
This book is based on a 1998/99 Münster doctoral dissertation; it is not clear to what extent it has been revised, though there are a few references to subsequent publications. It is built around a reading, or rather three partial readings, of Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* (hereafter *Supp.*) which constitute Chapter 4; these focus respectively on the theme of flight, on the Danaids’ techniques of persuasion, and on actions that can be categorized as overstepping of boundaries. Chapter 1 is an introduction; Chapter 2 analyses the phenomenon of supplication in Greek society generally; Chapter 3 explores treatments of it in the Homeric epics and in six tragic dramas. Lastly, Chapter 5 seeks to reach conclusions about the significance of ritual in Greek, and especially in Aeschylean, tragedy as a whole. (The title of this final chapter is ‘Tragödie – Ritual und Rhetorik’, but both here and in the rest of the book ritual consistently gets the lion’s share of attention).

G.’s interpretative principles (pp. 8–10, 75–79) strongly privilege the text as the object of interpretation. She says, to be sure (p. 78), that she does not wish to imply that stage-realization is of secondary importance compared with the text and its reading, but she proceeds not merely to imply, but to assert, just that. Her concern is with the ‘virtual performance’ which «der dramatische Text selbst entfaltet … auch ohne Bühne»; she will not ask «ob die Personen des Dramas die Hikesie-Gesten, auf die ihr Sprechen verweist, tatsächlich ausführen»; the action (Geschehen) of a drama is constituted by «was die Figuren sagen … nicht, was sie in einer von vielen möglichen Bühnenrealisierungen des Textes tun». This approach, for which she claims the authority of Aristotle (p. 76), totally ignores what she herself calls the ‘historical finding’ that «die Tragödien des fünften Jahrhunderts … sicher nicht für die Lektüre konzipiert wurden»; it ignores the fact that the author of the text was also the composer, choreographer, director, stage-manager, and in Aeschylus’ case the lead actor too; it ignores the fact that authors of the fifth century (Gorgias, Aristophanes), when they discuss the good or bad effects of drama, invariably think of its effect on the spectator, not on the reader. Of course it is impossible to reconstruct all the original (oral) stage-directions for *Supp.* or for any other ancient play. What follows from that, however, is that our knowledge of the play can never be complete; not that we are entitled to treat the part we know about as if it were the whole. We can reasonably expect that the non-verbal aspects of the performance will hardly ever have contradicted the clear implications of the verbal text; but they may quite often have crucially guided the audience’s interpretation of passages which for a reader are ambiguous – a very important consideration for an interpreter who relies as heavily as G. on reading significance into ambiguities.

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1 One of many things that remain unclear throughout the book is precisely what G. means by ‘ritual’. On p. 23 n. 53 she cites three definitions of ritual from recent studies of Greek religion (by Bremmer, Burkert and Zaidman & Pantel); these definitions are not equivalent, and G. gives no indication which, if any, of them she endorses. For another see S. Scullion, ‘Nothing to do with Dionysus’: tragedy misconceived as ritual, ClQu 52, 2002, 162–137, at pp. 130–1 (well thought out, but too restrictive in requiring that a ritual be performed ‘at regular intervals’).
Some of G.’s other principles and axioms are equally dubious. She takes it for granted (p. 21 and elsewhere) that the play was entitled *Hiketides* when it was originally performed and that the title will have influenced its audience’s reception and interpretation of it. In fact it is very doubtful whether plays which, like *Supp.*, were components of connected trilogies had separate titles at all in Aeschylus’ time; if they did, it is extraordinary that two of the five such plays certainly by Aeschylus that have survived, *Seven against Thebes and Eumenides*, have titles that do not fit their content.1 G. takes it for granted, too, that the ‘mythological history’ dramatized in tragedy ‘nicht bloß der Unterhaltung dient, sondern im Kontext eines Kultes oder Rituals anzusiedeln ist’ (p. 7). If this is a statement about myth in general, it is either false or else so vague as to be useless: even if all Greek myths were in some sense ritual in origin (and few would now wish to be dogmatic about that), they are so flexible, so freely alterable, that most classical Greeks must have lost any sense of a connection between a given (centuries-old, much-changed) myth and the (centuries-old, scarcely-changed) ritual with which it had once been associated.2 If it is a statement about the plots of tragedy, it stands or falls with the belief that tragic drama was itself, in some sense and to some extent, a cultic or ritual event; a belief which G. certainly holds (cf. p. 225, «Weder ist die Aufführung eines Dramas im Dionysos-Theater ausschließlich Religion noch lediglich Kunst»), in common with much of present-day scholarship, but which rests on very shaky foundations.3

