

The scout, however, does not stop there. He notes that, upon swearing their oaths over the black shield, the Argive leaders, in an inverted familial economy, leave behind *mnēmeia* for their parents. Apart from the patent connection between these “tokens” and death (i.e., like a *mnēma*, they are monuments to one’s death), the retrogressive movement of the *mnēmeia* (from child to parent as opposed to the other way around) picks up the subtle strands of stalled genealogical movement expressed in Eteocles’ appeal to children and elders. As in that instance, we get insight into how generative succession trips up on the desires of the very people who are to guarantee its forward progress. For just as Oedipus’s desire for Jocasta forestalled proper linearity, so the Argive return to Thebes threatens to reverse natural, genealogical movement (and it only makes sense that Polynices is the leader of the attack). In a sense, the genealogical reversal of the *mnēmeia* points to, or is the result of, the Argives’/exiles’ return to the “womb” of their motherland.

The resonance of the *genos* of Oedipus that seems to lurk behind the invocations and desires of each brother for the polis may supplement Eteocles’ “misogynist” tirade against the frightened choral women. Apart from a simple desire for order, the passage we looked at earlier also opens up further consideration of Eteocles’ behavior. His first question to the women reinforces his sense of identity as a sovereign and the responsibility he holds as a leader (i.e., to provide *ta kairia*): “Do you think these cries of yours are the best conduct for the safety of the city or will bring strength to our besieged army?” (183–84). These women, he implies, are acting irresponsibly in their disheveled agony (even though Eteocles himself had intimated in the opening lines that such a response would likely occur if ever his city were in danger).⁶¹ He claims he wants nothing to do with

60 Cf. Zeitlin 1982.26–27: “This reduplication subverts the ideological unity of the *oikos* by generating two sons instead of one to inherit a single patrimony, sons who demonstrate their sameness (not their resemblance) by their struggle for the same object which they cannot share . . . Thus excessive sameness, which violates the law of difference, must generate excessive difference as its response, in this case, in the form of antithetical opposites which cannot be mediated.” See Gagarin 1976.121, esp. n. 7 for a discussion of the origin of the dispute between Eteocles and Polynices.

61 See Vernant 1990a.40 on Eteocles’ prescriptions for the women’s prayers. Graf’s remarks on the role of women in warfare seem entirely apt here: “The prayer for the besieged town was the only thing left to the womenfolk . . . Women stood aside and acted only in emergencies, by throwing stones or by praying, *preferably silently*” (1984.246; my emphasis).

women, a prejudice that accords well with the civic-ideological purpose of autochthony (as Loraux and Saxonhouse argue, cf. notes 12–14 above). City things are men’s business, so women need to stay out of the way. But in this repudiation of the *genos* of women in favor of the polis, the irony of his double bind is exposed: the presence of women as a *genos* in the polis troubles him since women are the single locus of difference in the otherwise unified city he desires; but on another level, the absence of a properly differentiating female figure in his own family history colors the present moment of the play. Jocasta’s presence as this figure was a perversion: in the chorus’ words she was the most *dysdaimōn* of all mothers (926–28). Eteocles’ aversion then reflects and recapitulates the very circumstances that put him where he is as both leader of Thebes and as a point in Labdacid genealogy. As Zeitlin suggests, Eteocles’ invective “against *all* women for *all* time demonstrates precisely the status of Eteocles as the child of an incestuous union, who knows only how to repress the ‘speaking signs’ that are essential to the city for its genealogical diversity in favor of a homogeneous commonality ruled by a single principle” (1982.32–33). *Genos* and polis are inextricably related, an analogy masquerading as polarity.

