

# Family and Fatherland in Euripides' *Phoenissae*

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OF ALL Euripides' plays, *Phoenissae* is the one that, since antiquity, has been most diversely judged. It was much admired in some quarters in ancient times, but the hypothesis complains of its overcrowded and episodic character, and the scholiast of an irreconcilable confusion of themes at the end. Since then it has been praised as a masterpiece and abused without moderation. In this century it has been described as an incoherent work lacking all unity of tone or construction, as a lively but wholly unserious pageant or dramatic fantasia, as a conscious variation on a well-known subject, and as a sombre, highly organised drama. Scholars in recent years have mostly attempted to defend its coherence,<sup>1</sup> either by excising large parts as interpolations, as Friedrich and Fraenkel have done, without however gaining general adherence for their views;<sup>2</sup> or else by seeking unity of theme either in the play's pessimistic religious attitude, with its denial of all divine care and justice, as P. Treves did;<sup>3</sup> or in the fate of Thebes itself as the heroine of the play, as was most notably done by W. Riemschneider;<sup>4</sup> or, as A. J. Podlecki recently, in the pattern of images in the work.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly there are allusions to earlier plays in *Phoenissae*; certainly Treves' view of the divine background of the play appears to be largely just—the daemon responsible for the woes of the House of Labdacus is not a moral force, and the only greater god to intervene,

<sup>1</sup> Some still stress the lack of unity: A. Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen* (Göttingen 1956) 191; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1961) 351.

<sup>2</sup> W.-H. Friedrich, "Prolegomena zu den *Phoenissen*," *Hermes* 74 (1939) 265–300; contra Schmid-Stählin, *GGL* I.3 (Munich 1940) 862–68. Ed. Fraenkel, "Zu den *Phoenissen* des Euripides," *SBMünchen* (1963) 3–120, is opposed, to my mind convincingly, by H. Diller, *Gnomon* 36 (1964) 641–50, and especially H. Erbse, "Beiträge zum Verständnis der Euripideischen *Phoenissae*," *Philologus* 110 (1966) 1–34.

<sup>3</sup> P. Treves, "Le Fenicie di Euripide," *AeR* 11 (1930) 171–95.

<sup>4</sup> W. Riemschneider, *Held und Staat in Euripides' Phoenissen* (Berlin 1940).

<sup>5</sup> A. J. Podlecki, "Some Themes in Euripides' *Phoenissae*," *TAPA* 93 (1962) 355–73.

Ares, is hardly an instrument of justice in his desire for revenge on the descendants of the Sown Men. But many of the references to divine will are vague and glancing, and this aspect of the play is hardly pervasive enough to produce the disputed unity. The same is true of Podlecki's image-patterns, though here too interesting features of the play have been identified. There are the wild beasts threatening Thebes (Polyneices and Tydeus, later Polyneices and his brother are so described, and Podlecki associates with these the real monsters, the Dragon of Ares and the Sphinx—though as we shall see they have other functions as well). There are the often ironic images of dance and song: the chorus evokes the dances of Dionysus, and the conflicting dances of Ares (228, 655, 784ff), Jocasta dances with joy to see Polyneices (314–17), the walls of Thebes rose to the sound of Amphion's lyre (824)—but soon we hear of the inharmonious song of the Sphinx (807, 1028, 1506), and Antigone has left the chorus of bacchantes to appear as a "bacchant of the dead" (1490). Podlecki's other two themes are not to be found throughout the entire play. The contrast between words conveying brightness and darkness, sight and blindness is, as he really admits, several different contrasts found in different scenes. The prologue, the *teichoskopia* and part of the *parodos* sparkle with gold and bronze; the scene between Polyneices and his mother is touched with black and the sad white of Jocasta's hair; sight becomes important as the brothers refuse to look at each other; blindness is the mark of Teiresias and Oedipus. But Podlecki is perhaps right to see the invocation to the sun by Jocasta (1) and by Antigone (1562) as forming a frame to the whole play. Antigone appeals to Selene, daughter of the Sun (175), and Zeus is associated with heaven and the stars in 84 and 1006 (*cf.* 182). Common as appeals to the heavens are in tragedy, there is perhaps in this play a special contrast with the stress on the earth which we shall consider below. Finally, Podlecki isolates the idea of victory in a contest; certainly the word *καλλίνικος* is used a number of times and always with a fearful irony<sup>6</sup>—but, like the other phrases associated with this idea, only in the second half of the play. The purpose of my paper is to suggest that the unity of *Phoenissae* lies in a theme more general and in language that permeates the work more consistently than any that these critics have put forward.

<sup>6</sup> 855, 1048, 1059, 1253, 1374–75; the victory of the Cecropids, of Oedipus over the Sphinx, of Menoeceus, of Eteocles over his brother, all have their disastrous side. *Cf.* also 1728–29 if genuine.

