

## UNANSWERED PRAYERS IN GREEK TRAGEDY

MOMENTS before Euripides' Polyneices and Eteocles square off for their final, fatal battle in the *Phoenissae*, each prays for divine assistance (1359–76).<sup>1</sup> Their prayers, though very brief, are by the standards of Greek drama rather formal. Polyneices, as Theban as his brother Eteocles, is leading a force of Argives against Thebes to recover the kingship he claims is rightfully his. As he prays he looks toward distant Argos and invokes 'Lady Hera', for, he says, 'I am now yours, because I married Adrastus' daughter and dwell in his land' (1364–6). He has left his homeland, married into an Argive family, and now lives in Argos, and he must therefore appeal to an Argive deity.<sup>2</sup> Hera is here made a doubly appropriate recipient of his prayer—by locality as patroness of the Argolid and by function as protectress of marriage, her two major roles in the religion of Greek life and tragedy. Eteocles, commanding the home forces against invaders, looks to the nearby temple of 'Pallas of the golden shield'. He invokes her as the 'daughter of Zeus' and, like Polyneices but less explicitly, explains why he appeals specifically to her. He wishes to kill 'the man who has come to sack my fatherland' (1372–6). This Athena 'of the golden shield' is patroness of Thebes<sup>3</sup> and, in more general terms, a goddess who aids the city in defence against foreign invaders. Like Hera she is doubly appropriate, in terms of locale and function, to her worshipper's needs.

Polyneices prays to kill his brother and to bloody in victory his own right hand (1367–8). Eteocles asks to hurl his victorious spear into his brother's chest (στέρνα) and to kill him (1374–6). In the ensuing battle Polyneices lands the first blow, spearing Eteocles in the leg. Eteocles responds by hurling his spear into Polyneices' chest (στέρνα). And then, in close combat, Eteocles stabs Polyneices in the belly. As his brother lies dying, Eteocles, overexcited by his apparent victory, begins stripping him of his armour, but, in a last thrust, Polyneices strikes Eteocles in the liver. Moments later both die.

The two combatants had made formal prayers to cult deities to kill their opponents in battle. Both men were killed but, remarkably, both their prayers were answered to the letter. Polyneices killed Eteocles, no doubt bloodying his hand in the process. Eteocles killed Polyneices, striking him with a spear in the very στέρνα (1375 and 1397) he had prayed to hit. The final results were not altogether as either Polyneices or Eteocles would have wanted or intended, but the fault lies not with the deities. Mutual hatred so obsessed the brothers that in their prayers each thought only of killing the other (not of gaining or retaining the kingship, or even of his own safety) and each conceived of 'victory' only in these terms.

The prayers of Polyneices and Eteocles have been carefully crafted: each in four lines encapsulates and develops major themes of the play. But, beyond this, Euripides has taken pains to construct the prayers in such a way that both are answered. His care here led me, as one interested in Greek religion, to investigate whether such delicate handling of prayers is characteristic of Euripides elsewhere and of the tragedians in general. Prayer and sacrifice are the two fundamental forms of worship in Greek religion, and persistent suggestion or representation of the inefficacy of either would be a profound attack on the core of contemporary religion.

Greek prayers, both literary and other, have been studied extensively and, for analysis, have been categorized by form, structure, diction, forms of invocation, types of imperatives, optatives, and periphrases used, deity invoked, object or action requested, attitude of the one

<sup>1</sup> Lines 1369–71 of this messenger's report appear interpolated (E. Fraenkel, *Zu den Phoenissen des Euripides*, SBBA i [Munich, 1963] 64–5), but, interpolated or not, do not affect my discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Eteocles' earlier argument (604–8) that by invading his fatherland Polyneices no longer has any claims upon its deities.

<sup>3</sup> The Athena whom Eteocles invokes may have been Athena Onka, on whom see A. Schachter, *Cults of Boeotia*, BICS Suppl. xxxviii (1981) 130–1. Euripides may well have used the epithet χρυσάσπιδος (1372) to give his Athena a Theban colouring; its only other occurrence is in the opening lines of Pindar's *Isthmian* i, Μᾶτερ ἐμὰ, χρύσασι Θήβα.

praying and of the deity, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> Oddly, scarcely any attention has been devoted to what seem, in religious terms, the two most obvious and important categories, answered and unanswered prayers.<sup>5</sup> I here treat *prayers of petition directed to a deity*. Among the deities I include Olympian, chthonic, and other individual immortals as well as 'the gods' as a group. I exclude prayers to abstractions like Time and Justice and prayers to the dead. The latter are quite different from and more complex than prayers to immortals, in part because the status of the dead as deities is problematic and is handled differently by different authors in different situations. They will require separate study. To be judged answered or unanswered a prayer must include a *petition*. Hymns of praise without any requests (e.g. *E. Ph.* 784–97 [Ares] and 818–21 [Gaia]) and simple invocations of a god (e.g. *E. Ph.* 109–10 [Artemis], 175–6 [Selaina], and 1290 [Zeus and Ge]) can be neither answered nor unanswered. The petition must be *directed to a deity*, and here the line is fine. To judge by the diction (particularly of εὐχ- words)<sup>6</sup> and the usual constructions with the optative mood, the Greeks made less distinction between wishes and prayerful requests than we do. But to have a prayer of petition as it is usually understood, the deity must be invoked explicitly (by a vocative or second person verb) or implicitly as, e.g. in *A. Suppl.* 206–16, 625–709, and *Ch.* 800–6. ὦ Φοῖβ' ἀκέστορ, πημάτων δοίης λύσιν (*E. Andr.* 900) is a prayer. But standing in isolation as it does, θεοὶ σῶζοιεν ἔκ τε τῆσδε γῆς ἡμᾶς (*S. Ph.* 528–9) is a wish.<sup>7</sup>

V. Langholf treats answered vs. unanswered prayers in Euripides (*Die Gebete bei Euripides* [Göttingen 1971] 65–9), but unsatisfactorily. He claims that in Euripides' earlier plays 28%, in later plays 39%, and in plays after 412 BC 46% of the prayers requesting divine intervention are answered. The group of nearly seventy 'prayers' he assembles are a mixed bag and his treatment of them is inconsistent. Nine are directed to heroized or common dead (*Andr.* 508–9, 523–5; *HF* 490–6, 717; *Tr.* 587–94; *Or.* 255–6, 796–8, 1225–39; *Hec.* 534–41). Five make no request (*HF* 339–47, 888–90, 906–8; *Tr.* 469–71, 1280–1) and hence should not belong to the group. At least eight of the prayers designated 'unanswered' by Langholf must be or could reasonably be viewed as answered (*Alc.* 90–2, 220–5; *El.* 221 [discussed below, pp. 82–3]; *HF* 820–1; *Ph.* 84–7; *Or.* 316–27; and *Hipp.* 522–3 [discussed below, p. 91]). Langholf's crude quantification system also cannot take account of nuances such as half-answered prayers (e.g. *Or.* 1172–4). And, finally, the chorus' request to 'sleep-bringing Night' to come to Orestes (*Or.* 174–81), though expressed in the language and style of prayer, is no prayer. If one wishes to treat it as a prayer, as Langholf does, one must then also include similar appeals to Justice, Time, and other such abstractions.

Answered prayers are nearly impossible to treat systematically. Very often characters or the chorus in major or minor crises pray that a certain event or action occur. When later in the play that event or action does happen, we are most often left uncertain as to whether or how much the deity was responsible. Electra's little prayer to Apollo in *E. El.* 221 illustrates the problems. As she sees two strange men approaching, the frightened girl prays, 'Phoebus Apollo, I supplicate (προσπίτνω) you<sup>8</sup> that I not die'. The strangers turn out to be not assailants, but Orestes and Pylades. Their appearance leads eventually to the realization of Electra's most fervent desire to avenge the death of her father. To the extent that she does not die, Electra's prayer is answered. But there is no indication (and in the context we should expect none)

<sup>4</sup> For recent studies and bibliography on Greek prayers, see A. Corlu, *Recherches sur les mots relatifs à l'idée de prière d'Homère aux tragiques* (Paris 1966); E. von Severus, 'Gebete I', in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* viii 1134–52; H. S. Versnel, 'Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer', 1–64 in *Faith, hope, and worship*, ed. by H. S. Versnel (Leiden 1981); and W. Burkert, *Greek religion* (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 73–5.

<sup>5</sup> For the reaction, often violent, to unanswered prayers in later antiquity, see Versnel (n. 4) 37–42.

<sup>6</sup> On which see Corlu (n. 4) *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Such unanswered wishes involving, but not addressed to deities I exclude from consideration. Those interested may find examples in *S. Aj.* 185–6, *Ph.* 133–4, 314–16, and *OC* 1689–92. Such wishes in *A. Suppl.* (e.g. 1030–2, 1052–3, and 1062–73) are varied forms of unanswered direct prayers made throughout the play. On these see below, pp. 93–4.

<sup>8</sup> The σὲ of 221 is surely Apollo (with Denniston, *ad loc.*), not Orestes (Langholf, p. 47).

whether or to what extent Apollo was responsible for this. And such is the case with most instances where the results are as a character prayed they would be.

Unanswered prayers, petitions which are definitely not granted by the deity, are relatively few, especially in proportion to the hundreds of appeals to divine and divine-like figures in the corpus of Greek tragedy. Given the challenge to conventional religious beliefs in unanswered prayers and given the abundant ways poets could avoid them if they so chose, the treatment of unsuccessful prayers may reveal something of the relationship of tragic poets (both individually and as a group) to the religion of their time.

For some characters the results of their prayers are, as for Eteocles and Polyneices, quite different from, or even opposite to what they intended, but are, nevertheless, in accord with one interpretation of the language of the prayer. We must also investigate the nature of the deity invoked and the religious status of the individual making the prayer, but first let us consider the language of the prayer itself.

