

CIVIC IDEOLOGY AND THE PROBLEM OF DIFFERENCE:
THE POLITICS OF AESCHYLEAN TRAGEDY, ONCE AGAIN

For Pat Easterling, with thanks for everything, the year of her retirement.

I

THERE have been few issues in the contemporary analysis of Greek tragedy as hotly debated as what I shall call ‘civic ideology and the problem of difference’. By this I mean a nexus of interrelated questions concerning the political import of tragedy both for the fifth-century Athenians and for subsequent generations: how does the festival of the Great Dionysia—its rituals and dramatic performances—relate to the dominant ideological structures of democracy? How should critical or contestatory discourse be located within the dramatic festival and within the polis? How should the texts of tragedy be related to the society in which they were produced—and to the societies in which they are still being read and performed? The problem is not merely essential to our understanding of the genre of tragedy, but is also intimately connected to the history and theory of democracy and its discontents. To what degree can democracy respond to criticism and what space can it allow, in theory and in practice, for alternative viewpoints or opposition?¹ In its most aggressive form, such questioning of the exclusions and repressions of democracy is sometimes articulated as a challenge as to whether the costs of (ancient) democracy outweigh its benefits.²

This article is intended as a contribution to this on-going debate. Since the consideration of the *status quaestionis* will have to face up to some searching critical engagements with my own attempt to explore the general issue of the festival of the Great Dionysia, first published some thirteen years ago in this journal,³ I should stress from the outset that my aim in this discussion is not polemically to restate a position, but rather to use such critical exchanges to construct a basis from which to suggest some ways in which the debate may profitably progress. To this end, after a brief reconsideration of some of the ritual aspects of the festival, I shall be looking at some specific difficulties of political understanding with regard to the work that sets the agenda for all of Greek tragedy’s subsequent engagement with the polis, namely, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*—an author and text on which several of the most penetrating recent comments on tragedy’s politics have focused.

¹ See, for this general argument, J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens* (Princeton 1999); H. Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens* (Ithaca 1996); C. Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking* (Cambridge 1988); A. Boeghold and A. Scafuro (eds.), *Athenian Identity and Civic Ideology* (Baltimore 1994); P. Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture and Political Theory* (Princeton 1997); V. Hunter, *Policing Athens: Social Control in the Attic Law-Suits 420–320 B.C.* (Princeton 1994); D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 1991).

² See on the exclusion of women in the context of tragedy, e.g., N. Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*; S.-E. Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York 1988); and on slaves, G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London 1981) remains fundamental.

³ S. Goldhill, ‘The Great Dionysia and civic ideology’, *JHS* 107 (1987) 58–76; reprinted with corrections in J. Winkler and F. Zeitlin (eds.), *Nothing to do with Dionysus?* (Princeton 1990). The following in particular will be discussed: B. Goff, ‘History, tragedy, theory’, in B. Goff (ed.), *History, Tragedy, Theory: Dialogues on Athenian Drama* (Austin 1995); M. Gellrich, ‘Interpreting Greek tragedy: history, theory and the new Philology’, in B. Goff (ed.), *History, Tragedy, Theory: Dialogues on Athenian Drama* (Austin 1995); C. Pelling, ‘Conclusion’, in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford 1997); R. Friedrich, ‘Everything to do with Dionysus? Ritualism, the Dionysiac, and the tragic’, in M. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic* (Oxford 1996); R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (Oxford 1994); M. Griffith, ‘Brilliant dynasts: power and politics in the *Oresteia*’, *CA* 15 (1995) 63–129; J. Griffin, ‘The social function of Greek tragedy’, *CQ* 48 (1998) 39–61.

Now, it might seem easy to map in very general terms the mainstream of critical opinion on the politics of tragedy. That the event of the fifth-century drama festival in Athens is political (on the broadest understanding of that term) and that its specific rituals and language are integrally democratic is a starting point of much recent writing on tragedy. This does not mean that plays follow some naively conceived democratic party line, but rather that the festival itself, in organization and structure, despite earlier origins and later development, is in the fifth century fully an institution of the democratic polis, and that the plays constantly reflect their genesis in a fifth-century Athenian political environment. The pre-play rituals, the funding and administration of the festival, the establishment and even seating of the audience, are fully representative of the ideals and practice of democracy, and constitute the theatre as an analogous institution to the law-court and assembly—the three great institutions for the display of *logoi* in the city of words. The tragedies themselves, for all that they are enacted at the scene of ‘the other’—distant places, former times, alien figures—and for all that they are great poetry and concerned with general matters in a generalizing manner, reveal a constant concern with contemporary political discourse. In short, the festival is a performance integral to democracy in action. Theatre is not so much a commentary on *ta politika* as part of it. Any analysis that simply treats tragedy as literature—which is not an ancient category⁴—and treats literature as a superstructure to the base of political and social formation is nowhere less persuasive than with fifth-century Athenian drama.

I take it that such an account, at least in these broad terms, is familiar, and, within the usual range of collegial shrugs and qualifications, acceptable, at least as representative of the mainstream.⁵ Such a politicized understanding of tragedy as an event was formulated (at least in part) as a corrective to the aestheticizing response to tragedy, which in different forms is integral both to the Romantic tradition, so important for German scholarship on tragedy in particular, and to New Criticism, with its privileging of the Text as a free-standing object (‘as solid and material as an urn’).⁶ It is interesting and instructive thus to see how difficult it has proved to challenge this social and historical conception of the festival and its plays. Although the category ‘(great) literature’ is still sometimes invoked against understanding the plays within a historical context, the suggestion that ‘literary men’ can (or should) avoid politics and ideology by studying classical texts, is rehearsed now only as a nostalgic hankering.⁷ The most persistent line of argued challenge to this dominant trend of critical thought, however, takes its starting point from Aristotle’s discussions of ‘tragic pleasure’, in order to restate as a principle the priority of an aesthetic comprehension of drama. This argument hypostasizes ‘tragic pleasure’ as the dominant

⁴ See S. Goldhill, ‘Literary history without literature: reading practices in the ancient world’, *Sub-Stance* 88 (1999) 57–90.

⁵ A mainstream whose sources would include J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1972); C. Meier, *Die politische Kunst der griechischen Tragödie* (Munich 1988); C. Meier, *Die Entstehung des Politischen bei den Griechen* (Frankfurt am Main 1980); N. Loraux, *Les Enfants d’Athènes* (Paris 1981); current fellow swimmers would include, amongst many others, P. Cartledge, ‘“Deep plays”: theatre as process in Greek civic life’, in P. E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997) (and the other contributors to that volume); J. Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Ann Arbor 1991); N. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic* (Cambridge 1994); J. Winkler and F. Zeitlin (eds.), *Nothing to do with Dionysus?* (Princeton 1990); A.H. Sommerstein, S. Halliwell, J. Henderson, and B. Zimmerman (eds.), *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis* (Bari 1993); P. Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton 1990); P. Rose, *Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth* (Ithaca 1992); the works cited in n.3 above; and most recently S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds.), *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge 1999). It is noted as a mainstream or orthodoxy by many critics, including those cited in n.3 above.

⁶ For one partial account of this development see S. Goldhill, ‘Modern critical approaches to Greek tragedy’, in P. E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997). The urn joke is lifted from T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (Oxford 1983) 48.

⁷ So Griffin (n.3) 39, with his customary humour (and sense of gender politics), places the possibility of avoiding politics/history in the far distant past: ‘The time is long gone when literary men were happy to treat literature, and tragic poetry in particular, as something which exists serenely outside time, high up in the empyrean of unchanging

(and even the sole) aim of tragic poetry. It *opposes* ‘tragic pleasure’ to the claim that tragedy functions as a ‘democratic paideusis in itself’.⁸ That Aristotle’s case is itself a polemical critique of Plato’s views of the educative power of tragedy and of tragedy’s dangerous politics, and that Aristotle’s aesthetics are also part of an ethics, an ethics closely linked to the politics of citizenship, are fundamental aspects all too often repressed or denied in this case.⁹ It is also striking—to take one paradigmatic, if extreme, example—that in Malcolm Heath’s book-length defence of this privileging of emotional response there is scarcely a word about the festival as an event, or about the historical circumstances of production.¹⁰ Despite his apparently historicizing assertion that a fourth-century writer is ‘more likely to be a reliable guide to tragedy’ than what he rather uncharitably dismisses as the ‘untutored intuition’ and ‘unreconstructed prejudices’ of ‘the modern reader’,¹¹ Heath’s own argument is profoundly unhistorical, both because it does not develop an adequate account of the polemics and intellectual context of Aristotle, and, above all, because it resolutely refuses to consider the cultural framework of fifth-century drama.

Indeed, even if one believed that it is self-evident to oppose pleasure and education (a strange thing in a teacher), a more developed view of the politics of pleasure would certainly be desirable. Paradigmatically, Jasper Griffin, following Heath,¹² opines: ‘Of pleasure, however, it can be said that it has no history’.¹³ What, then, of the long tradition of Greek writing specifically aimed at exploring, controlling and directing the place of pleasure in the city and in the person—not merely Epicurus or the Cynics, but also Plato and Aristotle—or of the history of the invention of the term ‘emotion’ in nineteenth-century science, along with changing ideas of ‘the senses’, and the whole long history (precisely) of shifting ideas and ideals of feeling and pleasure (for which the Romantic movement is often so important for classicists’ presuppositions) from Christian accounts of ‘passion’ through to modern scientific psychology?¹⁴ Aristotle’s account of pleasure and rationality is part of a long and still continuing history of changing notions and experiences of the self—a history which makes it an extremely polemical hypothesis indeed to assume that ‘the pleasure’ of a Christian ascetic in the desert, a Victorian

validity and absolute values.’ For a good account of how the generalizations of tragedy contribute to ‘universalist’ readings, see O. Taplin, ‘Spreading the word through performance’, in Goldhill and Osborne (n.5). It would be interesting—though not possible here—to trace the transition from the German Romantic fascination with the sublimity of tragic poetry to the influential view of the particularity of tragic language in Vernant (n.5).

⁸ This phrase is taken from Meier, *Die Entstehung* (n.3), who argues that tragedy is an education into politics (and not merely an education in politics).

⁹ For the connections in Aristotle between ‘emotion’ and ethics and politics, see the essays collected in A. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle’s Poetics* (Princeton 1992), especially the contributions of Halliwell, Nussbaum, Nehamas and Lear; S. Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics* (Chapel Hill 1986); E. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton 1992); M. Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict since Aristotle* (Princeton 1988), and, in general, W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion: A Contribution to Philosophical Psychology, Rhetoric, Poetics, Politics and Ethics* (London 1975). Griffin (n.3), for example, alludes to none of this work, and M. Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London 1987) (see below) has almost no discussion of the ethical and political implications of Aristotle’s theorizing on emotion.