It is one of the merits of the political interpretation (often carried too far and made too exclusive) to have shown that the scene of Menoeceus' self-devotion is not an irrelevant piece of romantic melodrama. The boy who gladly sacrifices his life for Thebes is there to show himself all that is most unlike his cousins, the quarrelling brothers Eteocles and Polyneices, who place their private desires above the good of their country. Menoeceus' departing words, with their lesson of unselfish patriotism, must have been meant to leave a deep impression on their audience in the unhappy years of 410 or 409: if each man were to take the best thing he has and contribute it to the common good, our cities would prosper better (1013–18). As Mme de Romilly has shown,<sup>7</sup> the contrast between public interest and private ambition is one that, as can be seen from Thucydides and Aristophanes, was being formulated in these very years, under the impact of Alcibiades' self-willed career and the egoism of the leading oligarchs of 411. Euripides has here given to his favourite scene of self-sacrifice by a young and innocent person a newly sharp political meaning.<sup>8</sup> Mme de Romilly rightly rejects, however, attempts to draw closer parallels between characters in *Phoenissae* and actual persons or events. The divided and wretched atmosphere of Athens, and its longing for reconciliation, are undoubtedly reflected, but Polyneices can hardly "be" Alcibiades, or a typical democrat either.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most important political ideas in the play, and one that links the Creon–Menoeceus scenes with the main framework of the plot, is undoubtedly that of exile, so immediate, no doubt, to much of the audience at the time. Polyneices' exile is established by Jocasta in the prologue (72, 76) and stressed by Antigone on her roof, longing to embrace the "unhappy fugitive" (167) whom she can scarcely make out in the distance. The chorus welcomes Polyneices home, and he graphically describes to Jocasta the woes of exile (385ff), while she portrays as vividly those of the anxious family at home. And Oedipus and Antigone go out to exile together at the end.<sup>10</sup> In the Menoeceus

<sup>7</sup> J. de Romilly, "Les Phéniciennes d'Euripide, ou l'actualité dans la tragédie grecque," *RevPhil* 39 (1965) 28–47, and "Phoenician Women of Euripides, Topicality in Greek Tragedy," *Bucknell Review* 15.3 (1967) 108–32.

<sup>8</sup> See also J. Schmitt, *Freiwillige Opfertod bei Euripides* (Giessen 1921) 7–13.

<sup>9</sup> Thus E. Delebecque, *Euripide et la guerre du Péloponnèse* (Paris 1951) 347–64, and R. Goossens, *Euripide et Athènes* (Brussels 1962) 600–22, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Though Kitto, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 357, still holds the view he put forward in "The Final Scenes of the *Phoenissae*," *CR* 53 (1939) 104–11, that Antigone's decision to accompany Oedipus is an interpolation.

scene Creon desires his son to save himself by flight, a course that the boy himself connects with cowardice and consequent evil repute (1003–05).

The chorus of Phoenician women has doubtless been chosen for various reasons; not so much, as the scholiast suggests, because a foreign chorus could blame Eteocles freely—it does not do so at any length—but to contrast with the closely involved chorus of Aeschylus' *Septem* (and possibly those of Euripides' other plays this year); to complete the account of the House of Labdacus by recalling its oriental origin; because its exotic nature was visually and musically attractive; perhaps even because Athens was at this time interested in Phoenician Carthage, whence these women, who have travelled *via* the Ionian sea, seem to have come. But in addition, this chorus is composed of exiles (though the word is not used and they do not complain of their lot) and indeed of slaves, though slaves of a god are something special (205, 221, 225). We should recall that Jocasta describes exile itself as slavery (392), and Polyneices shortly after concurs (395); later he complains of being driven from his country “like a slave, instead of Oedipus' son” (628). For Antigone, too, life abroad had presented itself as slavery, as a prisoner of war at Mycenae or Lerna (185–89), and at 1606–07 Oedipus (contradicting Jocasta, who in the prologue had told us that he was brought up as Polybus' son) says that his childhood abroad was spent in slavery. Eteocles' definition of the condition is simply that of not ruling (520).

It would seem that we should be coming closer to Euripides if we saw these ideas, of patriotism and unselfishness, exile and slavery, as modes of relation to one's country. Some critics have seen that *Phoenissae* has a ‘Doppelthema’, that it concerns both Thebes and the House of Labdacus. But it is possible to be more precise. The main preoccupation of the play, I suggest, is the investigation of the various relationships, right and wrong, to one's family and one's country. Indeed, the country, “the fatherland that gave me birth” (996) or “that brought me up” (280, *cf.* 626), is in a sense only an extension of the family.

*Γῆ*, *χθών*, *πατρίς* are words of extreme frequency in the play (*πόλις* is also common).<sup>11</sup> Euripides is talking of country in the most physical

<sup>11</sup> *γῆ*: 5, 51, 73, 154, 174, 216, 245, 280, 295, 505, 511, 518, 571, 603, 638, 670, 673, 681, 686, 688, 715, 799, 867, 933, 939, 981, 1008, 1019, 1045, 1056, 1058, 1089, 1090, 1092, 1186, 1196, 1198, 1203, 1225, 1290, 1313, 1448, 1586, 1589, 1591, 1594, 1621, 1633, 1655, 1746. *γαῖα*: 626, 674, 806,

sense; the land, the earth itself. Features of the city of Thebes are rarely evoked, except for the walls and the seven gates—and even these are described as κληῖθρα γᾶς (1058). The citadel is not mentioned, nor any temples inside the walls save that of Persephone and Demeter. The citizens are unimportant, except in the field; and no ideals or qualities are associated with them, as pity, justice and the rule of law are associated with Athens in Euripides' *Suppliants* and elsewhere (and justice with Thebes in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, 919, 929, 937). It is the immediate countryside of Thebes that is called up. The old man in the *teichoskopia* introduces us to the features that will be celebrated again and again, the plain (fertile in corn, or else the scene of battle)<sup>12</sup> and the two rivers, Ismenus and Dirce (101–02).<sup>13</sup> These rivers were, of course, a striking symbol of what Euripides elsewhere calls the διπότημος πόλις (*Suppliants* 621), and the plain is recalled in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (1312); but no other play on a Theban subject makes as much of them as Euripides does here.