When Jocasta in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* has become alarmed at what she sees as irrational behaviour in her husband, she formally appeals to Apollo Lykeios (911–23).<sup>9</sup> Emerging from the palace with garlands and incense, she turns to Apollo 'because', she says, 'he is nearest' (919).<sup>10</sup> She supplicates him with offerings 'to provide to us a solution which is free from pollution' (λύσις . . . εὐαγῆ, 921). It need not surprise us in this play which teems with words and lines of double meaning that this prayer both is and is not answered. Laius' murderer is revealed in part through Apollo's oracles, and the eventual banishment of the murderer will remove the pollution of homicide and hence the plague from the city. With the revelation and exile of Oedipus<sup>11</sup> Thebes will become again εὐαγῆς and, at this moment in the play, Jocasta is still concerned with the pollution of the city, not of Oedipus or herself. But the solution which will free Thebes from pollution will also make Jocasta, Oedipus, and their family aware that they bear the most awful pollutions imaginable. From Jocasta's point of view no solution could have been less εὐαγῆς than the revelation of Oedipus as her husband and his father's murderer. But, we must remember, the acts which had caused this pollution had been committed long ago, years before Jocasta's prayer to Apollo. Oedipus' pollution was already established. It could well be argued that Apollo, in response to Jocasta's prayer, provided the best and most 'pollution-free' solution possible in the circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

In Euripides' *Andromache* Orestes, upon seeing Hermione's plight, utters a very brief prayer to Apollo: 'Phoebus Akestor,<sup>13</sup> may you grant a solution of these miseries' (900). The language (πημάτων δοίης λύσις) is reminiscent of Jocasta's prayer (λύσις . . . πόρης), but in other ways

<sup>9</sup> In this play, though not elsewhere, Sophocles associates the epithet λυκείος with Lycia (203–8). Apollo Lykeios is a major cult figure in Argos, Athens, and much of mainland Greece (Winkler, *RE* ii [1896] cols. 58–60; Kruse, *RE* xiii (1927) cols. 78–80; and Nilsson, *GGR* i<sup>3</sup> 536–8). The tragedians alone (*A. Th.* 145–6, *S. OT* 203–8 and 919) place him in Thebes. Sophocles' assimilation of him to Apollo Agyieus here and in *El.* 634–56, 1376–83 may reflect cult realities or may result from a literary adaptation. It is not improbable that a Theban cult of Apollo Lykeios/Agyieus is merely a Sophoclean fabrication. For this and other cults of Apollo in Thebes, see Schachter (n. 3) 77–88.

<sup>10</sup> Apollo is 'nearest' in spatial terms because here he is Agyieus, of whom an image or altar regularly stood outside the door of a house. See Fraenkel on *Ag.* 1081 and Gomme and Sandbach on *Men. Dysc.* 659. Apollo may also be, in metaphoric terms, the 'nearest of the gods' in that through his oracles he is the deity most intimately involved in the fate of the Labdacidae. Cf. Dawe on *OT* 919.

<sup>11</sup> In Sophocles' *OC* Oedipus is not exiled from Thebes immediately (427–44), but there is no indication in the *OT* that there would be a significant delay. Given Apollo's oracle that the murderer of Laius must be banished (95–8), Oedipus' desire for it, and Creon's decision to leave it up to Apollo (1518), we must conclude Oedipus is to be exiled forthwith. Otherwise Apollo's oracle must contradict itself, which it never does in tragedy.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 149–50. Compare the similar dilemma in Oedipus' threefold request to Teiresias (312–13): (1) 'Save yourself and the city'; (2) 'Save me'; and (3) 'Ward off all the pollution of the one who has died.' Unbeknownst to Oedipus, fulfilment of the first and last excludes the possibility of the fulfilment of the second.

<sup>13</sup> Akestor, 'Healer' or 'Mender', is a typical literary epithet. It is more formal than a common adjective, but is not used in cult. Unlike a true divine epithet, it can serve as a personal name (e.g. *Ar. V.* 1221, on which see MacDowell *ad loc.*).

the prayer resembles Electra's casual and informal invocation of Apollo in *E. El.* 221 (pp. 82–3, above). Such brief prayers, like 'God help me' or 'God save me' in English, often seem little more than elaborate interjections. But here in the *Andromache* this prayer may take on a different, even macabre significance since it is to be Orestes who, with the help of Apollo and his Delphians, murders Hermione's husband Neoptolemus (957–1008, 1085–1165, 1203) and thereby 'solves' her dilemma. The full working out of the requests in this prayer lies well beyond anything the audience can imagine or the character apparently intends when it is uttered.

Likewise the results of Electra's little prayer to Zeus in *Orestes* 1299–1300 are quite different from what she intends. 'Eternal power of Zeus, come to help my dear ones in every way.' Electra no doubt wants Zeus to assist Pylades and Orestes in their attempt to murder Helen. Thereafter in the rush of activity the chorus and audience are led to assume Helen has been killed and, if it occurred to them at all, they must have thought Electra's prayer answered. Only in 1493–7 does the audience discover that Helen had escaped her assailants by vanishing. Later (1629–37) we learn from Apollo, *deus ex machina*, that Zeus had ordered him to rescue his daughter Helen and to establish her as a goddess at the side of her brothers, the Dioscuroi. Zeus most certainly does not fulfil the immediate intent of Electra's prayer, but, in literal terms, her prayer *is* answered. Because of Helen's rescue Orestes, Pylades, and Electra will be able to enjoy the rewards which Apollo enumerates (1643–59). Zeus has taken action which ultimately benefits Electra and her 'dear ones', and, as elsewhere, Euripides has carefully formulated Electra's prayer so as to allow its purpose, if not its immediate request, to be fulfilled in the most literal terms.<sup>14</sup>

In Euripides' *Ion* 714–20 the chorus of Athenian women, who for good reason assume that Ion is an interloper threatening Creousa and the ruling house of Athens, ask, in the language of prayer, 'the ridges of Parnassus'<sup>15</sup> that he die and never come to their city. The chorus want only descendants of Erechtheus ruling in Athens, and, unaware of Ion's true identity as son of Creousa and an Erechtheid, ask for what is in fact most antithetical to their real desire. This request is not granted, and therefore the interests of the chorus are best served. Later, still in ignorance of Ion's identity, the chorus pray to 'Einodia, Daughter of Demeter', i.e. Hecate,<sup>16</sup> to 'guide' Creousa's attempt to poison Ion. 'May no one else', they continue, 'but nobly born Erechtheidai come and rule the city' (1048–60). The requests here too are self-contradictory. As later events reveal, Ion was the last of the nobly born Erechtheidai. Had he been killed by the poison, there would have been no Erechtheid left to assume the throne. Through Apollo's intervention the murder plot against Ion fails (1187–1290, 1563–5), but the chorus' real intent, that only descendants of Erechtheus rule Athens, is accomplished.

The results of these two prayers from the *Ion* fulfil the intent, but are counter to the specific requests of the worshipper. These prayers also demonstrate the importance of the deity invoked. Unlike the prayers previously discussed, they are addressed not to Olympian deities of cult, but to the 'ridges of Parnassus' and Hecate. The 'ridges of Parnassus', though frequented by Dionysus and invoked in the solemn language of prayer, were not and would never have been worshipped as deities. Greek mountains, even Delphic ones, do not hear or answer prayers. Lines 714–20 of the *Ion* are, in effect, only an intense, highly poeticized wish.<sup>17</sup> Hecate was, however, a genuine deity whose cult was established and developing in Athens at the time of this play. She appears to have had a positive, beneficial aspect brought to the fore primarily in cult and in occasional identifications with Artemis.<sup>18</sup> By addressing her here as 'Einodia, Daughter of

<sup>14</sup> In much the same terms is answered Pylades' prayer (1242–5) to Zeus and Justice, for success for Orestes, Electra, and himself.

<sup>15</sup> Euripides introduces Dionysus into this prayer-like request, but he is not the recipient of it nor is he made responsible for its fulfilment.

<sup>16</sup> Einodia, 'She in the Streets', is polyvalent, suggesting as a proper name Enodia, the Hecate-like goddess of Pherai in Thessaly (T. Kraus, *Hekate*

[Heidelberg 1960] 77–83) and, as an adjective, one important sphere of activity of this 'daughter of Demeter'. Note ὀδωσον, 1051. Similar resonances may be found in *S. Ant.* 1199–1202 and frag. 492 (N) and *E. Hel.* 569–70. For the identification of Hecate with Kore in literature see Diggle on *E. Phaëth.* 268.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *S. Ph.* 1464–8.

<sup>18</sup> On Hecate in fifth-century Athens, see Kraus, *Hekate* 84–94 and Nilsson, *GGR* i<sup>3</sup> 722–5.

Demeter' and thus identifying her with Persephone, the chorus puts forward, however, her dark, mysterious, and hostile side.<sup>19</sup> It was this chthonic Hecate to whom curse tablets were addressed<sup>20</sup> and of whom Medea, herself an expert in deadly poisons, was a devotee (E. *Med.* 395–8).<sup>21</sup> Hecate, mistress of dark nights, deserted streets and crossroads, and murder, here does not answer a prayer. The Olympian, Apollo Pythius, as he establishes himself *patroös* for the Athenians, intervenes to prevent it. It is usual in Greek tragedy that, as here, unmistakably unsuccessful prayers are made to 'non-deities' ('ridges of Parnassus'), to 'chthonic' deities usually associated with evil, or to other somehow unconventional deities.

Also chthonic are the 'gods' to whom Hecuba in Euripides' *Hecuba* prays unsuccessfully for the safety of her children Polydorus (ὦ χθόνιοι θεοί, σώσατε παῖδ' ἔμὸν, 77) and Polyxena (ἄπ' ἔμᾶς ἄπ' ἔμᾶς οὖν τόδε παιδὸς πέμψατε, δαίμονες, ἱκετεύω, 96–7), prayers which are particularly poignant because the audience has learned in the lines immediately preceding that Polydorus is dead and Polyxena is doomed to die. Hecuba had had a dream boding ill (69–76, 90–1) and she appeals here to the χθόνιοι θεοί because, as she says herself, πότνια χθών is μελανοπτερύγων μάτερ δνειρών (70–1). Here as in *IT* 1261–7 Euripides represents dreams emanating from the chthonic world and it is to the powers that create them that one prays to avert the evils they may be predicting.<sup>22</sup> The prophecy of this dream, as is usual in tragedy,<sup>23</sup> turns out to be correct (702–6) and Hecuba's prayers to avert from her children the disaster it portends are futile.