¹⁰ Heath (n.9).

¹¹ Quotations from Heath (n.9) 3.

¹² Griffin (n.3) 55 n.58 indicates his broad sympathy for Heath’s position, but distances himself from Heath’s extreme dismissal of anything but pleasure and emotion in tragedy.

¹³ Griffin (n.3) 55.

¹⁴ For the briefest selection of relevant work, each with further bibliography, see M. Nussbaum, ‘Tragedy and self-sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on fear and pity’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1992), a longer version of Nussbaum (n.9); J. Brunschwig and M. Nussbaum (eds.), *Passions and Perceptions: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge 1993); M. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton 1994); J. Gosling and C. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford 1982); P. Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York 1988); D. Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge 1987); M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (3 vols, London and New York 1978–86); R. Porter and M.M. Roberts (eds.), *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke and London 1996): ‘pleasure came into its own in the eighteenth century’ (1), ‘Every age, every society, it goes without saying, has its own particular form of pleasure’

upper-class woman, a modern academic, a Greek citizen must be the same, dehistoricized experience. Indeed, a focus on 'tragic pleasure', for all its long history in the criticism of tragedy, cannot properly be used to sideline the issue of the politics of citizenship in tragedy. How one writes about, thinks about, experiences pleasure—especially with regard to the great public displays of tragic drama—is itself rather a matter imbued with questions of ethics, politics, and history—as Seneca, Tertullian and Augustine (for example) continue to demonstrate in the even more charged debate about how to understand or police the pleasures of Roman entertainments. It is much harder to keep pleasure apart from the political and the historical than this critical tradition asserts.

The most recent attempt to develop these claims of emotion and tragic pleasure is Jasper Griffin's article, 'The social function of Attic tragedy', from which I have just quoted. Griffin's article is especially relevant because, unlike Heath, he wishes to ground his approach in a fully historical perspective. The resultant picture, however, as we shall see, also has considerable difficulties both as history and as cultural analysis. His approach to the problem is instructive, however, and will lead to what I think is a more promising avenue of enquiry.

Griffin notes first the existence of the pre-play ceremonies, only to downplay their importance: 'it is of course a very different thing to argue from the character of part of a festival...to that of the festival as a whole'.¹⁵ He rightly notes (against Winkler's overly militaristic account of the festival) the importance of dithyramb and comedy to the Great Dionysia. Yet, it should be recalled, dithyramb is a tribal competition, which, like the tribal competitions of the Great Panathenaia, depends on and enacts a specifically democratic social ordering and spirit (and, what is more, the politics of music, especially for dithyramb, becomes a charged subject in classical Athens¹⁶). Nor can Aristophanic comedy easily be used to demonstrate the lack of engagement in political or military matters. The pre-play ceremonies are indeed only a part of the festival—a part which most strikingly emphasizes a civic element expressed in different ways throughout the occasion. Griffin goes on to offer the somewhat misleading parallel of the Football Association Cup Final, where the singing of hymns and military bands before the game do not, he declares trenchantly, make the occasion religious or military. No one, I suppose, would suggest that the Cup Final was a religious or military event (despite the worship of teams and the fighting on and off the terraces).¹⁷ But what makes the Cup Final (or the Superbowl or a test-match) *more* than a game of sport (if we wish to understand it as a cultural event) is the surrounding of a game with a set of rituals and other performances. Precisely what makes these events worthy of cultural or even political analysis is their connection with nationalism, class divisions, media and financial power, social formation, the specifics of 'deep play'.¹⁸ It is because an event is made up of all its parts that each needs to be discussed individually and as part of the whole event. Griffin's football analogy seems misguided, and scarcely shows that the pre-play processions of the Great Dionysia do not contribute significantly to the politicization of the festival.

[*oikeie hedone?*]; J. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford 1988); P. Gay, *Pleasure Wars* (London 1998): 'Unstable perceptions of pleasure governed the dissensions that plagued Victorian middle-class culture' (106). Pleasure may not have 'the epistemic dignity' of happiness (R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. R. Miller (New York 1976) 57), but it is hard to see what Griffin means by denying it a history.

¹⁵ Griffin (n.3) 47.

¹⁶ See P. Murray and P. Wilson (eds.), *Music and the Muses: The Performance and Representation of Mousike in the Classical Athenian Polis* (Oxford forthcoming).

¹⁷ For a claim for the 'quasi-religious' nature of football, see G. Armstrong and R. Giolianotti, *Entering the Field: New Perspectives on World Football* (Oxford 1997) 10–11 (instantiated in articles on 'cult', and 'worship'); and for a most evocative account of the 'war' in the stands, see B. Buford, *Among the Thugs* (London 1991).

¹⁸ See (amid a rapidly growing and often rather stolidly sociological bibliography) A. Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sport* (New York 1978); J. Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture* (Cambridge 1986); R. Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford 1989); J. MacClancy (ed.), *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*

Griffin's downplaying of politics continues. Indeed, he questions whether there is anything 'fundamentally or essentially democratic' about the festival.¹⁹ He fails to mention the funding of chorus or festival: the choregia as a specifically democratic system;²⁰ the selection of judges and chorus and actors by democratic procedure; the possibility of tribal seating, and the certainty of seating according to political position in democracy (e.g. the seats for the *boule*); the procedure for getting tickets via inscription on the deme roll; the dating of the innovation of the pre-play ceremonies; the assembly in the theatre to discuss the theatre—indeed the whole gamut of performances which are instituted by democracy, and function as signs and symptoms of democracy in action. Rather, he argues that because tragedy had its origins under the tyrants—itsself far from certain, as he duly, if inconsequentially, notes²¹—and continued into the fourth and third centuries (with massive differences to which he pays no attention), the festival in the fifth century cannot be 'integrally democratic'. This is a wholly unconvincing historical argument, not least because it ignores the relevant evidence for continuity and change. Even if tragedy was instituted under Peisistratus, the fifth-century festival is a *different* political event, as the *new* institutional structures show. Similarly, tragedy was exported throughout the Greek world especially in the fourth century; but this subsequent development does not mean that fifth-century extant tragedy from Attica is not usefully to be seen as 'essentially Athenian'.²² It is important to see how tragedy goes beyond the democratic and Athenian aspects of fifth-century production, but it is scarcely helpful to attempt to ignore these determining factors.

Perhaps more important and productive than the rather obvious insufficiencies of these opening statements of Griffin is his cultural analysis of whether tragedy can be said to be didactic and questioning. He wonders whether the city could have staged plays 'in order to teach its citizens to question its own values'.²³ There are two separate issues in this question that need investigation. First, 'intention' is central to Griffin's argument. If the plays are didactic and/or questioning, it is, he argues, because the city (or its officials) have decided this to be so. So he asks whether 'any state...ever meant [to] indoctrinate its citizens' in such a way, and wonders if there is any evidence that the 'Athens of Aeschylus *actually wanted* to inculcate a duty' of questioning values, or '*consciously* set out to question its own ideology' (my emphases).²⁴ There is a very worrying confusion here between 'intention' (explicit or implicit) and 'function', which is particularly crippling in an article entitled 'the social function of Attic tragedy'. A test match

(Oxford 1996); G. Armstrong and R. Gioloanotti (eds.), *Football, Culture and Identity*; J. Williams, *Cricket and England: A Cultural and Social History of the Interwar Years* (London 1999); A. Brown, *Fanatics! Power, Identity and Fandom in Football* (London 1998); E. Dunning, *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilization* (London 1999).

¹⁹ Griffin (n.3) 47.

²⁰ Griffin (n.3) 50 notes solely that A. Sommerstein, 'The theatre audience, the *demos*, and the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (n.3) points out that citizens had to pay to attend the Dionysia (unlike other festivals) and so asks 'If they had thought of the tragedies as part of the civic training of a citizen, would the city have charged, and charged quite a high price, for admission?' This is an important but highly contested issue: first of all, the role of the theoric fund (probably a fourth-century institution), in relation to other forms of compensatory monies for citizens, is complex and needs consideration: see both Sommerstein, 70–1 and P. Wilson, 'Leading the tragic *choros*: tragic prestige in the democratic city', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (n.3). Second, and more importantly perhaps, there is no evidence that the theatre was not widely attended: it was the largest collection of citizens in the Athenian calendar. It is far from clear—and there is certainly no explicit evidence—that the charge was designed to exclude any group of citizens, or that it did in reality exclude them.

²¹ Griffin (n.3) 47 with n.26, where he cites the counter-case of W. Connor, 'City Dionysia and Athenian democracy', *C&M* 40 (1989) 7–32, and the general scepticism about the evidence for the early years of tragedy which is sounded by M. L. West, *CQ* 39 (1989) 251–4.

²² On which see now Taplin (n.7). See also P. Easterling, 'Euripides outside Athens: a speculative note', *ICS* 19 (1994) 73–80, and 'From repertoire to canon', in P. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (n.5).

²³ Griffin (n.3) 48.

²⁴ Griffin (n.3) 48, 49, 50.

between England and the West Indies or between Pakistan and India (to follow Griffin's own style of analogy) is an event replete with cultural and racial tensions, where social conflicts are expressed, negotiated, made evident and even discussed. It would be banal to conclude or demand that the organizations responsible for staging test matches 'intend' or 'intended' ('meant', 'actually wanted') such a process (even if they are aware of the issues).²⁵ Even when sport is more fully framed by an explicit politics (as in the Berlin Olympics of 1936 or the recently ended isolation of South African sport), the state's intervention is primarily at a particular legislative level which is often incapable of fully controlling the politics of representation of such an event—as in the case of the Berlin Olympics. Indeed, even if we had access to the 'intention of the city' in the way Griffin suggests, it is quite unclear whether it would give us more than one strand of the event's impact and enactment. 'Pleasure' may be one explicit aim of tragic theatre (as it is for the arenas of cricket or football or pornography or tourism), but it is simply inadequate to use such an aim as the overriding determining criterion for understanding the cultural politics of the Great Dionysia (as it would be for cricket or football or pornography or tourism). Griffin's argument thus points towards the fascinating problem in cultural analysis of the gaps and tensions between participants in and observers of an event, and between explicit intentions and social process in such events; but his model which proposes we should comprehend the cultural politics of the Great Dionysia as the direct instantiation of the intention of state policy is a distorting oversimplification, which damagingly confuses intention and function.

