

The Staging of Suppliant Plays

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THE ORIGINAL STAGING of Greek tragedy has become an area of increasing interest, owing in no small part to the work of Oliver Taplin. His *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, followed by *Greek Tragedy in Action*, legitimized—for a new generation of classicists—the study of tragedy as a creation in and for the theater.¹ The new emphasis is welcome, but its promise has often gone unfulfilled, owing to certain misconceptions about the space in which plays were originally staged; these misconceptions continue to distort our understanding of the plays as they were performed in fifth-century Athens. Chief among these involves the presence and function in the theater of Dionysus of an altar or altars, of critical importance in the staging of suppliant drama.²

The currently held view—that the altar used in suppliant plays was

¹ The following will be cited by author's name: J. T. ALLEN, *The Greek Theater of the Fifth Century Before Christ* (Berkeley 1920); P. ARNOTT, *Greek Scenic Conventions* (Oxford 1962); D. BAIN, *Actors and Audience* (Oxford 1977); C. COLLARD, *Euripides, Supplices* (Gröningen 1975); W. B. DINSMOOR, "The Athenian Theater of the Fifth Century," in *Studies Presented to David M. Robinson I* (St Louis 1951) 309–30; W. DÖRPFELD and E. REISCH, *Das griechische Theater* (Athens 1896); R. C. FLICKINGER, *The Greek Theater and its Drama*³ (Chicago 1926); A. F. GARVIE, *Aeschylus, Choephoroi* (Oxford 1987); E. GEBHARD, *The Theatre at Isthmia* (Chicago 1973) and "The Form of the Orchestra in the Early Greek Theatre," *Hesperia* 43 (1974) 428–40; J. GOULD, "Tragedy in Performance," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, edd. P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (Cambridge 1985) 263–81; N. G. L. HAMMOND, "The Conditions of Dramatic Production to the Death of Aeschylus," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 387–450; J. C. HOGAN, *A Commentary on the Complete Greek Tragedies: Aeschylus* (Chicago 1984); N. C. HOURMOUZIADES, *Production and Imagination in Euripides* (Athens 1965); H. FRIIS-JOHANSEN and E. W. WHITTLE, *Aeschylus: The Suppliants II* (Copenhagen 1980); H. W. PARKE, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London 1977); A. W. PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE, rev. J. Gould and D. M. Lewis, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1968) and *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford 1946); A. STANLEY, *Early Theatre Structures in Ancient Greece* (diss. Berkeley 1970); O. TAPLIN, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) and *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley 1978); R. E. WYCHERLEY, *The Stones of Athens* (Princeton 1978). All dates are B.C. unless otherwise noted. Less successful treatments of the other tragedians including the promise of 'stagecraft' in their titles: D. Seale, *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles* (London 1982), and H. M. Halleran, *Stagecraft in Euripides* (London 1985).

² The 'theater of Dionysus' henceforth refers to the theater in Athens; other theaters will be identified by city or deme. I wish to thank J. P. Poe for allowing me to see his unpublished article, "The Altar in the Theater," with which I am generally in agreement. See, however, n.81 *infra*.

located near the *skene* building³ —constitutes the major obstacle to our understanding of how these tragedies worked in the Greek theater. A review of the evidence (Section 1) demonstrates that there is little to support this view; when applied to the staging of a specific suppliant play, this placement of the altar proves highly impractical, as is demonstrated by examining the Collard and Arnott scenario for Euripides' *Supplices* (Section 2). Moreover, their account of original staging reveals further prejudices that must be challenged if we are to understand how tragedy was originally performed—in particular, misconceptions about the shape and function of the orchestra, the need for a (low) raised stage, and the dominance of the *skene* façade. After reconsidering these questions in Section 3, I propose detailed stagings of the openings of Euripides' *Supplices* and Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (Sections 4 and 5), arguing that the altar used in suppliant plays was usually, perhaps always, located in the center of the orchestra.⁴ The finding has broad implications for the presentation of other tragedies which I will outline briefly in the conclusion.

1. The Altar in the Theater

Over a third of surviving Greek tragedies require an altar or a tomb as a stage property.⁵ An altar is essential for staging scenes of supplication and refuge in Aeschylus' *Supplices*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Euripides' *Heracles*, *Andromache*, *Heracleidae*, *Supplices*, *Ion*. To this group we should add *Eumenides*, although Orestes does not actually cling to an altar but to the *omphalos* at Delphi and later to the *βπέρας* of Athena in Athens. Furthermore, part of the action of Aeschylus' *Persians* and *Choepori* and Euripides' *Helen* takes place around a tomb, a construction not physically different from an altar.⁶

³ This view is put forward by Pickard-Cambridge and Arnott, and incorporated in the commentaries of Collard, Bond, Garvie, and many others. See n.8 *infra*.

⁴ The term 'center' is used here and elsewhere for convenience; it is not meant to imply the center of a circle, since the orchestras in the theater in Athens and all the others discussed, save Epidauros, were trapezoidal or rectangular, not circular. See 277 and nn.59f *infra*.

⁵ P. Burian, "Supplication and Hero Cult in Sophocles' *Ajax*," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 153. See also J. Kopperschmidt, "Hikesie als dramatische Form," in *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie*, ed. W. Jens (Munich 1971) esp. 323f. Of fragmentary plays, Aesch. *Niobe* requires a tomb: see A. D. Fitton Brown, "Niobe," *CQ* n.s. 4 (1954) 175–80; Arnott 61; O. Taplin, "Aeschylean Silences and Silences in Aeschylus," *HSCP* 76 (1972) 60–62. D. F. Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (London 1984) 10, 25, thinks that Soph. *Aechmalotides* (*The Captive Women*) and *Second Athamas* may have used an altar. T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967) 62, 113, 171, 267, notes that Eur. *Dictys* had a scene of refuge at an altar; possibly also *Oeneus*, *Alexander*, and *Alcmeon at Corinth*. Altars and tombs are mentioned and possibly visible in other extant plays, without supplication or other comparable stage action taking place there: Eur. *El.* 216–21, *IT* 69, *Bacch.* 6–12, 196–99, 622–24.

⁶ For the equation of tomb with altar in tragedy, see Garvie 72, Taplin, *Stagecraft*

In addition to the altar required by these plays, however, many believe that there was a second altar in the theater reserved for the cult of Dionysus. According to the generally accepted view, "the altar at which suppliants in various plays made their entreaties is totally distinct from the ritual altar of Dionysus which belonged to the festival, not to the play, and was in the centre of the orchestra."⁷ The latter structure (here called 'orchestra altar') is presumed to be a permanent fixture in the fifth century that, owing to its sacred character, remained unusable for staging purposes. Those adopting this view further assume that the altar required by the play (here called the 'stage altar') was situated in the stage area—that is, in the space between orchestra and *skene*, possibly marked by a low wooden platform.⁸

What is the evidence for a pair of different altars, one reserved for Dionysus and the other for the play? We have no archaeological evidence for a stage separate from the orchestra, nor for an altar located on it, in the fifth-century theater of Dionysus.⁹ Nor is there archaeological evidence for an altar located in the orchestra before the Roman period, and even then the presence of such a structure is uncertain.¹⁰ Many archaeologists caution against restoring any permanent altar to the theater in Athens.¹¹ Outside Athens, there is evi-

117, and Arnott 60–62; on vases referring to tragic scenes, S. Gogos, "Das Bühnenrequisit in der griechischen Vasenmalerei," *ÖJh* 55 (1984) 43–53. For real tombs constructed to resemble altars, see H. Abramson, *Greek Hero-shrines* (diss.U.Cal. Berkeley 1978) 107f; on vases, see e.g. the white-ground lekythos by the Sabouroff Painter (*ARV*² 845.168 and 1672) in D. C. Kurtz, *Athenian White Lekythoi* (Oxford 1975) pl. 28.2.

⁷ Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 131f, cf. 31.

⁸ Arnott 45, 55, who claims (22f, 46) that this altar was a permanent fixture of a low wooden stage present from the time of Aesch. *Supp.* The argument for two theater altars—a ritual altar sacred to Dionysus in the center of the orchestra, and a usable stage altar located behind the orchestra near the backdrop, possibly on Arnott's wooden stage—has been generally accepted. See G. Markantonatos, "Τὸ θέατρον τοῦ Διονύσου," *Platon* 29 (1977) 229f; C. W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes* (London 1976) 46–48; R. Martin, *L'urbanisme dans la Grèce antique*² (Paris 1974) 282; H. C. Baldry, *The Greek Tragic Theatre* (London 1971) 40, 112; Hourmouziades 51ff, 56, 75. Among commentators, Collard 15, 17, 27; Friis-Johansen/Whittle 3f; G. Bond, *Euripides, Heracles* (Oxford 1981) 61; A. H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes, Peace* (1985) 93, 178; Garvie xliiif, etc.

⁹ Regarding a separate, 'elevated' stage, see 279–81 *infra*.

¹⁰ A hollowed-out area in the paved orchestra *may* have received the foundations for an altar (Dörpfeld/Reisch 33–36). Flickinger (73) shows an altar in the theater of Dionysus only in the Roman period; his summary of the theater's building history is still worth consulting.

¹¹ Early opponents of a permanent, fifth-century orchestra altar include C. Robert, "Zur Theaterfrage," *Hermes* 32 (1897) 421–53, esp. 438–47, and E. Bethe, "Thymeliker und Skeniker," *Hermes* 36 (1901) 597–601. Neither Dinsmoor, Gebhard, "Form," nor W. Wurster, "Die neuen Untersuchungen am Dionysostheater in Athen," *Architectura* 9 (1979) 58–76, refers to any such altar or shows it in his diagrams. Stanley (182) finds no evidence for a permanent orchestra altar, and A.

dence for a permanent (*i.e.* stone) altar in the early theaters at Thorikos, Ikaria, Rhamnous, and Isthmia,¹² but in none of these is the altar near the center of the orchestra.¹³ Rupp believes that in the late fourth- or early third-century theater at Epidauros, the small slab in the center of the orchestra could have taken a stone altar, but this is generally disputed.¹⁴ At the recently discovered theater at Trachones near Athens there is no trace of an orchestra altar,¹⁵ and the same is true for the relevant phases of the theater at Corinth.¹⁶ In sum, the archaeological record provides little evidence that a centrally located orchestra altar was a permanent fixture in fifth-century theaters in Attica or in the northern Peloponnesus.

That no trace of an altar survives from the fifth-century theater in Athens does not preclude there having been one. The orchestra's

Rumpf, "Attische Feste—Attische Vasen," *BonnJbb* 161 (1961) 212, says that it exists "nur in der Phantasie moderner Gelehrter."

¹² The earliest Thorikos orchestra dates to the end of the sixth century, the second phase—with "altar, temple, and rock-cut cavea"—to the mid-fifth. See H. Mussche, *Thorikos, A Guide to the Excavations* (Brussels 1974) 41; T. Hackens, "Le Théâtre" in *Thorikos 1965* (Brussels 1967) 75–96, esp. 95. Remains at Ikaria date to the fourth century, although associations with Thespis suggest earlier dramatic performances there. See Stanley 112, and O. Dilke, "Details and Chronology of Early Greek Theatre Caveas," *BSA* 45 (1950) 28–31. The theater/agora at Rhamnous dates toward the end of the fourth century; see J. Pouilloux, *La forteresse de Rhamnonte* (Paris 1954) 70–78, and Dilke 29f. Gebhard, *Theatre* 26, dates the theater at Isthmia between 400 and 390.

¹³ At Isthmia, a rectangular cutting situated slightly to the east of the central axis of the orchestra and 1.85 m. to the south of the *proskenion* probably took some sort of foundation block(s), "perhaps to support an altar" (Gebhard, *Theatre* 13). Stanley 112 wrongly claims that the altars at Ikaria and Thorikos are positioned "as though they were used as part of the action of the performance." The state plans show this is impossible at Ikaria (the altar lies behind the sight-lines of the *prohedria*) and unlikely at Thorikos (the altar is virtually cut out of the front-row seats) where the audience in the upper rows would be blocked from seeing anything that happened in its vicinity by those seated in front. Rather, each seems to have been built in relationship to a nearby temple (Dionysus at Thorikos; Delphian Apollo—called Pythion—at Ikaria) and may well have served as the cult altar for the god. For Thorikos, see Stanley 113; W. Cushing, "The Theatre of Thoricus," *Papers of the American School* 4 (1885–86) 10, 30f, and pl. 2, fig. 8; and H. F. Mussche, *Thorikos* (Ghent 1978) 33. For the Ikaria temple dedication and alignment of temple with altar, see C. Buck, "Discoveries in the Attic Deme of Ikaria," *Papers of the American School* 5 (1886–90) 63–65, and (with additions) in *AJA* 5 (1889) 174–76. The theater of Rhamnous is barely distinguishable as such, and the relationship of what appears to be an altar to the performance area is difficult to determine. See B. Petrakos, *A Concise Guide to Rhamnous*, tr. J. Binder (Athens 1983) 17f; Stanley 119–21; Pouilloux (*supra* n.12) 70–74.

¹⁴ D. Rupp, *Greek Altars of the Northern Peloponnese I* (diss. Bryn Mawr 1974) 254f.

¹⁵ *BCH* 101 (1977) 531; O. Tsachou-Alexandri, "'Ανασκαφή θεάτρου στους Τράχωνες," *Prakt* (1980) 64–67 and pll. 58f.

¹⁶ R. Stillwell, *Corinth II The Theater* (Princeton 1952).

shape and position shifted over the long history of the theater, and each move could have obliterated the earlier evidence.¹⁷ But the very possibility that an altar was relocated to accommodate changes in orchestra shape and orientation argues against the purely ritual use of such a structure. W. Burkert reminds us that an altar, the *sine qua non* of sacrificial cult ritual, “is ceremonially set up when the first sacrifice is performed. . . . thereafter the position of the altar remains fixed, whatever other alterations may affect the sanctuary.”¹⁸ *If there were a stone orchestra altar in the fifth century and that altar moved with the orchestra as the cavea was enlarged, then that very mobility casts some doubt on the sanctity of both the structure and its location.*

Indeed, the actual cult practice of the City Dionysia provides incontrovertible evidence that an orchestra altar (even if it existed) was not the ritual focus of the cult. The key elements in this annual worship of Dionysus were the sacrificial procession (*πομπή*) and the sacrifice and offering to the god (*θυσία*). The program of performances that followed these events was changed in various ways, but “whatever else might be postponed or admitted, the *πομπή* and *θυσία* were the essential part of the cult . . . and without these there could be no Dionysia. . . .”¹⁹ The locus of these cult activities was the temple and permanent altar to Dionysus in the southern part of the sanctuary.²⁰ An altar in the theater orchestra played no part in this annual ritual.

There were, however, two rituals for which an orchestra altar might

¹⁷ For the wandering orchestra center in the theater of Dionysus, see Dinsmoor 316f and fig. 2.

¹⁸ W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Oxford 1985) 87f. Arnott (44) draws attention to “the Greek reluctance to move an altar once constructed,” presumably unaware of the problem that this entails for his own view of a permanent, sacred altar in the orchestra of the theater of Dionysus.

¹⁹ W. S. Ferguson, “Demetrius Poliorcetes and the Hellenic League,” *Hesperia* 17 (1948) 135. Parke 127 describes these two elements as “the core of the Dionysiac festival.” For the program and alterations, see Ferguson 112–36; J. T. Allen, “On the Program of the City Dionysia during the Peloponnesian War,” *CPCP* 12 (1938) 35–42; L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) 138–42; Pickard-Cambridge, *DFA* 65f.