In the *Medea* (1251–60) the chorus pray to Ge and Helios to 'look down upon' Medea before 'she casts her bloody, murderous hand on her children'. They explicitly bid Helios to restrain and stop her, to remove 'this bloody and wretched Erinys from the house'. This prayer, as prayers in tragedy often do, stands just before a critical moment in the action,<sup>24</sup> here the murder of the children, and it points to the horror of the coming act. Both Ge and Helios are invoked initially, but the specific requests of the prayer (1258–60) are directed to Helios,<sup>25</sup> a figure prominent throughout the play as Medea's grandfather and protector. In Corinth, where the play is set, Helios was a major deity with altars on Acrocorinth and a temple at Isthmia. He, not unlike Athena for Athenians, formed a divine core around which much of the Corinthian national mythology centered.<sup>26</sup> In the *Medea* it is perfectly appropriate, and also consistent with Euripides' concern for details of cult, that Corinthian women invoke their city's god and Medea's patron and ancestor in this crisis. To contemporary Athenians, unlike to Corinthians, Helios apparently had little if any significance as a god of cult.<sup>27</sup> If we can believe Aristophanes, the Athenians even thought it 'unGreek' to sacrifice to him.<sup>28</sup> Worship of him as portrayed in

<sup>19</sup> On the chthonic side of the Thessalian Enodia, see Kraus 77–83. In tragedy this negative side of Hecate prevails: S. *Ant.* 1199–1202; E. *Med.* 395–8, *Hel.* 569–70, *Hipp.* 141–2, *Ion* 1048–60, and, perhaps, *Tr.* 323–6. Her identifications with Artemis in tragedy each hang on the word ἐκάτη (adjective or noun?) and are at best allusive, at worst doubtful: A. *Suppl.* 674–77 and frag. 388(N); E. *Ph.* 109–11. For a recent discussion see H. Friis Johansen and E. W. Whittle (*Aeschylus, The Suppliants* [Copenhagen 1980]) on A. *Suppl.* 676.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Wünsch, *Defixionum tabellae*, 101 and 107. From the fact that these tablets are addressed to either Hecate or Persephone, never to both, one has evidence that Hecate's identification with Persephone was extensive in practised religion.

<sup>21</sup> One must concede to Knox (*YCS* xxvii [1977], 204 n. 37 = *Word and action* 219 n. 37) that nothing in Medea's words explicitly indicates the chthonic over the beneficent Hecate. But Medea's unusually strong devotion and personal domestic cult of her, the context of the statement, and what later results all point to Hecate's negative side.

<sup>22</sup> Alternately in such a situation one may pray to Apollo (Agyieus) in his usual role of 'avertter of evils'. See, e.g. S. *El.* 634–59 (discussed below, pp. 89–90) and A. *Pers.* 176–214 and Broadhead on 203. Cf. Xen. *Smp.* 4.33.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. A. *Pers.* 176–214, *Ch.* 523–51 and 928–9, and S. *El.* 417–23.

<sup>24</sup> See W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* i 3 (Munich 1940) 720 nn. 4 and 5; W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (Berlin 1926) 101–4; and Langholf 69–76.

<sup>25</sup> Even the κατίδεν', 'look down upon', of 1252 indicates the prominence of Helios over Ge in this passage.

<sup>26</sup> On Helios in Corinth see Jessen, *RE* vii (1912) cols. 58–93, esp. 64; Ed. Will, *Korinthiaka* (Paris 1955) 209 and 233–5. It may be more than chance that Aphrodite, another major cult figure in Corinth, receives a hymnic ode in this play (627–41).

<sup>27</sup> On Helios as a god, see Appendix.

<sup>28</sup> Ar. *Pax* 409–13.

the *Medea*, like Medea herself,<sup>29</sup> was exotic. In the end Helios not only does not stop Medea from killing her children, but after the murders even provides his granddaughter safe passage from Corinth to Athens (1321–2).

To the unsuccessful petitions considered thus far we may add two directed to ‘the gods’ in general: in *S. Ph.* 1019–20 Philoctetes speaks to Odysseus,

May you die. I many times prayed<sup>30</sup> for this for you, but it didn’t happen because the gods dispense to me nothing pleasant.

In *OC* 1444–6 Polyneices addresses his sisters Antigone and Ismene,

I pray to the gods that you never encounter evils, because in all ways you don’t deserve to suffer misfortune.

In the *Philoctetes* the prayer and in the *Oedipus at Colonus* the resolution of the prayer lie outside the framework of the play, but in each clearly a prayer was not answered. Odysseus did not die as Philoctetes wanted, nor did Antigone and Ismene escape misfortunes. Neither prayer is formal, but no prayer to ‘the gods’ could be. οἱ θεοί as a group lack all the definitions of locale, cult site, and function which characterize practised religion. οἱ θεοί, like δαίμων, is a conceptual, not a cult term. Athenians, in the classical period at least, did not make prayers to οἱ θεοί in these terms. It is most interesting that the two such unanswered prayers in tragedy are found in Sophocles and are made by individuals who find themselves in foreign, hostile places and therefore without access to the gods of their family and homeland.<sup>31</sup> Prayers to ‘the gods’, whether they be successful or not,<sup>32</sup> are a literary device—meaning little more than ‘I pray’ or ‘I strongly hope’—a device which allows the poet to develop other thoughts without introducing a pile of deities’ names and epithets. ‘The gods’, abstracted from cult and thus from practised religion, form along with chthonic and other exotic deities a class of recipients of unanswered prayers.

When Polymestor has been blinded by Hecuba in revenge for his killing of her son, he prays to Helios (*E. Hec.* 1067–9): ‘If only, Helios, you would heal my bloody eyes . . .’ Helios, the giver of light and therefore of sight, and, in literature, healer of the blind<sup>33</sup> does not answer this prayer. Apart from Helios’ special character as a deity, the reason may well be Polymestor himself; this introduces a third important element in unanswered prayers, the religious status of the individual making the prayer. Polymestor, in addition to being one of the most unsavory characters in Greek tragedy, is also one of the most impious. Near the end of the Trojan war Priam had sent his son Polydorus with a fortune to Polymestor, his long time Thracian *xenos*, for safekeeping. At news of Troy’s capture and Priam’s death, Polymestor seized the money and killed Polydorus. The obligations of *xenia* in the classical period were under religious sanctions,<sup>34</sup> and for his gross violation of them Polymestor is repeatedly termed ‘impious’ (714–16, 788–94, 803–5, 852–3, 1004, 1027–30, 1086, 1233–5, 1247–8). He is, in the final judgment, ‘the most unholy *xenos*’ (790). And he then compounded his impiety by denying Polydorus burial (47–52, 781–2, 796–7).

<sup>29</sup> Page’s one-sided emphasis on the foreign and barbaric character of Medea (*Medea* xviii–xxi) is properly corrected by Knox in *YCS* xxv (1977) 193–25 = *Word and action* (Baltimore 1979) 295–322. Despite several conventional appeals to the gods Medea remains, however, a self-proclaimed devotee of Hecate and of Helios—both, if not totally unGreek, at least un-Athenian.

<sup>30</sup> Corlu, 110 and 114, understands ἠὲξάμην simply as ‘hope’ here. Though not impossible, this interpretation weakens or ignores the force of 1020. For much the same prayer, but directed to the future and to θεοὶ ἐπὶψοί, see 1040–2. Cf. 314–16.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *S. Aj.* 507–9 where Tecmessa imagines Ajax’ mother back on Salamis praying ‘to the gods’ for her

son’s safe return. It would be impossible as well as inappropriate for the foreigner Tecmessa to specify who these Salaminian gods would be.

<sup>32</sup> For οἱ θεοί in prayers, see *A. Ag.* 1, *Ch.* 212–15, 462; *S. OT* 879–82, *Tr.* 46–8, *Ph.* 1075–7; *E. El.* 415–16, 563–6, 590–5, *Hel.* 855–6, *Ph.* 586–7, *Ion* 422–4. In wishes, *A. Th.* 417–19, 422, *Ch.* 1063–4; *S. Ph.* 314–16, 528–9, 627, *Aj.* 949; *E. Andr.* 750–1, *Hel.* 1405–6.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Hesiod *fr.* 148a (Merkelbach and West). See O. Weinreich, ‘Helios, Augen heilend’, in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, i (Amsterdam 1969) 7–12 and Jessen, cols. 60 and 85.

<sup>34</sup> Mikalson, *Athenian popular religion* (Chapel Hill 1983) 99.

Similar correlations between the impiety of the individual making the request and the real or apparent failure of the prayers are to be found also in the prayers of Eteocles and Polyneices (E. *Ph.* 1359–76). Euripides' Eteocles was a perjurer (481–3) and for that he and his actions are explicitly termed impious and unholy (491–3, 609–10. Cf. 524–5). Polyneices was a traitor in that he led a foreign army, no matter for what reason, against his fatherland. This treason, like his brother's perjury, is an impiety that adversely affected his standing with the gods (604–9, 1628–30).<sup>35</sup> The Jocasta of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* cannot be compared to sinners like Polymestor and Eteocles, but like notoriously impious characters of tragedy,<sup>36</sup> she criticizes soothsayers and Delphic oracles. When Teiresias has been goaded into stating that Oedipus is Laius' murderer, Jocasta bids Oedipus not to be troubled because once Laius received an oracle that he would be killed by his son, and that didn't happen (708–25, 848–58. Cf. 952–3, 964–73). Similar questioning of divination is not uncommon elsewhere in tragedy, but here the implications and result of such questioning are elaborated. The chorus, which initially had confidence in Apollo's mantic power (e.g. 406–7), begins to question Teiresias' knowledge (483–6, 498–501). Later the doubts expressed about the oracles lead them to detail the implications for their most fundamental religious practices and beliefs (898–910):

Never again will I go worshipful to the sacred navel of the earth nor to (Apollo's) temple at Abai nor to Olympia, unless what is happening here becomes an example known to men. Zeus, ruler, commander over all things, if you truly hear, let it not escape you and your immortal rule that people are doing away with the old oracles of Laius and that Apollo is nowhere held in honour. The divine things (τὰ θεῖα) are perishing.

In the end, of course, the oracle about Laius and all else prophesied by Apollo and Teiresias prove true. Jocasta's criticisms of prophecy, however reasonable and understandable they appear in context, are nevertheless characteristic of impious characters in tragedy, and here cause momentarily a crisis of religious faith for the chorus. Athenians of the 420s generally took seriously the oracles of Delphi,<sup>37</sup> and Jocasta's attacks must have seemed, if not literally impious,<sup>38</sup> at least unwise and alien to a proper religious attitude.<sup>39</sup> Jocasta's appeal to Apollo Lykeios (not Pythios) so soon after these attacks (911–23) is a bit surprising. It is less surprising that her prayer to him is answered, as discussed above, only to her disadvantage.

Polyneices, Eteocles, Polymestor, and Jocasta each acted or spoke impiously or unwisely by religious standards of the fifth century. Helios, himself a deity only in very limited ways, simply did not answer Polymestor's prayer. Eteocles, Polyneices, and Jocasta appealed to real deities of cult, to Theban Athena, to Argiva Hera, and to Apollo Lykeios. But to them we may perhaps apply Oscar Wilde's dictum: 'When the gods wish to punish us, they answer our prayers.'