We could say that this hidden connection between the family and the city—the wellspring of Eteocles’ fear and acidity—points up the ambivalence of the autochthony he is so adamant about. Autochthony is, after all, a civic genealogical metaphor for the desire for the coincidence of family and earth/city, people and land. But in this instance, Eteocles wants to keep them separate. There is a strong current of racial/genealogical discourse in Eteocles’ misogynistic diatribe. He first calls the women *thremmata* (181), prays he never has to live with the *gynaikeiōi genei* (188), rails against the ills of *gynaixi synnaiōn* (195), and ends definitively by asserting: “What’s going on outside is a concern for men—no woman should concern herself with it” (200–01).⁶² The fascinating point here is that exactly where Eteocles’ vision of autochthony unites the city (the male race of Theban autochthons), young and old and everything alike in between (10–12), it also divides it (male vs. female). That division is important since it is built into the very structure of the play in the form of the dialogue between the female chorus and the male protagonist (203–63). The only way ultimately that Eteocles can suppress the ambivalence of autochthony—that it both unites and divides *genos* and polis—is by threat of death (196–99):

62 Cf. also: “Zeus, what a gift you have given us in this race of women!” (256).

κεί μή τις ἀρχῆς τῆς ἐμῆς ἀκούσεται
 ἀνὴρ γυνή τε ᾧ τι τῶν μεταίχμιον,
 ψῆφος κατ' αὐτῶν ὀλεθρία βουλευέσεται,
 λευστήρα δῆμου δ' οὔ τι μὴ φύγηι μόρον.

Any man, woman, or anything else in between who disobeys my authority will be sentenced to death and will not escape the fate of being stoned in public.⁶³

Even this forceful attempt at closure, however, is fraught with ambiguity. *Tōn metaichmion* in line 197 unsettles his distinctions and seems to be Eteocles' unconscious acknowledgment of the falsity or impossibility of his own polarities.

The difference between Eteocles and the women, at least from his purchase, is radical. He defends the civic order of autochthonous Thebes with almost oppressive passion, while they erratically endanger its stability with their poisonous femininity.⁶⁴ For this reason, he prescribes for them in his final words the proper vocal response (261–85), demanding that they pray for a good outcome. It seems strange that he is so adamant about univocality between himself and the women, seeing that, in all other instances, he wants nothing to do with them (cf. 201). In this case, however, he brings together their purposes (as he did with the city earlier), a move that simultaneously pushes the women away as it draws them closer and, importantly, silences them by dictating their words.

I suggested above that the chorus agitates Eteocles' inner turmoil, and the destabilizing force they symbolize (the homology of autochthony and incest, the inextricable connection between *genos* and *polis*) is all the more potent given that they have to be forced into compliance. This exacerbation of Eteocles' contradictions then underscores the lengths to which

63 Lines 194–95, under this ambivalence, take on an ironic new light: “You’re really aiding what’s happening outside, while we’re ruined from within by our own!” Cf. Dawson 1970.48, 50 ad loc.

64 Caldwell’s claim that Eteocles’ “deep-rooted fear of women” is his response to the curse that Oedipus levels against his sons (reiterating a similar sexual dynamic to that of Laius’s recourse to homosexuality) is attractive. In this light, “the dramatic occasion of civic danger brings to the fore those attributes of Eteocles most representative both of the prevailing social climate and of his own individual, yet paradigmatic, response to the threatening female, the Curse of his family” (1973.216–17).

he will go to valorize polis over *genos*.⁶⁵ But the women of the chorus cannot abide by such a radical demarcation. In the choral ode that intervenes (288–368), Aeschylus will put their disobedience and fear into stark relief, as the chorus expressly likens itself to victims on several metaphorical registers that deploy the language and themes of autochthony.

If, as Zeitlin suggests, the women speak both for the city and for the family (1982.30), then the chorus by its very presence highlights the sexual dimension of the family behind the civic dimension of the city. In the ode, the women make themselves the powerful and scary, yet apt, symbol for the notion of a pure origin, exposing in the mixture of threats from without and within the truly dual nature of this myth of autochthony. This characterization consists of a vision of their rape by the Argive attackers, an antithesis that also expresses a fundamental synthetic link: “For war and incest both interrupt the normal exchange of women, one in excessive exogamy, one in excessive endogamy” (Zeitlin 1982.33).

What is striking in the ode—and what is shot through the entire strophic/antistrophic exchange—is the pervasiveness of the sexual dynamic of this war. The women, as this ode makes poignantly clear, are ultimately those who stand to suffer the most if the war turns out badly (they will be sold into slavery instead of killed).⁶⁶ It stands to reason that they do not calmly choke back their fears as Eteocles had ordered in favor of better sounding prayers.⁶⁷ The fear they exhibit cuts right to the heart of who they are, women at risk of being raped and enslaved, and therefore the sexual aspect of this civil war is inevitably emphasized in their ode. As in their previous ode, their prayers for civic prosperity are consistently infused with eruptions of sexual panic.