In the parodos, the chorus long to reach Parnassus “leaving Dirce behind” (238). The first stasimon (638–89) calls up the time before the city was even founded, when “Tyrian Cadmus came to this land” that he was fated to colonise, to its fertile plains and its river Dirce. It is further evoked by the birth of Dionysus and his rites, which themselves recall the countryside and its fresh green growths. Euripides then leads into the story of Cadmus' slaying of the dragon, guardian of the rivers, and the sowing of the dragon's teeth. The Sparti are earthborn, and to the bloodstained earth they return. The chorus ends with an appeal to Epaphus to protect the land and to send the goddesses Persephassa and Demeter, “Earth, nurse of all things” (686), who hold the land.<sup>14</sup>

818, 900, 948, 1007, 1012, 1065, 1152, 1417, 1423, 1738; γηγενής: 931, 935, 1131; χθών: 6, 52, 72, 76, 80, 112, 271, 287, 485, 591, 601, 614, 635, 672, 776, 810, 883, 937, 998, 1014, 1101, 1182, 1184, 1233, 1366, 1628, 1682; πατρίς: 280, 359, 388, 406, 477, 488, 493, 605, 607, 609, 756, 918, 969, 996, 1004, 1017, 1030, 1376, 1629, 1735 (and πάτρα 573); πόλις: 46, 117, 153, 179, 214, 369, 439, 533, 537, 560, 570, 613, 629, 712, 831, 884, 893, 898, 925, 947, 993, 997, 1004, 1017, 1038, 1041, 1122, 1134, 1155, 1176, 1252, 1652, 1657.

<sup>12</sup> The tomb of Zethus (145) and of the Seven Maidens (159) are outside the city walls. Polyneices stands by the latter—perhaps, as Treves, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3), suggests, this is of ill omen to Jocasta and her sons.

<sup>13</sup> Argos is later also evoked by its river: “go to Argos and call on the waters of Lerna” (613). Cf. 126, 187.

<sup>14</sup> In the Oxford text of a disputed passage, γᾶ or γαῖα has been used eight times (638, 670, 673, 674, 681, 686, 688—plus γαπετεῖς 668), χθών once (672), πεδία once (643), γύαι thrice (646, 648, 669).

The second stasimon (784–832) evokes the green banks of, this time, Ismenus, and the Sparti again, with the discord that divided them, and the Sphinx, *πένθεα γαίᾱς*, sent by “Hades below the earth” (810). It apostrophises Gaia herself, who bore the Sparti, and tells of the walls that sprang up by the ford of the twin rivers where Dirce waters the green plain in front of Ismenus (825–27).

Having made clear what the land in this play is, we may turn to the family and see how the themes interact. A number of critics have realised that it is the fortunes of the whole royal family, not those of any individual in it, that concern us in this play. Pohlenz very rightly contrasts the approach of Aeschylus and Euripides to such a subject: “für Aeschylus bleibt bei allem inneren Zwist das Geschlecht eine organische Einheit,” but Euripides “sieht nur noch eine Familie, die ganz verschiedene Menschen, individuelle Charaktere hervorbringt.”<sup>15</sup> But it is not merely the House of Labdacus (and, we should add, Creon and his family, who are not Labdacids, and even Adrastus, connected only by marriage) that we are to consider; it is family life as such, in a period of strife and war.

No one could miss the relevance of Polyneices' remark at 374, “how fearful a thing, mother, is enmity within a family.” But while it is obviously true that any play based on a story like the one before us must inevitably make many references to the family, yet the perpetual stress on family relationships, family duties, family feelings in Euripides' language here has not been brought out in detail, or in its counterpoint to relationships, duties and feelings to one's country.

Jocasta's prologue makes the various ties of kinship clear (note how soon and precisely she introduces her brother Creon, 11), and with this the ways in which the family relationships have become confused and poisoned.<sup>16</sup> Oedipus' very conception was against Apollo's oracle; he was brought up by false parents, and killed his true father and married his true mother; his sons have shut him up disrespectfully, and he has cursed them. In the second scene the old man introduces Antigone by a phrase foreshadowing her later rôle as Oedipus' helper (88), and refers to her mother, who has given permission for the excursion to the roof, and her brother; Antigone's sisterly feelings need no stressing, and she longs to embrace Polyneices (165)—physical con-

<sup>15</sup> M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*<sup>2</sup> (Göttingen 1954) 380.

<sup>16</sup> Some of the details in the narrative that Kitto complains of as irrelevant, such as who named which daughter, convey a vivid impression of family life (*op.cit.* [*supra* n.1] 358).

tacts, right and wrong, between family members are to be important in the play.

When Polyneices appears, he identifies himself (very properly) by his descent on both sides (288–90); and the chorus, which claims a part in events by virtue of its own blood-relation, or that of its rulers, to the royal house of Thebes, summons Jocasta forth as “mother who bore this man” to throw her arms round her child (300). Jocasta’s lyrical outburst refers to this relationship several times, and describes the embrace in some detail (306–09); she hints at the connection of family and country by saying that Polyneices’ exile has left his father’s house and all Thebes desolate (318–21). She passes from the old father’s grief to her own, and her regret at having, like the city and the river Ismenus, no part in the ceremonies of Polyneices’ marriage abroad, which would seem to have been as disastrous and unnatural as so many other of the family relationships (343). Has it not brought a hostile army against Thebes? Whoever or whatever is to blame, it is Jocasta who suffers (354). And the chorus chimes in with an assertion of the strangeness and power of mother-love: the whole race of women loves its children (356).