Thus far we have isolated three significant elements in unanswered prayers of tragedy: imprecise language of the prayer itself; minor, exotic, or 'non-deities' invoked; and the impiety of the individual making the request. These are, as it were, generic features in that one of them at least occurs in most unsuccessful petitions to the gods. The following prayers, in addition to illustrating further these generic elements, each have other features of interest that merit separate attention.

In the *Electra* plays of Euripides and Sophocles, and, oddly, only in them, occur prayers of

<sup>35</sup> Mikalson, 94–5.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Pentheus in E. *Ba.* 255–62, 345–51; Creon in S. *Ant.* 1055, 1061–3, 1077–8; Tydeus in A. *Sept.* 377–83; Eurystheus in E. *Heracl.* 1027–40; Polymestor in E. *Hec.* 1280; Menelaus and Agamemnon in E. *IA* 518–20; and Eteocles in E. *Ph.* 766–73.

<sup>37</sup> For a general account of the Delphic oracle and its relations to Athens in this period, see H. W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle* i (Oxford 1956) 188–200. Note also *IG* i<sup>2</sup> 76, 78, and 80. On the Athenians' unsuccessful use of oracles during the plague years of 430–426, see Mikalson, 217–25 in *Studies*

*presented to Sterling Dow* (Durham 1984).

<sup>38</sup> Criticisms of soothsayers and oracles are not themselves termed impious in tragedy, but impious characters regularly indulge in them.

<sup>39</sup> For differing views on Jocasta's piety or impiety in regard to oracles, see Whitman, *Sophocles* 133–8; Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven 1957) 42–7, 171–6; Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles* (Cambridge 1980) 179–84; Reinhardt, *Sophocles* (Oxford 1979) 120; Nock, 'Religious Attitudes of the Greeks', *Proc. Amer. Philos. Soc.* lxxxv (1942) 474–5 = Nock, *Essays* 538.

petition by different characters to the same deity for opposing purposes. Each prayer brings into focus major oppositions in its play, but for our purposes the juxtaposition of successful and unsuccessful prayers sheds light on both. In *E. El.* 803–10 Orestes' attendant reports to Electra how Aegisthus and Orestes both had prayed to the Nymphs:

Your mother's bedpartner took up the preliminary grain-offerings and cast them onto the altars while saying, 'Nymphs of the rocks, grant that I and my wife, Tyndareus' daughter, who is back home, may many times sacrifice cattle to you when we are enjoying success as we do now and when our enemies'—he meant Orestes and you—'are faring badly'. My master, not speaking his words loudly, was praying in the opposite way, to recover his ancestral home.

Euripides' choice of the Nymphs as recipients of Aegisthus' worship is significant. It is only as an impious interloper that Aegisthus rules and even lives in Argos, and he could hardly appeal to gods of Argive state cult or to those of Agamemnon's household.<sup>40</sup> Aegisthus had no reasonable claim on them, nor did Euripides choose to manufacture one. The Nymphs, unlike most Greek deities, stand apart from family and state, and their rural caves and humble, often crude sanctuaries reflect the private, asocial, and apolitical sphere of their activity.<sup>41</sup> Individuals appealed to them, apparently, for personal and private needs, and it is just such requests that Aegisthus makes. He wants prosperity for Clytemnestra and himself, not for family in larger terms or for the state he rules.

It is at the sacrifice accompanying Aegisthus' prayer that Orestes kills Aegisthus—a murder which, in a sanctuary, amidst sacrifices,<sup>42</sup> and by a knife in the back, troubles virtually all critics.<sup>43</sup> But in strictly religious terms Euripides, I think, lessens or perhaps completely removes the onus by having the deities themselves reject Aegisthus.<sup>44</sup> In lines 810–43 the messenger describes how, after the prayers, Aegisthus' sacrificial victim proved to be defective and ill-omened. The unacceptability of Aegisthus' victim was an unmistakable sign to an ancient audience that the sacrifice had been unsuccessful, that the prayer accompanying it would also be unsuccessful.<sup>45</sup> By then assassinating Aegisthus at this sacrifice Orestes may be, as Denniston (p. 149) puts it, 'sailing very near the wind'.<sup>46</sup> But he is not guilty of sacrilege, I think, not because he does not receive the  $\chi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\upsilon\iota\psi$  or the meat (Denniston, pp. 148–9)<sup>47</sup> but because the gods (more specifically the Nymphs) have, by rejection of Aegisthus' sacrifice, removed him from

<sup>40</sup> Had Euripides constructed the scene to allow Orestes the choice of recipients of his prayer, they would have been very different. See, e.g., *A. Ch.* 1–19, 246–63, and 315–480, and *S. El.* 67–72, 1372–5.

<sup>41</sup> On the Nymphs as cult figures see Nilsson, *GGR* i<sup>3</sup> 244–53. Euripides suggests (*El.* 626) that his Nymphs are to be classed with those promoting successful human births. In Athens Nymphs were worshipped often together with Pan or Hermes, in caves on Mt. Pentelicon and at Phyle and Vari. The best known and excavated of these is the cave of Pan and the Nymphs at Vari (C. H. Weller, *AJA* vii [1903] 263–88). For the cave of Pan and the Nymphs at Phyle see Gomme and Sandbach on *Men. Dysc.* 1–49. Several dedications survive from these cults (*IG* i<sup>2</sup> 778–800 and ii<sup>2</sup> 4650–6 and 4826–40), many of them made by slaves and foreigners. These dedications reflect personal and individual, versus state and familial, concerns of the worshippers.

<sup>42</sup> Neither Aeschylus (*Ch.* 554–84, 838–77) nor Sophocles (*El.* 1442–1507) has Orestes kill Aegisthus in such a religiously charged environment. The closest parallel in the complete tragedies to Euripides' version of the killing is the ambush and murder, organized and led by the same Orestes, of Neoptolemus in the temple

and even on the altar of Delphic Apollo (*E. Andr.* 1069–1166). For other murders at sacrifices see M. Lloyd, *Phoenix* xl (1986) 16.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., S. M. Adams, *CR* xlix (1935) 121; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean drama* (Toronto 1967) 206–7; F. Stoessl, *Rh. M.* xcix (1956) 64, 89; G. M. A. Grube, *The drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 308; F. Zeitlin, *TAPA* ci (1970) 652, 660. But cf. M. Lloyd, *Phoenix* xl (1986) 15–16.

<sup>44</sup> As Apollo did Neoptolemus, if we take the mysterious voice in *E. Andr.* 1147–9 to be Apollo's.

<sup>45</sup> The thought that Aegisthus was in turn Orestes' victim and was sacrificed successfully, and that therefore Orestes' prayer was answered, will no doubt occur to some. But had Euripides intended this, he would have written lines 838–43 quite differently.

<sup>46</sup> Electra and Orestes are likewise 'sailing very near the wind' in religious terms when she entices Clytemnestra into her house to assist in 'birth-sacrifices' (653–63, 1141–4, 1122–38, on which see F. Zeitlin, *TAPA* ci [1970] 652) and he proposes maltreating Aegisthus' corpse and leaving it exposed to beasts and birds (894–9).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Grube, 308.



themselves and their protection. The gods have clearly thrown in their lot with Orestes and they choose to answer his prayer.<sup>48</sup>

In his *Electra* Sophocles has Clytemnestra (634–59) and Electra (1376–83) each make formal prayers at the very same altar of the same god for quite opposite purposes. To judge from the outcome of the play, Apollo answers Electra's prayer and rejects Clytemnestra's. Clytemnestra prays<sup>49</sup> in response to a frightening dream in which she saw her murdered husband emerge from Hades, seize his sceptre, and plant it at the hearth of the palace. From this sceptre a mighty branch appeared to sprout up and cast a shadow over all the land of Mycenae (417–23). Clytemnestra brings offerings and prays to Apollo Lykeios to be freed from the fears aroused by this dream (634–6). She asks Apollo that, if the dream portends good things, he let them come to pass, but if it portends evil, he avert the evil and send it to her enemies (644–7).<sup>50</sup> The Apollo here is Lykeios, the 'Wolf-Slayer', the major deity of the city Argos (6–7),<sup>51</sup> but presented here, as Sophocles does elsewhere, less as a state deity and more as the Apollo familiar to Athenians as Agyieus ('Of the Street') and Apotropaïos ('Averter of Evil').<sup>52</sup> As Agyieus he can be, for staging purposes, conveniently situated at the entrance gate of the palace (637, 1375). Although Clytemnestra's requests to enjoy her current economic, domestic, social, and royal status<sup>53</sup> are expressed in positive terms, they are in fact elaborations of her plea to escape the evils portended in the dream. She is praying not to acquire new things but that misfortune not happen to affect what she already has. As such her requests are all appropriately addressed to an Apollo Apotropaïos.

Clytemnestra presents Apollo with food offerings (θύματα πάγκαρπα, 634–5) as she prays; in her prayer Electra reminds Apollo of her previous generosity (1377–8) and her words, particularly in the opening lines of the prayer, echo Clytemnestra's.<sup>54</sup> These formal similarities, however, serve only to emphasize the differences. Clytemnestra prays that she may retain her wealth and style of life, hold the royal house and rule over her country, and maintain, amidst prosperity, ties with family and friends and those of her children who do not oppose her. She also has requests that she dare not express publicly but expects Apollo in his omniscience to know (657–9), requests which no doubt concern the death of Orestes from whom there is the only real threat to her safety and security. Clytemnestra's requests are self-centred and materialistic, culminating in the suggested but unexpressed wish that, for her own sake, her son were dead. Electra by contrast speaks not one word of herself and her comforts. She humbly and emotionally asks, supplicates, and beseeches (αἰτῶ, προπίτνω, λίσσομαι, 1380) Apollo to assist her and Orestes' plans. 'And show,' she prays, 'to men what punishments the gods give for impiety' (1382–3). Though very different both prayers are formally and ritually correct. The requests which Clytemnestra makes for material prosperity and an agreeable social life are commonplace in the religion of fifth-century literature and life.<sup>55</sup> A prayer for the death of one's

<sup>48</sup> See M. Lloyd, *Phoenix* xl (1986) 15–16.

<sup>49</sup> The need for studying and understanding all prayers in tragedy is well exemplified by J. H. Kells' (*Sophocles Electra* [Cambridge 1973]) comments on this prayer (634–59):

Since the prayer was thus a kind of bargain with the deity and nothing more, it could contain (according to popular belief) wicked and immoral, as well as innocent, proposals. The deity was supposed to tolerate such propositions: cf. Persius (*Sat.* 2.3 ff.). When a person prayed for something improper, he prayed silently or murmured *sotto voce*, so that the public might not hear him and become aware of his evil intent. For this reason, other people's 'silent prayers' were regarded with suspicion by the ancients: cf. Lucan v 105 f.