65 Bacon is right on when she claims that “the harshness of [Eteocles’] language and the intensity of his horror of women leave one with the feeling that the success [i.e., “calming” the women] is somehow against nature, and therefore unstable” (1964.30). Cf. also Foley 2001.46 n. 90.

66 Death is no picnic, of course, but the women, unlike the men, have less in the way of ideological compensation for it (*kleos*, a beautiful death, etc.). Cf. Gagarin 1976.159 and Byrne 2002.144. The chorus’ words are: “I declare that the one who dies fares much better than these [captives]” (336–37).

67 Dawson 1970.58 ad loc. contends that the absence of the dochmiac meter in the ode is evidence that the women are “somewhat calmer.” Cf. Gagarin 1976.152, esp. n. 2 for the difficulty of discerning the “emotional tone” of the dochmiac meter in *Seven* since it is “the earliest surviving play to make extended use of the meter, which Aeschylus may have created” (213).

The women open the first strophe (288–303) with a metaphor equating the Argive army to snakes threatening a nest of young birds. The Thebans, one assumes, are the nestlings whose home is being insidiously encroached upon, and the chorus calls upon the gods to rescue the *Kadmogenē polin* (302–03). The sexual imagery is explicit, as the women characterize the serpents as *dyseunētoras* (292), “bad bedfellows,” diction that likens the Argive invasion to unwanted coupling. Apart from the obvious reminiscence of the Cadmean serpent, the reference to bad bedfellows seems an ironic and appropriate term for the Argive men, specifically Polynices, as it hints at the history of sexual transgression of his *genos*.

The antistrophic response (304–20) inscribes a moral plea for the defense of Thebes (*areion*, 305), the “deep rooted land” (*bathychthon’ aian*, 306), as it houses the waters of Dirce, “by far the most nourishing of the streams that Poseidon the Earthshaker sends forth, of all those that are the children of Tethys” (305–11). Unlike the Argives’ threatening, dangerous desire for Thebes, which resembles the forcible, sexual threat of snakes, Dirce provides the proper ritual of reproduction and nurture (*eutraphestaton*, 307) for her children.

Strophe 2 (321–32) recalls the primordality of Thebes (*ōgygian*, 321) and reiterates an emotional investment in the safety of the city (*oiktron*, 321). But again the women cannot escape the real possibilities of the war, that “they will be manhandled and dragged away, young and old alike, like horses by their forelocks” (326–28). Distinctions are erased as even cries become mixed up (*meixothroou*, 331). Eteocles’ invocation of young and old alike in his opening was a valiant call to arms that set a standard for Theban civic loyalty. But here the consequences are foregrounded (the collapsing of generations), and the truth of a city bereft of its women is characterized as *bareias tychas* (332).

Antistrophe 2 (333–44) envisions unwed, yet marriageable young women giving up their proper wedding rights for the “path to hateful homes.” This strophe hints that not even the “most nourishing” Dirce can impart a timely, sufficient nurturing to these *artitrophois* (“just nursed”) girls who are plucked unripe (*ōmodropōs*). For that which defines the primal maternity of Thebes, Dirce, is cut off in the war fought for the right to own her.

Strophe 3 (345–56) carries on the imagistic crescendo by picturing the bloody screams of infants at their mothers’ breasts, the productive nourishment of these *artitrophois* spoiled by native gore. The proper, natural rearing of Thebes’ children is perverted by the invasion, milk poisoned by blood.

Finally, antistrophe 3 (357–68) concludes with a vision of the waste of the earth's bounty. Her fruit (her children) falls to the ground indiscriminately, much to the bitter chagrin of their caretaker, stalling in the process forward moving generational succession. In the city of Thebes, the children of the earth are the fruit scattered and wasted, leaving behind nothing but a barren city, *ekkenoumena polis* (330). An apt way to finish, summing up the relation of family and city: houses left without an heir are said to be *kenos*.