²⁰ Here the *πομπή* terminated and sacrifices to the god were made in a “kreonomia of national dimensions”—that is, a distribution of meat to the celebrants in a state-sponsored feast. See Ferguson (*supra* n.19) 134, Parke 127–29, Taplin, *GTA* 162, Pickard-Cambridge, *DFA* 61. Since the inedible parts of the victims were burnt in offering, the sacrifices took place at the sizable altar (roughly 11.5 × 3.3 meters) oriented east-west near the southern edge of the sanctuary, allowing a large crowd to witness the sacrifice from farther up the slope. See C. G. Yavis, *Greek Altars* (St Louis 1949) 54f, 116f, and 186f; also Dörpfeld/Reisch 23f; W. Judeich, *Topographie von Athen*² (Munich 1931) 317f; J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (New York 1971) 537 (several of his other conclusions are suspect). P. Kalligas, “Ἐργασία τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Διονύσου Ἐλευθερέως,” *ArchDelt* 18 (1963) 15f, dates the altar to the end of the fifth century. As no other altar-like structure has been found, one may assume that the earlier altar or altars were located on the same spot.

have served, the purification of the theater and the libation before the selection of judges.²¹ Early in the festival, the theater of Dionysus was purified by killing a young pig and carrying its corpse around the theater.²² Ancient testimonia do not indicate that any altar (orchestra or otherwise) was used; rather, the sources include this practice among similar purification rites for the Athenian council and assembly.²³ The same ritual also purified temples, public buildings, possibly even shipyards, often on a regular calendar basis.²⁴ Nilsson believes that the rite did not constitute a sacrifice to a god, but was simply a means of ritual purification. In this case, the victims did not have to be without blemish or defect, a restriction that applied to proper sacrificial offerings.²⁵ An altar sacred to the god Dionysus presumably played no part in such a purification rite.

This leaves one known possibility for the ritual use of a theater altar. Plutarch informs us that the *strategoï* offered customary libations (*νενομισμένας σπονδάς*) in the theater before the judges for the performances were selected and sworn in.²⁶ The nature and purpose of this libation are unclear, but we know that libations did not require an altar. In his account, Plutarch juxtaposes the libation of the *strategoï* with their unprecedented selection by the archon in 468 as judges, which *may* suggest a link between the libation and the selection and swearing-in of the judges. If so, the poured offerings could just as well honor Zeus Horkios (Zeus of Oaths) as Dionysus Eleuthereus, the god of the festival.²⁷ We may conclude that neither the purification of the

²¹ Proponents of an orchestra altar sacred to Dionysus have not, as far as I am aware, adduced either ritual as evidence for the sanctity of the altar, and hence for its unusability in performance.

²² Pickard-Cambridge, *DFA* 67.

²³ Istros *FGrHist* 334F16; for other sources see M. H. Hansen, *The Athenian Assembly* (Oxford 1987) 171 n.575.

²⁴ R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983) 21f, 30f.

²⁵ M. P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, tr. F. J. Fielden (Oxford 1925) 87.

²⁶ Plut. *Cim.* 8; see also Pickard-Cambridge, *DFA* 67. In noting the failure of critics to attend to these pre-performance ceremonies, S. Goldhill, "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology," *JHS* 107 (1987) 60, should perhaps have credited W. G. Forrest, "Themistokles and Argos," *CQ* n.s. 10 (1960) 236–39, and A. Podlecki, "Polis and Monarchy in Early Attic Tragedy," in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, ed. P. Euben (Berkeley 1986) 86f.

²⁷ Dem. 24.149–51 states that Zeus (without epithet) was made witness to the oaths sworn by jurors in the law courts. For Zeus and oaths, see L. R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States I* (Oxford 1896) 69f, and A. B. Cook, *Zeus II* (Cambridge 1925) 723, 728, 730. For the dicastic oath, see J. Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill 1983) 71; D. M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (London 1978) 44; R. J. Bonner and G. Smith, *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle I*

theater nor the libations of the *strategoï* required a ritual altar in the orchestra dedicated to Dionysus.²⁸

In addition to the archaeological remains and the ritual demands of the City Dionysia, ancient literary testimonia offer a third body of evidence regarding the altar(s) in the theater. An apocryphal account in the life of Aeschylus, attributed to Heraclides Ponticus, is used by Arnott and Dearden to *prove* both the presence of an orchestra altar and its “sacred character.”²⁹ According to this story, Aeschylus was in danger of being torn apart on stage (ἐπὶ σκηνῆς ἀναιρεθῆναι) for divulging the mysteries and so fled for refuge to the altar of Dionysus (κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν τοῦ Διονύσου βωμόν).³⁰ One should note that the passage does not specify that this altar was *in the theater*. If we are to entertain the unlikely possibility that this event really happened, it would make better sense to imagine that Aeschylus (who acted in his own plays) escaped the outraged audience by running not *towards* them into the orchestra, but *away* from them to the altar of Dionysus in the sanctuary down the hill, an altar whose sanctity and connection with the god were absolute. Even this is to credit the story too much, for most scholars are dubious about the reliability of the anecdote and of Heraclides Ponticus in general.³¹

(Chicago 1938) 146, 149–57. None of these sources, however, directly connects oaths with libations.

²⁸ Those who believe in an orchestra altar dedicated to Dionysus say nothing of the non-Dionysiac uses of the theater. If, as they assume, Nilsson (*supra* n.25) is wrong and purification *was* considered a form of sacrifice to a deity (in the theater, to Dionysus), what transpired when the special meetings of the *ekklesia* were held in the theater to review the administration of the festival? As a proper *ekklesia* (Pickard-Cambridge, *DFA* 64, 68–70), this meeting presumably required a separate purificatory rite from that of the festival of Dionysus, for the constituency of the audience and the purpose for which they gathered were quite different. Would a Dionysus-specific orchestra altar be fitting for such a sacrifice? This difficulty applies *a fortiori* for meetings of the *ekklesia* regularly held in the theater that had no connection at all with the festival of Dionysus, namely the annual review of the ephebes. See Hansen (*supra* n.23) 14.

²⁹ Arnott 45; Dearden (*supra* n.8) 46. Arnott repeats the story twice in *An Introduction to the Greek Theatre* (London 1959) 41, 58. The sole source for this bizarre episode is an anonymous scholiast to Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1111a10, who attributes the story to Heraclides Ponticus’ treatise *On Homer*. For text and short commentary, see F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles*² VII *Herakleides Pontikos* (Basel 1953) 51 fr.170.

³⁰ That Aeschylus had some difficulty related to the Eleusinian Mysteries is indicated in the Aristotle passage and possibly in Pl. *Resp.* 563c. Two late second-century A.D. accounts report that Aeschylus was tried and acquitted for ἀσέβεια (Ael. *VH* 5.19) before the Areopagus (Clem. Al. *Strom.* 2.461).

³¹ A. Podlecki, *The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy* (Ann Arbor 1966) 2, calls attention to the story’s “suspiciously picturesque embroidery.” A. Lesky, *Greek Tragic Poetry*, tr. M. Dillon (New Haven 1983) 37, thinks that Heraclides Pon-

Other testimonia deserve more consideration, in particular a passage from Pollux (4.123) informing us that, in the days before Thespis, a chorus member stepped up onto a table during a choral dance. By isolating himself from the other singers, he became a soloist and proto-actor.³² ἑλεός, the word Pollux uses for ‘table’, means more precisely a ‘chopping block’ or ‘sacrificial table’. In the *Etymologicum Magnum* we find a slightly different account that replaces ἑλεός with θυμέλη, a structure that “still exists in the theater [and] is named from the table, because the sacrifices were cut up on it, *i.e.* the victims being sacrificed.”³³ Although interpretation of this material is fraught with problems,³⁴ both stories lend support to the idea that an altar-like structure served as the focal point for pre-tragic dances. More importantly, they show that the original θυμέλη was not unusable (in the sense that I have been employing the word), for it became the first place where an actor (or isolated singer) performed.³⁵

ticus “dramatizes . . . wildly.” M. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore 1981) 68, calls both Heraclides and his account “unreliable,” and believes the episode reflects a scene in a lost comedy poking fun at Aeschylus’ interest in his birthplace, Eleusis (172f). If Lefkowitz is right, we have indirect evidence that the character ‘Aeschylus’ (a popular comic figure, as in Ar. *Ran.*) may have taken refuge in a comedy at the orchestra altar, suggesting once again that this altar was, in fact, usable during dramatic performances.

³² Pickard-Cambridge, *DFA* 71.

³³ *Etym. Magn. s.v. θυμέλη*. Pickard-Cambridge, *DFA* 86–88, gives a lucid account; W. Burkert, “Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual,” *GRBS* 7 (1966) 101, summarizes the other sources.

³⁴ One must be wary of drawing conclusions from this material about either the terminology or the location of stage pieces in the fifth-century theater of Dionysus. Regarding Pollux, Flickinger (98f) warns that “his testimony . . . should not be applied to fifth- and fourth-century conditions unless confirmatory evidence for so doing can be produced from these periods.” See 279 and n.68 *infra*. Hammond makes, if not a mountain, at least the beginnings of a mound out of the Pollux passage. Claiming that Pollux “distinguishes correctly between the θυμέλη and the table,” he argues (397) that from the first there was a speaker’s platform not in the middle, but *on the side* of the choric dances. This side platform, Hammond believes (402f), was later incorporated in the Agora productions of tragedy, and then found its final form in a rock-outcrop (*pagos*) off the east side of the orchestra in the theater of Dionysus (409f), influencing ancient staging until the death of Aeschylus (416–30, 434–41). That any such outcrop ever existed is questionable, and its height a matter of total conjecture. Furthermore, Hammond has to modify Dörpfeld’s account—on which he relies for the possibility that there was a rocky surface at all—to get the mound to lie outside the orchestra where he wants it. The ‘side-on’ staging that results is both unnatural and dramatically ineffective (noted as such by Garvie, xliv). Hammond’s *pagos* has been surprisingly well-received by Taplin (*Stagecraft* 448–90), Wycherley (212), and others, but recently challenged by R. Hamilton, “Cries Within and the Tragic Skene,” *AJP* 108 (1987) 596, 598, and reasserted by Hammond in “More on Conditions of Production to the Death of Aeschylus,” *GRBS* 29 (1988) 5–33.

³⁵ For other interpretations of the use of the θυμέλη see A. S. F. Gow, “On the

With this testimonium in mind, proponents of a sacred orchestra altar have suggested that the *diaulos* player who accompanied the performance did so from the steps of that very altar.³⁶ If, as Pickard-Cambridge, Arnott, and others believe, the musician used their supposedly unusable structure while playing for a performance, one wonders why the actors acting in the same performance could not use it as well.³⁷ This hypothesis is no more speculative than the idea that a central orchestra altar provided the podium for the theater musician.

Finally, what about evidence from the tragedies themselves for the presence and function of an orchestra altar? Not surprisingly, the plays offer no evidence for an unusable altar: we would not expect to find specific reference to an altar that is both in the theater and yet outside the world of the play.³⁸ On the basis of the archaeological record, ancient testimonia, the rituals of the festival of Dionysus, and the plays themselves, we may conclude that there is little evidence for a permanent altar dedicated to Dionysus and unusable in the play located in the orchestra of the fifth-century theater.

The suppliant plays, however, require a *usable* altar somewhere in the performance space. The question is, where? A trimeter fragment from an unspecified tragedy of Aeschylus points toward an answer: "You take your stand around the altar and grouped in a circle offer up your prayers."³⁹ The comment is made by an actor, providing a fairly clear indication that those referred to are present in the theater. Without a dramatic context, however, we cannot establish precisely where the prescribed action is meant to take place. The fact that the

Meaning of the Word *θυμέλη*," *JHS* 32 (1912) esp. 236f; Allen 37f; and W. Ridgeway, *The Origin of Tragedy* (Cambridge 1910) 40–47.

³⁶ Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 132; Arnott 44; Hourmouziades 75. In *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*², rev. T. B. L. Webster (Oxford 1962) 35, Pickard-Cambridge quotes the scholiast on Aeschines, noting that "in circular choruses [dithyrambs] the flute-player stood in the middle."

³⁷ In that case, the performances themselves would have constituted a kind of offering to Dionysus, and the god of the theater and his priests (who attended the performances) would have allowed a certain leeway regarding the use of the god's altar. In *Euripides, Cyclops* (Oxford 1984) 170, R. Seaford notes that the satyrs, while dancing around the orchestra altar, reject participation in Cyclops' hideous sacrifice in the cave by calling it *ἀποβώμιος* (365, 'away from the altar') "almost as if it has to be explained (by its exceptional nature) why the sacrifice does not take place at the altar the audience can see in the *ὄρχήστρα*." Burkert (*supra* n.33: 101f) leaves unclear whether the *θυμέλη* he locates in the center of the orchestra actually received sacrifices to Dionysus, but he thinks that it carries "the memory of sacrifice" and "perhaps . . . was used as an altar when this was required in the play."

³⁸ The closest we come is Eur. *Cyc.* 365 (*supra* n.37).

³⁹ Fr.379 Radt, from Σ *Il.* 14.200 (W. Dindorf, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem* IV [Oxford 1887]) 51.

group (presumably the Chorus) has encircled an altar would suggest that it is in the orchestra, not tucked away to the side or back of the playing area so that getting around it would be awkward.

We are on firmer ground when we consider the demands of an extant tragedy. The first half of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* is set before the tomb of Agamemnon, generally believed to have been in the orchestra.⁴⁰ Here Orestes makes his offerings at the graveside, the Chorus and Electra pour their libations, and—after the recognition scene—all three parties summon up the dead hero in the great *kommos*. Although the focal point for the first half, the tomb 'disappears' from the perceptual field of the audience once Orestes arrives at the door of the palace (line 652).⁴¹ At this point the action shifts from the orchestra to the façade at the back, perhaps emphasizing Orestes' growing isolation as he enacts his revenge.⁴²

How was the tomb of Agamemnon represented? Pickard-Cambridge's argument that, after *Agamemnon*, a grave-like mound was erected in the orchestra is unpersuasive.⁴³ After all, the play asks the audience to 'think away' this mound at line 652 when Orestes appears at the palace door. We have already remarked that Greek tombstones could appear sufficiently close in shape to certain altar types, so that for stage purposes an altar might represent a tomb.⁴⁴ If there were an altar already in the orchestra, it would make an ideal focus for the ac-

⁴⁰ Garvie xli; H.-J. Newiger, "Die *Orestie* und das Theater," *Dioniso* 48 (1977) 333; Taplin, *Stagecraft* 336–38 (if I understand him correctly); Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 43; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Aeschyli Tragoediae* (Berlin 1914) 247; A. Sidgwick, *Choephoroi* (Oxford 1900) 5, etc. Notable exceptions: Arnott 59f argues that his stage altar (*supra* n.8) represented the tomb of Agamemnon, meaning that virtually the entire play took place back at the palace façade; so also F. A. Paley, *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* (London 1879) 485. The disadvantages are obvious, not only for the *kommos*, but also for the numerous rapid entrances and exits from the palace in the last third of the play, each one facing the obstacle of the tomb or altar in front of the door. Hammond (436f) places Agamemnon's tomb on his multi-purpose *pagos* at the eastern edge of the orchestra, an arrangement that creates its own staging problems.