Nothing said here can be shown to be true for classical Greeks. Persius and Lucan are hardly adequate sources for understanding Clytemnestra's prayer.

<sup>50</sup> Such prayers of ἀποπομπή and ἐπιπομπή,

though common and explicit in the Hellenistic period, are found rarely in tragedy. See O. Weinreich, 'Primitiver Gebetsegoismus', in *Genethliakon Wilhelm Schmid* (Stuttgart 1929) 169–99 and Fraenkel on *Ag.* 1573.

<sup>51</sup> On whom see Kruse, *RE* xiii (1927) cols. 78–80.

<sup>52</sup> See above, n. 22.

<sup>53</sup> Though differently motivated the substance of Clytemnestra's prayer is virtually identical to that of Aegisthus in *E. El.* 805–7.

<sup>54</sup> Clytemnestra,  
ταῦτ', ὦ Λύκει' Ἀπολλων, ἰλεως κλύων  
δοῦς πᾶσιν ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ἐξαιτούμεθα (655–56)

Electra,  
ἄναξ Ἀπολλων, ἰλεως αὐτοῖν κλύει (1376) and  
νῦν δ', ὦ Λύκει' Ἀπολλων, ἐξ οἴων ἔχω  
αἰτῶ (1379–80)

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Orestes' prayer, 67–72. Note also the objects of Ischomachus' prayer in *Xen. Oec.* 11.8 and Mikalson, *Athenian popular religion* 22–5.

son, however, like the cursing or murder of one's child, would trouble an ancient audience and, especially when as here the child had performed no crime or sin, would have struck them as impious.<sup>56</sup> Clytemnestra's obvious wish for ill for her child, coming at the end of her prayer, is a timely reminder that, despite the conventional religious scene, we are still in the presence of a woman who murdered her husband. Her prayer, like many prayers in tragedy, serves more to reveal her strongest desires and traits of character than to involve a deity in the action.

To Clytemnestra and Electra, though not to the audience, the immediately following report of Orestes' death (660–763) must have seemed the fulfilment of Clytemnestra's prayer. For the audience it contributes to the dramatic irony characteristic of Sophocles. In the end, of course, Clytemnestra's ignominious death at Orestes' hand is the polar opposite of every petition in her prayer. Her prayer is—if I may be excused the expression—the 'most unanswered' of Greek tragedy, and the reason for its failure is to be found in the last words of Electra's prayer to Apollo: 'And show to men what punishments the gods give for impiety' (τῆς δυσσεβείας, 1382–3). Clytemnestra's prayer fails and the same Apollo is invoked against her not because she is, in general terms, a bad wife, a bad mother, evil, or unjust, but because, by the murder of her husband, she is impious.<sup>57</sup> Sophocles' Electra put her finger on exactly what concerns the gods in this tale of horrors.

In Euripides' *Heracles* Amphitryon, as he and Heracles' wife and children have refuge at the altar of Zeus, prays to Zeus to rescue his grandchildren from the evil king Lycus:

I cast my hands skyward, Zeus, and tell you, if you intend to help these children at all, to defend them now, since soon you be will of no help. And yet you have been called upon many times before. I labour in vain. (498–501)

Amphitryon's mention of his previous unsuccessful prayers to Zeus may not necessarily indicate that this prayer cannot and will not be answered, but it does not augur well. Only one successful prayer in tragedy (E. *Hel.* 1441–50)<sup>58</sup> is accompanied by such a negative comment, and elsewhere such an attitude betokens failure.<sup>59</sup> But the unexpected appearance of Heracles, 22 lines later, offers the hope that it has been answered. Heracles, presumed dead, does in fact rescue his children from Lycus but then, moments later, suffering from a madness brought upon him by Hera, slays them. In the end Zeus has failed to protect his grandchildren and has not answered Amphitryon's prayer. Amphitryon is pious and moral; Zeus is presented in the guise of Zeus Soter, the 'Saviour', a deity of Athenian cult,<sup>60</sup> and the language of the prayer is unequivocal. This prayer to Zeus is simply unanswered and is intended, I think, to be part of a sustained attack on the moral and religious implications of the myth of Zeus and his son Heracles. As I argue in detail elsewhere,<sup>61</sup> Euripides here presents in all its awful details a mythological tale that presumes a deity could have an illicit love affair, could forsake his child and grandchildren, and could feel overwhelming hatred. After the story with all its horrible consequences has been dramatized, perhaps the only possible response by a man pious in the Greek tradition is that if such are the implications, the story must be false. Heracles himself, the product and victim of such divine activities, makes the point:

I do not think the gods enjoy illicit love affairs. I have never thought it right nor will I ever believe that they tie up one another or that one god is master of another. For god, if he is properly a god, lacks nothing. These are the miserable tales of poets. (1341–6)

In this play the unanswered prayer is one of several implications and consequences of the mythological tale of Heracles' miseries. For this reason, I suggest, Euripides left it, alone among

<sup>56</sup> Cf. 1181.

<sup>57</sup> See 124 and 275–81. For the persistent concern with piety in this play, see 245–50, 464, 967–9, 1093–7.

<sup>58</sup> Even here the interpretation is uncertain. See Kannicht on *Hel.* 1447–50.

<sup>59</sup> *S. Phil.* 1019–21 and *E. Tr.* 1280.

<sup>60</sup> His sanctuary in Athens was the stoa of Zeus in the Agora, and he was credited with 'saving' the Athenians from slavery in the Persian wars. On this Athenian Soter see Farnell, *Cults* i 60–1 and Mikalson, *TAPA* cxvi (1986) 90 note 2.

<sup>61</sup> *TAPA* cxvi (1986) 89–98.

many unanswered prayers in his plays, unvarnished and unexplained. It is, by the religious principles of Euripides and his audience, inexplicable, and as a result a pious person must reject the mythological tale which implies it.

The elements of unsuccessful prayers examined thus far allow us also to see more clearly the import of three prayers in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Here, of course, the audience's expectations of divine intervention are preconditioned by Aphrodite's explicit statement in the prologue (1–57) that Hippolytus is her enemy and she is devising his destruction. When, soon afterwards, the old servant prays to Aphrodite, in front of her statue, to be 'understanding' and to pretend 'not to listen' when Hippolytus speaks insolently about her (114–20), the audience, unlike the human characters of the play, know the prayer is doomed to failure.<sup>62</sup>

Phaedra's nurse, in 522–3, in furtherance of her own scheme to bring together Phaedra and Hippolytus, prays to Aphrodite, no doubt under the gaze of the same statue: 'May you, lady mistress Kypris, be my helper.' Here the audience, unlike the characters, know that Aphrodite is already providing more 'assistance' to the nurse's plans than she could have ever expected or wanted. The prayer is, at one level, very much answered, and the effect is pathetic and tragic.

The prayers of petition in *Hippolytus* 871–3 and *Rhesus* 224–32, which are both unanswered, form an instructive pair because they have, as prayers, significant anomalies and each has been, on other grounds, denied Euripidean authorship. *Hipp.* 871–3 are often viewed as an interpolation,<sup>63</sup> whereas the whole of the *Rhesus* is condemned by many as uncharacteristic and unworthy of Euripides.<sup>64</sup> In the *Hippolytus*, as Theseus discovers and reads Phaedra's tablet, the chorus of girls foresees new trouble for the royal house (866–70). In the surviving manuscripts, but apparently not in all earlier ones (see schol. *ad loc.*), the chorus conclude their expression of fear with this prayer:

Daimon, if somehow it is possible, do not make this house fall. Hear me as I make my request, for from something I see, like a prophet, an omen of evil. (871–3)

Barrett (on 871–3) condemns these lines as an interpolator's lame attempt to replace 866–70 and for the awkward *πρός τινος* ('from something'). Another telling fault is that the prayer is addressed to a *daimon* who lacks all definition and qualification. Nowhere else in the corpus of Greek tragedy is a prayer of petition directed to such a *daimon*, and for good reason; *daimon*, by itself, represents in the classical period an unidentified, undifferentiated, unlocalized, and depersonalized divine force,<sup>65</sup> and to such the Greeks did not pray. Qualified or provided with a referent, *daimon* might, of course, be a certain type of deity (e.g. *A. Ag.* 519, on which see Fraenkel *ad loc.*) or a specific god (e.g. *S. OT* 1327–30).<sup>66</sup> But the *daimon* here lacks any such qualification and referent. One could, and often did, complain of the evils and misfortunes a *daimon* (as 'fortune' or 'a god') caused,<sup>67</sup> but since it was unidentifiable one could not reach it by prayer or other means of cult. The prayer in *Hipp.* 871–3 presumes a later, post-Platonic concept of *daimon*, and this point may be added to Barrett's indictment of these lines.

In *Rh.* 224–32 the chorus prays to Apollo as Dolon starts out towards the Greek ships on his reconnaissance mission:

Apollo Thymbraios<sup>68</sup> and Delios and the one who treads the temple of Lycia, O divine head, come in the night and be a protecting escort and guide for this man. Assist the descendants of Dardanus, O all-powerful one, O god who built the old walls of Troy.

The prayer continues in 233–41 with the requests that Dolon complete his mission, return home,

<sup>62</sup> On the 'Iliadic' character of this prayer, see below, p. 96.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g. Barrett *ad loc.*

<sup>64</sup> For extended discussion of the problems, see W. Ritchie, *The authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides* (Cambridge 1964).

<sup>65</sup> See Mikalson, *Athenian popular religion* 65–6 and Burkert, *Greek religion* 179–81.

<sup>66</sup> For examples from the *Hipp.* see 1092, 1401, 1406.

<sup>67</sup> Mikalson, 65–6. Of the dozens of examples in tragedy I give only those from the *Hipp.*: 241, 771, 832–3.