In this brief recapitulation of the choral ode, we can see that the sexual images evoked are vivid. The women are firmly in support of Eteocles, but they cannot betray, in Benardete's terms (1967), the principle for which they stand (family). They cannot, in other words, disregard the ramifications they face as a *genos* for the sake of a blind civic piety. What makes this ode so moving is that it is thoroughly civic minded but makes no pretense to conceal the sexual aspect of war. The conceptual opposition drawn between the women's fear (radical, brutal exogamy) and Eteocles' desire (radical uniqueness) animates their connection: for the women of the chorus, the projected victims in the end, the sexual (their *genos*) is the political; for Eteocles, the political is infected by the sexual.⁶⁸ The further Eteocles distances himself from the chorus, the stronger the connection between them becomes.⁶⁹ Consequently, the more he tries to segregate *genos* from polis, the clearer their interconnection emerges. Thus by the principle for which the women stand, they are a constant reminder to Eteocles that he cannot ever escape the principle for which *he* stands: the homology of *genos*/polis, the homology of autochthony/incest. The real fears the chorus expresses in its ode bear witness to the fact that war fought in the name of autochthony is destructive to normal human reproduction and hence to the future of the city.⁷⁰

68 Finley 1955.237 argues that the women symbolize "the city's rooted life, with which Eteocles, for all his desire, cannot identify himself except by dying." Cf. also Caldwell 1973.204.

69 Byrne 2002.144 suggests that the choral odes, particularly the parodos and stasimon, "create . . . a subtle impression of similarity between Eteocles and the chorus of women so that the women's fear of rape prefigures and predicts the emotional collapse and death of Eteocles." She claims, however, that "women's fear of rape is used in the *Seven* to serve the twin purposes of signaling the problematic nature of women's presence in the polis and of supporting the tragic development of the male protagonist . . . In the *Seven* women are unfairly made to condemn themselves" (149, 158).

70 It is worth noting that all wars are destructive to human reproduction; female choruses have similar laments, for example, about the Trojan War. What makes this ode important

This disturbing vision of autochthony—with its connection to incest, rape, and the destruction of the city—is a far cry from the normative vision of the myth's ability to create political and civic solidarity. Behind Eteocles' rallying cries to save the city, all centered on a notion of autochthony and civic purity, echoes the voice of his family history. The genealogical aspect of his identity, the fact that he is the son of Oedipus, brings to the surface of his patriotic rhetoric the unforeseen similarities between his own genealogy and the genealogy of Thebes that he so forcefully invoked. The scout's speech drew out these unseemly allusions as well, and the women of the chorus evinced the terror of a war fought on behalf of autochthonous roots in the very same terms so proudly vaunted by Eteocles. Taken together, these unforeseen associations dim the positive light Eteocles shines on autochthony and expose it for the defective civic genealogy it is. Mixed with the pride and solidarity of deep roots are incest, rape, and death. Autochthony comes to look like civic incest.

Seven, I believe, presents the myth of autochthony as a complex and contradictory means to stake a claim on who we are, showing up the potentially dangerous effects of a deep commitment to how we perceive ourselves. This myth provides the autochthonous citizen with a powerful metaphor for his singularity: on the one hand, it is a conscious deployment of identity and difference ("us" and "them"), and, on the other, it is an unconscious buttress against the possibility, the fear, that his singularity is only an illusion hiding his connection to others behind the veil of radical difference. It is, then, as with all identifications, a play of desire and feint, hide and seek. Aeschylus seems to be suggesting that there is a fundamental connection between identity and the suppression of difference. But, importantly, that suppression is not simply directed against Others; it is also fundamentally a suppression of the Other within.

Seven draws our attention toward the link between autochthony and its dark sides. In doing so, it precisely illustrates that the inherent, ineradicable contradictions of autochthony situate the myth between belief and reality by making it an intimate part of the autochthonous citizen himself.

is the pervasive use of autochthonous metaphors, the very thing Eteocles uses to shore up his city's defense. Foley remarks on the relationship between the language of the ode and funerary lament that "although the chorus is not formally lamenting here [in the parodos], the way that the text subtly alludes to traditions in which funerary lament played a central role serves to anticipate and liken the role of the disruptive chorus here to its later role in lamenting the brothers" (2001.47 n. 94).