⁴¹ See the excellent discussion by Taplin, *Stagecraft* 338–40.

⁴² Orestes moves from a place of communality which is close to the audience (actors and Chorus share the orchestra from lines 22 to 584) to the back of the playing area, farthest from the Chorus and the spectators. Orestes' isolation is complete when he alone sees the Furies; at that point Aeschylus has him flee the theater altogether (1062). Newiger (*supra* n.40) 333 also stresses the importance of two different playing areas in *Choephoroi*.

⁴³ Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 43. Changing the verbal description of stage furniture and settings is simpler and more effective than altering what is physically present on stage. Greek theater celebrates the superiority of words over things to engage the imagination of the audience and draw them into the world of the play. See K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley 1972) 20.

⁴⁴ See *supra* n.6.

tions of the first half of the play.⁴⁵ When the setting shifts to the palace and a tomb is no longer needed, none of the performers would refer to the tomb as such and the identification of the altar with a tomb would be effaced.⁴⁶

Choepori provides good evidence for an orchestra altar flexible enough to represent not only an altar to a god, but the tomb of a hero. Agamemnon's burial place is referred to as a tomb or mound or grave seven times in the first 200 lines of the play.⁴⁷ If the structure were immediately recognizable as a tomb, such abundant verbal reference would not prove necessary. More strikingly, at 106 the Chorus tell Electra to honor βωμὸν ὡς τύμβον—"the tomb as though it were an altar," or, as the word order suggests, "the altar as if it were a tomb." It is hard to imagine what these lines mean, unless Aeschylus is signalling to the audience that the altar in the orchestra is to be taken as the tomb of Agamemnon.⁴⁸ When not so described (in the second half of the play), the altar reverts to a simple element in the orchestra which the audience is accustomed to seeing.

Evidence for a usable orchestra altar is also found in comedy. The scholiast to Aristophanes' *Knights* notes that the comic poet (presumably the Coryphaeus) comes forward to the θυμέλη to recite the parabasis.⁴⁹ Of course, the scholiast's familiarity with the circumstances of the original production may be no better than our own. At some point in the production history of Aristophanes, however, the comic para-

⁴⁵ Proposed by Sidgwick (*supra* n.40) 5. See also S. Srebrny, *Critica et exegetica in Aeschylum* (Torún 1950) 17, for the flexible use of the orchestra altar. Garvie rightly claims that the first half of *Choepori* was staged in the orchestra (see *supra* n.40), but he thinks that the altar there was unusable. He therefore imagines a *second* altar in the orchestra representing the tomb of Agamemnon, located upstage and to the side of the sacred altar to Dionysus (xliii–xliv). A very untidy stage picture, this arrangement muddies the already complicated blocking and raises the unnecessary problem of how to emphasize the altar/tomb while effacing the sacred altar that Garvie locates dead center of the orchestra.

⁴⁶ The Chorus *do* apostrophize the tomb once in the second half of the play, at 722–25. They are surely in the orchestra for these anapaests—additional evidence that the tomb was located there, not (*contra* Arnott 59ff) near the palace.

⁴⁷ At lines 4 (twice), 99, 106, 108, 168, and 200.

⁴⁸ Electra calls Orestes and herself "suppliants at the tomb" (336), suggesting a further link between the two structures, for tragic supplications usually take place at an altar. The use of an altar for a tomb also seems to operate in Eur. *Hel.* (63–65, 466, 546–48, 797–801), as the parody at Ar. *Thesm.* 885–88 suggests. When Mnesilochus reports that Proteus is buried in the tomb on which he is sitting, the unsophisticated Critylla threatens to punish him for "saying that this altar is a tomb" (889). See Arnott's good discussion, 62; also Garvie 72.

⁴⁹ *Scholia in Aristophanem* I.2 *Equites*, edd. D. M. Jones and N. G. Wilson (Gröningen 1969) 129 (*ad* 519). The meaning of θυμέλη went through various transformations during the ancient period (*supra* nn.33–35), but the scholiast clearly refers to an altar in the orchestra.

basis appears to have been delivered from the orchestra altar. At that period an altar was centrally located and thought to provide the best position from which to address the audience.

Despite the currently accepted view that the altar for suppliant plays could not have been located in the center of the orchestra, the literary evidence examined so far supports the presence of such an altar in that position which was used as a stage property during performances. It remains unclear whether this usable altar was a permanent fixture or a portable piece of stage furniture customarily located in the center of the orchestra during the City Dionysia. Recognized by the audience as an altar, it could also represent the tomb of a hero when so described and treated by the performers. It also may have provided the preferred location for the direct address to the audience that constituted the comic parabasis. We will now examine the rôle this altar might have played in staging Euripides' *Supplices*.

2. Euripides' *Supplices*

The *Supplices* begins with a 'cancelled entry' in which the actors take up their positions in full view of the audience before the play begins. Although a common practice in Greek tragedy,⁵⁰ the cancelled entry in *Supplices* is unprecedented, for it involves not one or two actors but an expanded company. Aethra, the mother of Theseus, stands at the altar of Demeter at Eleusis, where she has come to make offerings. She is surrounded by the Chorus of fifteen Suppliant Women, the Argive mothers of the Seven against Thebes who have come to beg Athens to secure burial for their dead sons.⁵¹ In addition to the cluster of women around the altar, the Argive leader Adrastus is lying on the ground (20f) near the entrance to the temple of Demeter and Kore (104).⁵² In some proximity to this prostrate figure stands a secondary Chorus of the sons of the Seven (106), who later participate in the funeral procession that marks the return of their fathers'

⁵⁰ Other tragedies with cancelled entries include Aesch. *Sept.*, *Ag.*, *PV* (?), *Niobe*, *Myrmidons*; Soph. *OT*; Eur. *Heracl.*, *Andr.*, *HF*, *Tro.*, *Hel.*, *Or.*, and possibly *Andromeda*. In extant comedy, Ar. *Ach.*, *Nub.*, *Vesp.*, *Lys.*, and *Eccl.* seem to begin with cancelled entries. See Taplin, *Stagecraft* 134–36 and (*supra* n.5) 61f. Burian ("The Play before the Prologue," in *Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of Gerald E. Else* [Ann Arbor 1977] 79–94) suggests some interesting possibilities on how these tableaux may have been activated so as *not* to be 'cancelled'. His scenario for the *Supplices*, however, is unconvincing because it fails to account for the presence of Adrastus and the secondary Chorus.

⁵¹ Collard (18) establishes that the Chorus consisted of fifteen performers; the number 'seven' is (as often) symbolic, not literal. See also Webster (*supra* n.5) 124.

⁵² This temple entrance is never used in the play, save perhaps in the cancelled entry for the performers to get on stage quickly.

corpses (1114–64).⁵³ The supplementary Chorus numbers at least six, for six corpses are later brought on stage; more likely there are fifteen sons, matching the fifteen mothers (the boys' grandmothers) who make up the Chorus proper.⁵⁴ In total, not less than 23 and not more than 32 performers take up their positions before the play begins.

Where do they go? Their position at the opening of the play establishes where the audience focuses its attention and defines what physical relationships between the different groups can be developed. The altar where the Chorus entrap Aethra is the crucial determinant. Its placement organizes the subsequent action until the Chorus finally free Aethra by removing their suppliant wands (360f). Collard and others who assume that the orchestra altar was unusable place the suppliants' altar in front of the temple door, claiming that the entire opening tableau takes place in the stage area behind the orchestra.⁵⁵ Assuming a wooden stage was available,⁵⁶ does the placement of 23 to 32 actors on a narrow *logeion* hugging the *skene* make any sense, dramatic or otherwise? And if we eliminate this stage platform, does setting the entire cancelled entry in the space between the back of the orchestra and the *skene* stand up to scrutiny?

Such an arrangement would strike a theater director as perverse. By requiring the largest 'cancelled entry' in extant tragedy, Euripides as playwright allows his actors to take up position *anywhere* in the performing area without having to justify their movement to that position. Does it stand to reason that Euripides as *director* would then abandon those very possibilities by putting everyone up on the low wooden stage or, barring that, back near the *skene*? The crowding that results seems a peculiar directorial choice, especially with the open space of the orchestra available.

Let us picture this proposed staging in greater detail. Fifteen Chorus members kneel in a circle around Aethra who stands at a stage altar, the entire group between the *skene* and the orchestra. This is

⁵³ First mentioned at line 106, the secondary Chorus must be part of the opening tableau since there is no opportunity for them to enter later.

⁵⁴ *Supra* n.51; also Collard 19 and 390f. Hourmouziades 81 thinks that the boys' Chorus numbers seven.

⁵⁵ According to Collard (15–17), "In front of this [temple] door stood the altar. . . . Aethra is 'discovered' sitting at the stage-altar surrounded by the Chorus . . . and Adrastus lying in despair at the temple-doors surrounded by the Sons of the Seven. . . ." A similar opening arrangement is proposed by E. Capps, *The Stage in the Greek Theatre* (New Haven 1891) 8f; Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 68–72, 74, 129, 131f; Arnott 49, 53; Hourmouziades 78.

⁵⁶ See *supra* 265 and n.8. Capps (*supra* n.55) 35f follows Dörpfeld/Reisch 367–69 in denying any raised platform, locating the stage altar "near the rear wall of the *skene*, in that part of the orchestra most distant from the spectators."

strange, but not impossible. But what of Adrastus and the supplementary Chorus, a group of seven to sixteen male characters? Are they to be kept interestingly distinct from the group of females around the altar? Not in Collard's staging where both groups are behind the orchestra *and* on axis with the temple 'door'. Following Arnott, Collard specifies that the suppliant altar is directly in front of the door, meaning that this structure with its group of sixteen women will block any view of Adrastus, who is lying in the doorway. Without changing Collard's focus (which is clearly on the backdrop), we could place the altar off-center and so split the two groups on the stage by using the central door as a kind of divider. But this choice would emphasize an entrance that is never used and plays no symbolic rôle in the drama.⁵⁷ The problems multiply with Theseus' entrance at line 87. With all the bodies already in the stage area, where does he go?

One could elaborate further infelicities in the Collard/Arnott staging. More to the point, we must examine the prejudice that construes ancient staging as horizontally defined rather than spatially interactive. What informs the view that the background is the magnet for stage action? Here we must confront the old nemesis of historians of ancient theater: the shape and function of the orchestra, the nature of the stage area, and the rôle of the *skene* façade. After re-examining these aspects of the fifth-century theater, we can propose a more sensible staging of *Supplikes* and then consider a dramatically effective scenario for the even more problematic opening of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.

3. Orchestra, Stage, and *Skene*

Modern conceptions regarding the staging of tragedy—and even our sense of the development and meaning of the genre itself—are inextricably tied to the idea of a circular orchestra. Although earlier theories about the strictly ritual origins of Greek tragedy have tended to lose influence, their after-image can still be found in the belief that an orchestra circle *always* formed part of the Greek theater. There is no evidence, for example, that the circular threshing floor influenced the development or shape of the theater orchestra, but the association remains attractive to us moderns who have lost the feel of both the wheat and the chaff.⁵⁸ Even more seductive is the spacious orchestra

⁵⁷ Collard 15f; also Taplin, *Stagcraft* 455.

⁵⁸ The influence of the threshing floor on theater orchestras is argued by A. D. Ure, "Threshing-Floor or Vineyard," *CQ* n.s. 5 (1955) 225–30, and more or less accepted by M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton 1961) 54; Taplin, *GTA* 10; P. Cartledge, "The Greek Religious Festivals," in *Greek Religion and*

circle and magnificent cavea of the late fourth- or early third-century theater at Epidaurus, which has been mistaken as a reflection of *earlier* Greek theaters and as proof of the primacy of a circular orchestra.⁵⁹

Archaeologists have been telling us clearly and for some time that there is no substantive evidence for a circular orchestra in the fifth-century theater of Dionysus.⁶⁰ The most recent examination of the archaeological material and the best comparative studies of other theaters of similar date indicate that, for the fifth century, there “are no remains, including the controversial material in the theater of Dionysus, which indicate that the orchestra was circular.”⁶¹ Gebhard concludes that in the fifth century, the shape of the orchestra was no different from the space defined by seats and terrace, that is, a space “with a slightly irregular rectangular outline.”⁶² Indeed, it appears

Society, edd. P. E. Easterling and J. V. Muir (Cambridge 1985) 122; Gould 266. Simply put, the argument goes that threshing floors were used not only for grain but also for drying grapes (link with Dionysus); farm communities use threshing floors as dancing platforms (link with choruses); fifth-century orchestras were circular, so were threshing floors, and the case is proved. However, an ancient threshing floor was usually located on a projecting ridge to catch the wind, a siting exactly opposite that of a theater orchestra that was protected at the bottom of a slope. See J. H. Young, “Studies in South Attica,” *Hesperia* 25 (1956) 123–26, and M. Langdon and L. V. Watrous, “The Farm of Timesios,” *Hesperia* 46 (1977) 163. Moreover, threshing floors were generally paved with stone or carved from bedrock; theater orchestras remained unpaved until Roman times. See E. Capps, “Prof. Christ on the Greek Stage,” *CR* 9 (1895) 136, and R. E. Wycherly, *How the Greeks Built Cities*² (London 1962) 165. And, most importantly, the early form of the orchestra was not circular.

⁵⁹ As Gebhard (“Form” 428) points out, “On the plan of every theater an orchestra circle is restored, although only at Epidaurus does it actually exist.” See n.62 *infra*. For the date of the theater at Epidaurus see A. von Gerken and W. Müller, *Das Theater von Epidauros* (Stuttgart 1961) 77–80; also E. Pöhlmann, “Die Proedrie des Dionysostheaters im 5. Jahrhundert und das Bühnenspiel der Klassik,” *MusHelv* 38 (1981) 129. *Why* a circular orchestra should first appear at this time and at Epidaurus—a question forcefully raised by R. E. Wycherly, reviewing C. Anti, *Teatri greci arcaici da Minosse a Pericle* (Padua 1947) in *JHS* 67 (1947) 137—is, admittedly, difficult to answer.

⁶⁰ Dörpfeld’s conclusion that the archaeological remains in the theater of Dionysus justify restoring a circular orchestra in the fifth century (Dörpfeld/Reisch 26–28, 366–69) has been challenged on several occasions. See O. Broneer, *AJA* 42 (1938) 596ff, and J. T. Allen, *CP* 62 (1947) 259, who states categorically that “there is no evidence that the orchestra in this theater [Athens] was ever so marked.” More recently, Pöhlmann (*supra* n.59: 129–34) has argued that the idea of an ‘original’ circular orchestra has been read back from the Hellenistic theater of Epidaurus and is not supported by the scanty fifth-century remains in Athens. See also Gebhard, “Form,” and Wurster (*supra* n.11: 60).

⁶¹ Gebhard, “Form” 429.

⁶² Gebhard, “Form” 440. See also E. Pöhlmann, “Bühn und Handlung in Aias des Sophokles,” *AuA* 32 (1986) 23, and C. Ashby, “The Case for the Rectangular/Trapezoidal Orchestra,” *Theatre Research International* 13 (1987) 1–20. Even after Gebhard’s 1974 article, many scholars cling to the outmoded, if noble, fiction of a

that the sixth- and fifth-century Greeks acknowledged no established form governing the shape of the orchestra, but developed and adapted their theaters according to local needs and topography.⁶³ The architecture of the theater did not become standardized until relatively late, probably under the influence of the theater at Epidaurus.⁶⁴ Therefore it was not the precise shape of the orchestra but what happened in it that seems to have mattered to fifth-century tragedians and their audience.