In Polyneices’ reply, country and family are for the first time linked; desire for his home and fear of his brother mingle. He insists that everyone in reality loves his fatherland, whatever they may say (358–360, *cf.* 406–07)—perhaps some cynical Athenians had been denying it. He too conceives of this fatherland very concretely, weeping at the sight of his own home, the well-known altars, and “the gymnasia in which I was bred, and the water of Dirce” (368). But now he has another country, “I live in a strange city” (369–70); this tension is to be significant. But it is his position with regard to his old family that is now elaborated; he grieves at the sight of his mother and cries out, as we saw, against disunity in the family (374). He asks after his father and sisters. Jocasta begins by reminding us of her sons’ “lawless birth” and her “evil marriage” (380–81); she goes on to ask about her son’s exile and his own marriage. Polyneices expounds the grief of “being deprived of one’s fatherland” (388ff). What he demands of Eteocles is “a share in the land” (80, *cf.* 601) or his “home” (260, 473; *cf.* 483, 486, 574). He cannot bring himself to speak of his brother: *τοῦ φίλτατος* (434, full of irony) or *ὁμογενεῖς φίλους* (436) is as close as he can get.

As for Eteocles, he comes in with “mother” on his lips (446), but

Polyneices is only "this man" (451). "It is your brother whom you see," Jocasta reproaches him (456); and she reminds Polyneices too of this. But they remain "this man" to each other. Polyneices explains that, putting his and his brother's interest before the desire to dwell in his old home, he arranged to alternate in power with Eteocles; and he reveals that he has come to seize and sack Thebes. His boasted love of country—and of family too—thus appears in a sinister light.<sup>17</sup> (Those tempted to sympathise too much with Polyneices should recall that both brothers had shut Oedipus up, and both had been cursed by him.)

Eteocles' naked ambition for "tyranny" or power excludes even the most superficial claim to love of country; but he can lay his finger on the weak point in Polyneices' case—that he is coming "to lay waste the land" (511). And he can claim to be ready to allow his brother "to dwell in this land" as a private citizen (518).

Jocasta turns on both the young men. She ends her tirade with two questions that define their attitudes to country and family very clearly. Eteocles is asked point-blank if he loves his tyranny more than his city's safety (560). To Polyneices Jocasta points out that, if his expedition fails, his city will be safe, but he will have brought disaster on his new family at Argos; the Argives will reproach Adrastus for ruining them for a girl's marriage (580–83).

In the lively quarrel which follows, Polyneices appeals alike to the gods of his country, to his father and mother, and to his city; but Eteocles jeeringly points out that the enemy of his fatherland has no right to do so (604–08). Nor may he see his father and sisters as he asked; Argos is now his country. Polyneices seems to accept it: "no longer am I your son" (619), he says to his mother and prepares to meet Eteocles in the field. But it is Eteocles who brushes aside Jocasta's horror with *ἐρρέτω πρόπας δόμος* (624). Polyneices turns back for one last appeal for a share in his old country and family: "I call the land that bred me and the gods to witness how I am driven without honour from my country, like a slave, rather than the son of the same father" (626–28).<sup>18</sup> But he ends scandalously with the wish that he may kill the man he still will not call his brother, and "conquer this land of Thebes" (635).

<sup>17</sup> Antigone had already feared going to a strange land as slave to a harsh master (190).

<sup>18</sup> 630, like 627, ends *ἐξελαύνομαι χθονός*. Of course a slave has no share in a country by Greek standards.



There supervenes the first stasimon, which deals, as we saw, both with Cadmus, ancestor of the family, and the land he came to. Then Eteocles summons Creon, his uncle, for advice concerning both *οἰκεῖα καὶ κοινὰ χθονός* (692). Creon is drawn in strong contrast to his nephew, as the prudent, pious and apparently patriotic older man. For a while little is said that is germane to our argument, except that Polyneices' boldness is said to be inspired by his relationship to Adrastus (704); and at 730 we may note the reference to Dirce, the only topographical one in this passage. But at last Eteocles utters for the first time the word 'brother', in the shocking prayer that he may meet him in battle and vanquish him (754-55). For the rest of the family also he makes his dispensations. Creon is to see that "my sister Antigone shall marry your son Haemon" (757-59); as for his mother, for whom he earlier showed some respect, "you are my mother's brother—why should I speak at length?" (761). For his father he has only cold words. He sends "your son Menoeceus who bears the same name as your father" (769) to fetch Teiresias. Last of all he tells Creon, in the event of his own death, not to allow Polyneices burial "in this land of Thebes" (776).

The next stasimon we have already discussed. It plainly connects, in the antistrophe, the fortunes of Oedipus and his family with the misfortunes of the country.

Teiresias, in this play, is a man whose dependence on his family is complete; for Euripides has replaced the usual anonymous attendant<sup>19</sup> with the seer's own daughter; partly, it must surely be, as a prefiguration of that other pair of blind old man with supporting daughter with whom the play is to close;<sup>20</sup> partly for the more immediate pathos of the father-child relationship in a scene which reveals to Creon the threat to his son. And, as is often suggested, Teiresias' reference (855) to his part in the victory of Erechtheus at Athens may remind the audience that that king had had to sacrifice a daughter. It would perhaps be possible here to accuse Euripides of overdoing his pathos. At any rate, he drives the relationships home. "Lead on, my daughter" (834) are Teiresias' first words; "your father is weak," he continues, and asks "Menoeceus, son of Creon" how far

<sup>19</sup> There is no solid reason to suppose that the attendant in *Oedipus Rex* is the daughter, any more than in *Antigone*.