The second issue raised by Griffin is whether the genre should or can be called 'didactic and/or questioning'—and he gets into a terrible muddle first trying to keep the two terms apart. So, Homeric epic, we are told, can be 'called questioning, but hardly didactic'.²⁶ This is a difficult assertion to evaluate. He continues: 'the didactic poetry of archaic and classical Greece by contrast is characteristically straightforward and unproblematic'. From this it might be thought that a delimited point about genre and intention is being made. 'Didactic' would mean 'actually or professedly designed to serve an educational function'—as with Tyrtaeus, say. But, if this is right, it is hard indeed to see the connection between Griffin's two assertions. The argument would seem to be that (a) Tyrtaeus (Hesiod, Theognis), the professedly didactic poets, are 'characteristically straightforward and unproblematic' (not necessarily a self-evident starting point in itself) and that they constitute 'didactic poetry'; (b) Homer is a 'questioning' poet, who is not generically 'didactic' and cannot be called didactic; thus (c) didacticism and questioning cannot be put together (in Greek literary tradition, and, by analogy, in tragedy). If this is the argument here, and I am not sure what else it can be, the slide in it is clear and worrying. Homer is repeatedly called the teacher of the people, and forms a central plank of Greek education (in all senses). It is undeniable that in this sense he functions as a didactic force in Greek culture, for all that his texts can be said to be questioning also. It is in this general rather than generic sense that tragedy too is said to be didactic (and was so taken by Plato, Aristotle and others). (I cannot think of any modern critic who aligns tragedy directly with 'didactic poetry'.) Tragedy and Homer have different strategies and roles from so-called 'didactic poetry'—but that scarcely implies that tragedy cannot both include questioning and function didactically. So, too, Griffin tells us that the Funeral Oration is didactic but has 'no obliqueness, no irony'.²⁷ What does this prove, except that the Funeral Oration *contrasts* with tragedy? As the Funeral Oration and tragedy show different forms of ritual and language, so they demonstrate different possibilities of performance—of education and irony. So Pelling writes with more sense of the different

²⁵ My favourite account of this is C.L.R. James' famous autobiographical essays, *Beyond a Boundary* (London 1963). Further, less evocative bibliography in Williams (n.18).

²⁶ Griffin (n.3) 49.

²⁷ Griffin (n.3) 49. Plato's *Menexenus* and its reception would be interesting to read here.

possibilities of didacticism in culture: ‘Part of civic ideology...was to feel worried about civic ideology, in the right place and the right setting. And the tragic theatre was the right place.’²⁸ It is hard to see why Griffin finds the combination of irony and didacticism and questioning so difficult to imagine in a city which was the stage for Gorgias, Thucydides, Plato, and the other sophists, as well as Socrates. Indeed, while the connection between democracy and questioning may be hard to see at the level of ‘state indoctrination’ (Griffin’s criterion), none the less the slogan of *es to meson*, ‘putting things into the public domain to be contested’, the principle that two sides of a question must always be heard and argued, the sophists’ notions of the shiftiness of values, and of the questionability of convention (*nomos*), comic theatre’s parody of such questioning, together provide aspects of a framework which is useful both for seeing how tragedy can be questioning and didactic, and for locating tragedy within the range of specifically fifth-century intellectual concerns and styles.²⁹

Griffin’s attempt to downplay the political nature of the Great Dionysia and to see tragedy rather as a ‘refined, sophisticated and thoughtful pleasure’ has some helpful things to say about how the generalizing and emotional strands of tragic theatre encourage and support its export and continuing success beyond the conditions of its production. It is also important, I think, as Griffin at least encourages us to do, self-consciously to historicize the current critical interest in ‘historical contextualization’, which may be the most significant development of the last twenty years of criticism of tragedy. Why the focus on the polis now—something that is, after all, scarcely mentioned in Aristotle’s *Poetics*?³⁰ And, as Griffin emphasizes, tragedy’s emotions and the pleasure taken in such disturbing feelings, are elements that any adequate general account of tragedy must explore. But what he calls his ‘destructive criticism’ of recent political understandings of tragedy is deeply flawed, not least because of his willingness to underestimate the complexity of the cultural event of the Great Dionysia (and the range of relevant historical material, one might add).

This particular rather negative critical discussion, however, leads me to draw two more general conclusions which I hope will provide a more constructive basis for (my) further investigation of the politics of tragedy.

First, the opposition between tragic pleasure and social didacticism, conceived as an exclusive or even strongly marked polarity, has had a distorting effect on what is a more complex dynamic integral to tragedy. The democratic paideusis of the fifth-century genre may function because of—and not despite—its ‘vivid and piercingly pleasurable enactments of suffering’.³¹ Paideusis need not exclude powerful emotional response; emotion need not exclude paideusis. Indeed, paideusis can be of and through emotions; emotions can be seen as a threat to or as a part of paideusis—and Greek philosophical writing is much taken up with these issues, both, say, with its interest in the control of the passions, and in its depiction of the emotions raised by a Socrates.³² As with rhetoric in the assembly or lawcourts, emotional, political and intellectual responses intertwine in intricate manners, for which a single model, which aggressively privileges one strand of response, is unlikely to be sufficient to the complexity of how meanings and feel-

²⁸ Pelling (n.3) 235.

²⁹ For the particular connection between intellectual enquiry and democracy, see G. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom* (Berkeley 1987).

³⁰ See E. Hall, ‘Is there a polis in Aristotle’s *Poetics*?’, in Silk (ed.) (n.3).

³¹ Griffin (n.3) 60.

³² See, e.g., D. Halperin, ‘Plato and the erotics of narrativity’, in J. Kluge and N. Smith (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, supplementary volume (1992); M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge 1986); S. von Reden and S. Goldhill, ‘Plato and the performance of dialogue’, in Goldhill and Osborne (n.5); and for the later period, M. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton 1994), and the works cited in n.14.

ings are produced in the theatre.³³ In discussing tragedy, it is not merely that we should try to avoid too exclusive an opposition between strong emotions and political *paideusis*, but rather that we should explore their imbrication.

My second point follows from this and leads back to the texts of tragedy. As is clear especially from Heath but also from Griffin's article, the argument which promotes the emotions of tragedy over and against its politicized contextualization all too often functions by oversimplifying the event of the tragic festival (as, it should be promptly retorted, the political analysis of tragedy has sometimes repressed the emotional power of the plays).³⁴ If the dynamic interplay between politics and emotions, intellectual evaluation and tragic pleasure, is to be adequately explored, then *both* cultural history *and* the theatre of emotions need to be taken seriously, and, in particular, what the tragedians themselves make of such dynamics must also be considered. Here is where the texts of tragedy are instructive. A strong case could be made that in *Troades*, for example, there is a constant tension between passionate, emotional response to suffering and an intellectualizing comprehension, epitomized in Andromache's two speeches, first on her marriage, and second on Astyanax's death sentence. The debate between Helen and Hecuba may appear to be fiercely rationalizing: but in the end it is Menelaus' feelings of desire that will prove the telling factor in its outcome. Similarly, in *Phoenissae* Polyneices' frigid political understanding of exile significantly *contrasts with* his violent emotional reaction to his brother³⁵—as Creon and Menoikeus have such different emotional and intellectual responses to the arguments of political duty. In the *Bacchae*, the responses to Dionysus and the events of his drama from Teiresias, Cadmus and Pentheus significantly traverse a range of different emotional and intellectual possibilities. Other examples could be given, of course. But it is already clear from the above that Euripides dramatizes, and thus opens to exploration, the tensions between intellectual, emotional and political responses (in a way which would find instructive parallels in Thucydides' accounts of the differing motives in the Peloponnesian war). Tragedies themselves dramatize the complex interplay between emotional and intellectual engagement—for an audience to respond to. This dynamic should be part of the discussion of how tragedy functions in the polis.

So—to begin to develop a more fully expressed example from these two general points—in what follows I shall be discussing some recent interpretations of the *Oresteia* as a political text. In view of its final setting in the lawcourt and its references to contemporary politics, its closing procession with the praise of the polis, its obsessive thematic focus on the logic of justice, it is not hard to see why this work in particular has been read from such a political perspective. But it is also important that this trilogy leads towards its celebratory conclusion through some of the most emotionally charged highpoints in the corpus of extant tragedy, from the Carpet-scene to the death of Clytemnestra to the terrifying entrance of the Furies. What is more, it has some of the most emotionally powerful choral odes and speeches *about* emotional reaction, from the terrified choruses of the *Agamemnon* to Orestes' declaration of his desires before and after the matricide. And in Athene's most famous speech, the goddess maintains (*Eum.* 696–703) the *political* necessity of allowing and maintaining strong feelings in a good city—fear and awesomeness (*to deinon*): 'Do not cast out all awesomeness from the city. For which human is just who has no fear?' While political readings of the *Oresteia* may have sometimes underplayed the powerful emotions central to this drama, aestheticized readings have in turn underestimated the

³³ See I. Lada, 'Emotion and meaning in tragic performance', in Silk (ed.) (n.3) and "'Empathetic understanding": emotion and cognition in classical dramatic audience-response', in *PCPS* 39 (1993) 94–140; and Nussbaum, 'Tragedy and self-sufficiency' (n.14).

³⁴ On the unnecessary restriction of the sense of the political, see the discussion of Meier below with n.67.

³⁵ See S. Goldhill, 'Whose Antiquity? Whose Modernity? The "rainbow bridges" of exile', *Antike und Abendland* (forthcoming).

politicization of its emotions. Is the fear of transgressive disorder, embodied in the female, Clytemnestra, and leading to her murder, a vivid, intensely felt emotion, part of the paradox of tragic pleasure? Or is it a politicized element of the (gendered) discourse of *dike* enacted before the polis? I would say both, and in importantly interrelated ways. In the following analyses, although my specific focus is on some very interesting political interpretations, I hope also to be able to pay due attention to the underpinnings of emotional engagement in this trilogy.

II

If, then, tragic drama can be termed political, without necessarily denying its emotional force, the question still remains of *how* the plays should be related to the developing discourse and institutions of democracy. Within the general frame of this debate, I want to look at the specific issue of how the conceptualization of what has been called ‘civic ideology’ has become a focus of criticism, and specifically at two recent engagements with the category of civic ideology by way of introduction.

The first is that of Mark Griffith. In a lengthy and stimulating article, to which I will return more than once in this piece, Griffith makes a general case about the political force of tragedy as an institution, and a specific argument about the *Oresteia* as one of its key texts. He writes as follows: ‘that “civic ideology” was not and could never be a single monolithic construct and that the ideology implicit in tragedy was by no means univocally “democratic” are two of the main theses of the present article’.³⁶ He agrees that it makes sense to talk of a tension between the texts of tragedy and the ideology of the city,³⁷ but adds ‘I am concerned not to let “the democratic polis”, “the city’s order”, and “the ideology of the city” stand too pat.’³⁸ He worries that there is a critical tendency ‘to locate and define a coherent “democratic ideology” as the Athenian norm against which tragedy’s “transgression” and conflicts are played out’. ‘It is not’, he writes, ‘that there was no such democratic ideology or that the plays did not reflect it or speak to it, but there were other competing ideologies too which need to be taken just as fully into account.’³⁹ Griffith’s general case is closely related to his specific claim that the *Oresteia* has a particular aristocratic agenda, but it is his general aim of introducing *stasis* into the category of civic ideology that I wish to stress. For Griffith, to see democratic ideology as a monolith is to repress the significance of competing ideologies.