The staging problems that result from the prejudice for an orchestra circle are not due to circularity *per se*, for in the ancient Greek theater the audience sat on more than one 'side' of the orchestra no matter what its shape—rectangular, trapezoidal, an irregular curve, or (as later) a full- or semi-circle. The problem lies in the assumptions regarding orchestral *function* that have become associated with a circular shape. In particular, a circle suggests a place set apart by its formal perfection—that is, a place reserved for the choral dance, where actors appear only when absolutely necessary. It logically follows that the actors need their own performance area independent of the orchestra, somewhere close to the *skene*, probably on a low raised stage abutting this backdrop.⁶⁵ The idea of a circular orchestra, then, suggests the need for a separate stage area, which in turn leads to the conception of Greek staging that 'hugs the back wall'. These prejudices inform Collard's staging of Euripides' *Supplikes*, one example among many of the failure to consider that non-lyric scenes might regularly have been performed in, and not behind, the orchestra.

circular orchestra in Classical Athens—Taplin, *GTA* 10f; O. G. Brockett, *History of the Theatre*⁴ (Boston 1982) 34f; Hogan 22f; K. Treu, "Griechische Tragödie und Theaterpraxis," in *Die griechische Tragödie in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Funktion*, ed. H. Kuch (Berlin 1983) 146; J. M. Walton, *The Greek Sense of Theatre* (London 1984) 45 (circular at least for the "Periclean" theater); Cartledge (*supra* n.58) 122f; Hammond (*supra* n.34) 6ff; and others. Some go further in claiming that fifth-century theaters were *built around* an orchestra circle. Gould (266) describes the orchestra circle as "the fixed and essential element in the construction of a theatre for dramatic performances." Nearly forty years earlier, O. A. W. Dilke ("The Greek Theatre Cavea," *BSA* 43 [1948] 127, 133) wrote that "in the designing of theatres the orchestra had to be planned first. . . . A suitable centre is found and the orchestra circle is drawn." This may have been true in the Hellenistic period, but not before.

⁶³ Wycherly (*supra* n.59) 137f. Martin (*supra* n.8: 284) speaks of the "liaison du théâtre et du terrain" and of "la composition architecturale intégrée au paysage." In a non-trivial sense, the early theater was more a space than a building, lacking the inherent controls of an architectural order that defined, for example, the temple and stoa, the most fixed of Greek architectural forms.

⁶⁴ See Wycherly (*supra* n.58: 170f); compare the evolution of theater architecture towards a fixed form with the similar development of the complex of buildings constituting the Greek agora.

⁶⁵ See *supra* n.8 and n.70 *infra*.

As regards the fifth-century theater, there is no evidence to indicate that the orchestra, in either shape or conception, was reserved for the Chorus. To be sure, Greek tragedy distinguishes the Chorus from the actors in important ways. Their characteristic modes of expression are different, and the interplay of the lyric (song and dance) of the Chorus and the rhetoric (speech in dialogue meters) of the actors is one of the great resources of the ancient theater.⁶⁶ Circumstances of production in the fifth century also came to differentiate actors (paid by the city) from the Chorus (financed by the *choregos*).⁶⁷ But these differences were not incorporated into theater architecture until much later, and then to answer the needs of very different plays (or different approaches to old plays) in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. When Pollux, one of our earliest sources (reign of Commodus) for the division between acting and choral areas, writes that “the *skene* belongs to the actors and the orchestra to the chorus” (4.123), he is referring to the Neronian theater in Athens and not to the situation six hundred years earlier.⁶⁸ The erection in later theaters of a permanent raised stage cutting off access to the orchestra may have given rise to the view that these two performance places—orchestra and stage area—were always distinct.

The continued silence of the archaeological record, as well as the close analysis of the plays themselves, supports Dörpfeld’s original opposition to a stage elevated high above the orchestra.⁶⁹ However, misunderstanding the function of the orchestra altar and believing that the theater had a circular orchestra reserved primarily for the Chorus, Arnott and others restore the fifth-century theater of Dionysus with a temporary wooden stage, roughly a meter in height and connected to the orchestra level by wooden steps.⁷⁰ Supporters argue

⁶⁶ See J. McCaughey, “Talking About Greek Tragedy,” *Ramus* 1 (1972) 26–47; R. Rehm, “Aeschylus and Performance,” in *Themes in Drama* VII, ed. J. Redmond (Cambridge 1985) 229–48.

⁶⁷ J.-P. Vernant overemphasizes these differences in *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece* (with P. Vidal-Naquet), tr. J. Lloyd (Atlantic Highlands 1981) 1f.

⁶⁸ Flickinger 97f reminds us that “unless his language prevents it, it is more natural to suppose that he [Pollux] had the Athenian structure of his own day in mind.” See also Taplin, *Stagecraft* 432f. Cf. Hammond’s view (390 n.9) that “the information which Pollux gives on tragedy usually is worthy of respect,” and the results *supra* n.34.

⁶⁹ Dörpfeld/Reisch 342–65. Dörpfeld even insisted that the later additions of *proskenia* were not intended as stage platforms, but only as backgrounds (*AthMitt* 28 [1903] 383, 411; 49 [1924] 50). See G. M. Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Hellenistic Drama* (London 1967) 126, and Hourmouziades 59. Convincing arguments for the dramatic impossibility of a fifth-century elevated stage were made long ago by Allen (35–42) and Flickinger (84–99); more recently by Taplin (*Stagecraft* 441f).

⁷⁰ Arnott 15–41; other supporters include T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Theatre Production*² (London 1970) 7; Hourmouziades 58–74; Wycherly 207; Hammond (*supra*

that this arrangement—henceforth referred to as the ‘wooden stage’—would not unduly hinder the movement of performers between *skene* and orchestra.⁷¹

The only archaeological evidence for a perishable wooden stage would be cuttings in stone blocks or bedrock into which wooden supports might fit. Dörpfeld found ten such cuttings in the breccia footing wall that backs the stoa facing the *temenos* of Dionysus, as well as a T-shaped platform extending from the back wall towards the orchestra.⁷² These cuttings have given rise to elaborate reconstructions of a scenic backdrop and perishable stage for the theater of Dionysus. We need not linger over them, for the *date* of this breccia foundation is the crucial question. Dinsmoor established in 1951 that the breccia footing wall could be no earlier than the last quarter of the fifth century,⁷³ and excavations at the sanctuary of Dionysus in 1963 revealed stratigraphic evidence that has brought the date for these buildings down even further.⁷⁴ The growing consensus among archaeologists is that the buildings using breccia in the sanctuary of Dionysus—the second temple of Dionysus, the stoa and footing wall (with cuttings for a wooden backdrop), and the T-platform (once thought of as the prototype of a raised stage)—were all built in the fourth century.⁷⁵

This information affects our understanding of ancient staging even more radically than the re-evaluation of the shape of the orchestra.

n.34) 22f. Those unpersuaded of the need for a raised stage (low, wooden or otherwise) include Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 74, Taplin, *Stagecraft* 442f, Hogan 2f, 36ff, Garvie xlv.

⁷¹ Arnott 34 seems alone in justifying this stage by claiming that “the idea of close actor-chorus intercommunication is itself suspect and does not stand up to examination.”

⁷² This T-platform measures 6.53 m. in width and extends 3.26 m. from the wall. The cuttings can also be seen *in situ*, although two of the ten have been obliterated. See Dinsmoor 319–27.

⁷³ Although lacking clear stratigraphic evidence, Dinsmoor (317f) offers a fairly certain *terminus post quem* for the introduction of breccia into Attica. Since breccia also provides the foundations for the new temple of Dionysus below the theater, Dinsmoor argues that the stoa, footing wall, and new temple were all begun at the same time; he attributes (329) the program to Nicias (421–415 B.C.).

⁷⁴ Beneath the breccia foundations of the new temple, Kalligas (*supra* n.20: 14f) unearthed stratified material from the middle of the fourth century. Dinsmoor’s relative chronology (dating both sets of foundations to the same period) remains valid, as does his conclusion (323) that “the evidence points to a moment when the background of action in the orchestra consisted of the stoa, faced by a removable wooden scene building. . . .” The absolute chronology, however, moves down into the fourth century.

⁷⁵ R. F. Townsend, *Athenian Architectural Activity in the Second Half of the Fourth Century B.C.* (diss. U. North Carolina 1982) 91–132; Wurster (*supra* n.11) 62; Wycherly 210ff; Gebhard, “Form” 434.

We must dismiss the many reconstructions of the fifth-century theater that feature an elaborate palace façade, or projecting *paraskene*, or a *prothyros* receding from a long wooden colonnade, and so on. Moreover, without the secure anchor of a permanent (stone) building for wooden additions, we cannot assume that the fifth-century theater possessed a playing area defined by an elaborate backdrop. Therefore we should be suspicious of any proposed staging that continually pulls the action away from the audience towards a back wall, and even more wary of accepting a hypothetical wooden stage affixed to that wall.

Of course many tragedies require some form of backdrop (representing various locations) with a central entrance, but, as far as we can tell, no surviving play of Aeschylus before the *Oresteia* demands one.⁷⁶ Taplin (following Wilamowitz) argues persuasively that Aeschylus introduced the façade and door with his production of the trilogy in 458, and points out that the palace façade dominates the action of *Agamemnon*.⁷⁷ What is often forgotten, however, is that the palace and central door become less and less significant as the trilogy continues.⁷⁸ *Choephoroi* ignores this façade for more than half the play, during which the action takes place at the tomb of Agamemnon in or near the center of the orchestra.⁷⁹ Indeed, the façade as palace must be thought away by character and audience alike until Orestes 'reinvents' the royal house by reappearing there in disguise at 652. From this point the façade again dominates the action, and the first entrance from the house (either the slave at 657 or Clytemnestra at 668) sets off an increasingly intensive use of the door until the appearance of

⁷⁶ The earlier plays of Aeschylus (*Pers.*, *Supp.*, *Sept.*, *PV?*) and such later ones as Soph. *Ichneutae* and *OC*, and Eur. *Supp.* and *Andromeda* are not set before a palace and require no entrance through a doorway.

⁷⁷ Taplin, *Stagecraft* 452–59; see also U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Die Bühne des Aischylos," *Hermes* 21 (1886) 606–11; Stanley 183–202; and Hourmouziades 9. Regarding the early Aeschylean theater, Allen (27f) thinks that "the plays were performed on the orchestra-terrace without the aid of an artificial background; an altar and a few simple accessories alone suggested the scene." An unlocalized barrier without a door may have been erected behind the orchestra terrace wall to cover 'backstage' crosses, rapid costume changes, etc. Gebhard (*Theatre* 20f) stresses the need for such a shield in a theater like that at Isthmia with its sunken orchestra.

⁷⁸ An observation also made by E. H. Haight, *The Symbolism of the House Door in Classical Poetry* (New York 1950) 20. Taplin (*Stagecraft* 459) claims for the trilogy what properly should be reserved for *Agamemnon* alone: "The dramatic and poetic uses of the background building in the *Oresteia* [are] unsurpassed in Greek tragedy and perhaps in all drama. . . ."

⁷⁹ It is generally accepted that all entrances in the first half of the play are made via the *eisodoi*; I agree with Taplin (*Stagecraft* 339f) that the best 'first use' of the façade as palace is Orestes' appearance at the door (line 652), and not, for example, Electra's exit at line 584 (so Garvie xliv).

Orestes with the bodies of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra at 965. In *Eumenides* the façade and entrance further diminish in importance (see 298f *infra*), playing no part in the staging of the last 900 lines of the play, when the action shifts from Delphi to Athens.⁸⁰ While introducing the backdrop and using it consummately in *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus took full advantage of the *entire* performance space available to him when he staged the trilogy.⁸¹

In the vast theater of Dionysus the fundamental staging challenge is to make the play reach out to its audience.⁸² As the theater lacked a large stone *skene* and high stage, the center of the orchestra provided a much stronger acting area than the area by the temporary façade which was at the greatest distance (both visually and acoustically) from the audience.⁸³ Those who insist that the exchanges between

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Newiger (*supra* n.40) 333.

⁸¹ Even in *Agamemnon* two key scenes are played in the orchestra. The famous tapestry scene (810–974) begins with Agamemnon standing in his chariot in the orchestra (Hogan 74) and Clytemnestra controlling the threshold (Taplin, *Stagecraft* 307, *cf.* 309). To avoid problems of upstaging, Clytemnestra eventually must move into the orchestra (probably when calling out the tapestries, 908–11) if there is to be anything like a face-to-face confrontation appropriate for the stichomythia of 931–43. The long lyric dialogue between Cassandra and Chorus (1072–1177) also takes place in the orchestra; at some point Cassandra steps down from the chariot and slowly draws the Chorus into the dance.

However, Cassandra's cries against Apollo Agyiates, "lord of the ways" (1081, 1086), have led commentators to misinterpret her stage movements. E. Fraenkel concludes that an altar to Apollo Agyiates must be located near the palace door and, arguing in a circle, uses this purported altar to prove that Cassandra must be moving upstage towards it (*Aeschylus, Agamemnon* III [Oxford 1950] 491f; *cf.* his more cautious comments at II 259). Taplin (*Stagecraft* 319) agrees with the location of this altar and believes that Cassandra "was going to go off into the palace in quiet obedience at 1072ff, then on her way she stops at the altar of Apollo at 1080ff." Similarly, Poe (*supra* n.2) thinks that "when Cassandra addresses Apollo as Agyiates (*Agam.* 1081) she is about to enter the house." These views neglect the dramatic context of the scene: Cassandra has stood silent and immobile during Clytemnestra's outburst (1035–71); is she suddenly to dismount from the chariot and proceed upstage crying *ὄτοτοτοί*, so that in eight lines she is about to enter the palace? Aeschylus is extremely attentive to exits, having carefully arranged the deliberate procession of Agamemnon down the tapestries in the previous scene. Indeed, he builds the second, 'spoken' half of the Cassandra scene (1178–1330) around *her* movement into the palace—first a false exit (1290–1312), then her noble and tragically aware departure (1313–30). To give Cassandra a rushed near-exit in the first eight lines of her lyric dialogue with the Chorus makes no theatrical sense of what I take to be the most important scene in the play.

⁸² From front row to back the sprawling cavea measures nearly 100 feet longer than that of the theater at Epidauros: see B. Hunningher, *Acoustics and Acting in the Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus* (Amsterdam 1956) 7, 11.

⁸³ The acoustics in the theater of Dionysus are difficult to measure, but Hunningher (*supra* n.82: 3) recalls the basic principle that "sound intensity varies inversely with the square of the distance, which means that if a person is standing ten feet from a speaker and moves away to a distance of thirty feet, the sound intensity of the

actors took place on a horizontally defined wooden stage fail to appreciate this theatrical fact.⁸⁴ The shallow lateral focus of a wooden stage only exacerbates the problems of an outdoor theater, distancing the action and limiting the possibilities for dramatic interplay in the open space of the orchestra. As observed in Euripides' *Supplices*, the altar plays a far more crucial rôle in the action of that tragedy than does the temple façade. The fact that no one enters from that façade underlines its insignificance for staging Euripides' play, a subject to which we must now return.

