

WESTPHAL'S TRANSPOSITION IN AESCHYLUS, *SUPPLICES* 86–95

WESTPHAL wished to transpose lines 88–90 and 93–5 of the *Supplices*. This transposition has been supported recently by R. D. Dawe (*The Collation and Investigation of Manuscripts of Aeschylus*, 163), by Holger Friis Johansen in *C. & M.* xxvii (1966), 43–4 (also in his edition of the play), and by Sir Denys Page (in his new Oxford Text of Aeschylus). However, the transposition gains little support from a careful examination of the language and context of the passage, as I shall now proceed to demonstrate. I discussed the whole passage previously in my article 'Aeschylus *Supplices* 86–95', *Classical Philology*, I (1955), 21–5, and much of my argument can be found in that earlier article.

The manuscript M gives (apart from minor differences) :

<p>εἰθείη Διὸς εἷ παναληθῶς· Διὸς ἔμερος οὐκ εὐθήρατος ἐτύχθη· παντᾷ τοι φλεγέθει κὰν σκότῳ μελαίνα ξὺν τύχῃ μερόπεσσι λαοῖς.</p>	<p>86</p> <p>90</p>
<p>πίπτει δ' ἀσφαλὲς οὐδ' ἐπὶ νώτῳ κορυφᾷ Διὸς εἰ κρανθῇ πρᾶγμα τέλειον· δαυλοὶ γὰρ πραπίδων δάσκιόι τε τείνουσιν πόροι κατιδεῖν ἄφραστοι.</p>	<p>95</p>

Line 86 is corrupt and requires emendation. Leaving aside that difficulty for the time being, there are some superficial difficulties, at first sight, in the sequence of thought from lines 86–7 to 88–90, and also from lines 91–2 to 93–5. These are as follows (they are, in fact, the two arguments which are adduced in favour of Westphal's transposition) :

1. Line 87 says 'Zeus' desire is hard to hunt down'. Lines 88–90 go on to say 'Everywhere indeed it blazes, in the dark too . . .'; but it is surely not difficult to find something that is alight and blazing.
2. Lines 91–5 appear to say that all Zeus' decrees are accomplished, because he works in a mysterious way. But why should mystery alone imply power and success?

The first argument breaks down because *εὐθήρατος* does not mean 'easy to track down' in the sense 'easy to find'. The implications of *θηράω* are the aggressive implications of chasing with a view to capture, and *εὐθήρατος* means 'easy to chase and capture'. I gave arguments for this in my previous article in *Classical Philology*, but I shall try to restate them more clearly here.

θηράω, wherever it appears in tragedy, implies chasing with a view to capture. *εὐθήρατος* is not a common word, but where it occurs, it means 'easy to catch', 'easy to capture'. *οὐ θηρασίμους γάμους* in *P.V.* 858–9 means 'unobtainable marriages', not 'undiscoverable' ones; the kind of chase involved is

that of hawks pursuing doves, only just a little behind them. These hawks chase a prey that is fully in view; they are not tracking down a prey which has yet to be found. Further, *P.V.* 856–9 (which includes the hawk–dove metaphor; this metaphor occurs also at *Suppl.* 223–4) refers directly to the situation of the Suppliants pursued by the Egyptians:

οἱ δ' ἐπτοημένοι φρένας,
κίρκοι πελειῶν οὐ μακρὰν λελειμμένοι,
ἤξουσιν θηρεύοντες οὐ θηρασίμους
γάμους, φθόνον δὲ σωμάτων ἔξει θεός.

The word *εὐθήρατος* is likely to contain an allusion to the dramatic situation. The Egyptians in the *Supplikes* know perfectly well where the Suppliants are. They are not tracking them down with a view to finding them; they are in hot pursuit, hoping to capture them. In such a context, the natural meaning for *εὐθήρατος* is 'easy to pursue and capture', rather than 'easy to track down'.

Context words are used in other passages to imply that no one can interfere with Zeus' will:

Aesch. *Suppl.* 1055 'Thou wouldst charm the uncharmable', in a context where the Suppliants' charms are apparent;

Homer, *Il.* 8. 143 (quoted by the scholiast on the present passage) 'A man cannot ward off the intent of Zeus', in a context where warriors are trying to ward off the enemy.

In the Homeric passage, what is said is that 'a man cannot ward off the intent of Zeus'; this presumably implies, in the context, that it is impossible to ward off the enemy, if Zeus wishes the enemy to succeed. Similarly, in our present passage, what is said is that 'Zeus' desire is not easy to chase and capture' (meaning, I suppose, that one cannot force Zeus' desire into one's own mould); this presumably implies, in the context, that it will not be at all easy for the Egyptians to catch the Suppliants, if Zeus wills otherwise.