<sup>20</sup> This is observed, alone as far as I know, by J. Schmitt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) 11, and A. J. Podlecki, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 361 n.12.

it is to where his father stands (841–43). “Take hold of him, my child” (846), Creon replies.

When Teiresias speaks out, it is without riddles. “This land has long been sick, Creon; since Laius became father to a child against the will of the gods, and begot a husband to his mother, unhappy Oedipus” (867–69). None of his race should dwell or rule in the land (886–87). And he promises to reveal how to find “a saving remedy for the city” (893). Creon is at first totally convinced of his own devotion to his fatherland (900), and two lines later he asks what else one would be more eager for. And yet, when Teiresias laconically declares that he must sacrifice his own son, he cries (919),

*οὐκ ἔκλυον, οὐκ ἤκουσα· χαίρέτω πόλις.*

We may recall Eteocles' similar, and similarly wrong, dismissal of his family. The position is put with appalling clarity to poor Creon: “you must kill Menoeceus here, your son, for the sake of your fatherland” (913–14). The antithesis is posed again in 918: “evils to you, but great tidings and delivery to the fatherland” and at 952, “save either your son or your city.” But Creon is not able “to slaughter my son and give him to the city” (964), though he would die himself as “an expiation for the fatherland” (969). He insists that all mankind love their children (965), a line balancing Polyneices' earlier insistence that all men inevitably love their fatherland (358).<sup>21</sup> Both men use their assertion for selfish ends. And yet “the old man should be forgiven,” as his son pleads (994–95).

We have now arrived at what is in some respects the central scene of the play. Menoeceus' sacrifice is particularly closely connected with the land. He is in a double sense at least *ὁ γῆς ὑπερθανών*. For Ares is demanding, in return for Cadmus' killing of the earthborn snake or dragon which guarded the streams of Dirce, that on that very spot human blood should be shed for the earth to drink. Then and only then will Ares, avenger of the dragon (which is again called earth-born), and Earth herself, the mother of the Sparti, be favourable to Thebes (931–41). Menoeceus alone, who is of the dragon's seed, is an acceptable sacrifice. Eluding his father's attempt to save him by exile, “carrying me away and depriving the city of its fortune” (993), he serenely takes the duty on himself, refusing “to become a traitor to

<sup>21</sup> He is generalising further on 356, the assertion of mother-love alone.

the fatherland that gave me birth” (996).<sup>22</sup> No, as he declares, “by Zeus who dwells with the stars, and bloody Ares who once made the Sparti, sprung from the earth, lords of this land,” he will kill himself in the precinct of the dragon and “set free the land” (1006–12). “I go,” he adds, “and bringing my death as a worthy gift to the city, I will relieve the land from its sickness” (1013–14). And he ends with the generalisations about political unselfishness quoted near the beginning of this paper.

But what of Menoeceus’ relations to his family? Euripides insists upon the links between the house of Creon and the Labdacids. Creon is Jocasta’s full brother (11), his son Haemon is to marry Antigone (757), Jocasta nursed Menoeceus on his own mother’s death (987–88); and it is to her that Creon turns to prepare Menoeceus’ body for burial (1318–19). But this household had no part in the sins of Laius and Oedipus, and here father loves son, and son both father and brother, in the natural way. Menoeceus is fortunate; for him loyalty to his country and loyalty to his family do not, superficial appearances to the contrary, conflict: “am I to leave the land like a coward, betraying father and brother and my city?” (1003–05). Yet, as Jocasta is briefly to think, it is Creon who has reaped the fruit of her marriage to Oedipus. More strictly, as he and his sons are descended from Cadmus’ Sparti, so the wrath of Ares pursues them.

The third stasimon, 1019–66, opens by remembering that the Sphinx, cause of so many woes, was “offspring of Earth and the nether Snake,” and that she took her station near the water of Dirce; her acts were the source of wailing to mothers and daughters (thus to families). Then it tells of Oedipus’ arrival in “this land of Thebes,” welcome at first, and then a cause of distress “for he defiles the city.” In contrast, Menoeceus is praised “who goes to death for his fatherland, leaving grief to Creon” (1054–56),

*τὰ δ’ ἐπτάπυργα κληῖθρα γᾶς  
καλλίνικα θήσων.*

And the singers wish that they might themselves become mothers of such noble children.<sup>23</sup> A very different mother is about to appear.

<sup>22</sup> The line ending “I will go and save the city” (997) is given stress by echoing 989, the misleading promise “I will go and save my life.”

<sup>23</sup> Within the ode γῆ or γαῖα is used five times (1019, 1045, 1056, 1058, 1065), πόλις thrice (1038, 1041, 1050) and πατρίς once (1030).

Nonetheless, the messenger who summons Jocasta calls on her not as mother but as “renowned wife of Oedipus” (1070). (In all this part of the play we are kept in mind of Oedipus as preparation for his appearance.) Jocasta is eager to hear the military as well as personal news so that she can pass it on to the blind old man (1088)—a neat piece of dramatic carpentry. He will only rejoice “that this land is saved” (1089); for her—as for Menoeceus, but how differently!—the welfare of her country and family are entangled. The family, as is proper for a Greek woman, comes first; her earliest question was for Eteocles (1072–76) and her summing up is “my sons are alive and the land has escaped destruction” (1203). For a moment she hopes that the evil harvest of her marriage has been reaped by Creon, who has lost his son “fortunately for the city, but to his private grief” (1206–1207).