4. Restaging Euripides' *Supplices*

With a clearer picture of the theater altar, orchestra shape, stage, and *skene*, we can propose an alternative staging of *Supplices* that makes dramatic sense in the fifth-century theater of Dionysus. In the cancelled entry, Aethra takes her position at the orchestra altar, facing the audience; she is surrounded by the Chorus of suppliants. Adrastus lies on the ground near the backdrop representing—at this point in the play—the temple of Demeter at Eleusis.⁸⁵ The supplementary Chorus of sons of the Seven are arrayed behind Adrastus (that is, between him and the *skene*), a kind of human frame around a prostrate

speakers's voice will be only one-ninth of what it was at the first position." At Epidaurus, the sound level in the *cavea* diminishes when the speaker moves away from the center of the orchestra in any direction: see Dilke (*supra* n.62) 137f. Capps (*supra* n.58: 135) observes that "an actor standing between the proscenium and center of the orchestra could be better seen and better heard by the majority of the spectators than one who stood on the proscenium." F. Canac, *L'acoustique des théâtres antiques* (Paris 1967) 36, highlights the advantages of the area by the *θυμέλη* which he locates in the center of a circular or semi-circular orchestra: "Cet emplacement est assez remarquable du point de vue acoustique. . . . tout bruit produit au timélé est clairement entendu au faite de la *cavea*."

⁸⁴ The superior position and acoustics of the orchestra (as opposed to the area near the *skene*) was also recognized when the *ekklisia* met in the theater of Dionysus. See Capps (*supra* n.58) 136. This arrangement may have reflected the fifth-century *bouleuterion* in the Athenian agora, restorations of which place the speaker's platform in the 'orchestra', surrounded on three sides by rectangular seating. See W. A. McDonald, *The Political Meeting Places of the Greeks* (Baltimore 1943) 134, 173, and pl. XVIII; H. A. Thompson and R. E. Wycherly, *The Athenian Agora* XIV (Princeton 1972) 29f.

⁸⁵ The action later seems to move to Athens, recalling the similar 'sliding' change of scene that occurs in Eur. *Heracl.* See G. Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester 1955) 97–103, and Hourmouziades 125–27. Like *Med.*, *HF*, and *Ion* (each of which ends by incorporating the protagonist into Athens), *Heracl.* and *Supp.* emphasize the involvement of the Athenian audience in the issues of the drama. These tragedies raise doubts about any interpretative scheme that construes Athens as a "non-tragic theatrical space," such as that presented by F. I. Zeitlin, "Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama" in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, ed. P. Euben (Berkeley 1986) 101–41.

old man.⁸⁶ We will call Aethra's opening position 'downstage center' and that of Adrastus 'upstage center'.

The advantages of this opening tableau are immediately apparent. First, Aethra can now deliver her prologue to the audience from the strongest acting position in the theater.⁸⁷ Second, by placing Aethra at the orchestra altar, Euripides would have emphasized the part she is to play in the opening section of the drama. From this central position, Aethra delivers the prologue (1–41), holds her first exchange with Theseus (98–110), demonstrates her sympathy for the suppliants (286–96), and, most importantly, makes an eloquent and persuasive appeal to Theseus (291–331) that convinces him to champion the rights of the suppliant women. The release of Aethra from the altar—an action that does not occur until line 360⁸⁸—ends the first 'act' of the play, a surrender on the part of the Argive mothers that follows from Theseus' surrender to his own mother who has pleaded on their behalf.

This opening tableau makes a clear distinction between two groups—women around the altar closer to the audience, old man and young boys in the area behind the orchestra at a much greater distance. Paying attention to the difference in gender is not some modern 'twist' on the play. Euripides weaves this idea through the opening section: Aethra states that women should leave the action to men (40f), and she pointedly tells Theseus to ask the suppliants, not her, about what has transpired (109).⁸⁹ Later she refers again to the idea that women are inadequate to deal with matters of public import (298–300). Theseus rejects this view (295), and eventually Aethra does so herself, speaking out boldly on behalf of the suppliants and the city of Athens (301–31).

Considerations of gender in *Supplikes* go deeper than the thoughts of the characters. Euripides builds the action on an alternating pattern of female and male voices: the play begins with Aethra's prologue and the lyric chorus of the Argive mothers (1–86); signalled by Aethra's in-

⁸⁶ The deictic ὄδε referring to Adrastus (lines 21 and 104) does not prove—*contra* Arnott 49—that the temple door where he lies must be near the altar. It simply shows that Adrastus is within pointing range of Aethra and Theseus.

⁸⁷ A greatly elevated position—either on top of the *skene* or from the *mechane*—is visually more powerful, but such appearances are exceptions. I am not suggesting that *all* action took place 'orchestra center', only that this position provided the strongest acting area in the ancient theater and was used accordingly.

⁸⁸ The boughs act as chains: δεσμὸν δ' ἄδεσμον τόνδ' ἔχουσα φυλλάδος (32, "bound by this unbinding bond of leaves"). Later Aethra describes herself as "encircled by imprisoning suppliant boughs" (102f).

⁸⁹ It is Adrastus, not the suppliant women, who then responds to Theseus' inquiry (Collard 140).

sistence that others speak, the voice shifts to an exchange between males, Theseus and Adrastus (110–262), culminating in Theseus' rejection of the Argive supplication; the women regain the initiative with the second lyric section and Aethra's long speech to Theseus (263–333); and finally the scene closes with Theseus' change of mind, his decision to seek Athenian support for the suppliants, and his 'freeing' of his mother from the altar (334–64). This shift between male and female points of view suggests that Euripides took a similar thematic approach when directing the play.

The following blocking for the opening scene realizes what is implicit in the text regarding gender and civic policy. After the prologue, the Chorus rise and dance around Aethra at the orchestra altar.⁹⁰ The women describe themselves as suppliants (42–44), prostrate before the altars of the gods (64f). These implicit stage directions, as well as the Chorus' direct appeal to Aethra as a wife and mother (52–62), strongly suggest that the Chorus maintain physical proximity to Aethra and the altar. In Collard's staging, however, the Chorus do nothing of the sort. They stand up, move away from Aethra and the altar, walk down the steps to the orchestra where they begin and conclude their dance, then reverse the process, remount the steps, and some of them work their way behind Aethra (but in front of the prostrate Adrastus) so that they can surround her once again on the narrow stage.⁹¹ Collard's blocking is too busy and too cramped to be dramatically effective; moreover, it breaks up the sense of physical connection between Aethra and the Argive mothers that Euripides has so carefully written into the opening sequence.

Theseus makes the first proper entrance in the play at line 87. As with all subsequent entrances and exits (except that of Evadne and Athena, who probably appear above the *skene*), Theseus enters the orchestra via one of the *eisodoi*. After an introductory five lines to cover his entrance, Theseus continues downstage while speaking to Aethra, stopping on the same axis to one side of the altar.⁹² At line 104, the groaning of Adrastus (*τίς δ' ὁ στενάζων οἰκτρὸν ἐν πύλαις ὄδε;*) directs Theseus' (and the audience's) attention away from Aethra;

⁹⁰ The first lyric section is not literally a *parodos*, for the Chorus is already in the theater.

⁹¹ Collard 17; also Hourmouziades 78. Arnott 53 avoids part of the problem by setting the Chorus on the steps of his wooden stage below Aethra, ignoring the lines that specify the Chorus surround her at the altar (*ἐν κύκλω*, 103).

⁹² The *eisodoi* are angled slightly downstage into the orchestra, not upstage toward the backdrop. Euripides takes advantage of this natural layout for Theseus' entrance and exchange with his mother; as a result, Theseus' turn and cross upstage to Adrastus marks a significant refocusing of the action.

until that point Theseus mentions neither Adrastus nor the supplementary Chorus of sons of the Seven.⁹³ When Aethra tells her son to ask the suppliants why they have come, Theseus crosses upstage to Adrastus who is lying near the façade, gets him to uncover his veiled head and then to rise (110–12), and from that position the two men play a scene together of some 150 lines.

Setting the Theseus-Adrastus exchange in the stage area behind the orchestra maintains the thematic blocking that separates male from female. At the outset of the play, a silent grouping of males (the boys' Chorus) observes the activity of Aethra and the suppliant women; now a silent group of women watches as the two male representatives make their respective cases regarding the suppliants' fate. Since the altar is sufficiently downstage of the backdrop, the audience views the Adrastus-Theseus debate 'through' the filter of the women. Even though they take no part in the actual dialogue, Aethra and the Argive mothers occupy the visual foreground. This blocking subtly anticipates their ultimate importance for the outcome of the debate. As almost all seats in the theater of Dionysus are above the performance level, the group at the orchestra altar does not obstruct the scene taking place behind the orchestra. It is likely that the Chorus sit or kneel on the ground (as they are said to at 10, 44, 271f), and Aethra probably sits at the altar as she has done earlier (93).⁹⁴

At the conclusion of their debate, Theseus rejects Adrastus' appeal, and the old Argive leader instructs the Chorus to leave their suppliant wands at the altar and depart from Eleusis. The Chorus obey the first order, which has the effect of keeping Aethra bound to the altar (as is clear from 359f). Instead of leaving the theater, however, they take their appeal to Theseus, first in iambics (263–70) and then in dactylic

⁹³ The belated attention to the upstage group of men further justifies an opening tableau that maximizes distance between the male Argives and the women at the altar. In the staging of Collard, Arnott, and Hourmouziades, however, Theseus must virtually step over the prostrate body of Adrastus and walk right in front of the secondary Chorus in order to approach his mother at the stage altar in front of the temple door.

⁹⁴ For those sitting in the front row *prohedria*, a low wooden stage would improve the sightlines. For almost everyone else in the audience, the vantage is so very much *down* on the action that foreground figures present no visual hindrance. Cf. Arnott's claim (53) that placing the principals on his low wooden stage will result in "Aethra and Adrastus dominating the group." Valid for an indoor theater with a large number of seats level with or below the stage, the idea that dominance in the theater of Dionysus can be achieved from a low wooden platform set at the back of the playing area shows little awareness of the realities of that theater. Friis-Johansen and Whittle (4) make the same error, claiming that the Chorus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* "are in possession of the [wooden] stage" for most of the drama and thus achieve "striking visual emphasis."

hexameters (271–85). Their exhortations to one another to rise from the ground and then to fall before Theseus in supplication indicate that they leave the altar and move upstage towards Theseus. The division into two hemichoria⁹⁵ means that those who sing need not prostrate themselves, and vice-versa, so that the non-singing contingent can perform the stage directions suggested by the text. Drawing close to Theseus, the chorus take him by his knees (272), chin (277), hand (278), and again fall at his knees (285). The supplication that appeared in tableau at the outset has now moved upstage to Theseus, leaving Aethra alone at the altar for the first time. The stage picture is as follows: the supplementary boys' Chorus stands with Adrastus close to the backdrop, perhaps having moved towards one of the *eisodoi* when the old leader announced (prematurely) the Argive departure from Eleusis (258); Theseus stands in the upstage part of the orchestra surrounded by prostrate or kneeling Argive women; and Aethra remains at the altar in the center of the orchestra, still held by suppliant wands, but now alone.

From this position, Theseus and Aethra are on the same axis running from the orchestra altar back to the façade; this alignment allows Theseus suddenly 'to see' his mother again, having neither spoken nor referred to her since line 108. The text indicates precisely this blocking, for instead of responding to the Chorus after their extremely emotional appeal (they have literally fallen at his feet), Theseus addresses his mother: *μητέρα, τί κλαίεις λέπτ' ἐπ' ὀμμάτων φάρη βαλοῦσα τῶν σῶν*; (286, "Mother, why are you weeping, covering your eyes with your cloak?"). In a striking visual echo, Aethra's veiling and collapse at the altar (286–90) recall the gesture and posture of Adrastus earlier (110–12). When urging his mother to raise her head and uncover her eyes, it is reasonable to assume that Theseus crosses back to her at the orchestra altar, reversing his upstage move to Adrastus when he made a similar request of the old man.

If this reconstructed blocking is correct, then Euripides has carefully brought mother and son together for what will prove to be the crucial exchange of this long opening section. By having the Chorus leave the orchestra altar to make their supplication to Theseus, Euripides has 'freed up' the stoniest acting area in the theater. The two Athenian principals stand together downstage center, the focus of both the audience before them and the Argives (gathered together for the first time) behind them. The stage is set for the colloquy that Aethra passed up earlier when she deferred to Adrastus, and one

⁹⁵ Collard 179–81.

should note that the gender differences that originally guided the blocking have given way to grouping by bloodlines and city. The shift is all the more appropriate, for Aethra now rejects the maxim that women have nothing worthy to say (299f). She speaks out strongly not only for her son, but for the good of the city: σοί τε καὶ πόλει καλόν (293). Her decision to tell Theseus that he has made a profound mistake in rejecting the Argive supplication marks a radical departure from the γνώμη with which she ended her prologue, “For women who are wise, it is right to act through men in all things” (40f).

Aethra does more than change Theseus’ mind. Her words serve as the catalyst for the first of several political speeches in the play. After addressing eight lines to his mother, Theseus then speaks of her in the third person (343); his words serve as a transition into his short but famous description of Athenian democracy (349–56). At this point Theseus seems no longer to be speaking directly to his mother; surely the lines regarding democracy are best addressed to the audience for whom they are intended. Positioned at the altar—the spot where Aethra delivered her prologue—Theseus is in the perfect place to make such a public pronouncement. After emphasizing the democratic nature of the city over which he rules, Theseus returns to the immediate dramatic context of the play by calling for the Chorus to remove the wands that bind his mother to the altar (359f). Mother and son then exit via one of the *eisodoi*, and the opening act of *Supplices* is complete.

Our new assessment of the position and use of the theater altar allows for a theatrically effective scenario for the original staging of *Supplices*. The staging proposed here, however, must contend with one last scholarly prejudice, namely that ‘audience address’ is somehow off-limits in tragedy.⁹⁶ Any play with a prologue obviously involves addressing the audience; to deny this requires that we construct some convention that the character is ‘really’ speaking out loud his or her inner thoughts, a solution raising far more problems than it solves.⁹⁷ Other conventions of similar ilk have been proposed—in-

⁹⁶ Bain 98; cf. his “Audience Address in Greek Tragedy,” *CQ* n.s. 25 (1975) 13–23.