A second, related, if less nuanced, case is to be found in Barbara Goff’s recent overview of tragedy, history and theory. ‘Athenian civic ideology’, at least as she thinks I describe it, ‘lacks the crucial component of inequality; it operates at no-one’s expense because it has to distort no social relations.’⁴⁰ By definition, for her, there are true social relations which ideology distorts, and thus it always operates at someone’s expense. If ideology is allowed thus to stand as an uncontested projection of hegemonic values, it is precisely the cost of maintaining such power relations that will remain hidden. It is not competing ideologies that worry Goff, but real inequalities, the materiality of inequality. So she concludes ‘civic ideology binding the citizens was bought at the price of the subjection of the other Greeks’.⁴¹ Again, it is worth noting the continuation of the economic and material vocabulary. The civic ideal, claims Goff, is one of ‘unity’—an idea that would need considerable glossing, especially in the light of Loraux’s work

³⁶ Griffith (n.3) 63 n.3.

³⁷ ‘The claim that one essential function of Attic tragedy is (in some sense) to explore social conflict, transgression, and ambiguities, including those of civic identity itself, should by now provoke little disagreement’ Griffith (n.3) 109.

³⁸ Griffith (n.3) 109 n.143.

³⁹ Griffith (n.3) 109.

⁴⁰ Goff (n.3) 22.

⁴¹ Ibid.

on stasis, before it could function as such a master term⁴²—and, she argues, it is to be regretted if either tragedy or its critics fail to make visible the repressive power on which the ideal of unity rests. In debt to Marxist notions of ‘false consciousness’, Goff wants her power clean and on the table, like a coin. ‘Civic ideology’ is a dangerous category because it does not allow the real inequalities of society to become visible.

Both of these critics thus find a critical difficulty in the inclusiveness of the category ‘civic ideology’, a difficulty in where to locate difference, competition, contest and dissent. Similarly, Chris Pelling thoughtfully points out how important it is to allow a space *within* ideology for ‘questioning’ (as opposed to just idealization or imperative)⁴³. Michelle Gellrich wants to move away from the binarism implicit in phrasing the problem as a question of text and context (drama and festival, ideology and opposition), and wants to see a more diffuse sense of power operative throughout the polis.⁴⁴ One should also add the thrust of recent feminist writing which questions how such dominant ideology can affect a modern as well as an ancient audience.⁴⁵ Friedrich, however, although he allows that Euripides may conform to a model of interrogation of civic ideology, wishes in general to close any polemical gap between plays and civic ideology (as, in a different way, does Seaford)⁴⁶—though neither goes as far as Griffin, who sums up any intellectual pleasure in tragedy as (merely) the audience seeing ‘their shared beliefs and values satisfyingly restated’⁴⁷—as Kovacs demands a reader should invoke nothing ‘that would not have occurred naturally to an ordinary Athenian in the audience’.⁴⁸ The problem is, then, in short: how monolithic, how determinate, how repressive is the concept of ‘civic ideology’?

One way to approach this highly pertinent question would be to enter into an abstract discussion of the central term ‘ideology’, which is a highly slippery one. There is considerable slippage, for instance, between Goff’s notions, where ideology is what maintains the veil over power relations, and Griffith’s, where ideology is a set of ideas, beliefs and values associated with a particular group. The relation between the tacit and the explicit, between the imaginary and the real, between power and misrecognition, are difficult areas here, and the difficulty is not eased by each critic’s unwillingness to offer and then use a closely defined sense of the term—a procedure which I too, I confess, would regard as an imprudent hostage to fortune. What I intend to do, however, is less abstract. I shall rather turn back to the rituals which opened the festival of the Great Dionysia to explore how the notion of *difference* is inscribed within social performance, and through this investigate how the dynamics of social engagement in the theatre have been often underestimated—including in my own earlier article on the festival. Since I will eventually be turning to the *Oresteia* in this article, it had better be reiterated that these rituals

⁴² N. Loraux, ‘Reflections of the Greek city on unity and division’, in A. Molho, K. Raaflaub and J. Emlen (eds.), *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy* (Stuttgart 1991); ‘La majorité, le tout et la moitié’, *Le genre humain* 22 (1990) 89–110; ‘Le lien de la division’, *Le Cahier du collège international de philosophie* 4 (1987) 101–24.

⁴³ Pelling (n.3), especially 225–35.

⁴⁴ Gellrich (n.3).

⁴⁵ See the works cited in n.2, and, more usefully, V. Wohl, *Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy* (Austin 1998).

⁴⁶ Friedrich (n.3); R. Seaford, ‘Something to do with Dionysus—tragedy and the Dionysiac’, in Silk (ed.) (n.3); ‘Historicizing tragic ambivalence: the vote of Athena’, in Goff (ed.) (n.3).

⁴⁷ Griffin (n.3) 60.

⁴⁸ D. Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse* (Baltimore 1987) x. This is a particularly unreflective and unuseful category: even if one could know what an ordinary Athenian made of any drama (we have evidence almost entirely from such extraordinary fellows as Plato); even if one thought that all ordinary Athenians had similar responses (which is scarcely likely); even if one ignored the ludicrous repression of class, educational, political and social backgrounds of a mass audience—are they all ‘ordinary’?; even if one believed that audience response did not change over time and circumstance; it would still be grossly limiting to assume that only what occurred ‘naturally’ should be the object of enquiry—as if tacit knowledge, unexpressed assumptions and unrecognized prejudices were not also of interest and relevance.

are part of an on-going fifth-century development of the Great Dionysia. Certainly one of them, the parade of tribute, must have been introduced shortly after the first production of the *Oresteia*, but a more precise dating for the introduction of the others is impossible.⁴⁹ All were in place for the period of all of our extant plays of Euripides and Sophocles.

The first of the four rituals on which I shall focus is the libation and sacrifice presided over by the ten generals. While this places the drama festival firmly under the aegis of the authority of the democratic polis, it is worth recalling that the only reason we know about this rite is because of a story in Plutarch's *Life of Cimon* (8.7–9), which, although a late source and possibly informed by later attitudes,⁵⁰ is instructive:

... Ἀψεφίων ὁ ἄρχων, φιλονεικίας οὔσης καὶ παρατάξεως τῶν θεατῶν, κριτὰς μὲν οὐκ ἐκλήρωσε τοῦ ἀγῶνος, ὡς δὲ Κίμων μετὰ τῶν στρατῆγων προελθὼν εἰς τὸ θέατρον ἐποίησατο τῶν θεῶν τὰς νενομισμένας σπονδάς, οὐκ ἀφήκεν αὐτοὺς ἀπελθεῖν, ἀλλ' ὀρκώσας ἠνάγκασε καθίσει καὶ κρίναι δέκα ὄντας, ἀπὸ φυλῆς μιᾶς ἕκαστον. ὁ μὲν οὖν ἀγὼν καὶ διὰ τὸ τῶν κριτῶν ἀξίωμα τὴν φιλοτιμίαν ὑπερέβαλε.

... Apsephion the archon, because of the spirit of rivalry and partisanship among the spectators, did not appoint judges for the competition by lot, but when Cimon and the generals came into the theatre, and made the regular libations to the god, he did not allow them to depart but forced them to take an oath and to sit as judges, as there were ten of them, one from each tribe. The competition, especially because of the dignity of the judges, excelled itself in its sense of ambitious striving.

Plutarch tells how in 468, ten years before the *Oresteia*, the rivalry among the citizen spectators was so intense that the presiding archon made the generals act as judges for the competition. Because of the dignity of these judges, however, there was even more *philotimia*. What this anecdote reflects first is the sense of the competitive pursuit of status—*philotimia*—that informs the *agon* of drama both for the spectators and for those directly involved in the production of the plays. This is conceived both at a tribal level—it is specified that the fact that one general came from each tribe was significant—and at the level of the élite *choregoi* and playwrights. Second, and equally importantly, the anecdote shows the archon intervening in the ritual order of the festival, manipulating the symbolics of ritual. It is a gesture designed, at an explicit level, to reduce conflict; but it also draws attention to the possible dangers of conflictual *philotimia*, and a state official's attempt to control it, which in turn raises the stakes of the competitiveness. The presence of the ten generals in the theatre is always a way of staging the authority of the democratic state, but this staging can be reframed, as the scene becomes a site of negotiation for the audience and its sense of *philotimia*.

This sense of the complexity and contest of engagement in ritual is even more striking in the second of the ceremonies I shall discuss, the presentation of crowns to benefactors of the state. The famous legal case argued between Demosthenes and Aeschines 'on the crown' indicates

⁴⁹ For an account of the earlier rituals of the festival and the development of the festival, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Something to do with Athens: tragedy and ritual', in R. Osborne and S. Hornblower (eds.), *Ritual, Finance, Politics: Athenian Democratic Accounts Presented to David Lewis* (Oxford 1994). Her views there are largely complementary to mine here, especially in her sense of the repeated manipulation of 'the symbolic distance between the world of tragedy and the world of the audience' (290).

⁵⁰ A problem discussed with bibliography (pp. 33–5) with regard to the cultural politics of the Panathenaia by V. Wohl, 'εὐσεβείας ἔνεκα καὶ φιλοτιμίας: hegemony and democracy at the Panathenaia', *C&M* 47 (1996) 25–88. The discussion of the cultural politics of the Panathenaia has been well discussed by the contributors to J. Neils (ed.), *Goddess and Polis* (Princeton 1992). Plutarch's sense of ambitious striving at the Great Dionysia is easy to parallel from classical sources: see P. Wilson, *Choregia* (Cambridge 2000).

immediately the potential there is in a festival site for it to become the occasion for the stasis of *philotimia*. Indeed, Demosthenes is also involved in a case against Meidias because of a punch thrown in the theatre.⁵¹ The theatricality of Demosthenes' account—as he restages in court his theatrical humiliation—is part and parcel of the display and contest of democratic status that the institution of *choregia* in particular involves. On the one hand, in the rhetoric of the law court, where personal status is struggled for by the élite, the performance of liturgy is a repeated weapon of justificatory self-presentation and of aggressive accusation. How one has performed the role of democratic citizen is what is at stake. On the other hand, the performance of the festival itself offered a great occasion for what the Athenians called *lamprotes*—the opportunity to be singled out as a brilliantly glorious individual, who has benefitted the polis and who is publicly shining in the civic gaze.⁵² The role of the *choregos* in the Great Dionysia stages the difficult interplay between the hierarchical pursuit of status within democracy and the collective ideals of the polis. The interplay between collective and individual, mirrored in the relation of chorus and hero on stage, is a central dynamic of democratic power in action.