Repeatedly G. commits the fallacy of illegitimate conversion, inferring ‘all A is B’ from ‘all B is A’. She argues, for example (p. 147) that by saying at the start of *Supp.* that they are in flight (καταφύτα, v. 3) the Danaids «geben … ihr Selbstverständnis als Schutzflehenden … als Flüchtlinge» That is a doubly bad argument. In the first place, it is not true, even in Aeschylus, that a suppliant is necessarily a person in flight: Thyestes became a suppliant (προσφρόντιος) to Atreus when he returned from the exile into which Atreus had previously driven him (Ag. 1583–8) and, to look to other authors, Priam in the *Iliad*, Hekabe in Euripides’ *Hekabe*, Iphigenia in his *Iphigenia at Aulis* – all texts discussed by G. in the previous chapter – become suppliants without ever having been fugitives in any sense. In the second place, even if all suppliants were fugitives, it would not follow that all fugitives were suppliants. Nor is this argument even necessary to establish the conclusion: the Danaids ‘proclaim their understanding of themselves as suppliants’, before they have said a word, by the wreathed olive-branches they are carrying. It is true that G. has forbidden herself to take account of this, because the branches happen not to be mentioned in the text until vv. 21–22; but the Danaids proclaim their suppliant status in words too at the very outset by praying to Ζεύς θενιότος.

1 In *Seven*, Thebes and the Thebans are never referred to under those names; in *Eumenides* the Erinys are called Erinys, Arai and (at the end) Semnai ‘Theai, but never Eumenides. See Hermes 117, 1989, 433–6 and my article ‘The titles of Greek dramas’, to appear in SemRom.

2 In the interpretation of an ancient culture – indeed of any culture other than one’s own – it is vital to bear in mind that not all the connections between cultural phenomena that might be perceived by a sophisticated outside anthropologist can have been present to the minds of, or even subconsciously influenced the behaviour of, the persons actually within the culture. Many far better scholars than G. have forgotten this (or write as if they had).

A related fallacy appears in G.’s discussion (pp. 154–6) of the connection she sees between the Danaids’ threats of suicide and the Prokne1 myth which they refer to in vv. 60–67. Starting from the word αὐτοφονέος (v. 65), G. rightly notes that Greeks often regarded suicide and the killing of close kin as species of the same genus, both involving the shedding of one’s own blood. Relying on a rather imprecise formulation of this idea by Oudemans and Lardinois,2 she proceeds as though suicide and kin-murder could be regarded as synonymous (‘gleichbedeutend’), and argues that «Prokne … wird, indem der Mord [des Itys] auch als Selbstmord lesbar wird, mit ihrem Sohn identisch» and, conversely, that references by the Danaids to suicide «auch als Spiegelung des bevorstehenden Verwandtenmordes deuten». Presumably this valuable interpretative tool can be applied more widely: Orestes becomes his own mother; Eteokles and Polyneikes are virtually one person; Lokaste’s suicide is also (why not?) a symbolic killing of the son who has ruined her life …

All too often G.’s prose is impenetrably obscure. I have many times given up in despair the attempt to fathom what her conclusion is on this or that issue (it is sometimes easier to establish what her conclusion is not). The conclusion of the whole book is a fair sample; I do not pretend to know what it means:

«Aischylos eignet sich das Spezifische seines Materials – der Mythen, der Riten – an und entwickelt daraus die Gesetze seiner Dramen-Poetik. Indem er dabei die Tradition zerlegt, um sie neu zusammenzusetzen, zeigt er das seine Kultur bestimmende Gleiche – die Mythen, die Riten – als ihr Anderes.»