⁹⁷ Are we really meant to examine the inner motivations that would lead a tragic character to deliver a prologue to no one but himself? Are we to ask, for example, what a character like the farmer in Eur. *El.* is *doing* onstage when he decides to divulge the background to the play? But so we must, if Bain is right (*supra* n.96: 22) that “the speaker of a [Euripidean] prologue never admits the presence of an audience or makes reference or appeal to it in the course of his speech.” The scholiast to Eur. *Tro.* 36 displays better dramatic sense by admitting the obvious, namely that the prologist in that play, Poseidon, speaks to the audience (*Scholia in Euripidem* II, ed. E. Schwartz [Berlin 1891] 349); see also E. Havelock, “Watching the Trojan Women,” in *Euripides, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. E. Segal (Englewood Cliffs 1968) 115.

cluding addressing someone's retreating back, or talking to the Chorus, or even imagining that the Chorus are singing for the benefit of each other—to avoid the simple explanation that the lines or lyric are directed to the audience. These conventions seem to reflect a concern not to interfere with the 'dramatic illusion' of the play,⁹⁸ a concern that vanishes if one recalls the sensible words of G. M. Sifakis:

in tragedy the actors never drop their role, although they do address the audience while maintaining their dramatic characters. . . . Both classical tragedy and comedy are played not just in front of the audience but explicitly *to* the audience; they both use forms of 'narration by means of imitation', if we may use Plato's terminology (*Rep.* 3.393c9, 394d2).⁹⁹

A tragic character or Chorus addressing the audience does not in itself rupture the pretence of the play. Playing directly to the audience arises naturally from the physical layout of the Greek theater, but it also reflects the civic nature of the festival of Dionysus, as well as the contemporary significance, both cultural and political, of the plays themselves.¹⁰⁰

In *Supplikes*, Theseus' comment on democracy (349–56) is not an isolated instance of a character addressing a speech, or part of a speech, to the audience. The play includes a long debate between Theseus and the Theban herald contrasting two very different forms of government (399–510). The form and substance of this *agon* demonstrably reflect the situation and concerns of fifth-century Athens, not those of the 'historical' Theseus.¹⁰¹ Similarly, at Theseus' behest, Adrastus delivers a long funeral oration (857–917) over the bodies of

⁹⁸ See, for example, Bain 4 n.1; Taplin, *GTA* 165f. These critics seem to believe that the conventions of Greek tragedy preclude a character from addressing the audience as representative citizens. However, this device makes the best dramatic sense not only of Theseus' address, but also of Eteocles' exhortation to the adult male population of Thebes in Aesch. *Sept.* See H. J. Rose, *A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus I* (Amsterdam 1957) *ad Sept.* 1.

⁹⁹ G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London 1971) 10f.

¹⁰⁰ Along with the assembly and lawcourts, the theater was one of the chief Athenian arenas where issues of public importance were explored; see R. G. A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1982) 10–18.

¹⁰¹ One might consider the circular reasoning that Collard (29) employs to deny the presence of such contemporary references: "The Athenian audience would have felt no surprise at arguments conducted in terms which only we feel to be somehow 'anachronistic'. . . . [Athens'] sense of uniquely egalitarian justice and government drew its strength no less from the same mythical tradition as the contemporary institutions. . . . These ideas and attitudes are voiced in contemporary terms because they are appropriate to the *agon*: Euripides exploits the timeless antagonism of autocratic Thebes and democratic Athens to create an argument satisfying to a contemporary Athenian audience." How can Collard be sure that only *we* would notice the anachronism? Regarding the relationship between politics and mythical

the dead heroes. Neither the genre of Adrastus' speech nor the manner in which the dead are to be buried bears any relation to the heroic period in which the action nominally takes place; both belong squarely in the world of fifth-century Athens.¹⁰² The most effective focus for Adrastus' public address is the theater audience, an extension of the "young of the city of Athens" (*νέοισιν ἀστῶν τῶνδ'*, 843) to whom Theseus asks Adrastus to direct his remarks.¹⁰³

The original staging in the theater of Dionysus of a play like Euripides' *Supplikes* reflects a fundamental concern with the audience. This observation has far-reaching consequences for the staging of other plays, especially the problematic opening of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. By recovering something of the original staging, we may discover that Aeschylus' conception of theatrical space was no less flexible than Euripides', both admirably suited to present matters of contemporary importance to their fifth-century audience.

5. Restaging *Eumenides*

Dealing with the staging problems of the opening of Aeschylus'

tradition, would it not be truer to say that the Athenian democracy re-presented and re-interpreted available myths to its own ends? And how appropriate *is* this debate to the *agon*? The action of the play does not require reference to democracy or other forms of government, so why does the debate take this particular form? Perhaps the word 'timeless' in the last sentence signals the basic problem with Collard's position.

¹⁰² Collard 344 notes that "Warriors slain on the Epic battlefield were burned and their ashes buried there, but the home-bringing of ashes for burial was an Athenian custom instituted only in the fifth century and associated with the public epitaphios." See F. Jacoby, "Patrios Nomos," *JHS* 64 (1944) 37–66. Collard nonetheless refuses to place Adrastus' speech in a fifth-century Athenian context: "It is wrong to exaggerate its debt, admittedly unique in Tragedy, to the public epitaphios delivered in Athens each year to honor those killed in war" (323). In the same vein, Zuntz (*supra* n.85: 13–15) emphasizes the differences between Adrastus' oration and those heard annually at the Kerameikos, failing to realize that these very differences would have been instructive precisely *because* the fifth-century audience would have interpreted Adrastus' speech in terms of familiar—and contemporary—paradigms. How could they not?

¹⁰³ For the view that this phrase does not refer to the youth of Athens, see P. Burian, "Logos and Pathos," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism* (Durham 1985) 219 n.41. Goldhill (*supra* n.26: 63–68) and Parke (134) call attention to the pre-performance ceremony in which state-educated orphans of Athenians who had fallen in battle were presented in the orchestra in full hoplite armor. Neither, however, mentions the particular relevance of this event to Eur. *Supp.*, the climax of which involves a procession into the orchestra of the sons of the Seven carrying the ashes and bones of their fathers. They refer to themselves as orphans (1132f), later wondering if they will ever carry shields to avenge their fathers' deaths (1144). I hope to examine elsewhere the relationship between the pre-play procession and its dramatized counterpart in Euripides' tragedy. The obvious parallels provide additional evidence that the matter of the play spoke directly to the fifth-century audience and that the staging would have reflected as much.

Eumenides is difficult enough; sorting through the scholarship is next to impossible. “The explanations that have been offered are legion,” Allen (76) noted nearly seventy years ago, and nothing has slowed the proliferation of ideas about when and from where the Pythia, the Furies, Orestes, and Apollo enter. The consensus is as follows:¹⁰⁴

(1) Critics agree that the backdrop represents the temple of Apollo at Delphi (1–234), and later the temple of Athena in Athens (235–565). We are to understand that the trial of Orestes and subsequent action takes place on the Areopagus (566–1047).

(2) The Pythia delivers the first half of her speech (1–33) directly in front of the temple entrance. She arrives at that position via an *eisodos* or is ‘discovered’ there after a cancelled entry.

(3) The Pythia exits through the door in the façade (33), leaving the stage empty, only to re-enter from the temple moments later in a state of great agitation.¹⁰⁵ After reporting what she has seen inside the temple, she exits via an *eisodos* (63), and the stage is now empty a second time.

(4) After her exit, the scene shifts to the interior of the temple. Apollo and Orestes (who clings to the *omphalos*) are revealed together, either by means of the *ekkyklema* rolled out through the temple door, or simply by the actors walking into position somewhere in the stage area (a belated cancelled entry). After Apollo advises Orestes to seek refuge in Athens, the god leaves (possibly through the door) and Orestes exits along an *eisodos*.¹⁰⁶

(5) Critics are divided as to whether the presentation of Orestes at the *omphalos* also includes some or all of the Chorus of Furies, in keeping with the Pythia’s description of what she sees inside the temple. If it does, the Furies are either rolled in on the *ekkyklema* with Orestes, or walk into place with him in a cancelled entry. If no Furies are visible yet, then the stage is empty a third time once Apollo and Orestes exit.

Beyond this the variations are virtually endless and have been endlessly debated. The possibility that the Chorus is not yet on stage has led to the idea that the ‘dream’ of Clytemnestra need not appear either, but could be conveyed by a disembodied voice emanating from the behind the façade. In this staging, the performance area would be empty a fourth time, either for a full forty-five lines (94–139) if Clytemnestra does not appear, or just after her exit if she does. At that point the Furies finally make their entrance via the door in the

¹⁰⁴ See Taplin, *Stagecraft* 362–87, for a comprehensive review.

¹⁰⁵ For the Pythia’s re-entry, see Taplin, *Stagecraft* 363 and *GTA* 62.

¹⁰⁶ Whether Hermes appears and leads Orestes off is not important here.

façade, dancing the *parodos* of 140–77. If, however, the Furies (in whole or in part) are visible to the audience during the Apollo-Orestes scene, then Clytemnestra's ghost must also appear, entering from an *eisodos* (94) and exiting in the same manner when she has finished her speech (139). The *parodos* then proceeds with the Furies already on stage; for those who think only a few have been visible up to this point, the rest make their entrance through the temple door.

For all these proposed stagings, how and when the Furies first appear to the audience constitute the greatest problem. Those who favor an early entry agree that the Furies should appear at the same time that Apollo and Orestes are revealed inside the temple (64). After the Pythia's exit, the playing area is now understood to represent the temple interior and we see revealed on the *ekkyklema* what the Pythia described earlier. Taplin (*Stagecraft* 442f) exposes the problems in this view and argues persuasively that the *ekkyklema* was not available during Aeschylus' lifetime. Even if it were, the roll-out device could not hold everyone—Apollo, Orestes at the *omphalos*, and the Chorus of Furies. The usual compromise is to include only a few of the Furies, but this generates further difficulties.¹⁰⁷ With the *ekkyklema* blocking the doorway, how do the other Furies get out when it is time for their entrance in the *parodos*? To avoid disrupting the Pythia's speech, those who are to appear at line 64 must be stationed on the *ekkyklema* before the play begins; however, this means that when the Pythia makes her first entrance into, and subsequent withdrawal from, the temple (34), she cannot open the door very wide lest she prematurely expose what is inside to the audience; of course the door must be closed when she leaves.¹⁰⁸

If the *ekkyklema* presents problems, a belated cancelled entry after the Pythia's exit (63) poses even more. In this instance, Apollo, Orestes, and the Furies take up positions and establish that the setting is now the interior of the temple.¹⁰⁹ We cannot reject a cancelled entry

¹⁰⁷ For the 'few Furies' compromise, see A. M. Dale, "Seen and Unseen on the Greek Stage," *WS* 69 (1956) 96–106 (= *Collected Papers* [Cambridge 1969] 123f); R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "The Delphic Temple in Greek Tragedy," in *Miscellanea Tragica in Honorem J. C. Kamberbeek*, ed. J. Bremer et al. (Amsterdam 1976) 486f; Walton (*supra* n.62) 98; D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' Oresteia: A Literary Commentary* (Toronto 1987) 139f, 175.

¹⁰⁸ Stanley 209; Pickard-Cambridge, *TDA* 44.

¹⁰⁹ Hammond 439 thinks that stagehands brought out the *omphalos* and stone seats for the Furies before the performers assumed their positions in a cancelled entry. Hammond is over-literal and forgets that if stone seats come on, someone will have to take them off. The Pythia does describe the Furies as "seated on thrones" (47), calling to mind the seats of those who consult the Delphic oracle (a nice irony) and perhaps even the throne reserved for herself as prophetess (as earlier at 29). The

after the play has started simply because it is unprecedented, but we should dismiss it as dramatically impracticable since it suspends the action after only 63 lines. The delayed cancelled entry is especially troubling because it occurs immediately *after* the prologue, making the play's opening appear to be a false start. If it were going to be so difficult to get us 'inside' the temple, why would Aeschylus set the prologue outside the temple in the first place?

Taplin makes the strongest case against the early appearance of the Furies, arguing that it weakens the impact of their horrific *parodos* beginning at line 140. For Taplin, nothing must detract "from the full impact of their first entry as they awaken one another and flit singly into the orchestra to join the bestial choreography of the song" (*Stagecraft* 374). However, three factors militate against Taplin's proposed late entry (line 140) of the Chorus. First, the stage is emptied completely of performers *four times* in the first 139 lines, making for an unnecessarily jerky opening that breaks up any sense of dramatic momentum. There is no difficulty with the Pythia's exit into the temple, for she returns quickly and with frantic energy (34–38) to report what she has seen inside. Stopping and starting becomes a problem, however, in the scene between Orestes and Apollo. Both enter an empty stage only to leave the stage empty a second time after an exchange of only thirty lines, a kind of hit-and-run scene-building that generates no sense of ongoing action. The pattern is repeated with the appearance of Clytemnestra who also enters an empty space. Worse, she must harangue the offstage Furies without being able to direct her speech at them, and her efforts seem particularly odd since she tries to get the Furies to look at her wounds (103).¹¹⁰ One can imagine an audience being gripped by rapid exhortations aimed at an offstage target, but this dramatic strategy will not sustain a forty-five line speech. Where is the continuity necessary for the "gradually mounting, threatening terror and horror" that Taplin emphasizes? His series of truncated scenes delimited in each case by emptying the stage seems less a

detail serves to emphasize the Furies' desecration of the temple, not to signal the presence of stone seats in the orchestra or on the *ekkyklema*. In a recent revision of his position, Hammond (*supra* n.34) eliminates the thrones, but his staging ideas remain impractical.

¹¹⁰ One wonders how audible the Furies' groans would be if delivered from behind the backdrop with the door closed, the situation that obtains in Taplin's staging. An offstage, high-pitched death cry could certainly carry in the theater of Dionysus, but could a *μυγμός*? Taplin (*Stagecraft* 371 n.2) refers to the Furies' offstage sounds as "bloodcurdling noises," but the text (118–28) suggests something closer to dogs whimpering in their sleep. The potential effect of offstage Furies in the theater of Dionysus is more one of laughter than terror.

sign of innovative stagecraft than the mark of repetitive and ineffective dramaturgy. It is hard to believe that Aeschylus would have begun the last play of his trilogy with such a sequence of false starts.

Second, Taplin's scenario denies that the action from 64–234 takes place inside the temple. He argues that Apollo and Orestes enter alone "in mid-dialogue," presumably strolling out through the temple door (*Stagecraft* 363f). If the suppliant Orestes is leaving his place of sanctuary before we get a chance to see him there, why do we need to see *anything* that happens inside the temple? And yet we clearly do, for the action must be set in the temple interior when Apollo commands the Furies to get out of his house (179f).¹¹¹ If we follow Taplin's idea for a "mid-dialogue" entrance, we never see a polluted Orestes in supplication at the *omphalos*. That stage picture would surely have proved more terrifying to a fifth-century audience than even the most horrifying entrance of dancing Furies.¹¹² But Orestes at the *omphalos* (with or without Furies) is impossible in Taplin's staging because he never allows the action to get 'inside' the temple.

The third problem with this scenario stems directly from Taplin's dramatic "first principle" for the opening of the play: namely, to maximize the impact of the initial appearance of the Furies. Although a good directorial choice, it is not the only one, and the dramatic payoff it delivers must be weighed against what is lost. In this regard, Taplin and other critics pay little attention to the fact that the Furies are described by the Pythia in great detail (46–59) before they reveal themselves to the audience. They are portrayed as women, then Gorgons, then harpies but without wings, black, disgusting, noses dripping, eyes oozing a horrible fluid, and dressed in a way that defiles the temple. The Pythia's description is more horrifying than any visual representation on the fifth-century stage could be. We are reminded that the genius of Greek tragedy lay (at least in part) in the power of words to evoke images rather than the power of graphic physical representations to make their quite different effect. The size of the audience and their distance from the performers mean that the masks could give at best a general impression, much less shocking than the precision of the Pythia's verbal picture.¹¹³ Since the Furies are so

¹¹¹ Uncharacteristically, Taplin (*Stagecraft* 373f) resorts to special pleading to skirt this difficulty. See n.121 *infra*.

¹¹² According to Hourmouziades (101), "In the *Eumenides* the *omphalos* is indispensable."

¹¹³ Bain (9 n.3) observes that "only a minority of the audience" could be expected to see the details of the mask.

described, it would be counterproductive to make their physical 'revelation' the keystone in staging the opening of the play.