Of the messenger’s speech we need say little, except to note the way that Parthenopaeus’ death is recorded, as a loss to his mother and grandfather (1161). It is then revealed that the brothers are planning a duel. The brief dialogue between Jocasta and Antigone is done in terms of family relationships: my child . . . (1264), your brothers . . . (1267), with your mother . . . (1269), mother who bore me . . . (1270), then twice more the vocative of daughter (1272, 1280), twice that of mother (1274, 1288), with two more references to Antigone’s brothers (1272, 1277), and Jocasta’s declaration that she will die if she cannot save her sons. The chorus comments in pity for the wretched mother (1286–87) and in horror at her “twin children,” now “twin beasts”: which will first strike *ὄμογενῆ δέραν, ὄμογενῆ ψυχὰν* (1291)? They invoke not only Zeus, but *γᾶ* (1290) and the Doric *δα* (1296). As they say at 1298, *πέσσει πέσσει δάι’ ἀντίχ’ αἰμάξετον*. Podlecki has observed that Euripides stresses that the brothers *fall*;<sup>24</sup> it is surely because they fall to the earth that so dominates their fate. Physical contact is again used to make the relationship vivid and concrete.

Creon now returns to the empty stage, still torn by antitheses, uncertain whether “to bewail myself or the city” (1310); for “my son has perished, dying for the sake of the land, winning a noble reputation, but one grievous to me” (1314). It would be sad to lose, by excising the scene with Fraenkel, the touching fraternal feeling expressed in Creon’s dependence on Jocasta to lay out the body, and the picture of

<sup>24</sup> 1415, 1420, 1422, 1424; perhaps compare also 640, the fall of the heifer followed by Cadmus, and see *infra* pp.122–23.

grief for a dead son that reinforces the impression of that maternal grief we are not actually to see. The messenger next announces the catastrophe to Creon in expected terms: your sister's sons are dead (1339); your sister has died with her sons (1349). This time Creon receives the news as a calamity both for himself and the city (1341).

The messenger begins his account by describing how "the young sons of old Oedipus" (1360) stood opposite to each other. Polyneices turns to Argos, now his by right of marriage ties and residence in the land, as he says, and invokes Hera, the Argive goddess, to help him slay his brother. Boldly, as Eteocles has done, he uses the word 'brother'. The latter prays to Pallas (1374-76):

δὸς ἔγχος ἡμῖν καλλίνικον ἐκ χερὸς  
ἐς στέρν' ἀδελφοῦ τῆςδ' ἀπ' ὠλένης βαλεῖν  
κτανεῖν θ' ὃς ἦλθε πατρίδα πορθήσων ἐμήν.

The usual stress on physical details reinforces the horror of the wish. Eteocles is now in some sort the champion of his own country, but perhaps we should note the selfish stress on the possessive ἐμήν (compare 696, "my home").

Fighting like wild boars, the two wound each other mortally. In the context perhaps even the Homeric reminiscence γαῖαν δ' ὀδᾶξ ἐλόντες . . . πίπτουσιν (1423-24) may take on extra meaning. Their mother arrives just as her sons are dying, to call upon them as her children and lament τὸν πολὺν μαστῶν πόνον (1434)—yet again, a physical detail evokes the physical relationship. Antigone, looking to the future instead of the past, cries that her beloved brothers have abandoned their family duty—to support their mother's old age and assist Antigone's own marriage (1435-37). Finally come the pathetic deaths of the two brothers; Eteocles silently confirming by touch and glance that for his mother at least he has affection (1440-41), the gentler Polyneices still able not only to look at, but to speak to and pity mother and sister (1442-44)

καὶ κασίγνητον νεκρόν.  
φίλος γὰρ ἐχθρὸς ἐγένετ', ἀλλ' ὅμως φίλος.

He has forgotten all about Argos now; it is for burial in his own land that he begs (1447-50):

θάψον δέ μ', ᾧ τεκοῦσα, καὶ σύ, κύγγονε,  
ἐν γῆ πατρώα, καὶ πόλιν θυμουμένην

παρηγορεῖτον, ὡς τοσόνδε γούν τύχω  
χθονὸς πατρίδας, κεί δόμους ἀπώλεσα.

And he asks his mother to close his eyes. Again, at this supreme moment, the themes of family and fatherland meet.

It is surely impossible to suppose that these dying words of Polyneices, so far from casual, so closely bound up with the basic ideas of the play, are not taken up again; that we must cut, therefore, all mention of Antigone's wish to bury him as incompatible with her departure to exile with her father. It seems possible to keep the text (preferably excising the last lines of the play, with their repeated assertion of an intention to bury the body) and to understand Antigone as simply reducing and finally giving up her plan in the face of Creon's determination to carry out Eteocles' commission to him; admittedly some awkwardness is involved. But to the extent of her capacity, Antigone has shown the affection for Polyneices manifested in the prologue, and tried to obey his last commands.

We see that the new and maturer Antigone who has returned to us is still entirely a creature of family ties. She laments the mother whose breasts gave her milk (1526–27), her brothers, and above all the woes of Oedipus. Calling on him to come at long last out from the house, she announces the death of his sons and the wife who guided his steps. Oedipus appears, to lament with her<sup>25</sup> and to receive Creon's command to leave the country, in accordance with Teiresias' revelation that "while you dwell in this land the city will never flourish" (1590–1591). For Creon fears "lest through your avenging spirits the land suffer some evil" (1593–94).<sup>26</sup>

Oedipus sums up his own woes in a speech that is usually considered dull or awkward.<sup>27</sup> At any rate it drives home his disastrous relationships with all his family. He ends, "you kill me, if you drive me from the land" (1621). (Later, 1687, he envisages falling to the ground and lying unassisted.) But Creon is determined: "I would not let you live in the land" (1626). And he turns to the disposal of the bodies. Polyneices, who came "to lay waste the city that was his fatherland" (1628–29) is to be thrown "unburied beyond the frontiers of the land"

<sup>25</sup> Note the relationship words in their laments, 1547–48, 1550, 1553, etc.; in 1571 the plain of Thebes again.