<sup>68</sup> Thymbraios, like Delios, is a localizing epithet, specifying Apollo of Thymbra, a city near Troy. See Kruse, *RE* vi (1936) col. 697.

and enjoy the horses of Achilles which had been promised as a reward. The invocation of Apollo here and his prominence throughout the play are understandable. In *Iliad* x the same event is portrayed from the viewpoint of the Greeks and Athena dominates the scene, but here the dramatist has picked up the suggestion in *Il.* x 515–18 that Apollo represents the Trojan side in this encounter. What is odd and unparalleled in this prayer, however, is the status of Apollo and the acts he is asked to perform. The chorus pray that Apollo come ‘in the night’ and escort their hero Dolon. To put the matter simply, in tragedy Apollo does not work nights<sup>69</sup> nor does he provide escort service.<sup>70</sup> Hermes is the appropriate deity for both, as the chorus fully recognize in their preceding conversation with Dolon:

May Maia’s son, the master of thieves, escort you there and back. (216–17)

Their lyric prayer to Apollo is an awkward and inappropriate duplication of this wish.<sup>71</sup> It presumes Apollo working at a time and in a way uncharacteristic of his usual roles in tragedy and contemporary religion. The chorus also addresses him as *παγκρατής* (‘all-powerful’, 231), an epithet at variance with Apollo’s status and role in tragedy and cult. Apart from Time (*S. OC* 609), Sleep (*S. Aj.* 675), and the volcanic fires of Lemnos (*S. Ph.* 986), only Zeus and his accoutrements are *παγκρατής* in tragedy (*A. Th.* 255, *Eum.* 918, *Pr.* 389 [cf. *P. Oxy.* 2164 fr. 1.14], and *E. fr.* 431.4 [N.]).<sup>72</sup> The dramatist here has violated, unintentionally it would appear, one of the strongest religious conventions of Greek tragedy. These peculiar ideas of Apollo’s status and sphere of activity should, I think, be added to the list of unEuripidean elements of this play.

Ajax’ soliloquy in lines 815–65 of Sophocles’ *Ajax* contains five prayers of petition: that Zeus bring news of Ajax’ death to Teucer and thereby save his corpse from maltreatment; that Hermes Pompaïos give him a quick death; that the Erinyes avenge him on the Atreidae and the whole Greek army; that Helios report his death to his parents back on Salamis; and that Thanatos come. His final invocation of Helios, Salamis, Athens, and the Trojan springs, rivers, and plains involves no specific request, only a ‘farewell’ (*χαίρετε*, 863).

Zeus is invoked first (*σὺ πρῶτος, ὦ Ζεῦ, καὶ γὰρ εἰκός, ἄρκεσον*, 824), no doubt for the same reason Ajax invokes him in 387–91, because he is his *προγόνων πάτερ* (387). The news of Ajax’ death does in fact quickly reach Teucer, in Teucer’s own words, *ὡς θεοῦ τινοῦ* (998–9). Tecmessa discovers the body, but Teucer first secures it, takes it up,<sup>73</sup> and leads the effort to obtain proper burial. Ajax’ prayer to Zeus is therefore answered to the letter. The Hermes Chthonios Pompaïos to whom Ajax appeals for a quick and ‘spasm-free’ death is a curious hybrid of Hermes the upper-world guide and Hermes the chthonic Psychopompos. Elsewhere Psychopompos is ‘Guide of the Dead’, not ‘Leader to Death’, but in the *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles has Hermes Pompaïos lead Oedipus to his death (1544–8) in very similar terms. There too the wish would seem to be for a quick and painless death. This transference or blending of Hermes’ functions, though fairly easy, is found only in Sophocles.<sup>74</sup> Elsewhere prayers for death are usually directed to Zeus, Hades, or, as later here, to Thanatos himself.<sup>75</sup> If we accept as genuine all of 835–44 Ajax, with a bit of characteristically Greek sympathetic magic, bids the Erinyes to destroy Agamemnon, Menelaus, and the whole Greek army. ‘May they perish *αὐτοσφαγεῖς* by their dearest descendants just as the Erinyes see me falling *αὐτοσφαγῆ*’ (840–2). That neither Agamemnon nor Menelaus will die in this way may, along with the scholiast and

<sup>69</sup> Apollo’s identification, in tragedy, with daylight and Helios may be as early as Aeschylus’ *Bassarai* ([Eratosthenes] *Catasterismoi* 24, on which see M. L. West, *BICS* xxx [1983] 63–71) and is assured in *E. Phaëthon* 224–6 (Diggle). On the topic see Diggle *ad loc.*

<sup>70</sup> Apollo’s role as protector and exegete for Orestes (*A. Eum. passim*) offers no basis for comparison.

<sup>71</sup> For a similar situation involving both Apollo and Hermes, but properly worked out, see *A. Eum.* 89–93.

<sup>72</sup> For implicit or explicit expressions of Zeus’

superiority over Apollo, see *A. Eum. passim*, *S. OT* 898–910 and *OC* 1085–95.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *βαστάση* 827.

<sup>74</sup> In *A. Ch.* 622 one may assume that Nisos is already dead when Hermes ‘reaches’ or ‘overtakes’ (*κιγχάνει*) him.

<sup>75</sup> Zeus, *A. Pers.* 915–17 (cf. *S. Aj.* 387–91); Hades, *S. Tr.* 1040–3 and *OC* 1689–92; Thanatos, *A. fr.* 255 (N) and *S. Ph.* 797–8. For Thanatos see also R. Garland, *The Greek way of death* (Ithaca 1985) 56–9 and 155.

the anomalous φιλιστων, point to interpolation.<sup>76</sup> If we leave aside the problematical 841–2, Ajax' prayer that Agamemnon, Menelaus, and the whole Greek army perish as he does (835–40, 843–4) still remains, with the exception of Agamemnon, unanswered. Sophocles may have meant the audience to realize that this prayer, like Ajax' earlier attempt at revenge, would not be accomplished. He may be giving a timely indication, after the *Trugrede* of 646–92, that Ajax' fruitless obsession with vengeance remains with him to the end. In terms of unanswered prayers we should note that the Erinyes fall into that category of chthonic and non-deities to whom such unsuccessful prayers were regularly addressed.

Whether the Sun paused in his course to inform Ajax' parents of his death we are not told. No normal Greek would have expected or prayed for such a thing,<sup>77</sup> but we are after all dealing with Ajax<sup>78</sup> and tragedy. We should not by now, however, be surprised to find an unanswered or unanswerable prayer addressed to Helios.<sup>79</sup> Ajax' request here is, like his prayer to the Erinyes, really an intense wish expressed in the language of prayer. So too is Ajax' final prayer of petition, to Thanatos that he come, and it is fully answered.<sup>80</sup>

From Sophocles and Euripides, or their interpolators, come all the unanswered prayers discussed thus far. Aeschylus as a general rule apparently avoided them, which is not surprising given the particular theological cast of his work. The one exception, and it is a major one, is his *Suppliants*. The play teems with prayers, some of which are definitely not answered. The sons of Aegyptus intend to marry their cousins, the daughters of Danaus, despite their opposition. Danaus and the Danaids have fled from Egypt with the Aegyptiads in hot pursuit, and have taken refuge at a sanctuary in Argos, a land to which they have ties through kinship with Io. In *Supp.* 524–35 the chorus of Danaids, after a highly formal and Aeschylean invocation, pray to Zeus Olbios<sup>81</sup> that he, among other things, cast the pursuing Aegyptiads into the purple sea. Five hundred lines earlier (23–39) they had similarly prayed that the Aegyptiads be drowned in a storm at sea. There they addressed the polis, land, gleaming water,<sup>82</sup> all the heavenly deities, the local heroes, and, emphatically, Zeus Soter.<sup>83</sup> Both prayers are formal and are directed to major deities. Both are made by suppliants in a sanctuary. Neither is answered. The pursuing Aegyptiads<sup>84</sup> arrive in Argos minutes later, safe and dry.<sup>85</sup>

The Danaids want desperately to escape 'marriage with' or 'the bed of' the Aegyptiads. This they include in the prayers to Zeus Soter and the other deities described above. They make the same prayer twice to Epaphos, the son of Io (141–3, 151–3), twice to Artemis the virgin goddess (144–50, 1030–32), and, in the exodus, twice more—though in the form of a wish—to Zeus (1052–3, 1062–4). The Danaids thus seven times pray or make prayer-like wishes to escape marriage or sex with their nefarious and impious cousins. Are these prayers answered or unanswered? Until we have the second and third plays of the trilogy, the *Aegyptioi* and *Danaides*, we can never be sure how Aeschylus chose to represent the 'wedding night'.<sup>86</sup> Was it rape and thus not marriage? Was it a real marriage, or one not consummated? Was it sex promised but

<sup>76</sup> On which see Stanford on *Aj.* 841–2.

<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere Helios usually reports to one god the activities of other gods, e.g. *Od.* viii 270–1 and *Hymn to Demeter* 62–87.

<sup>78</sup> T. Rosenmeyer (*The masks of tragedy* [Austin 1963] 186), without noting the anomalous character of the prayer, claims it is appropriate to Ajax' major concerns in the play. See also Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles* p. 45.

<sup>79</sup> See above, pp. 85–6.

<sup>80</sup> If, as E. Fraenkel, C. W. Macleod, and M. L. West argue (see West, *BICS* xxv [1978] 113–14), lines 854–8 are interpolated, we must remove this final prayer to Thanatos (854) from consideration.

<sup>81</sup> Olbios is here a literary and not a cult epithet, despite scattered attestations in later cult. See Friis Johansen and Whittle on 524–6 and 526.

<sup>82</sup> Whether the 'polis, land, and shining water' are recipients of the prayer or merely possessions of the gods invoked depends on which text one prefers. See Friis Johansen and Whittle on 23–9.

<sup>83</sup> On Zeus Soter see above, p. 90. He had, at least in later times, a sanctuary in Argos (Pausanias ii 20.6). On the triad of Olympian deities, heroes, and Zeus Soter, see Friis Johansen and Whittle on 26.

<sup>84</sup> For the likely presence of a chorus of Aegyptiads, and not just their herald, see Friis Johansen and Whittle on 825–902.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. 1045–6.

<sup>86</sup> On the impossibility of reconstructing the lost plays, and on errors of those who have attempted to do so, see A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Suppliants* (Cambridge 1969) 141–233 and Friis Johansen and Whittle i 21–55.

refused? The variants of the later mythographic tradition can be invoked for a number of such possibilities.<sup>87</sup> But such quibbling over terminology is not characteristic of Aeschylus and is not appropriate here. What the Danaids most abhorred happened, and their prayers to avoid it failed. To the abundant and often ill-founded speculation about the contents of the last play of the trilogy we might add the expectation that somewhere a divine spokesman (Aphrodite?) explains why the deities, Zeus in particular, refused the earlier prayers of the Danaids.<sup>88</sup> If the Danaid trilogy developed along the lines of the *Oresteia*, the explanation might be that Zeus necessarily denied the Danaids' immediate wishes in accomplishing his larger purposes for Argos and justice. If Aeschylus is what most think him to be, he would hardly have left unanswered and unexplained suppliants' prayers to Zeus, Protector of Suppliants.