If *εὐθήρατος* is taken in this sense, then lines 88–90 follow line 87 naturally; the 'blazing', no less than the 'darkness', is a potent force against the would-be 'captors' of Zeus' will. *παντᾷ* presumably carries implications of ubiquity and omnipotence (the power to act anywhere, regardless of men's efforts to imprison his will within the narrow confines of their own schemes). *φλεγέθει* suggests the awful majesty of Zeus the Lightener. *κάν σκοτώ* amplifies the *παντᾷ*; 'everywhere' includes 'in the dark too'. The expression 'in the dark too' is difficult to interpret. At one level, presumably it means that Zeus often conceals his blazing splendour from men, as he did from Semele until his final epiphany destroyed her. Taking 'dark' in this literal sense, it could indeed be considered difficult to hunt down and capture something that operates as often as not in the dark; the luminosity of the blazing is no objection to this theory, since Zeus was capable of concealing his blazing under a cover of darkness. However, it is not certain that 'dark' should be taken so literally. The continuation, 'with outcome dark to mortal men', strongly suggests that the 'darkness' refers to the unexpectedness of future happenings. In this case, the sense may be: 'Men cannot capture (i.e. gain control over) the will of Zeus; it operates just when and wherever it pleases, often in wholly unexpected ways'. This is the metaphorical, as opposed to the literal, interpretation; the two do

not necessarily conflict.¹ Thirdly, in this context, an allusive interpretation can be suggested: 'The Egyptians are not likely to catch the Suppliants, against Zeus' will; Zeus may strike unexpectedly at any time, any place, with his punitive lightning'. I think that it is possible that all three interpretations have some measure of the truth; and each one of them provides a reasonable connection of thought in the Strophe.

It is not crystal clear whether Zeus, or his *ἕμερος*, is the subject of *φλεγέθει*, but this appears to be an ambiguity which exists in the Greek text itself; it makes little difference to the basic sense, and the difficulty would remain even if Westphal's transposition were made. *ἕμερος* is not used elsewhere in the sense 'will'; it appears to be used here with allusion to the Egyptians' desire for the Suppliants, and possibly also to Zeus' desire for Io.

The second objection to the received ordering of the text is that lines 91-5 appear to say that all Zeus' decrees are accomplished, *because* he works in a mysterious way. Why should mystery alone imply power and success? In my previous article, I suggested three reasons:

1. If you cannot see a thing happening, you cannot interfere with the process.
2. Zeus is a master of the unexpected, and can easily cast men down from their high hopes.
3. The words *δανλός* and *δάσκιος*, applied to the ways (physical paths or abstract methods) of Zeus' mind, imply uncanny intellectual power.²

These three points are, I think, sufficient answer in themselves. There is also the contextual consideration. At this stage of the drama, things look black for the Suppliants, and it is not at all clear how they will escape from their predicament, or how the Egyptians will be punished. It is only by acting in some unforeseen way that Zeus can accomplish the downfall of the Egyptians. In such a context it is reasonable to say that Zeus accomplishes all that he decrees *because* he has the power to act in an unforeseen way.

Further, the word *πόροι* (which often implies 'passages' from an intention to its execution, i.e. 'means') is highly relevant after lines 91-2 have talked of accomplishment of a decree. Zeus has at his disposal intellectual means ('paths of his mind') which are beyond the ken of man, and therefore no man can 'trip up' (*ἀσφαλές*) that which he has decreed.

It seems to me, therefore, that it is possible to make good sense of this passage without changing M's ordering of the lines. Indeed the *πόροι* of the antistrophe fit in much better where they stand in M. It is scarcely safe to apply a major

¹ The 'metaphorical' interpretation was not suggested in my earlier article; it is a more recent addition. The existence of three levels of meaning is not an extravagance; this phenomenon occurs whenever a metaphorical expression is used with allusive force, e.g. Homer's 'A man cannot ward off the intent of Zeus'.

Level 1: 'ward off' in physical sense (literal).

Level 2: 'ward off' in sense of 'stop it happening' (metaphorical).

Level 3: 'we cannot ward off the enemy, since Zeus is against us' (allusive).

² Scholars have sought to find a continuation of the hunting metaphor in lines 93-5, the image being that of a wild animal being hunted down in dark woodland places. But Aeschylus' imagery is of hawks chasing doves (*P.V.* 856-9, *Suppl.* 223-4), not of wild animals in the woods. Here I think that the scholiast's interpretation of *δανλοι δάσκιοι τε* as *πυκνοι* is shrewd and very much to the point; I developed this idea in my earlier article. (The scholion reads: *πυκνοι γάρ εἰσιν οἱ τῶν πραπίδων αὐτοῦ τοῦ Διὸς πόροι.*)

transformation like Westphal's to the text of Aeschylus unless there is far stronger evidence against the received text than this.¹

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¹ I have already discussed the emendation of line 86 and the general implication of the Strophe in my earlier article.