The tensions and ambiguities of autochthony comprise the tensions and ambiguities of the citizen himself. And what is the autochthonous citizen if not caught between myth (his ancestors born of the earth) and reality (himself born of flesh and blood parents)? Logic may well help the autochthonous citizen identify these ambivalences, but it cannot necessarily unmoor them from him.⁷¹ As absurd as it may sound, reminding Eteocles that his enemy is, in fact, his brother will not shake him from the conviction that Polynices and his gang of warriors are, in the chorus' words, *heterophōnōi* (170).⁷² This is because to acknowledge that he and his brother are one and the same person would dissolve the firm distinctions that make him the very person he is in his own eyes. Eteocles' sense of self, and that of every autochthonous citizen, hangs on this very suppression. "Identity and alienation are thus strictly correlative."⁷³ In the next section, I will examine this dynamic and consider how it unravels in the end.

THE AUTOCHTHONOUS CITIZEN AND HIS (BR)OTHER

In the introduction, I adduced Žižek to illustrate the relationship between the individual and ideology. Žižek calls this connection anchored in the unconscious the ideological fantasy. One sees, I think, in his theory of the ideological fantasy that it is necessarily not a "thing" that a subject takes on and "uses" for the sake of ideological distortion.⁷⁴ The ideological

71 As Freud would say, if there is one thing you cannot really know, it is your own unconscious.

72 To the very end, the chorus—at least the half who have sided with Eteocles after his death—refers to Polynices and his army as "foreigners" (*allodapōn*, 1076).

73 Žižek 1989.24. The *locus classicus* for the development of this theory is Lacan 1971.

74 This, in fact, is how Žižek develops and expands upon Marx's idea of false consciousness. By his reasoning, it is decidedly not a false consciousness in the sense of an external imposition; rather, it is a self-sustained suppression within the subject. The belief that one can appropriate an ideology for one's own purpose from a position outside of it is the very trap of ideology, a trap that betrays one into thinking there is a beyond. The notion that there is no outside of ideology (most famously theorized by Althusser 1971) has perturbed many. See, for example, Rorty 1994, Eagleton 1994, or Michael Bérubé's discussion and critique on his weblog's "Theory Tuesday" (<http://www.michaelberube.com>). Žižek's (ethical) position, however, is instructive: "Here, however, one should be careful to avoid the last trap that makes us slide into ideology under the guise of stepping out of it. That is to say, when we denounce as ideological the very attempt to draw a clear line of demarcation between ideology and actual reality, this inevitably seems to impose the conclusion that the only non-ideological position is to renounce the very notion of extra-ideological reality and accept that all we are dealing with are symbolic fictions, the plurality of discursive

fantasy is rather an intimate, essential part of the subject, the very condition of possibility for his emergence. Fantasy in this light has the prime role in the constitution of the self; it is the “level on which ideology structures [his] social reality itself” (Žižek 1989.30). To reiterate Žižek’s terms (1989.45):

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our “reality” itself: an “illusion” which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real impossible kernel . . . The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.

“Consciousness, then,” as William Batstone has recently argued, “is structured by the drives and desires we suppress for the sake of the images and mirages we identify with” (2006.16). If we are to read the myth of autochthony in this way, as an ideological fantasy whose suppressions underwrite the subject’s sense of self and give consistency to his reality, then Aeschylus illustrates Žižek’s point well. For the things Eteocles suppresses by invoking the myth of autochthony against Polynices and the Argives are the very things that make him who he is: in this case, both different from and ultimately exactly the same person as his twin brother. That is, when the war you wage is civil and the enemy is your twin brother, there is, in the last instance, no such thing as difference. In Batstone’s words: “No matter where you turn something is suppressed, and, whatever it is, it is you” (2006.20).⁷⁵ Whatever rhetoric Eteocles deploys to define himself

universes, never ‘reality’—such a quick, slick ‘postmodern’ solution, however, is ideology *par excellence*. It all hinges on our persisting in this impossible position: although no clear line of demarcation separates ideology from reality, although ideology is already at work in everything we experience as ‘reality,’ we must none the less maintain the tension that keeps the *critique* of ideology alive . . . Ideology is not all; it is possible to assume a place that enables us to maintain a distance from it, *but this place from which one can denounce ideology must remain empty, it cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality*—the moment we yield to this temptation, we are back in ideology” (1994b.17).