The ritual of presenting the crown in the theatre to distinguished citizens not only embodies the tensions within democratic power dynamics, but also is reappropriated to—replayed on—the stage of the lawcourt. Demosthenes offers his rather pious version of what the ritual means—it is, he says, to stimulate the vast audience to do service to the city (*de cor.* 120)—in part because the award of a crown to him has been accused of illegality by Aeschines (3.32 ff.) and it is useful for him to emphasize that the event is a demonstration of civic virtue not individual ambition. (The case against the award fails, of course, and destroys Aeschines' career.) In part, too, it is because the singling out of individuals in this way may have the potential to articulate a tension or fissure within the ideals of democratic collectivity—the threat of *philotimia* (paradigmatically articulated in the figure of Alcibiades). What makes this ritual expressive of 'democratic ideology', I am suggesting, is not its projection of unity or masking of real power, as Goff would have it, nor its repression or expression of an 'aristocratic' competitive ideology, as Griffith would have it, nor, for that matter, because it encourages service to the state, as Demosthenes would have it. Rather, what counts is the articulation of difference precisely within a democratic frame. The recuperative power of ideology is found in its ability to define dissent and difference as well as success within its own terms; to project opposition, and to determine, comprehend, inform it. Democratic institutional power and ideological formation are the condition of possibility of this competitive, individualistic display.

The third ritual, the display of the allies' tribute, was introduced shortly after the *Oresteia*, when the treasury of the Delian league was transferred to Athens. But as the pseudo-Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution* indicates (23–4), this can, and probably should, be read as part of a long process of increasing Athenian imperial power and self-confidence, a trajectory in which the *Persae* plays a significant role. The audience in the theatre watches, and watches itself watching, the foreign ambassadors as spectators of the procession of their tribute—as well as the public interaction of the ambassadors with leading Athenian public figures, at least as Aeschines describes the scene. It is important, however, to juxtapose this scene of viewing of imperial power on display with the contemporary debate on the role of wealth within the democratic state—a topic of particular contemporary interest.⁵³ For in Herodotus and Thucydides, as well

⁵¹ See P. Wilson, 'Demosthenes 21 (*Against Meidias*): democratic abuse', *PCPS* 37 (1991) 164–95; J. Ober, 'Power and oratory in democratic Athens: Demosthenes 2, *Against Meidias*', in I. Worthington (ed.), *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action* (London and New York 1994).

⁵² See Wilson (n.50) *Choregia*.

⁵³ Forthcoming books are expected from S. von Reden and R. Seaford (see already R. Seaford, 'Tragic money', *JHS* 118 (1998) 119–39). At the time of submitting this article, L. Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games and Gold* (Princeton 1999) had not yet been published in England. T. Figueira, *The Power of Money: Coinage and Politics in the Athenian Empire* (Philadelphia 1998) is not concerned particularly with such symbolic display, however.

as in Aeschylus, there can be read a particular ideological construction of money that redeploys traditional concerns for thrift and the avoidance of conspicuous consumption within a democratic civic ideal of financial service to the polis. Thus in a telling phrase, Aeschines (3.240) abuses Demosthenes σὺ δὲ πλουτεῖς, he says, ‘you, you’re rich’, καὶ ἡδοναῖς ταῖς σαυτοῦ χορηγεῖς, ‘and yet you play *choregos* to your own pleasures’. The opposition between personal expenditure on mere pleasure and the proper duty of the citizen is neatly marked by the use of the verb χορηγεῖς, as the term that epitomizes state expenditure is applied to personal pleasure. So, too, Herodotus (7.144) tells how important the civic, collective deployment of the new wealth of the Laureion silver mines was even for Athens’ survival as a polis over and against the wealth of the Persians, a theme also of the *Persae*. One might even think of the transition of Agamemnon’s public consumption of his wealth in the carpet scene of the *Agamemnon*, surrounded as it is by images of the dangers of wealth, to the *Eumenides*’ blessings for the city’s wealth and prosperity.⁵⁴ The display of tribute in the theatre is a ritual contribution to this debate—a display of a principle—a performance which echoes against the funding of the plays by liturgy. Both the display of tribute and the performance of liturgy mark the democratic ideological framing of money—an issue which is certainly open to redeployment and negotiation as the extensive lawcourt contests above all make clear.

The display of tribute, however, was strongly linked to the fourth ceremonial, the parade of ephebic war orphans, by Isocrates, in the fourth century. He claimed (*de pace* 82) that the display of tribute was designed to make Athens hated by her allies and was testimony to the wrong-headedness of an imperialistic military policy. He saw the display of war orphans as the demonstrations of the sick fruit of such a policy: young men proclaiming how their fathers had been slain in the war machine. It is clear, I think, how this argument manipulates expectation. Even if ‘loss’ is a recognized part of the pathos of war from the *Iliad* onwards, this highly rhetorical attack on military service to the polis is very different from the famous laments for the old or beautiful young struck down in battle or sack of city. What I want to stress in particular, however, is Isocrates’ self-conscious strategy of juxtaposing different rituals to make a point, and re-reading their import from a political perspective. Offering the viewer a different view. The participation and observation of ritual is in part determined by subject position. Fighting and dying for the state, a principle evoked by the parade of ephebes, may be a value strongly projected at one—ideological—level in fifth-century Athens, but the very fact of it being made explicit opens it to the politics of engagement and reappropriation (especially in the fourth century). Ritual as much as tragedy is open to rhetorical re-reading.

Two general points have emerged from this discussion of the pre-play rituals, which offer significant correctives to the way in which the festival has been discussed in terms of civic ideology. First, there is necessarily a complex *dynamic* of contest and competition *within* what I have been calling civic ideology. On the one hand, the projection of other positions, the recognition of transgression, the expectation of competing arguments is part and parcel of democratic ideology. Democracy requires different positions for its constitutive debates, and prides itself on allowing such difference to be expressed (in contrast, say, to the state under a tyranny). On the other hand, the power of ideological argument is precisely to frame and re-coup difference in terms of itself. So difference is conceptualized within a democratic frame and treated thus (in extreme form, say, by ostracism or condemning to death, as with Socrates). From within democracy, it is hard to think transgression, alternatives, contestation except in democratic terms. Any attempt to locate difference in ideology must take account of both aspects of this dynamic. Both contest and the recuperation of contest are integral to ideological formation. Second, we cannot adequately explore theatre and civic ideology without recognizing the element of engagement,

⁵⁴ See Seaford (n.53) 124–31.

subject positioning, negotiation. Playing the good democrat, seeing oneself playing the good democrat, enjoying not being a good democrat, expecting others to be good democrats, and so forth, are all elements of being a citizen in Athens. Even Plato can cheer at a parade. Goff's economic language is too formalistic to deal with the complexity of the performance of citizenship at the Great Dionysia. Ritual, especially changing ritual, in a rapidly changing society, a society which privileges the judging, viewing spectator as an ideal of citizenship,⁵⁵ is not the simply conservative transmitter of ideology it is sometimes taken to be—especially in the crisis-ridden moment after the Persian wars between the Areopagus reforms and Pericles' citizenship law. So when Griffith calls for a recognition of competing ideologies within democracy, as Pelling specifies a place for 'questioning' within ideology, this is indeed an important aspect of democratic self-recognition—but must be set in relation to the recuperative, re-assimilating power of an ideological frame. But when Goff wants to point to the repressive, all-embracing, concealing nature of ideology, the citizens' engagement in and manipulation of ideological positioning needs pointing out. It is this turn and turn about that makes the discussion of ideology with regard to the performance of the Great Dionysia so important and so slippery. Both plays and rituals involve a complex audience participation, and it is the combination of and tension between plays and rituals which together makes up the Great Dionysia as the constitutive performance of the citizen as θεατής.

III

For the third section of my paper, I want to look at how the *Oresteia* has acted and continues to act as the proof-text for the general discussion of ideology, ritual and politics. How does a tragedy relate to the polis? To approach this question, I shall first offer (as brief but necessary background) three ways through the vast amount of material on this topic, three traditions of scholarly engagement, which will be viewed in the light of the first two sections of this article; then I shall turn to juxtapose two of the most recent contributions to a debate whose flourishing continues to show how the strife of warring words has no neutrals.

The first tradition of reading is the search to locate a specific and narrowly conceived political message in the *Oresteia* which is usually defined as Aeschylus' political position. This is usually focused on the Areopagus reforms, but also finds sustenance in the Argive alliance, Pericles' political standing, and even that old favourite, the zeugite admission to the archonship.⁵⁶ Although there are still some attempts to produce such narrowly defined politics within the *Oresteia*, one of the great advances produced by thinking more broadly about the Great Dionysia as an event is that the standard strategy of defending one's own interpretation by an appeal to an author's political intentions has become less acceptable, as critics have tried to come to terms with the complexity of the public exchange that is the production of meaning in theatre. Here, the recognition of the engagement of the audience in the interpretive procedure and the recuperative, framing power of ideological formation—the concerns of my first section—work to make the simple claim of authorial expression and control of meaning seem rather too naive for the theatrical experience.

The second major tradition of political reading has focused not so much on the *Oresteia*'s reflection of the business of the assembly, as on its contribution to the understanding of the polit-

⁵⁵ See S. Goldhill, 'The audience of Athenian tragedy', in P.E. Easterling (ed.) (n.5); and 'Theatre in the history of vision', in K. Rutter and B. Sparkes (eds.), *Word and Image in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh forthcoming).

⁵⁶ Exemplary are K. Dover, 'The political aspects of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*', *JHS* 77 (1957) 230–7; E. Dodds, 'Morals and politics in the *Oresteia*', *PCPS* 6 (1960) 19–31; both well criticized by C. Macleod, 'Politics and the *Oresteia*', *JHS* 102 (1982) 124–44; material also surveyed by A. Bowie, 'Religion and politics in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *CQ* 43 (1993) 10–31. The most extensive, though now very dated, general account along these lines remains A. Podlecki, *The Political Background to Aeschylean Tragedy* (Michigan 1966).

ical process itself. Tragedy's paideusis can be located in the retelling of the myths of the past for the democratic polis, and the *Oresteia* above all, with its massive tale of the genesis of law, the placement of violence, and its conclusion in the polis of Athens, is the paradigmatic tragedy for this model of educating the citizen into citizenship. Christian Meier has become a figurehead for this conceptualization of tragedy.⁵⁷ Paradigmatically, he writes: 'what Aeschylus made of Ephialtes' reforms is not only a moot point, but one with little real bearing on our interpretation of the trilogy'.⁵⁸ It is tragedy as a contribution to and modelling of the political process that Meier emphasizes. Despite the attraction of this general thesis, close as it is to Vernant's still formative account of the tragic moment, I would like to point to two major problems with Meier's reading of the *Oresteia* specifically. The first is the question of 'message'. For Meier's version of an Aeschylean 'message' is disconcertingly simple. Although he indicates that there is 'a whole chain of insights, almost an integrated system' to be traced throughout the trilogy, the conclusion to this chain is blunt: 'Victors should be conciliatory'.⁵⁹ 'The new order finds room for the old forces'.⁶⁰ He distinguishes this as the 'lesson' of the 'intellectual strand' of the trilogy, which he separates in a most worrying way from the imagery of the 'uncertain, the uncanny and the chaotic'⁶¹ (a good example of how the attempt to keep the emotional and intellectual aspects of tragedy separate or even opposed can distort the understanding of the play as a whole). The reduction of the *Oresteia* to a motto from a fortune cookie both depends on and justifies a highly truncated, teleological reading of the work, especially of its discourse of victory and reconciliation. The desire for a single simple message from the *Oresteia* distorts any understanding of its democratic paideusis.