The most common features of unanswered prayers have been found to be the imprecise language of the prayer, the secondary or exotic character of the deity invoked, and the improper religious status (usually impiety) of the worshipper. Of these only the last figures in the explicit mentions of such prayers in tragedy. Aeschylus offers the most graphic and chilling accounts. As the hybristic, unjust, impious man flounders at sea,

Those whom he calls upon hear nothing, and he struggles in the midst of the current. The god laughs (γελᾷ δὲ δαίμων) over the reckless man . . . . *Eum.* 558–60

In the *Suppliants* the Danaids imagine Zeus, if he does not heed them, as holding his gaze away from them as they pray (173–4).<sup>89</sup> That Zeus here does 'not see', rather than 'not hear', accords with Aeschylus' predilection, particularly apparent in this play,<sup>90</sup> to represent the gods 'looking upon' humans and their activities. In the *Agamemnon* (396–402), as in the *Eumenides*, it is the injustice and impiety of the individual that cause his prayers to fail. Though particularly Aeschylean in their emphasis on *hybris* and injustice, these passages do establish a general theological background for the unsuccessful prayers, in tragedy, of Polymestor, Eteocles, Polyneices, and other impious characters discussed above.

For Sophocles, in the *Antigone*, pollution can cause prayers to fail. Teiresias describes, also very graphically, how the altars of the heavenly and chthonic deities (βωμοὶ . . . ἐσχάραι τε) are literally befouled with bits of Polyneices' unburied body and, for this reason, the gods 'do not accept the prayers that accompany sacrifices' (*Ant.* 1016–20). That Creon and the city have left Polyneices unburied violates the unwritten laws of the gods and is thus, of course, an impiety, but because pollution was so prominent in matters of death and burial,<sup>91</sup> Sophocles introduces it here as a familiar and quasi-mechanical intermediary between impiety and unsuccessful prayers.

The pollution as well as the impiety of murder can also jeopardize the success of prayers. For this reason in tragedy (*S. OT* 236–40) as in life<sup>92</sup> the untried, unpurified murderer was banned from attending prayers or other religious ceremonies. This too may lie behind the unsuccessful prayers of murderous characters such as Sophocles' Clytemnestra and Euripides' Aegisthus and Polymestor. In such matters the gods are not, to use Euripides' language, ἀσύνητοι (*IA* 1185–90); they take into account the religious status of the individual making the prayer.

Only in Euripides' *Cyclops*, a satyr play with greater affinity to comedy than tragedy,<sup>93</sup> do we find a character who, as he prays, threatens that, if his prayer is not answered, he will cease to believe in the god or his power. For Odysseus, if Zeus Xenios does not heed his prayer (354–5), then Zeus is wrongly (ἄλλως) thought a god when he is a 'nothing' (τὸ μηδὲν ὄν).<sup>94</sup> If

<sup>87</sup> E.g. scholia to *E. Or.* 872 and *Hec.* 886, [Apollo-dorus] ii 1.5

<sup>88</sup> In 1059–61 one chorus claims that the Danaids' prayers are not μέτριον. See Friis Johansen and Whittle *ad loc.*

<sup>89</sup> ἔχων παλίντροπον  
ὄψιν ἐν λιταΐσιν

<sup>90</sup> E.g. 1–2, 104–10, 144–50, 359–60, 625–9, 811–16, 1030–2. See Fraenkel on *Ag.* 461 and 1270. In Homer, by contrast, the gods 'hear' successful prayers:

*Il.* i 43 (cf. 380–1 and 453), 457; v 121; x 295; xv 378; xvi 527 (cf. 515–16); xxiii 771; xxiv 314; *Od.* iii 385; iv 767; vi 324–8; ix 536; xx 102.

<sup>91</sup> On pollution in regard to *Ant.* 1016–20, see Parker, *Miasma* 33 and 44.

<sup>92</sup> See Parker, *Miasma* 104–43.

<sup>93</sup> On which see R. Seaford, *Euripides Cyclops* (Oxford 1984) 1–59.

<sup>94</sup> For a quite different interpretation of line 355, see Seaford, *ad loc.*

Hephaistos and Hypnos do not aid him, then he must consider Fortune (τύχη) a god, and the gods inferior to Fortune (599–607).<sup>95</sup> Both these prayers, it must be noted, were answered. In his tragedies Euripides uses a similar device to question not the existence, but the wisdom (σοφία) of the gods. In the *Phoenissae* (84–7) Jocasta concludes her prayer to Zeus for safety and a settlement between Polyneices and Eteocles with, ‘You ought not, if you are wise (εἰ σοφὸς πέφυκας), to allow the same mortal always to suffer misfortune’. The old man in the *Hippolytus* concludes his prayer to Aphrodite on Hippolytus’ behalf<sup>96</sup> with these words: ‘Gods ought to be wiser (σοφωτέρους) than mortals’ (120). These prayers, in contrast to those of the *Cyclops*, were *not* answered. This may serve to remind us that a persistent concern of tragedy is the wisdom, not the existence or powers of the gods.<sup>97</sup> The answered prayers in the *Cyclops* confirm their existence and power; the unanswered prayers in the *Phoenissae* and *Hippolytus* call into question their σοφία.

Although events occasionally turn out as characters pray they will, prayers in tragedy seem intended primarily to reveal the thoughts and personalities of the characters, not to motivate or determine subsequent action. Tragedians, unlike Homer (e.g. *Il.* i 33–52, vi 269–311, and xvi 220–52), do not describe the full process of prayer, the god’s hearing of and reaction to the prayer, and the god’s action as a result of the prayer. This is, in part, because in most plays the action is described solely from the human point of view, and thus encompasses only the prayer and the result. But also Greek tragedians, unlike Christian writers, were not fundamentally concerned to demonstrate the power of prayer, i.e. the causal relationship between prayer and event. Prayers in tragedy thus usually appear incidental to the course of the action but are important in establishing *ethos* and *pathos*. My interest, as a historian of religion, is in prayer itself as a form of worship and its representation in tragedy. The poets may not make prayers into important determinants of events, but they were, I propose, sensitive to the challenge unanswered prayers presented to the religious beliefs of their times. And in this Euripides, despite his ill and often ill-founded reputation as a critic of religion, is no less circumspect than Sophocles.<sup>98</sup> The three tragedians avoided directing unanswered prayers to deities actually worshipped in Athens. Almost without exception they provided, implicitly or explicitly, sufficient reasons—either in terms of the language of the prayer or of contemporary religious beliefs—why a character’s prayer was not answered or was answered otherwise than he expected.

In their concern for these religious aspects of unsuccessful prayers to the gods, the tragedians differ markedly from Homer in the *Iliad*. In Book ii Agamemnon, amidst the full ritual of sacrifice, prays to Zeus that, before the sun sets, he destroy and burn the palace of Priam and kill Hector and his comrades (ii 410–20). The Achaeans did not sack Troy that day, but did so eventually, as Homer delicately points out in Zeus’ response, οὐδ’ ἄρα πῶ οἱ ἐπεκράαινε Κρονίων (419).<sup>99</sup> It was, no doubt, because Zeus intended eventually to fulfil Agamemnon’s

<sup>95</sup> 606–7,  
ἢ τὴν τύχην μὲν δαίμον’ ἠγεῖσθαι χρεῶν,  
τὰ δαιμόνων δὲ τῆς τύχης ἐλάσσονα.

<sup>96</sup> See above, p. 91.

<sup>97</sup> On occasion, however, the perceived lack of wisdom or justice of the gods causes a character to question their existence. See, e.g., *E. El.* 583–4, *Suppl.* 731–2, *IA* 1034–5, *Tr.* 356–8, and *Frr.* 286, 292, 577, and 900 (N).

<sup>98</sup> The views, though not many of their supporting arguments, of religion in Euripides which Wilhelm Nestle presented in *Euripides, Der Dichter der griechischen Aufklärung* (Stuttgart 1901) 51–152, esp. 115–16 remain pervasive. About prayer he concludes, in *Vom Mythos zu Logos*<sup>2</sup> (Stuttgart 1940) 500, ‘Das Gebet [bei Euripides] ist meist fruchtlos’. A similar, equally mistaken view of prayer in Euripides may be found in

G. Zuntz (*The political plays of Euripides* [Manchester 1955]) 20: ‘There are gods: powerful impersonations of the uncontrollable forces that make mankind their sport. No prayers reach them.’

<sup>99</sup> With the same words Zeus gives delayed fulfilment to the prayer of Achaean and Trojan soldiers who ask Zeus that whichever side first violates the oath concerning the duel of Alexander and Menelaus die along with their children and that their wives be enslaved (iii 295–302). Although the specific terms of the oath as stated by Agamemnon (iii 276–91) were not violated (but cf. iii 456–60 and iv 13–16), clearly Homer treats the oath as broken by Pandarus’ bowshot at Menelaus (iv 66–7, 71–2, 155–68, 269–71, vii 69). The eventual fulfilment of the soldiers’ prayer may be seen in the death of Pandarus (v 290–6) and the sack of Troy (cf. iv 160–8).

request that he 'received the sacrifices' (420). Otherwise we have here the only instance in epic and tragedy where a god accepts an offering but refuses the accompanying prayer.<sup>100</sup> In iii 318–23 the common soldiers pray to Zeus that Alexander or Menelaus, whichever one caused the trouble, die in their duel and that the others have friendship and trustworthy oaths. In the duel Menelaus prays, to Zeus, to punish and kill Alexander, so that later men may fear 'to do evil to a *xenos*' (iii 349–54). Later Menelaus complains bitterly to Zeus that he failed in this purpose (iii 365–8).

In Book vi Hector prays to Zeus and the other gods that Astyanax rule Ilium and be illustrious among the Trojans, be a better warrior than his father, and bring joy to his mother (vi 475–81). Later (viii 526–7) Hector prays to Zeus and the other gods that they drive from Troy the Greek 'dogs'. In Book ix the (two?) emissaries to Achilles go to the seashore and pray to Poseidon that they easily persuade Achilles to rejoin the battle (ix 182–4). And, finally, in Book xvi, Achilles poured a libation of wine to Zeus of Dodona and prayed (1) that he give glory and courage to Patroclus, and (2) that when Patroclus drives the enemy from the ships, he return, unscathed, to the ships together with his armour and his companions. Zeus heard the prayer, and granted one part, but nodded disapproval to the second (xvi 225–56).

Each of the prayers, either completely or in large part, is unanswered, but we find none of the 'generic features' characteristic of such prayers in tragedy. In each the language of the prayer is unequivocal, the deity is Zeus in all cases but one, and the religious status of the petitioner is unexceptionable. These prayers remain unfulfilled solely, it seems, because the requests are counter to the will of the gods, to the βουλή Διός, and the poet feels no need for explanation. Such I would term the Iliadic form of unanswered prayer, and the only similar prayer in tragedy is that of the servant in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (above, p. 91) where, as in the *Iliad*, the individual prays for something contrary to the deity's previously announced purpose. Such a prayer is doomed to fail.