<sup>26</sup> γῆ occurs four times in eleven lines, 1586, 1589, 1591, 1594.

<sup>27</sup> D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama; Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 244, is alone in calling it fine and pathetic.

(1630), and it is to be proclaimed that no one is to pay him rites "or cover him with earth" (γῆ, 1634). Creon and Antigone argue the matter; we should note her line, "What did he do wrong, if he sought his share in the land?" (1655), and her appeal to Creon in her mother's name (1665). She decides, on failing, to accompany her father (some form of the word father ends the line seven times in thirty lines).<sup>28</sup> Creon has been continuing to serve his country's interests where not too demanding; but we see him once more as the devoted father, as he drives out Antigone also lest she fulfill her threat to kill Haemon if forced into marriage with him: "go, you shall not kill my son, leave the land" (1682). The passage is certainly perfunctory, and Creon is throughout surprisingly unsympathetic to another person motivated like himself by strong family feeling.

Antigone, with selflessness equal to Menoeceus', has thus come to a decision very different from his.<sup>29</sup> Her feminine virtue is to sacrifice everything, even her hope of marriage and her part in her country, to the strongest of all family ties, duty to a parent. Her exile is not cowardly, as Menoeceus' would have been; and that of Oedipus is for his country's good, where that of Polyneices had almost been his country's ruin. Antigone guides Oedipus to the dead bodies so that he may *touch* them in farewell. He addresses Jocasta both as mother and wife (1695), and he recognises, in death, the fallen Eteocles and Polyneices as his sons (1701, cf. 1697 πτωμα): ὦ φίλα περήματ' ἄθλι' ἀθλίου πατρός. Father and daughter go out into exile (the word is repeated 1684, 1691, 1709, 1710).<sup>30</sup> Thebes is safe, and the only family relationships still existing are natural and good ones.

It seems, therefore, that *Phoenissae* is a coherent and very carefully organised whole. But in tone, as opposed to theme, it is true that the Menoeceus episode contrasts with the rest of the play, especially the part that precedes it. The scenes with Jocasta and her sons have been treated in what, for want of a better word, one may call Euripides' most emotionally and psychologically realistic style. These are the emotions that real people in the circumstances posited by the famous

<sup>28</sup> 1679, 1684, 1686, 1691, 1692, 1701, 1709.

<sup>29</sup> A. Garzya, *Pensiero e tecnica drammatica in Euripide* (Naples 1962) 105, "i due episodi si trovano in una ideale rispondenza."

<sup>30</sup> Exile in this play is always made vivid by being to a specific place, so the reference to Colonus (1705) must not be cut. (Polyneices goes, Antigone fears to go, to Argos; Menoeceus is supposed to go to Dodona.) In addition, Euripides likes to end a work with a prophecy of the future.

old legend would feel, he seems to be implying; and it has been observed again and again that Eteocles' political views so resemble those of Plato's Callicles and Thrasymachus, and of Thucydides' Athenians in the Melian Dialogue, that we must suppose them to have been really held by certain sophistically educated young men of the late fifth century. And it is not only because Eteocles, being such a man, is naturally a good deal of a sceptic (a trait put to good dramatic use by Euripides, who wants Teiresias to reveal the will of the gods to Creon, not to the ruler of the city) that the supernatural appears but vaguely in the background. There are a few unanswered appeals to the traditional gods, by Jocasta and Antigone especially; there are references to *τύχη* and "some god" or "divine power" or "the calamity of the Erinyes." But Eteocles' god is simply Power or Tyranny (506); Jocasta protests that Ambition is "worst of divinities" (531–32); going to battle Eteocles asserts that Discretion is the best of gods (782). If Oedipus' curse is seen to be working, it is in a purely naturalistic manner; it is simply through fear of its efficacy that his sons have decided to alternate in office, and Eteocles' greed, which wrecks this arrangement, is all too natural.<sup>31</sup>

But with the chorus following the *agōn* (638–89) a new note is struck, and the legendary and miraculous past of Thebes begins to exercise its hold over the play: Cadmus founding his city as the oracle bade, where a heifer sank to the ground; the wonderful birth of Dionysus, the dragon of Ares, and Epaphus son of Io. It is not that these themes are wholly unheralded. The prologue begins with the time "when Cadmus came to this land" (5–6), but the miracles connected were not mentioned. And the first four choral songs form a well-recognised *Liederkreis*; but if the chorus in the *parodos* sang of the Dionysian rites at Delphi, and of another dragon's lair, that on Parnassus, still these were very remote from the action, and "Ares with impetuous onset" (240) could be taken simply as a poetic personification of war, rather than the divine personage with a will of his own that he later becomes.

After the relatively short scene between Creon and Eteocles the chorus sings again (784–833) of Ares and Dionysus, and of the race of the Sparti and the Sphinx; in the epode they evoke the more cheerful legends of Thebes, the gods' presence at the wedding of Cadmus and Harmonia, the raising of the city walls at the sound of Amphion's lyre, and Io "the horned first mother of the race." And so we are pre-

<sup>31</sup> At 798 and 812 the chorus still refers to Strife as the cause of the woes of the family.



pared for Teiresias' strange warning that the earthborn dragon must be appeased. We are still in this mysterious world, with  $\gamma\eta$  holding all its magical meaning, as Menoeceus swears to go and kill himself in the sacred place and "set the land free."