The second area where I feel particular disquiet with Meier's account is on the issue of gender. 'The problem of man versus woman was not one that much exercised the Greeks', he wrote in 1980⁶²—though I suspect he would hesitate to put it quite like that now. Although he recognizes that the conflict of the *Oresteia* 'is constructed, for part of the time, as a struggle between male and female', he argues that this conflict 'stands for something more general'⁶³—a view articulated perhaps more subtly by Peter Euben.⁶⁴ So Meier writes: 'The division of the sexes is very well suited to the presentation of something that obviously did interest Aeschylus: the history of existential conflict and its settlement in a just and political order.'⁶⁵ The *Eumenides*, he declares, is 'an expression of political thought'⁶⁶—for which gender can only be an image, a metaphor. Now it would be easy to be quite snuffy about this dismissal of what has become a staple of the analysis of the *Oresteia*, and indeed it does look bizarre to see a construction of political thought that does not recognize gender as a category. But I think that there is more at stake here. For what boundaries should there be to the construction of the self as a political sub-

⁵⁷ See also for interesting developments and precedents: G. Cerri, *Il linguaggio politico nel Prometeo di Eschilio* (Rome 1975); D. Lanza, *Il tiranno e il suo pubblico* (Turin 1977); V. di Benedetto, *L'ideologia del potere e la tragedia greca* (Turin 1978); P. Euben (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley 1986); E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford 1989); A. Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago 1992).

⁵⁸ C. Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, trans. A. Webber (Cambridge 1993) 115.

⁵⁹ Meier (n.58) 134. The version in *The Greek Discovery of Politics*, trans. D. McLintock (Cambridge 1990) 121–2, is more developed, but equally closely focused on the specific political issue of conflict and resolution.

⁶⁰ Meier (n.58) 135.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Meier, *The Greek Discovery of Politics* (n.59) 98.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Euben (n.5) (who writes: 'It seems to me that Aeschylus "uses" the politics of gender and sexuality to make "larger" points about "the" human condition', p. 92) The inverted commas in this sentence do not quite take away its declarative force, I suspect.

⁶⁵ Meier, *The Greek Discovery of Politics* (n.59) 98.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

ject? What makes an issue ‘political’?⁶⁷ The issue of gender is central because of the integral masculinity of the citizen, but so too is the functioning of mythic narrative as a fundamental element of the imaginary of the citizen; so too is the sense of past models of masculine behaviour, from Homer, say, or lyric. So, too, the use of language, the lures and dangers of rhetoric; or the language of childbirth and familial duty; or the question of prophecy and control... It is not only gender that is excluded from Meier’s politics, and this impoverishment of the sense of the construction of the political subject necessarily and damagingly distorts the political reading of the trilogy.

The third major trend in political reading to which I wish to draw attention is one that Meier is explicitly criticizing (under the banner ‘feminist’): I will call it for convenience ‘myth and gender’, to indicate a specific interconnection of a concern with the gender politics of the trilogy with the mythic narratives of the *Oresteia*, and the *Oresteia* as myth.⁶⁸ The *Oresteia*’s discourse of gender, that structures the trilogy’s conflicts, is seen in relation both to the myth of matriarchy overthrown, and to a host of other mythic narratives, such as the Amazons, and to ritual patterns, such as the mysteries. The *Oresteia* itself is thus seen as contributing to the projection and promotion of an idea of civic order, which includes in its sense of oikos and polis interaction a normative view of gender hierarchy particularly in and through marriage. Although this line of argument has obvious connections with Meier’s work, it promotes a more general sense of the political and a broader sense of how the *Oresteia* communicates in the theatre.

Now these three traditions of relating this tragedy to the polis are sketched in this way as no more than a street map to an area. Indeed, much modern work not only draws on each of these lines of argument, but also spends much energy on locating itself within such a matrix: so Meier recognizes the importance of the precise references to the Argive alliance, and tries to downplay the significance of the role of gender and mythic narrative in constructing his political model, whereas Wohl, for example, focuses on gender in relation to a very broadly conceived political model of social process, but downplays any specific Athenian political reference or discussion of state power. My brief (heuristic) account is intended first as a way of seeing how the points raised by my first section continue into the political readings of the *Oresteia* in particular: the question of how a drama relates to (or instantiates) the ideology of the polis, on the one hand, and the problem, on the other, of the intricacy and variation of audience engagement in the dramatic event, are sharply focused by these different (but interrelated) levels or forms of political understanding—from precise reference to specific policy, to the discussion and enactment of the political nature of power, to the most general sense of the politicized subject, the citizen. Secondly, this brief outline also acts as a necessary introductory frame to two recent critical stud-

⁶⁷ So, the argument of J. Griffin, ‘Sophocles and the democratic city’, in J. Griffin (ed.), *Sophocles Revisited* (Oxford 1999), (a discussion further to Griffin (n.3), which came out too late to be fully integrated into this article) depends on a very narrowly conceived sense of politics, especially when, for example, he denies any political point to Sophocles’ *Electra*. Sophocles’ play is indeed significantly different in its narrative focus from the *Oresteia*, not least for its lack of an explicit polis frame. However, one possible political significance of its representation of (the psychology of) revenge for the polis is strikingly revealed by the modern example adduced by E. Hall (‘Sophocles’ *Electra* in Britain’, 261–2) in the same volume. Fiona Shaw (in F. Dunn (ed.), *Sophocles’ “Electra” in Performance* (Stuttgart 1996)) recalls how when she performed in Deborah Warner’s production of *Electra* in Northern Ireland, the audience refused to leave the theatre without a discussion of the play’s implications—which I take to be a paradigm of a political response to drama. The shattering emotions of the play may truly speak to a city experienced in stasis—and thus play a role in the paideusis of the citizen.

⁶⁸ See F. Zeitlin, ‘The dynamic of misogyny in the *Oresteia*’, *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 149–84; Bowie (n.56); Wohl (n.45); N. Rabinowitz, ‘Tragedy and the politics of containment’, in A. Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (Oxford 1992); S. Pembroke, ‘Women in charge: the function of alternatives in early Greek tradition and the ancient idea of matriarchy’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967) 1–35; S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1986) chs. 1–2; and—years ahead of its time—R. Winnington-Ingram, ‘Clytemnestra and the vote of Athena’, *JHS* 88 (1949) 130–47, revis(it)ed in *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983).

ies that seem to me to be exemplary of the current debate on the *Oresteia* and politics. These are, once again, Griffith's article 'Brilliant dynasts' and, secondly, Richard Seaford's provocative book *Reciprocity and Ritual*.⁶⁹ Perhaps the simplest way to see the possible productivity of juxtaposing these two critics is to note that, for Griffith, the *Oresteia* in particular and tragedy in general offers an 'assurance of the continuation in authority of a class of aristocratic leaders, vulnerable, occasionally flawed but in the last resort infinitely precious and indispensable',⁷⁰ whereas, for Seaford, in the *Oresteia* in particular and in tragedy in general 'the royal household may threaten and its self-destruction enhance the well-being of the polis. A frequent pattern of tragedy is the destruction of the royal household ending in profit for the polis.'⁷¹ So does tragedy offer the haven of polis-cult at the expense of the élite, or a reassurance of the necessity of élite leadership within polis-cult?

Griffith's argument is long and detailed. It depends first on the recognition of aristocratic social networks of *xenia* and *hetaireia* as they are transgressed but ultimately vindicated in the *Oresteia*, second on the final establishment in the *Eumenides* of both hierarchical relations between ruler and ruled, and the connections between élite families. The audience, he writes, has 'witnessed the reassuring meshing together of (horizontal) personal ties among these international dynastic families, and the concomitant (vertical) trickling down of benefits thereby accruing to the civic community... With patrons such as these', he enthuses, 'the future of Athenian democracy looks rosy indeed.'⁷² There are two brief points I want to make about this rosy view of aristocratic patronage before moving on to Seaford. The first concerns his picture of the meshing together of international dynastic families through the rituals of *xenia*, marriage, *hetaireia*. What happens to Griffith's picture of aristocratic networking if we widen the frame? It certainly emphasizes how polemical such a rosy picture must seem. Within seven years, Pericles, one of Aeschylus' former *choregoi*, has passed a law, the citizenship law of 451, that meant that such international meshing debarred a man from citizenship in Athens. It is too often forgotten that this law hit a sure blow precisely at any international aristocratic familial bonds through intermarriage. And before long, the very word *hetaireia* had become synonymous with suspicion and the threat of political sedition. If we widen the frame in the opposite direction, we find not only that *xenia* in Homer is a resource shared by king and swineherd alike—not an especially aristocratic rite, and indeed in the *Odyssey* properly performed by a swineherd where the aristocrats fail—but also the relation between ruler and people is far from straightforward. In particular, Odysseus returns home having lost all his *hetairoi*, to kill the young princes of the realm before setting off again; and Achilles prays for and brings destruction on his own troops, and loses his own best friend, in the pursuit of personal glory.⁷³ Already in Homer there is a powerful discussion of leadership and its rituals, which is being redrafted in tragedy—repeatedly, especially with Odysseus, and, differently, Agamemnon, to the *denigration* of the great aristocrats of the past. Indeed, so far does Griffith push his rosy assimilation of aristocratic behaviour that the killing of Clytemnestra and Orestes' acquittal, he suggests, should be seen 'as discreet victories of aristocratic friendship-deals and patronage, vesting the salvation of the polis in the continued benevolence and diplomatic skill of its elite'.⁷⁴ A discreet and benevolent and diplomatic...matricide! Something has been occluded here...

The second brief point I wish to make about Griffith's argument is to hesitate before his image of the polis where the ordinary citizen 'looks up to his "betters" for protection, super-

⁶⁹ Griffith (n.3); Seaford (n.3).

⁷⁰ Griffith (n.3) 110.

⁷¹ Seaford (n.3) 342.

⁷² Griffith (n.3) 107.