⁷⁵ He continues with an important qualification/implication: “And [suppression] is not really all that bad. For, as Lacan liked to point out, the suppressions of the unconscious not only mean that we are worse than we believe, but also that we are better than we know.”

and his people, there is something suppressed, and whatever it is, it is him (and his brother Polynices). Looking back, this much was already echoing in the first lines of the play in the tension between *heis* and *polys* (6). In fact, Eteocles' very first invocation of the people, *Kadmou politai* (1), a civic rallying point, now sounds less defining when we remember that Cadmus was not an autochthon himself but a Phoenician exile (Orwin 1980); he has foreign blood but still represents the archetypal autochthonous citizen. Thus every subsequent reference to Cadmus—including the ones we examined—carries within it this fundamental fragmentation. This underlying divide figures significantly in the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices. Aeschylus stresses this tension between autochthon and alien, self and (br)other, when he has Eteocles finally confront Polynices and ultimately himself (653–77). The radical distinction between *genos* and polis, autochthon and alien, here comes apart.

Eteocles may be concerned about the nature of the threat or the truth posed by Polynices' shield—how is it possible that Dikē would restore Polynices to the throne? What type of falsely named (*pseudōnymos*) Dikē is this (662–71)?—but there is a conspicuous element missing in his response, his own shield. This has led Helen Bacon to speculate that Eteocles' shield bears the *sēma* of the Erinys on it, for (1964.35):

The fury is certainly the proper counterpart to Dike on the shield of Polyneices. To appeal to Dike is to appeal to the fury that will enforce Dike—his own Dike, but also his brother's Dike, for they are equal in this as in everything else. Each brother is subject to the law which he invokes against the other. This is the inescapable knowledge which the shields express.⁷⁶

This is a keen insight, but the extra-textual step is unnecessary because the whole shield scene, as Benardete points out (1967.14), moves gradually toward the equivalence of shield and shield-bearer.⁷⁷ To Eteocles at

76 Orwin 1980.192 n. 24 seems to endorse this reading and develops some implications. So, too, Winnington-Ingram 1983.24.

77 Cf. Burnett 1973.350 n. 20: "If [the identification of shield and shield-bearer] were the case Eteocles would achieve . . . the formal identification of himself with the symbol of his destined act." Following Cameron—who ultimately believes Eteocles "forgets his systematic measures for the defense of the city and neglects to use the power of words in

least, the shield and the person are indistinct; “signs have become fates” (Benardete *ibid.*). This has the effect of turning the enemy’s shield against its bearer by positioning opposite it a shield with a naturally inimical *sēma* on it.⁷⁸ “In each case,” as Cameron explains, “[Eteocles] shows how the motto, boast, or blazon of the enemy is in fact true in an unexpected sense unfavorable to the attacker. His explication and acceptance of this meaning activates the omen” (1970.107).

By the time we hear of Polynices’ position at the seventh gate, there is no one but Eteocles to face him—*tis allos mallon endikōteros* (673)—and the shields become immaterial. This is finally a contest over a sense of self, where the dual nature of Eteocles’ being comes into direct confrontation with itself in the person of Polynices. In this context, it seems especially significant that Eteocles’ shield is left undescribed, for his nature is not dual if it is just an empty mirror of Polynices’ in the way the other paired warriors are. “The *agon*,” Burnett claims, “has been transformed, to become a recognition scene” (1973.352). The language Eteocles uses reflects his divided commitments coming together—it is both civic and kindred, exclusive and self-reflexive—and he discovers the “uncanny at the heart of the familiar”:⁷⁹

ἄρχοντί τ’ ἄρχων καὶ κασιγνήτῳ κάσις,
ἐχθρὸς σὺν ἐχθρῷ στήσομαι.