The conclusions drawn from the specific analyses of epic and tragic supplications, in Chapter 3, are a little clearer (pp. 143–6), but not very enlightening: either too narrow to be general, or too broad to be useful. Supplication, we are told, «dient … häufig dazu, einen Raum zu schaffen, aus dem heraus derjenige, der bereits dem Tod anheim gegeben ist, noch zu sprechen vermag». Even if, as we must, we water down ‘delivered into the hands of death’ to ‘threatened with death’ – as G. does in her next sentence – it still does not apply to all or even most of the cases considered in the chapter. When, on the other hand, we learn that something common to all these cases alike is ‘ihr Interesse an einer Auseinandersetzung mit der strukturellen Dynamik von Übergängen, von Passagen’, the only possible response is ‘so what?’ Such an interest is not characteristic of supplication scenes in particular: every story worth telling is going to contain transitions, passages, changes of state or status, what Aristotle called μεταβολή, and certainly every tragic drama does. Equally G.’s claim that the situation of the suppliant is often presented as «ein Grenzen aufhebendes Zugleich von Leben und Tod» (p. 145) is of little interest until it is shown that this is distinctively associated with supplication scenes: the Greek drama, after all, in which this paradoxical interplay of life and death is most strongly stressed is Sophocles’ Antigone – which contains no supplication scene (though it easily might have done – say during Antigone’s last appearance on stage – had Sophocles so wished).

What of the reading(s) of Supp. itself? G. certainly has some good interpretations of particular issues, though few of them are new; but some other conclusions bear little relation to the evidence. In her discussion of the passages in

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1 We do not know whether Tereus’ wife was known to Aeschylus by the name of Prokne, but like G. I shall for convenience call her so.

2 Oudemans and Lardinois cite R. Parker, Miasma (Oxford, 1983) 123 and n. 73; but Parker there in turn refers to his Appendix 2 (p. 351), and there we read merely that αὐτοφονέος and some other αὐτό- compounds ‘are used in tragedy of kin-murder, and occasionally of suicide’.
which the Danaids exploit the story of Io to bolster their claim for protection (whether addressing Pelasgos or Zeus) she concludes that behind both of them stands the insight «daß Überzeugung sich nicht in erster Linie der Wahrheit verdankt, sondern einer mimetischen Fähigkeit zur Produktion von Geschichten, die der Wahrheit ähnlich sind» (p. 197). If this is the insight that Aeschylus is trying to convey, he has chosen a very odd way of conveying it. In speaking to Pelasgos (vv. 291–322) the Danaids succeed in convincing him that they are of Argive descent by telling him facts about Io’s life in Argos which he knows to be true (cf. v. 310) and presenting a genealogy linking Io with themselves which is presumably also true. In addressing Zeus, the Danaids base their claim on the fact that they are his descendants, by Io, through Epaphos (vv. 527–535, 588–9); that is true too. Both arguments, however, might seem to founder on the fact that the Danaids’ hated pursuers are also descended from Zeus and Io through Epaphos. In their appeal to Pelasgos the Danaids actually mentioned this, unbidden (vv. 321–3) – and still the appeal was successful, because it is backed by the power of the suppliant to threaten divine wrath if his/her plea is ignored. In their appeal to Zeus they suppress the inconvenient fact – and still the appeal is unsuccessful, because Zeus can neither be hoodwinked nor blackmailed (despite the Danaids’ attempt to do so in vv. 154–175). If these scenes suggest anything at all about what persuasion depends on, they suggest it depends, not on the ability to tell a plausible tale, but on the ability (i) to produce true, checkable facts and (ii) where the facts are against you, to do some arm-twisting.

The best thing in the book is the discussion of touching (pp. 219–238). This creatively and revealingly links a range of touchings that are of importance in Supp.: the saving, healing, generative touching of Io by Zeus (which is nevertheless at least once explicitly [v. 1067], and perhaps once implicitly [v. 315 ἱεροῖς], spoken of as an act of violence1); the violence (often spoken of using verbs like ἐρήμωσθαν or ἄχμητεθαν) which the Danaids fear or suffer from their cousins; and the violence which their cousins will later suffer at their hands. The hand itself, the instrument of touch, is brought into the analysis, from the ‘hand-held things’ (ἐργηθέντα) of v. 21 which are both olive-branches and (by anticipation) daggers to the hands that ‘make the air quiver’ (628) when they are raised to vote the decree of asylum in the Argive assembly.2 There are rich thematic linkages here, which could well be pursued into further ramifications (the imagery of Supp. has been nothing like as well analysed as that of the Oresteia). This section might well have had a stronger impact had it been published as a separate article.

But as a whole, the book is deeply disappointing. This is largely due to G.’s inability – quite understandable in a graduate student – to maintain sufficient critical distance from the scholars in whose footsteps she is avowedly following. She speaks of her text-based approach as «ein wenig aus der Mode» (p. 9). On the contrary: she is all too unquestioning a follower of fashion.

Alan H. Sommerstein