Vows, i.e. promises of future offerings on the condition of the fulfilment of a request, are more common in epic than tragedy,<sup>101</sup> and they differ significantly from simple prayers of petition in that, essentially, the god accepts or rejects a proposed bargain. In the *Iliad* Athena, disguised as Laodocus, urges Pandarus to kill Menelaus with a bowshot and, before shooting, to vow to Apollo, 'famous for the bow', a hecatomb of sheep (iv 86–104). This Pandarus did (iv 119–21) and he hit but did not kill Menelaus. Pandarus, if he thought his vow successful (and he probably did not), did not live long enough to repay it. Indisputably unsuccessful was Peleus' vow to the river Spercheius that Achilles, if he returned home, would cut a lock of hair and sacrifice a hecatomb and fifty rams (xxiii 144–9). The most familiar unsuccessful vow in the *Iliad* is that of the Trojan women to Athena. They bid her break the spear of Diomedes and grant that he fall before the Scaean Gates so that, if she pities the town and the wives and children of the Trojans, they may sacrifice twelve cattle to her (vi 305–10).<sup>102</sup> These last two vows are certainly unsuccessful, and, as for the unanswered prayers, the poet offers no explanation in religious terms.

The unanswered prayers of the *Odyssey* are few, but more characteristic of those of tragedy.

<sup>100</sup> See G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: a commentary* i (Cambridge 1985), 160. In *Od.* ix 550–5 Zeus did not 'care for' (οὐχ ἐμπόζετο) Odysseus' sacrifice of the ram after the Polyphemus' episode and devised destruction for Odysseus' ships and comrades.

<sup>101</sup> For vows in tragedy, see *A. Th.* 271–8, *Ag.* 933–4, 963–5; *S. Tr.* 237–45, 610–13; *E. IT* 15–24, *fr.* 82.22–6 (Austin). Of these only in *A. Th.* 271–8 is a request possibly not fulfilled. Eteocles promises, 'if things turn out well (εἴ ξυνηχθόντων) and the city is saved', sacrifices, trophy-monuments, and spoils for the city-protecting gods, Dirce, and Ismenus. The city is saved, and that is the major import of the prayer, but, from Eteocles' point of view, things hardly could have turned

out worse. On Eteocles' ἀσεβῆς διανοία which contributed to the unhappy result, see 829–31.

<sup>102</sup> Helenus had recommended and Hector ordered that the women vow to Athena twelve cattle 'if she pities the town and the wives and children of the Trojans and if she keep Diomedes from Ilium' (*Il.* vi 86–101, 269–78). Had the women not reformulated the vow to include the breaking of Diomedes' spear and his death, Athena could have accepted the bargain, in the short term at least, since Diomedes was soon driven back from Troy. That would, of course, have spoiled the *pathos* of Book vi which looks to the long term fortunes of Troy.



Twice, at the sight of Penelope, the suitors pray to share her bed (i 366, xviii 213). They invoke no god, and we should perhaps not see that as significant, but it is characteristic of the suitors that they seldom, even in their numerous pre-banquet sacrifices, address specific gods. They are, of course, apart from their other wicked behaviour, impious men in their persistent 'dishonouring' of *xenoi* who enjoyed the gods' protection.<sup>103</sup> Likewise impious were Eurylochus and Odysseus' other surviving companions when they killed the cattle of Helios. They ritually sacrificed the cattle and prayed 'to the gods' (xii 352–365). 'The gods' here are the Olympian gods (xii 344) and the prayer the vow described by Eurylochus (xii 345–7) that they will build a temple for Helios and put in it many dedications if they reach Ithaca. Since the sacrifice was attended by bad omens (xii 394–6)<sup>104</sup> and since twenty lines later Zeus virtually pronounced a death sentence on these men (xii 384–8), we can conclude that the gods rejected the vow. As in tragedy, a common feature of these unsuccessful prayers is the impiety of the petitioners.

The most intricate unanswered prayer in epic is Penelope's prayer to Artemis<sup>105</sup> that she die (xx 60–82). In this elaborate, somewhat rambling prayer she wishes death so that she might see Odysseus in the underworld, not 'delight the mind of a man inferior' to Odysseus (i.e. not marry one of the suitors), and escape the grief that plagues her night and day. Like the chorus of Euripides' *Ion*, she unwittingly prays for what is in reality most contrary to what she really wants. Her request is not granted by Artemis but, by not dying, she eventually, through Odysseus' return, receives all she desires.

In the *Odyssey* the impiety of those who unsuccessfully pray and the prayer of Penelope differ significantly from such prayers in the *Iliad*. If the differences were not so clear cut and if the *Iliad* were not so consistent in its presentation of unanswered prayers, one could reasonably explain the differences from differing emphases of the poems, with the *Iliad* describing the working out of the plan of Zeus (hence the 'Iliadic form' of failed prayers) where few if any truly impious men are at hand, and with the *Odyssey* stressing the punishment of the impious and hybridic suitors. As it is, I think the prayers of the *Odyssey* may be one further indication of the gods' greater awareness of and concern for the moral and immoral, and pious and impious behaviour of human beings.<sup>106</sup> If so, it is all the more understandable that, in frequency and character, the unanswered prayers of the *Odyssey* are more like those of tragedy.<sup>107</sup>

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## APPENDIX

### HELIOS AS A GOD

The status of Helios as a 'god' in fifth-century Athens is difficult to assess. We know of no sanctuary, altar, or sacrifice. *IG* ii<sup>2</sup> 4962, side B might be thought to establish an offering in iv BC, but Michael Walbank informs me that the crude lettering of side B may be as late as ii BC. Dedications to Helios date from iii BC or much later (*IG* ii<sup>2</sup> 3168, 4678, 5000). The minor roles assigned to him in the Pyanopsia, Thargelia, and Skira look like errors or the products of a syncretism with Apollo or Zeus, a syncretism which penetrated cult late (Deubner, *Feste*, 48, 190–2, 201 and N. Robertson, *Rh. M.* cxxviii [1985] 235,

<sup>103</sup> ii 66–7, 211; vi 206–8; viii 575–6; ix 175–6, 267–71, 477–9; xiii 201–2; xiv 56–8, 283–4, 388–9; xvi 422–3; xvii 475, 483–7; xxi 25–9; xxii 39, 413–16; xxiii 64–7.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. the bad omens accompanying Aegisthus' sacrifice to the Nymphs in *E. El.* 803–43 (pp. 88–9 above).

<sup>105</sup> Artemis is invoked as the deity who, in epic but not in tragedy, gives non-violent death to women. See Penelope's same desire for death, but expressed as a wish, in xviii 205–8. Cf. *Od.* xi 172–3, 198–9, 324–5; *Il.*

xix 59, xxi 483–4.

<sup>106</sup> In addition to references in note 103 above, see *Od.* i 29–47; iii 132–6; iv 806–7; v 108–9; xiii 213–14; xiv 83–4; xxiv 351–2.

<sup>107</sup> I should like to thank Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Richard Hunter who both offered valuable comments on an early version of this paper. I thank also Glen Bowersock and Christian Habicht for the opportunity to pursue this study in the pleasant environment of the Institute for Advanced Study.

n. 7). For a quite different view of Helios' importance in the festivals, see E. Simon, *Festivals of Athens* (Madison 1983) 75–6, 108. It is worth stressing that, according to Aristophanes (*Pax* 409–13), Athenians in 421 BC could claim that they sacrificed to the gods but the barbarians sacrificed to Helios and Selene. The allusion to Persian practices (Herod. i 131.2) is unmistakable.

What evidence there is that Helios was viewed as a god in Athens in the classical period all comes from philosophical circles and appears linked to belief in the divinity of heavenly bodies in general rather than to any cult of Helios in particular. In the 430s Anaxagoras was subject to charges of impiety for saying Helios was a 'glowing rock' and Selene, the moon, was 'earth' (W. K. C. Guthrie, *A history of Greek Philosophy* ii [Cambridge 1965] 266–338 and J. Mansfeld, 'The Chronology of Anaxagoras' Athenian Period and the Date of his Trial, II', *Mnemosyne* xxxiii [1980] 17–95). Socrates once reportedly prayed to Helios after a night of meditation (*Smp.* 220d) and, years later, when Meletus charged that he did not believe in the gods at all, Socrates responded, 'Don't I believe that Helios and Selene are gods, as other men do?' (*Ap.* 26c–d). In the *Apology* Plato obviously chose Helios and Selene primarily or solely to distinguish Socrates from Anaxagoras. Were it not for this, the choice of them would be most unusual for an Athenian wanting to demonstrate his worship of the city's gods. Compare, e.g., the questions asked of the archons-elect in this regard (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 55.1–3). Socrates, we must remember, was hardly more conventional in his religious beliefs and practices than in other aspects of his life. See, e.g., B. D. Jackson, 'The Prayers of Socrates,' *Phronesis* xvi (1971) 14–37. Plato *Lg.* x 10.887e and Hesiod *Op.* 338–41 are usually taken (e.g. M. L. West on Hes. *Op.* 339; Jessen, col. 58) to prove that the Greeks worshipped the sun at its rising and setting. *Op.* 338–41 certainly and *Lg.* x 10.887e probably mean not this, but that one should render worship to the gods at sunrise and sunset (or, in Hesiod, at bedtime). Plato's recommendations of the worship of Helios elsewhere in the *Laws* (vii 821c–822d. Cf. x 899b) stem from his interest in astral religion and have little relation to common religious beliefs of the time. On Helios in Plato's *Laws* see G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton 1960) 445–8.

On balance we might conclude that in classical Athens (unlike, of course, in Corinth) Helios held a special place: as an obvious and imposing power he was a θεός but yet was not accessible to the usual forms of worship. One did not want to offend him with pollution (on which see R. Parker, *Miasma* [Oxford 1983] 293, 316–18) or disparaging words (like Anaxagoras), but one did not or could not influence him with prayer and sacrifice. On this see Jessen, cols. 62–3. Later, of course, with the emergence of astral religion and the identification of Apollo with Helios in cult, the situation changed dramatically. From this later period probably derives the information of the scholiast to S. OC 100 who claims, citing the second-century BC scholar Polemon (*fr.* 42 [Preller]), that Athenians sacrificed 'wineless sacrifices' to, among others, Mnemosyne, Eos, Helios, and Selene, for none of whom a cult is attested in the fifth or fourth centuries in Athens.