I myself shall stand against him, leader versus leader,
brother versus brother, hateful enemy versus hateful
enemy. (674–75)

The reality Eteocles had known—the sound distinction between Theban autochthons and Argive aliens, himself and his brother—here dissolves as his suppressions emerge. It produces his final moment of clarity, his final moment of self-understanding. As Batstone argues: “In representing the other, we play ourselves. In the theater of plurality, we find the fiction of

this present danger with the acumen and care he has so far exhibited in the city’s defense” (1970.118)—this would be an ill-omened move. On the consistency of Eteocles’ character throughout the play, see the forceful essay of Kirkwood 1969. On the infelicity of looking for consistency in character, however, see Vernant 1990b.36 and Gagarin 1976.125.

78 Cf. Kirkwood 1969.13–14, Cameron 1970.101–07, Zeitlin 1982.44–49.

79 Batstone 2006.17–18.

identity. That is because we cannot understand what we do not understand, and so, when we come to understanding (of any thing, of the other) we come to self-understanding” (2006.17). Eteocles is not Polynices but ultimately he is: the child of an incestuous union, an autochthon, a leader, a brother, an enemy, who, in his death, simultaneously gains his identity and loses his difference (822–31).

ὦ μέγαλε Ζεῦ καὶ πολιοῦχοι
 δαίμονες, τοῖ δὴ Κάδμου πύργους
 τούσδε ῥύεσθαι,
 πότερον χαίρω κάπολολύξω
 πόλεως ἀσινεῖ σωτήρι (>)
 ἢ τοὺς μογεροὺς καὶ δυσδαίμονας
 ἀτέκνους κλάύσω πολεμάρχους,
 οἱ δὴ τ' ὀρθῶς κατ' ἐπωνυμίαν
 (>) καὶ πολυνεικεῖς
 ὅλοντ' ἀσεβεῖ διανοίαι;

Oh mighty Zeus and all you gods who protect us, you who have saved the city of Cadmus. Am I to celebrate and shout for the safety of the city that has remained unharmed? Or am I to mourn for our pitiable and ill-fated warriors who died childless? For indeed, they perished of their own unholy purposes, true to each other's names: [both truly lamentable,] both full of strife.

“Polarized difference,” Zeitlin contends, “then yields to doubling homology, as the double progeny of a doubly seeded womb meet in a duel and collapse their single selves into the grammatical category of the dual” (1982.41). The logical conclusion of a (civil) war fought on behalf of autochthony is not just similarity but a deadly conflation of two into one—and finally none.

Ultimately, the move Aeschylus makes here is revealing and redemptive. By playing out the existential difficulties of a city with dreams of a pure, autochthonous origin in the genealogical echoes of its devoted leader, he shows at one and the same time the uncanny similarity between autochthony and incest, the violence and exclusion underlying civic unity, and the essential desire for a singularity that separates (but ultimately bridges) self and other. And though, as the scout reports, all the warriors have died (794–98), most notably Eteocles and Polynices at each other's

hands (805), nevertheless true victory has come to the city of Thebes. She has survived the war and has rid herself of the curse of the Labdacids: "Take heart, children nurtured by mothers, our city has escaped the yoke of slavery!" (792–93). The scout's words are telling: he addresses the citizens as children born of mothers. There is no mention of autochthony. The death of the sons of Oedipus reproduces in the last instance the prosperity of the city. Until, that is, the next generation emerges.⁸⁰

I noted above that the end of *Seven* is widely regarded as an interpolation added sometime after the production of Sophocles' *Antigone* and/or Euripides' *Phoenissae*.⁸¹ Antigone and Ismene, heretofore unmentioned in the play (let alone acknowledged as children of Oedipus), arrive and, with the chorus, divide the responsibilities of mourning. Antigone and one half of the chorus stand beside Polynices, Ismene and the other half beside Eteocles. A herald then arrives to announce the edict, here pronounced by the "leaders of the people of the Cadmean city" (i.e., there is no mention of Creon⁸²), that Eteocles is to be buried honorably within the city and Polynices to be left unburied outside. Hutchinson argues that "the whole structure of the drama, and its relation to the trilogy, are destroyed by this inopportune appendage" (1985.210). In Vidal-Naquet's judgment, however, the final scene still captures the logic of *Seven*: "It is a debate that sets in opposition on the one hand the changing law of the city and, on the other, the stable law of lineage" (1990.282–83). That is, it maintains the divided commitments of city and family so poignantly illustrated throughout the play, bringing them to their final tragic confrontation. As Benardete claims: "Antigone survives Eteocles to split the city exactly where he boldly assumed that it was whole" (1967.29). The finality of this ultimate civic act—the end of a civil war, the victory of the city of Thebes—is sealed not with a celebration of male solidarity but with the split laments of two females, two sisters. More tragedy will follow because what is expressed here is not the closing of a sad chapter in Theban history but the continuation of it.