⁷³ See J. Haubold, *Homer's People* (Cambridge 2000) with bibliography of earlier discussions.

⁷⁴ Griffith (n.3) 83.

vision, representation and direction'.⁷⁵ What happens to that image, if we were to build in, say, sortition, which involved the direct engagement of so many citizens in the business of government? Or if we include the role of the 'ordinary' citizen in military and ritual matters? While there is undoubtedly a recognition of a social élite in Athens, 'looking up to one's betters' would need a more careful detour through the imaginary as well as the institutions of the Athenians before its ideological force could be asserted so baldly. As Dicaeopolis can assert in challenge to his 'betters' (Arist. *Ach.* 595): 'Who am I?': πολίτης χρηστός, 'I am a Good Citizen'! Indeed, it could be said that the social systems of *philia* in Athens, coupled with the commonly lauded ideal of *autarkeia*, and the claims of 'equality' before the law, worked against the commitments to hierarchy familiar from the Roman or Elizabethan sense of patronage and place.⁷⁶

Seaford, also at great length and in detail, traces a transition from Homer to the fifth-century polis. He argues that, unlike in Homer, in tragedy narrative often represents intrafamilial violence, in the form of transgressive and corrupt ritual; this discord is resolved, he further claims, in the establishment of polis-cult, in particular hero-cult, and thus tragedy celebrates the polis as polis. The *Oresteia*'s final celebration of the polis is the demonstration of this pattern in Aeschylus. This argument in its general form is open to several criticisms (for all the fine discussions along the way)—not least because it tries to fit too many disparate and contradictory elements into a single Procrustean ritual model. In particular, one could point to the large number of plays which end without any significant establishment of cult; which do not even represent the destruction of a royal or ruling family; which do not conclude with the celebration of any collective polis-cult but which mourn suffering; which allow cult a more ambiguous or ironic role as a conclusion to a particular narrative. Indeed, as I have discussed elsewhere, Seaford's overemphatic desire to keep any anxiety, questioning or irony away from the securities of ritual closure leads to further distortion of his argument and of the ancient material. Although he is right to be suspicious of what he terms elsewhere the 'fetishization'⁷⁷ of ambivalence—it is much harder to subvert 'the patriarchal system' or 'the politics of democracy' than it is sometimes suggested by modern literary critics—nonetheless to declare of the *Oresteia* simply 'the questions are indeed answered and the conflicts resolved',⁷⁸ is not to do justice to what the questions might be, what might constitute an answer, and how difficult it is to 'resolve the conflicts' of a political system. However, here I wish to raise one small point that looks back to my earlier discussion of responses to ritual. For Seaford, ritual is always a recuperative institution of the polis that binds the citizens in a display and reinforcement of solidarity. In part this view is supported by his concentration on the most conservative of ritual patterns: sacrifice, marriage, death. Yet as I suggested above, there is more scope for change and contest in and around ritual. Even hero-cult, in the collectivity of the polis and as viewed by tragedy, may not be straightforwardly celebratory.

What strikes me as exemplary about both these critics is the way in which the three traditions I described come significantly and powerfully together. For each, there is a recognition of the power of ritual and mythic models, and an interest in how conflict, ever gendered in the *Oresteia*, is explored through such patterning. For each, the play is aimed at the conceptualization of *ta politika* in the fifth century, with a message about citizenship and the city, which is both political in a narrow sense and also articulated throughout the different images and languages of the

⁷⁵ Griffith (n.3) 68.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., P. Millett, *Lending and Borrowing in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge 1991); A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London 1989); S. von Reden, *Exchange in Ancient Greece* (London 1995), and for a different and more convincing take on the dynamics of mass/élite relations, see J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology and the Power of the People* (Princeton 1989).

⁷⁷ Seaford, 'Historicizing tragic ambivalence' (n.46), 203.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 208.

text, and thus more generally political. For each, there is a sensitivity to the specificity of fifth-century politics, for all that neither wishes to offer a naive view of Aeschylus' agenda for the *boule*. This intertwining of different models of reading the *Oresteia*'s politics seems to me to be a necessary foundation for contemporary interpretation. What strikes me also as exemplary, however, is that they offer such opposite views of the politics of the play. What are we to make of such a polarization?

There are several standard moves immediately available. We could say simply, one is right and the other wrong: the polarity can be removed by showing that either is sufficiently incorrect in detail or in structure of argument to invalidate the general case. We could, equally, declare that both are quite wrong, and the polarity, although evident, is irrelevant. We could fall back on a rather easy idea of literary ambiguity, and note how texts produce conflicting readings. We could even take the ameliorative route of the middle road and say that there is something to be said for each. What I want to do here, however, is to look at both readings through a single crucial passage of the *Oresteia* and then, finally, to offer some comments on open and closed political readings by way of a conclusion.

The passage in question is Orestes' final speech (*Eum.* 754–77):

ὦ Παλλάδας, ὦ σώσασσα τοὺς ἐμοὺς δόμους,
 γαίας πατρώιας ἐστερημένον σύ τοι 755
 κατώικισάς με, καί τις Ἑλλήνων ἐρεῖ
 Ἄργειος ἀνὴρ αὖθις, ἐν τε χρήμασιν
 οἰκεῖ πατρώιοις, Παλλάδος καὶ Λοξίου
 ἕκατι καὶ τοῦ πάντα κραίνοντος τρίτου
 Σωτήρος· ὃς πατρώιον αἰδεσθεὶς μόρον 760
 σώζει με, μητρὸς τάσδε συνδίκους ὄρων.
 ἐγὼ δὲ χῶραι τῆϊδε καὶ τῶι σῶι στρατῶι
 τὸ λοιπὸν εἰς ἅπαντα πλειστήρη χρόνον
 ὀρκωμοτήσας νῦν ἄπειμι πρὸς δόμους,
 μή τοί τιν' ἄνδρα δεῦρο πρυμνήτην χθονὸς 765
 ἐλθόντ' ἐποίσειν εὖ κεκασμένον δόρυ.
 αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ὄντες ἐν τάφοις τότε
 τοῖς τὰμὰ παρβαίνουσι νῦν ὀρκώματα
 ἀμηχάνοισι πράξομεν δυσπραξίαις,
 ὁδοὺς ἀθύμους καὶ παρόρνιθας πόρους 770
 τιθέντες, ὡς αὐτοῖσι μεταμέλῃ πόνος.
 ὀρθουμένων δὲ καὶ πάλιν τὴν Παλλάδος
 τιμῶσιν ἀεὶ τῆνδε συμμαχῶι δόρι
 φαῦτοισιν ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν εὐμενεστέροι.
 καὶ χαῖρε καὶ σὺ καὶ πολιισσοῦχος λεώς· 775
 πάλαισμ' ἄφυκτον τοῖς ἐναντίοις ἔχοις,
 σώτηριού τε καὶ δορὸς νικηφόρον.

O Pallas, O saviour of my house!

I was deprived of my paternal land,

But you have brought me home. And in Greece it will be said:

The man is an Argive again, and is home amid his paternal

Property, because of Pallas and Apollo and the Third who fulfills all,

The Saviour. He showed respect towards a father's fate,

And saves me, as he saw these advocates of my mother.

Now I will depart, after pledging my oath to this land and your people
 For the future, even to the fullness of all time to come,
 That no man, no leader of my land will come here
 To bear against them a spear of hostility.
 For I myself, then in my grave, if they transgress my present oath,
 Will take revenge with baffling misfortune,
 And will make their journeys dispirited and ill-omened,
 So that they repent their toil.
 But if they keep their oath, and always honour this city of Pallas
 With an army bound by alliance,
 I will be favourably disposed towards them.
 Farewell to you, and to the city's people.
 May you grasp your enemies in an unbreakable hold,
 That brings salvation and victory in battle.

Athene has announced that the vote has been equal and Orestes is thus free. Orestes delivers his thanks, offers promises for the future and leaves. It is worth stating from the outset that at this point the focus shifts. A third of the play is yet to come; the concern is not with Orestes as aristocratic diplomat nor with Orestes' self-destructive family. The royal family is saved in Argos, and its future royal leaders are linked permanently to Athens, as the focus shifts to the polis of Pallas. From here on, it is the city that is at stake, the city which will provide the answers and potential. One way that the *Oresteia* contributes to a discourse of politics is by taking the archetypal exemplary tale of Homer and reformulating it so that the polis, the democratic polis, becomes the condition of possibility for closure.⁷⁹

Orestes' words pick up many of the terms in which the trial and indeed the whole narrative have been formulated. He stresses first that Athene has saved his house, δόμους, and reestablished him in his oikos, κατώκισας, and returned him to the country of his fathers γαίης πατρώιας: the placement of the man in his household and in his paternal heritage is complete. So he is recognized—as the frame widens—in his international status as an Argive man secure in his paternal property: ἐν χρήμασιν οἰκεῖ πατρώιοις. So, too, he sees the trial as reinforcing the priority of the father over the mother (760–1): saving means privileging the fate of the father over the advocates of his mother. It is on this phrase, πατῶιον αἰδεσθεῖς μόνον σώιζει με, that Griffith in particular concentrates. He notes that Orestes' promise 'combines elements of inter-city alliance, inter-family networking, and hero-cult, in a manner guaranteed to appeal to every segment and level of Athenian society',⁸⁰ but adds that the support and authorization of Zeus for this relation is not merely important in linking this conclusion into the divine, cosmological narrative of the *Oresteia*, but also is depicted as the proper 'restitution [owed] to the son of the guest friend whom he had failed', Agamemnon.⁸¹ Thus Zeus's *aidos*, an odd phrase directed towards a human, as Sommerstein notes,⁸² is to be understood not so much as a general theological statement about god's care for humans and justice, as an appeal within the same frame of aristocratic networking which Griffith sees as central to the workings of aristocratic power.

The phrase before and the phrase after this expression make Griffith's argument difficult, however. Interestingly, Griffith stops his quotation of Orestes' speech mid-sentence, and thus leaves out of his discussion the qualification μητρὸς τὰσδε συνδίκους ὀρώων, 'as he saw

⁷⁹ See Goldhill (n.68) 147–54.

⁸⁰ Griffith (n.3) 104. I will return to the issue of hero-cult below.

⁸¹ Ibid. 106.