Neither an early (line 64) nor a late (140) entrance of the Furies seems dramatically advisable. The former demands the *ekkyklema*—which is too small to do the job, blocks the door, and may not have been an Aeschylean option—or entails a belated cancelled entry that stops the play shortly after it has started. The latter is no improvement, generating a series of false starts that sacrifice dramatic power and continuity in order to achieve a dubious goal. Ideally, we would emphasize both the Furies' first appearance and the *omphalos* inside the temple (where the action at 64–234 is clearly set) without resorting to an *ekkyklema*, belated cancelled entry, or a sequence of 'empty stages'. In other words, we need to stage the opening of *Eumenides* in a space that is, almost simultaneously, outside *and* inside.

What do we know about the distinctions made in tragedy between scenes set outside and those set indoors? In Aeschylus' *Persians* the playing area shifts from inside the council chamber (140) to an outside area (Atossa's arrival by chariot at 155, noted at 607f) without benefit of *ekkyklema* or overt change of scenery.¹¹⁴ A similar flexibility between interior and exterior setting occurs at *Choephoroi* 875–930. If critics do not all agree that the scene moves inside the house for the crucial encounter between Orestes and Clytemnestra, most would concur with Garvie (lii) that "the distinction between the courtyard and the exterior of the palace is . . . blurred." We may conclude that in the theater of Aeschylus, the audience must imagine and interpret the stage setting in terms not only of what they see but also of what they are told.

In later tragedy when the *ekkyklema* is employed to reveal an interior scene, the audience receives a clear signal that the subsequent action is to be understood as taking place inside. Even here, however, the exposed 'indoor space' could gradually lose that identity. Using *Heracles* as an example, Hourmouziades notes (103) that in Euripidean tragedy "once the *ekkyklema* has intruded into the acting area, the former gradually loses all connection with the interior, from which it has been 'removed', and is identified with the place where . . . the chorus are standing." With or without the *ekkyklema*, the playing area of the Greek theater (the orchestra and/or stage area) can repre-

¹¹⁴ The bibliography on this scene is vast. For the position I adopt, see Taplin, *Stagecraft* 454 and (*supra* n.5) 67f; also Gould 268 and, to a lesser extent, H. D. Broadhead, *The Persae of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1960) xlv.

sent both inside and outside, exactly what is required for the last play of the trilogy.

With this in mind, let us consider an alternative sequence for the opening of *Eumenides* that takes advantage of the strong central orchestra position and fully exploits the flexibility of interior and exterior space offered by the Greek theater:

(1) The orchestral altar represents the *omphalos* 'inside' the temple at Delphi; the stage area behind the orchestra is 'outside' the temple.

(2) In a normal cancelled entry (*before* the play begins, as in Euripides' *Supplikes*) Orestes and the Furies take up their positions in the orchestra; the Pythia does the same, but stands upstage near the center of the façade.¹¹⁵ The members of the Chorus either cover their masks with their robes as they walk in or carry their masks so they cannot be seen and put them on after they lie on the orchestra floor.¹¹⁶ The opening tableau is similar to that described later by the Pythia.

(3) The Pythia delivers the first part of her prologue in the stage area near the façade, unaware of what lies at the center of the orchestra.¹¹⁷ Finished with her prayer, she 'enters' the temple simply by walking into the orchestra.¹¹⁸ At the sight of Orestes and the Furies, the Pythia falls on her hands and knees and scrambles back to where she stood before. Her description of what she has seen is still before the audi-

¹¹⁵ T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley 1982) 68f, also proposes a cancelled entry for the opening of *Eumenides*. Since his focus is elsewhere, he neither examines what is wrong with the alternatives nor goes into the details of staging (and the thematic reasons for adopting them) presented here. A. Podlecki (*Phoenix* 38 [1984] 277) credits Rosenmeyer with "a careful analysis of the staging of *Eum.* 67ff"; Garvie (*JHS* 104 [1984] 195), however, finds Rosenmeyer's idea "interesting but not completely convincing." I hope that my analysis will change that judgment to 'interesting and convincing'.

¹¹⁶ Proponents of the *ekkyklema* adopt a similar strategy: "They [Furies] would be slumped over in such a way that their hideous masks would not be revealed" (Hogan 149).

¹¹⁷ Because the audience see what the Pythia cannot see—that there is a discordance between the neatly ordered genealogy and prayer with which she begins the play and the scene she is about to witness at the *omphalos*—they have a certain ironic relationship to the first part of her speech.

¹¹⁸ The demonstrable flexibility of the Greek theatrical space indicates nothing impossible or even foreign about having the Pythia 'enter' the temple without actually going offstage behind the *skene*. An exit and re-entry through the central door is only one way (albeit the normal one) to represent the movements that the Pythia makes; by thinking that it is the *only* way, scholars introduce problems that Aeschylus as playwright and director would surely have avoided. The distinction between outside and inside might be helped by Arnott's wooden stage, but the physical distance between façade and orchestra center adequately distinguishes the two areas, helped by the fact that the Pythia stands while Orestes is huddled at the altar and the Furies lie asleep on the orchestra floor.

ence's eyes, but it has not yet 'come to life'. When she finishes her speech, she exits through an *eisodos*.

(4) Apollo enters through the center door and speaks to Orestes while approaching him at the *omphalos* at the center of the orchestra. Their scene is played amidst the sleeping Furies, making sense of Apollo's lines about Orestes' pursuers (66–73), especially *καὶ νῦν ἀλούσας τάσδε τὰς μάργους ὄρᾶς ὑπνω πεσοῦσαι* (67f: "You now see these maddened women overcome, fallen into sleep"). At the conclusion of their scene, Orestes and Apollo exit through an *eisodos*.

(5) Clytemnestra enters from the opposite *eisodos* and tries to wake the Furies who lie at her feet.¹¹⁹ Their inarticulate responses give the sense that some frightening, powerful force is being called up from the ground. As Clytemnestra makes her final exhortation and exits by an *eisodos*, the Furies begin their dance, rising to an erect posture and facing the audience for the first time. The revelation is all the more powerful since the Furies have slowly awakened to life before the audience's eyes.¹²⁰

(6) At the close of the *parodos*, Apollo re-enters (either from an *eisodos* or through the door in the backdrop) to expel the Furies. We can now make sense of Apollo's opening lines: *ἔξω, κελεύω, τῶνδε δωμάτων τάχος χωρεῖτ', ἀπαλλάσσεσθε μαντικῶν μυχῶν* (179f: "Out! I command you, and fast. Get out of this house, leave the prophetic inner sanctum").¹²¹ The Furies leave through an *eisodos* at 231 to track down Orestes, followed by Apollo at 234, and the scene shifts to Athens.

(7) No longer the *omphalos* at Delphi, the orchestra altar now represents the aniconic cult image in her temple at Athens. This shift has been prepared for by Apollo's advice that Orestes go to Athens and embrace the *βρέτας* of Athena (79f), by Orestes' subsequent departure (93), and by the pursuit of the Furies (231). Orestes enters via an *eis-*

¹¹⁹ If Aeschylus had four actors available (unlikely in my opinion), then Clytemnestra could be part of the cancelled entry and rise from the orchestra floor when it is time for her entrance (line 94). See Hammond 439 and (*supra* n.34) 27, where he has her enter from "a trap door in the wooden stage."

¹²⁰ This choreography seems much superior to that envisaged by Taplin, in which the Furies' waking is signalled by offstage noises. Taplin (*Stagecraft* 372f) admits that the designation in the *Life* of Aeschylus of the Furies' entrance as *σποράδην* indicates no knowledge of fifth-century staging techniques, a point also made by J. Herington, *Aeschylus* (New Haven 1986) 140, who nonetheless supports Taplin's staging.

¹²¹ Taplin claims that these lines refer to the sanctuary in general, and that Apollo speaks to the Furies outside the temple. But *μυχός* usually means the inmost part of a building, and the effect of Apollo's expulsion of the Furies is far greater if the *omphalos* is visible throughout the scene.

odos (234), establishing the orchestra as the temple interior and the altar as the cult image of the goddess (235–43).¹²² He supplicates at this central position a second time, an exemplary use of iconographic parallels available in the Greek theater. Orestes appeals to Athena from the strongest stage position, perfectly placed for the Chorus to surround him in their “binding song.”

This proposed staging for the opening of *Eumenides* radically simplifies the blocking and avoids the complications of the other scenarios. Those complications arise in part from the assumption that the *skene* façade characterizes the playing space of tragedy. We have noted above that the backdrop plays no part in the first 652 lines of *Choephoroi*. How important is it in *Eumenides*? The setting shifts three times in the play, from the temple of Apollo at Delphi, to the temple of Athena in Athens, to the Areopagus. In the opening setting at Delphi, all but the first 63 lines take place in the interior of the temple; in the second setting at Athens, the scene takes place wholly inside the temple. Why insist, then that the backdrop of this play must represent a temple *exterior*? To do so, as we have shown, only leads to confusion and raises unnecessary obstacles to the effective staging of the larger opening sequence.

We must still consider the use of the central doorway in *Eumenides* and what it reveals about the interior and exterior space of the play. In the traditional staging, the door is used only three times in the play—when the Pythia leaves at 33 and returns at 34, when Apollo, Orestes, and Furies enter at 64, and when the rest of the Furies enter at 140. There is no need for a door in the remaining 900 lines of the play. Even if it *were* used in the supplication scene at Athens, then it would open onto an *interior* space (the temple of Athena). If used in the trial scene, and the trial were imagined as taking place in a courtroom, then once again the door would open on an interior space. If, on the other hand, the court of the Areopagus was out of doors, then the entrance would not be a door at all, just a means of access to the playing area, and the backdrop would cease to stand for any sort of building.

The point, I hope, is clear: the backdrop in *Eumenides* cannot determine the setting of the play in any specific way. For those who

¹²² An efficient transition from Delphi to Athens calls for the Furies' departure by one *eisodos* at 234, followed immediately by Orestes' entrance by the other. To have a stagehand carry on a separate property and place it in the orchestra would only disrupt an otherwise smooth transition. Taplin, *Stagecraft* 386 and *GTA* 84, Hogan 157f, and Gould 287 agree that the playing area now represents the interior of the temple; Newiger (*supra* n.40: 333) places the *βπέρας* of Athena in the “Mittelpunkt” of the orchestra.

insist that the façade does specify the playing area, then they must admit that the doorway opens onto an *interior* space for all but the first speech of the play (1–63). Why insist on a temple façade for that opening speech, only to ask the audience to think it away in every subsequent scene? A director who approaches staging in this manner lets the tail wag the dog; one doubts if Aeschylus would make so basic a mistake.

The alternative staging proposed here gives dramatic impetus to the opening of the play by guaranteeing continuity of place (the interior of the temple of Apollo) and the ongoing presence of the Furies. At first they are seen sleeping (with Orestes), then waking (with Clytemnestra), then searching (the first chorus), then debating (with Apollo), then pursuing (their departure to track down Orestes in Athens). As the analysis of Euripides' *Supplikes* has revealed, however, there is more to good staging than efficiency. We also judge good stage direction by how forcefully it brings across important thematic elements, by how fully it realizes the play for an audience. Does the staging we have proposed for *Eumenides* meet those standards?

All who have studied the *Oresteia* know that there are countless internal connections within each play and across the trilogy. In the staging proposed here, the ghost of Clytemnestra moves among the Furies who lie sleeping near the *omphalos*, trying to shake them from their slumber and rouse them to vengeance. The stage picture recalls a not dissimilar scene in *Choephoroi*, the *kommos*, in which Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus wake the spirit of Agamemnon to help them take vengeance on Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. I have argued above that in the second play Agamemnon's tomb is represented by the orchestra altar. If we locate the *omphalos* of Delphi at the same place—the equivalent in the theater of Dionysus to downstage center—then Clytemnestra's cry for the spirit of vengeance to rise up mirrors the *kommos* not only in subject but also in staging. In *Eumenides*, of course, a physically present Chorus is summoned to life, not the invisible spirit of the dead. Nonetheless, the reflection of the *kommos* becomes far weaker if Clytemnestra attempts to rouse off-stage Furies (as Taplin and Herington maintain), or to direct her efforts at two or three Furies on the upstage *ekkyklema* (the majority view).

Images of sleeping and waking constitute part of the rich poetic texture of the trilogy. In *Agamemnon* the Watchman tries to stay awake (12–19), then rouses the house with the news of the beacon (26–30); Clytemnestra describes one beacon fire awakening the next (299), then warns the Greeks who are sleeping in captured Troy (337)

to beware the wakeful anger of those they have conquered (346); the Herald speaks of the dead whose grief is so great that they have no wish to wake again (568f); Clytemnestra recounts her many sleepless nights (889–94); the Chorus tell Cassandra to put her prophecies to sleep (1247); one Elder wants to stop the murderers “whose hands are not asleep” (1356f); and so on. Similarly, in *Choephoroi* the nightmare of Clytemnestra (32–41, 523–25) gives rise to the libations at the grave of Agamemnon. In the *kommos* we watch the collective ‘waking’ of the spirit of vengeance in all the participants, especially Agamemnon. As Orestes says, ἄρ’ ἐξεγείρη τοῖσδ’ ὄνειδεσιν, πάτερ; (495: “Aren’t you awakened by these reproaches, Father?”) In the last line of the play, the Chorus wonder when the force of anger will sleep (1076); the sleeping Furies at the opening of *Eumenides* seem to answer that question. However, dramatic image now becomes stage action as the audience watches the actual arousal of the Furies, rising from the orchestra floor to take their full part in the drama. The careful progression from poetic language to its realization by performers on stage suggests that the dramatic climax of the opening scene does not lie in the Furies’ *entrance*, but in their *waking*.

What of the conversion of the Furies at the end of the play? The Chorus dance out their rage, Athena tries to quell it; the Furies repeat the threats, again Athena attempts to calm them. After four such lyric outbursts from the Chorus and spoken responses from the goddess (778–891), the Furies finally respond to Athena’s plea to “put the black wave of bitter anger to sleep” (831). As they leave their dance and return to dialogue metre, the Coryphaeus says that they have fallen under a kind of spell (900). The metamorphosis from Furies into Eumenides accomplished by Athena repeats in reverse the transformation of sleeping Chorus to active agents of vengeance brought about by the ghost of Clytemnestra. In the original production, this implicit connection between Athena and Clytemnestra could have been made more explicit, because both parts (together with the Pythia’s) were played by the same actor.¹²³

Perhaps we have here a “mirror scene” of the sort that Taplin identifies as a basic structural element in Greek tragedy.¹²⁴ There can be no doubt that the Furies dance out their rage in the orchestra; perhaps Aeschylus also places Athena among the Chorus when she tries to calm them down. The scene would then end with a stage picture of the transformed Furies on the orchestra floor and Athena standing among them as she recounts the blessings that the Furies are

¹²³ W. Whallon, *Problem and Spectacle: Studies in the Oresteia* (Heidelberg 1980) 106.

¹²⁴ Taplin, *GTA* ch. 8, “Mirror Scenes,” esp. 122–27.

to sing for Athens (903–15), the mirror image of the staging we have proposed for the appearance of the ghost of Clytemnestra. On this occasion, however, the Furies rise in a song of blessing over the city (916–1031), and leave the theater not to pursue Orestes, but to make their dwelling in their new home, Athens.¹²⁵

6. Conclusion

Sensible staging of Euripides' *Supplices* virtually demands locating the suppliant altar in the middle of the orchestra. We have seen the advantages of placing in the same position the tomb of Agamemnon in *Choephoroi* and the *omphalos* and statue of Athena in *Eumenides*. A brief survey of other suppliant plays shows that they, too, benefit from organizing the relevant action around an orchestra altar.