Aeschylus's *Seven* shows us that the reproduction and prosperity

80 See Foley 2001.50 n. 110 on the chorus' unease about the continued pollution of the city even after the brothers are dead.

81 See Foley 2001.52, with citations, for a discussion of the possibility that the interpolation was part of an Aeschylean revival. See also Orwin 1980.187 n. 1 for older scholarship and for the compelling case that the end presents the triumph of a feminine form of justice.

82 See Orwin 1980.193 for a defense against the view that the absence of Creon proves Aeschylus's "dramatic ineptitude."

of a society conforms to the dialectical responsibilities of family and city. The terms he chose to dramatize this tension, the unity of a city in a desperate time and the aberrations and exclusions this unity leans upon, shore up how meaningful—and how dangerous—the desire for singularity can be. Through Thebes, a city riven with perversions and contradictions, a city that experienced generationally solidification and fragmentation in a seemingly endless cycle, Aeschylus asks us to behold the relationship between city and man (and woman) and to remember the ambivalence bred of the fantasy of a pure origin. And though, as Burnett says, “the all-embracing action is one of salvation,” where the city finally escapes the danger posed by the war and the Labdacid curse (1973.345), Aeschylus leaves us with the uneasy feeling that more trouble is just over the horizon. And as an Athenian writing and producing his play in a paradigmatically Athenian context,⁸³ Aeschylus seems to be gesturing toward that horizon, implying that wherever the Athenians turn—whatever means they justify for whatever civic, political, or national ends they pursue—there is something suppressed. And whatever it is, it is them.⁸⁴

This much the chorus supporting Eteocles intimates in the final words of the play (1072–78):

ἡμεῖς δ' ἅμα τῶιδ', ὥσπερ τε πόλις
καὶ τὸ δίκαιον ξυνεπαινεῖ·
μετὰ γὰρ μάκαρας καὶ Διὸς ἰσχὺν
ὅδε Καδμείων ἤρυξε πόλιν
μὴ ἵνατραπῆναι μηδ' ἄλλοδαπῶν
κύματι φωτῶν
κατακλυσθῆναι τὰ μάλιστα.

And we will go with Eteocles, since here the State and Justice speak with one voice. For it was he above all who after the blessed gods and Zeus almighty, as pilot of our

83 See, paradigmatically, Goldhill 1987 on tragedy's relation to the Great Dionysia and civic ideology.

84 Heiden's concluding remarks on *Oedipus Tyrannus* are apt in this context: “Will to cooperate finds a way, while public *langue*, an archive of serviceable old improvisations, presupposes community as its basis and thus is powerless to sustain it. In presenting *Oedipus the King* before the public, Sophocles invited eavesdroppers to overhear the conversations of mortals who had progressed beyond friendship and styled themselves law-abiding citizens instead. Their best behavior was not bad, but their worst was horrifying” (2005.257).

Cadmean city, saved us from overturning and from being engulfed in a wave of foreign invaders.⁸⁵

The saga continues, and we end where we began. Even after Eteocles has died, the suppressions survive.

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85 In 1069–70, the half of the chorus that mourns Polynices justifies the side it takes by claiming that "this tragedy is shared by the entire race (*geneai*)." As Foley says: "Here the chorus again conflates family and city in a manner contrary to Eteocles' stated practice (not borne out in the event)" (2001.50 n. 107). I am not sure, however, how this means they "claim the grief of the house as their own." The reference to *genos* may well signify the female *genos* responsible for mourning, but it seems more likely that they mean the Cadmean *genos* as a whole (which would include them). This reading is buttressed by their allusions to the laws of the polis at the beginning (1066) and end (1070–71) of their lines. Hutchinson 1985.221 ad loc. agrees with this assessment "if after [*geneai*] we postulated a lacuna."

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