On his departure the chorus sings again of the Sphinx, and draws us back *via* the woes of Oedipus to the quarrel of his sons, before turning briefly again to the self-sacrifice of Menoeceus and the death of the dragon at Cadmus' hands. It has been pointed out<sup>32</sup> that to have the first three stasima within almost four hundred lines of each other and all in the central part of the play is unparalleled in surviving tragedy (and the only remaining intervention of the chorus [1284–1306] is very short and deals in simple terms with the duel of the brothers and the chorus' apprehensions). One of the main functions of the chorus, therefore, has been to ease the transition to the magical atmosphere of the scenes where Menoeceus is present. Afterwards we sink back into a comparatively naturalistic world; the messenger need not perhaps be taken too seriously when he states that Zeus struck Capaneus down (1181), but the anonymous *δαίμων* of the house of Oedipus, or an equally anonymous *θεός*, is a more threatening force than in the early scenes (see 1199, 1266, 1426, 1580, 1614, 1653, 1662). There is no *deus ex machina* however. Opinions will probably differ on whether these changes of mood and level are dramatically effective or disruptive of coherence.<sup>33</sup>

What, then, do we think that Euripides is saying in *Phoenissae*? Not, certainly, that duty towards country must always come before duty towards family, or the reverse. Is he suggesting that selfishness and selflessness towards these institutions may appear in different forms, but that the latter is always to be set above all rival values? These last include wealth and power, empty and temporary goods as Jocasta calls them (549–57),<sup>34</sup> or intelligence, which in this play does its possessors no good. Oedipus' cleverness in guessing the Sphinx's riddle brought him to disaster (1047); the prudent Jocasta and Creon are not spared grief. It must be confessed that if this was Euripides' primary

<sup>32</sup> G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 371.

<sup>33</sup> Conacher's interesting theory (*op.cit.*, *supra* n.27) that the main purpose of the play is the interplay of the mythical and naturalistic conceptions, perhaps suffers from being too fine-drawn and needing to exaggerate, for example, the "god-ridden" nature of the prologue.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. 438–42, Polyneices' desire for riches.

purpose, the play is not perfectly focussed; the vital figures of Menoeceus and Antigone are not given quite enough dramatic weight.

But if we do see this purpose as moral and even political, we may ask ourselves a final question. If the poet draws selfishness, ambition and greed from the life, and wraps idealistic public spirit in the veils of legend and magic, does this suggest that he wrote in a mood of deep disenchantment with the Athens of his day? Even, perhaps, that he consciously intended to convey this disenchantment?<sup>35</sup> In the same way, does his strangely a-political conception of *γῆ* or *χθών* indicate that his own love for his country was now rather a mystical feeling for the Attic countryside, rather than any trust in the political virtues to which Athens had at least aspired, if she did not always attain, and which had sustained the patriotism of some of his earlier plays (and which even later Sophocles could restate in *Oedipus at Colonus*, especially at 260–62)?

Or have we begun at the wrong end? Did Euripides start his work with the legends of the earthborn dragon and the Sown Men in mind, and elaborate thence the relationship of the ruling family with "the land of Thebes"? It is certainly the choral odes dealing with these legends which form the most profoundly imaginative part of the play. Notably rich and resonant, they remind us that *Bacchae*, also on a Theban legend, is not far away. It would be easier to answer these questions, if we were certain that the Menoeceus story was Euripides' own invention, as many have supposed; and what the chief motives of his departure to Macedon may have been.

The play as a whole is doubtless unequal in quality. Apart from the striking choral lyrics, it possesses a number of original and dramatic scenes, notably the *teichoskopia* and the *agōn*, and indeed the Menoeceus scene itself, which is subtly varied from and more smoothly managed than previous examples of similar scenes in Euripides' surviving works.<sup>36</sup> It also possesses other scenes that are melodramatic or skimped, especially towards the end. And certainly we do not feel that the dilemmas of any of the characters, picturesque and well-

<sup>35</sup> D. Ebener, "Die Phönizierinnen des Euripides als Spiegelbild geschichtlicher Wirklichkeit," *Eirene* 2 (1964) 71–79, sees the play as slightly optimistic: even if the only patriotic character is "der Knabe, der die Schwelle zum bewussten Leben gerade erst überschritten hat," yet Euripides' "Hoffnung bleibt ihm mehr als ein Wunschraum. Sie verzichtet nicht auf Mahnung und Beispiel" (79).

<sup>36</sup> H. Strohm, *Euripides: Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form* (Munich 1957) 50–63; J. Schmitt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) *passim*.

contrasted as they are, are conveyed at a truly tragic level. Partly, perhaps, because he wanted to concentrate on a group and not an individual, Euripides has here not found the psychological depth of which at his greatest he was capable; while the supernatural mostly remains an external element of plot, rather than part of the pessimistic view of man's place in the world which is only just sketched in. A few years later Sophocles wrote a play on a closely related subject which also dealt with the pains of exile, the claims of old and new countries, and love and hatred within the family, and which achieved what Euripides here misses. By its concentration on the mighty figure of Oedipus, and its coherent and deeply felt beliefs about man's relation to the gods, *Oedipus at Colonus* proclaims itself the profounder work.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> I am much indebted to Mrs P. E. Easterling and Miss Clare Campbell, who read and criticised this paper. To Mrs Easterling I owe the suggestion of a comparison with *Oedipus at Colonus*.