⁸² A. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus: Eumenides* (Cambridge 1989) *ad loc.*.

these advocates of my mother'. The support for a/the father is seen explicitly as the rejection of a/the mother—as the Furies had themselves pointed out (*Eum.* 640): πατὴρς προτιμᾶι Ζεὺς μῶρον. *Timé* and *aidos* are also part of an argument about privileging the father versus the mother, and not just about Zeus's commitment to Agamemnon as a *doruxenos*. The phrase I want to look at most carefully, however, is the description of Zeus immediately preceding, in 759–60: τοῦ πάντα κραινόντος τρίτου Σωτήρος. It is a complexly layered expression that goes far beyond its usual gloss as a 'ritual formula'. For the imagery of the third, as Burian and Clay have emphasized,⁸³ is repeatedly used in the *Oresteia* to mark an idea of ending, that turns out to be no ending. Most recently in the *Eumenides* at 589 the Furies claimed to have won the first of the three falls necessary for victory, and the final lines of the *Choephoroi* had wondered precisely if the third saviour had come, or should it be called doom. Can Zeus now for the first time be truly called Saviour and Fulfiller, as Sommerstein suggests?⁸⁴ Or is it only Orestes' tale that ends, for Orestes that he is saviour, and there is yet more for Zeus—Zeus Agoraios—to achieve (as Athene will go on to suggest in her debate with the Furies)? But Zeus is not merely τρίτου Σωτήρος, he is also τοῦ πάντα κραινόντος, 'the fulfiller of all'. This recalls in particular the language of the *Agamemnon*. At 369, it was said of Zeus ἔπραξεν ὡς ἔκρανευ: 'he did as he fulfilled', a tautological choral attempt to find some patterning in events. Similarly, at 1485–6 the chorus, struggling to deal with the regicide, call on Zeus παναιτίου πανεργέτα, 'responsible for all, doer of all'. Apollo has claimed Zeus to be on the side of the matricide, and here the agent of the matricide marks Zeus as the fulfiller, but does so in language which recalls the overdetermination of causation and responsibility which has made the sense of action in the *Oresteia* so difficult. At the culminating moment of Orestes' story, then, it is not the self-destruction of the household but its safety that is emphasized, but this is subject to the divine narrative and its culmination not merely of the trial's commitment to gender roles, but also to the thoroughly un-Aristotelian discourse of causation and action stretching back through the *Oresteia*.⁸⁵ What constitutes action and indeed ending, fulfilment, is itself a question which the *Oresteia* repeatedly poses—and which should not be occluded here. Thus the speech of Orestes does not merely celebrate his and his house's safety, but also reminds the audience of the god-driven complexities of action that have led to this moment and that stand against the proclamation of any single security of human achievement. That the 'end' of Orestes and his house is not the end of the play's understanding of the narrative is immediately instantiated in the continuing hostility of the Furies, now aimed at the polis of Athens itself. There is in the Aeschylean tragic world always a recognition of the dark webs of involvement beneath even a shining triumph.

The second section of Orestes' speech from 762 to the end pledges support to Athens for all time, before making his farewell and wishing the city victory in his final three lines. Again, the language recalls much of the terminology of conflict in the *Oresteia* elsewhere, but I want here rather to raise a question that critics have rather skated over: Orestes' announcement of his own heroization (767–8).⁸⁶ He talks of burial and his continuing force after death to the benefit of Athens—although Aeschylus obscures the siting of a grave. Now in Homer, the promise of a tomb is a promise of memorial, a recompense of glory for future generations to know; and figures often claim or promise a tomb. But it is extremely rare for a character in drama to announce his own future heroization. Heracles, for example, at the end of the *Trachiniae* is notoriously taciturn about his forthcoming transfiguration. The only two examples, I believe, are both Attic

⁸³ P. Burian, 'Zeus Σώτηρ Τρίτος and some triads in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *AJP* 107 (1986) 332–42; D. Clay, 'Aeschylus' Trigeron Muthos', *Hermes* 97 (1969) 1–9.

⁸⁴ Sommerstein (n.82) *ad loc.*

⁸⁵ I have discussed the un-Aristotelian nature of Aeschylean 'action' in S. Goldhill, 'Character and action, representation and reading: Greek tragedy and its critics', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1990).

⁸⁶ See Sommerstein (n.82) *ad* 767; Griffith (n.3) 104 n.131; Macleod (n.56) 126.

heroes, namely Eurystheus at the end of the *Heracleidae* and Oedipus at the end of the *Oedipus Coloneus*. In both these cases, there is elaborate preparation for the heroization, with explicit reference to a divine oracle foretelling and authorizing the transfiguration. And in the *Oedipus Coloneus* for sure, and probably in the *Heracleidae*, the death is reported.⁸⁷ As Wilkins comments: 'the institution of a hero cult...was an extraordinary event in need of divine sanction'.⁸⁸ Yet here there is none. Although the repeated plurals of self-reference and the language of oaths makes Orestes' proclamation suitably grand and binding, it is not the word of God. So what should one make, if anything, of this strange self-ritualization? A continuation of divine support for Orestes creating a homology between hero cult and the military alliance promised? Is this homology confused by any recollection of the shenanigans over Orestes' bones reported by Herodotus? Or any possible doubts about the Argive alliance? Or the vagueness of the cult aetiology? The pattern of ritual transgression followed by ritual re-establishment is a well-known structure of the *Oresteia*'s normative discourse, but the combination of military treaty with a ritual of future hero cult makes for me a strange moment in the discourse of power and politics in the trilogy. The brief statement of the establishment of cult here—well before the final scene of the play and its depiction of (lasting) ritual—is difficult to see as fitting neatly into Seaford's model of closure in hero cult.

Indeed, one might go so far as to suggest that the oddness of this expression of the institution of cult marks an important openness in the connection of ritual and politics for Aeschylus and his audience. While the treaty between Argos and Athens is represented positively in this speech and in the trilogy in general, the role of the bones of Orestes and the siting of the tomb are less straightforward matters. The vagueness of Aeschylus' Orestes importantly allows for a non-specific though supportive association of the ancient Argive royal family and the Athenian polis. The political language is carefully indirect where a more precise declaration of a cultic establishment could be difficult.

The inscription of the political language of Orestes' final speech in the narrative web of the *Oresteia* thus encourages the dissemination of political discourse by interweaving even the terms of military alliance within the discourse of divinity, action, causation, power, memory, ritual that so dominate the narrative of the trilogy. It is this interweaving, this dissemination, that both Griffith's and Seaford's readings have difficulty, it seems to me, in incorporating into their general models. Neither reading can cope adequately with the narrativization of its politics. As we have seen, how Aeschylus represents action and the politics of cult is more intricate and layered than either Griffith or Seaford allows.

This conclusion leads finally, it would seem, once again to underline how a discussion of politics in the *Oresteia* is inevitably informed by the issue of closure, or more precisely, of how closed and how open a reading to offer of the politics of the trilogy. I do not wish to review here the language of closure in the *Oresteia*, or to run through the many arguments that have been constructed about the teleology of the trilogy or its tension with the openness of the language of social order.⁸⁹ Rather, what I wish to emphasize is the *certainty* with which Seaford in particular expresses his position on the political conclusion of the trilogy. 'The questions are indeed answered and the conflicts resolved', he declares, despite his recognition of 'the text's manifest complexity and ambiguity'.⁹⁰ Ambiguity, anxiety, even 'the contestation of linguistic ambiguity'⁹¹

⁸⁷ *OC*. 1518 ff. for the announcement; *OC* 1579–1669 for the death narrative; *Herac.* 983 ff. for the announcement, but the lacuna after 1052 makes certainty about the representation of his death impossible.

⁸⁸ J. Wilkins, *Euripides Heracleidae* (Oxford 1993) ad 1026–8.

⁸⁹ I have discussed this elsewhere in S. Goldhill (n.68) 33–56; *Aeschylus: The Oresteia* (Cambridge 1992), both with further bibliography.

⁹⁰ Seaford, 'Historicizing tragic ambivalence' (n.46), 208; see also Seaford (n.3) 363–7.

⁹¹ Seaford (n.3) 366 n.134.

may be recognized, only as long as there is no diminution of the clear political conclusion—about social cohesion through ritual. This certainty about clarity and ambiguity, I suggest, has its own agenda(s). Reading for closure or reading for ambiguity is always already a politicized positioning, an engagement. I am as unswayed by a claim of ambiguity when it is applied to the anti-semitic writing of Paul de Man, as I am dismayed by the certainty with which the Bible is read to justify the violent re-possession of land. The issue is not simply ‘is it ambiguous or not?’, ‘open or not?’, but ‘what is at stake in our *determination* that it is ambiguous, open or not?’ The question for scholars engaged in such a project, then—including me, of course—is ‘how to write, critically informed by such self-consciousness?’⁹²

What I hope to have shown in this article is first that arguments which attempt to depoliticize the Great Dionysia by appealing to an aim of intense emotion or ‘tragic pleasure’ have poor historical grounding. Their avoidance of a developed cultural analysis offers a very truncated and distorted view of the festival indeed. But, perhaps as importantly, the privileging of an emotional response over and against a political or intellectual response to drama also ignores how tragedies themselves stage and discuss the emotional. Tragedy repeatedly dramatizes strong emotional reactions as one element in responses to the world, and is prepared to discuss the place of powerful emotions in society. Although the emotions are an integral factor in tragedy, it is only one part of an intricate event. There is a politics and history of the emotions also. Second I have tried to explore the politics of the Dionysia by looking again at its rituals, and by qualifying my own earlier account. I have stressed how the festival itself, plays and rituals, cannot be adequately appreciated without an awareness of its ideological dimension, but also how this involves a complex dynamic of potential transgression and of potential engagements and recognitions. I have argued thus for a need to recognize not merely the complexity and flexibility of ideology in action, but also the complexity and flexibility—and variety—of audience response. Third, I have looked at how the *Oresteia* has been read as a political document within this frame, and how, for all the sophistication of recent criticism, there is still a difficulty in relating the polysemous text to the production of political meaning. I suggested, finally, that a greater self-awareness of the reader’s own engagement in a political discourse might help move us away from the easy rhetorical polarization of closed and open, ambiguous and clear messages.

The discussion of tragedy and the polis, which inevitably involves each critic in the *agon* of producing, controlling, debating political meaning, seems likely to continue, and to continue with its current intensity. This, however, is *one* reason why the study of tragedy continues to be particularly worthwhile in the current academy, and why we should be engaged in it.⁹³

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⁹² Since one of the readers for *JHS* wrongly believed that this paragraph indicated that I was claiming that all readings were equally valid, I had better be clear—once again—that I have absolutely no truck with that particular trivializing view. The issue here is how does one deal with the recognition that political discourse is inevitably read from a political perspective, even in the search for neutrality. No doubt, my own political belief that commitment and openness are not necessarily mutually exclusive values is reflected in my critical perspective on the *Oresteia* (as are the political positionings of other critics).

⁹³ This article once had a different shape as the T.B.L. Webster Memorial lecture at Stanford University. I wish to record my thanks to all involved in the invitation and discussion there. Thanks, too, to the Editor (who encouraged me to remove all the jokes) and the readers of *JHS*. The piece is dedicated to Professor Pat Easterling, with whom I have been discussing Greek drama for many years—to my constant education and pleasure.