Aeschylus' *Supplices* seems the perfect candidate for orchestra staging, a tragedy in which the Chorus play the most important part and the setting is an open-air sanctuary with no backdrop required or referred to.¹²⁶ An orchestra altar opens up the dramatic possibilities of this difficult play, but Friis-Johansen and Whittle insist on placing the altar and “two-thirds of what [action] is left when parodos, stasima and exodos are excluded” onto a wooden stage connected to the *skene*.¹²⁷ The general problems attending that arrangement have been treated above, but a particular difficulty arises in the long exchange between the Chorus and the King of Argos (234–523). If altar and Chorus are on a low wooden stage and Pelasgus remains in the orchestra, as Friis-Johansen and Whittle imagine, then the King cannot speak directly to the suppliants because of the upstaging problems that inevitably result.¹²⁸ Long speeches can work effectively in Greek tragedy with both parties facing out, but not dialogue scenes of this sort where some interplay between performers is indicated. The prob-

¹²⁵ I hope that the staging proposed here will realize dramatically the differences and similarities between Athena and Clytemnestra presented by R. P. Winnington-Ingram in his masterful “Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena,” *JHS* 88 (1949) 130–47 (= *Studies in Aeschylus* [Cambridge 1983] 101–31).

¹²⁶ For other opinions, see A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplices: Play and Trilogy* (Cambridge 1969) 160f.

¹²⁷ Friis-Johansen and Whittle 3f, echoed by W. G. Thalmann, *Dramatic Art in Aeschylus's "Seven Against Thebes"* (New Haven 1978) 85.

¹²⁸ See discussion of the same problem in *Ag. supra* n.81. It is clear from Aesch. *Supp.* 188–90 that the Chorus sit at the altar in supplication, and their continuous proximity to it is marked in different ways at 222–24, 241f, 333f, and 480–83. When Pelasgus finally persuades the suppliant women to leave their wands on the altar and move from it (506–23), this does not signal a choral descent from a wooden stage, *contra* Friis-Johansen and Whittle 394f. Rather it marks the commitment of the King to the suppliants' cause and prepares the Chorus for their first stasimon (524–99), allowing those still seated to rise and providing a reason for them all to leave their suppliant boughs on the altar before they begin their dance.

lems are avoided if this scene is staged in the orchestra, which is also the best place for the troublesome lyric encounter between Chorus (metaphorically clinging to the altar) and the Egyptian Herald who tries to force them to the ships (825–902).¹²⁹

Euripides' *Heracles*, *Heracleidae*, and *Andromache* begin like his *Supplikes* with the cancelled entry of suppliants at an altar. For *Heracles* the advantages of an orchestra-central position for the long prologue (1–106) should, by now, appear obvious, and the subsequent speeches benefit from delivery in the orchestra: the 'bow debate' between Lycus and Amphitryon (140–205), the speech by the Coryphaeus (252–74), which is the longest speech by a chorus-member in tragedy, Megara's reply (275–311), and finally Amphitryon's criticism of Zeus (339–48). This last speech covers the exit of Megara and the children into the palace as they abandon the altar to prepare for death. Locating the altar some distance downstage from the house door allows for a visually effective exit from the performance area. If the altar is by the door in the façade, as Bond (*supra* n.8: 61) thinks, then the suppliants' exit covers little ground and is theatrically insignificant. Having spent the opening 350 lines setting up the departure of Heracles' family, Euripides would hardly want them 'slipping out' a nearby door. The play asks for something more striking: a fully-staged departure from an orchestra altar.

The commerce between the *skene* and orchestra is all the more important when the family re-emerges from the house wearing funeral wreaths and clothed in black. The visual impact of their costume change would be greatly diminished if they should stop at a stage altar near the backdrop rather than cross downstage to the orchestra altar. This, moreover, is by far the best position for Heracles to find his family when he returns from his labors. After learning what has transpired, he takes his sons by the hand and leads them back inside the house "like little boats in tow" (631f). If everyone is already back against the façade for this second departure, then a potentially stunning sequence of Heracles leading his small sons to safety collapses into an awkward and visually uninteresting exit.

The play culminates in a longer and even more powerful exit. Persuading Heracles to make a new life in Athens, Theseus leads him away from his home just as the returning hero earlier had led his family back to it. In this third and final departure, Theseus leaves the performance area via an *eisodos*, with Heracles following in his wake

¹²⁹ All the more so if (as seems unlikely) there is a second chorus of Egyptians. See Friis-Johansen and Whittle 172f; cf. Garvie (*supra* n.126) 193f.

like a boat in tow (1424f). The earlier image and action are repeated, but with a crucial difference: the *skene* representing the house is abandoned, and with it the altar of Zeus in the orchestra.

As with *Heracles*, the opening action of *Andromache* concerns a suppliant forced to leave the altar, and in each case the aggressor threatens to use fire (Lycus at 240–46, Hermione at 257f). Andromache's prologue (after a cancelled entry) and the Chorus' *parodos* (beginning at 117f with an address to Andromache) are both better staged if the altar is in the orchestra. A strong upstage position greatly enhances the strident entrance of Hermione from the palace (147), allowing her to talk 'down' to Andromache. By the end of her speech, however, she has joined Andromache near orchestra-center. Indeed, the suppliant's very fixity at the altar—compared to the lead clamps used in ancient building (266ff)—exerts its own perverse attraction on Hermione, whose character is defined by a preoccupation with her Trojan rival. Andromache remains seated in supplication during the first stasimon (274–308), in which the Chorus recount the judgment of Paris and the fall of Troy. This song of the city's destruction is performed around one of the victims, giving the ode a particular focus that the Chorus acknowledge in the closing antistrophe (301–08). At that point they address Andromache directly; their action is nearly impossible if the Trojan princess is upstage by the façade, but effectively accomplished if she stands at an altar in the orchestra.¹³⁰ There, also, Menelaus confronts Andromache and threatens to kill her son, a ruse that draws her away from the protection of the altar. It is striking that her subsequent diatribe against Menelaus and the Spartan race (445–63) engenders no spoken response. This would indicate that Andromache is being dragged upstage while still facing the audience and denouncing her persecutors. As she speaks her last line, Menelaus and his men pull her through the door and into the palace, a brutal if articulate rejoinder that confirms all that Andromache has said.

Unlike *Heracles* and *Andromache*, the altar in *Heracleidae* is occupied from the beginning to the end of the play. The suppliants take

¹³⁰ P. T. Stevens, *Euripides, Andromache* (Oxford 1971) 83, 126f, locates the altar onstage "a little to one side of the central door" and sees Andromache as but one more example "of a silent [Euripidean] figure in the background while the Chorus sing an ode." Not surprisingly, Stevens finds in this stasimon "no direct relevance to the dramatic situation." For the location of the altar, Stevens and Arnott (47) take as evidence Andromache's statement that it is *δόμων πάροικον* (43, "alongside the house"). Surely an orchestra altar is sufficiently close to the façade to fit that description if taken as a general indication of the altar's whereabouts. To follow literally such descriptive phrases leads to problems that no tragic playwright could have intended, such as that discussed *supra* n.109.

up their positions in a cancelled entry, and with the help of the Chorus and Demophon fend off Copreus' attempt to remove them (55–287).¹³¹ Although offered a haven inside (340–43), Iolaus and the sons of Heracles remain at the altar. Even after Iolaus departs for battle (747), the Heracleidae stay at their place of refuge and are clearly in the same position during the final scene between Alcmena and Eurystheus (928–1052).

Always present as suppliants, the young children (*νηπίους*, 956) provide the focal point for this strange tragedy. Although they themselves never say a word, others speak or refer to them over twenty-five times in the course of the play.¹³² From their central position at the orchestra altar, the sons of Heracles witness an extraordinary sequence of events: their attempted abduction, the defense of their rights, Macaria's decision to offer herself in sacrifice, the near-comic arming of Iolaus, the report of his rejuvenation and victory, and the barbaric revenge of their grandmother Alcmena. While others speak of rejuvenation (Iolaus) and eternal youth (the reference to Heracles and Hebe in the heavens), a group of young boys stand in the middle watching a twisted adult world unfold. Their presence in the orchestra gives the audience a crucial perspective on the disturbing events of the play.

In *Helen*, the tomb of Proteus is used at important moments, but not for continuous supplication as is the altar in *Heracleidae*. After a cancelled entry to the tomb, Helen delivers the prologue (1–67) and plays a scene (68–163) with Teucer, who enters from an *eisodos*. This opening pattern is by now familiar, and a place in the orchestra seems best for it. Helen is certainly in the orchestra for the *parodos* she shares with the Chorus (167–251); after her long speech, the Chorus repeatedly urge her to leave the tomb and go into the palace (317, 324, 327). That departure is postponed, however, for a *kommos* and monody (330–85), again presumably in the orchestra; only then do the Chorus and Helen vacate the performing area, leaving it empty for Menelaus' first appearance.

After his entrance and scene with the Portress, Menelaus withdraws to the façade and observes Helen's emergence from the palace. She speaks of returning to the tomb, but stops to ponder Theonoe's proph-

¹³¹ The open area of the orchestra allows the assailant to get upstage of the suppliants at the altar, so that all parties can still face downstage towards the audience. An altar by the façade, however, would turn much of the movement and dialogue upstage, difficult to see and impossible to hear.

¹³² By every character except the Messenger: 10f, 24, 29–34, 48, 90–93, 123ff, 196, 224ff, 243–49, 270, 309–14, 340f, 344–47, 427, 442, 445, 532, 574–78, 602ff, 630, 710–16, 873–78, 955f, 1001–07, 1034ff, 1044.

ecy that her husband is alive and on his way to Egypt (528–40). Menelaus steps out to apprehend her and Helen runs for safety at the tomb, mistaking the man in rags for a lackey of Theoclymenus. Menelaus grabs her, but Helen struggles forward and arrives at her place of supplication (541–56, with a great deal of movement indicated in the text). This wild encounter makes much better stage sense if Helen is headed downstage towards a tomb in the orchestra than if the entire struggle takes place on the same spot she occupies when she reappears from the palace. Once attained, orchestra center offers the strongest area for the long recognition scene and shared reminiscence that follow (557–857), including the pact that the couple will die together at the very tomb of Proteus should they be caught. With Theonoe's entrance (865), the action moves farther upstage, although Menelaus does deliver part (if not all) of a long speech on his knees at the tomb of Proteus (961–95). Again, downstage center is the best position, allowing Menelaus to speak out towards the audience with the tomb before him, rather than sideways or away from the audience as would result were the tomb located by the façade.

Granted that an altar or tomb in the orchestra makes sense of the staging of *Helen*, we must consider a passage that has led commentators to place the altar directly in front of the door. Theoclymenus, the new Egyptian king and Helen's suitor, appears late in the play returning (with entourage) from the hunt. With his very first words he greets his father's tomb, noting that it is located at the ἐξόδοισι ('the exitings') so that he will be able to greet it whenever he leaves or enters the palace (1165–68). Arnott, Dale, and Kannicht take this as proof that the tomb lay beside the palace door, and that Theoclymenus 'apologizes' for its peculiar position.¹³³ The problem is, however, that Theoclymenus is nowhere near the palace door when he addresses the tomb; he is still in an *eisodos* on his way to the orchestra. It is possible, therefore, that he refers to a tomb in the orchestra, considered sufficiently close to the house to deserve comment. That Euripides has Theoclymenus speak of his father's tomb in this manner may have more to do with the 'good king/wicked successor' motif found elsewhere in the play than with an apology for placing a tomb

¹³³ Arnott 61f; A. M. Dale, *Euripides, Helen* (Oxford 1967) 143; R. Kannicht, *Euripides, Helena* (Heidelberg 1969) 307ff. An easier explanation suggests itself: Theoclymenus uses ἐξόδοισι to refer to the road leading out of the city gate near which his palace is located, and through which he returns from hunting. The original audience may well have assumed nothing more complicated than this, since the same arrangement occurred in Athens, where tombs lined the road outside the Dipylon Gate.

by the door. For the literal-minded, it should be noted that the only time Theoclymenus greets the tomb is here from the *eisodos*; when he actually enters (1300) and exits (1390) through the palace door, he fails to mention it at all.¹³⁴ In any case, we should be wary of rejecting—on the basis of an over-literal reading of a single passage—the considerable staging advantages of an orchestral altar or tomb.

We should perhaps end with comedy and ask if the findings presented here have any relevance to fifth-century comic staging. In Aristophanes' *Peace*, Trygaeus needs an altar for sacrifice and finds one immediately "outside" (*θύρασι*), ready at hand. Critics assume that Trygaeus refers to Arnott's so-called "permanent stage altar" located just outside the door.¹³⁵ But imagine the difference if this long sacrifice scene (937–1128) is not staged at the *skene* but centers on an altar in the orchestra which, of course, is also "outside."

Sent off to fetch a sheep, the slave returns from the house with paraphernalia for the sacrifice and is immediately sent back to fetch the animal. The farther he has to run, the better for the comedy; stepping back inside the door and out again to a stage altar is too easy for a comic slave, as Xanthias would testify. After the sheep is brought out, Trygaeus tells his slave to circle the altar with the basket of grain and lustral water (956f), a comic runaround well-suited to the orchestra. He then commands the slave to throw barley seeds at the spectators, an order that the slave begins to carry out in the very same line (962). The joke—involving a play on the word *κριθή* ('barley seed' and 'penis')—requires that some of the audience actually get pelted with seeds; none reaches the women (presumably in the upper rows), but the slave points out that they'll get theirs tonight. From an orchestra-central position, the slave can indeed sprinkle the front-row audience; if the altar were onstage, however, the action would require so much time and effort as to change completely the nature of the gag.

Trygaeus next builds and lights a fire at the altar, which, if actually done, would be much safer in the orchestra than close to the wooden façade. To save the *choregos* the price of a sheep, however, Trygaeus decides to have the sacrifice take place 'offstage', so the slave has to lug the animal back inside the palace. Stage animals are notorious

¹³⁴ A similar passage occurs when Menelaus asks Proteus' whereabouts and the Portress points to his tomb (466). This exchange takes place near the palace door, leading some to conclude that the tomb must be alongside it. It is equally possible that the Portress compresses two bits of information into one short response—(1) Proteus is dead, and (2) that is his tomb there, in the orchestra—without intending to signal that Menelaus is virtually on top of the King's grave when he asks the question.

¹³⁵ Arnott, Sommerstein, Dearden, all *supra* n.8.

scene-stealers, and the greater the distance from altar to door the better for the comedy.¹³⁶ A series of exits and entrances with various props follows, capped (as we might expect) by the master's accusation that his slave has a lot of time, and the overworked slave's protestations to the contrary (1041f). Suddenly, drawn by the smell of cooking meat, the oracle-monger Hierocles appears from an *eisodos*. At first Trygaeus ignores him, then denies him his supplication for food and drink, and finally offers the cooked meat instead to the spectators. Carried out in relative proximity to the audience, this 'sacrifice' is intended for them all along. Comic routines are even more difficult to describe than to perform, but the point, I hope, is clear. The comedy of this scene flourishes in the orchestra; if pulled back to a stage altar near the façade, it can barely breathe.

The fifth-century theater of Dionysus was irrepressibly three-dimensional—large, out-of-doors, and open—a far cry from the framed stage of a proscenium-arch theater. An aggressively public space, this theater directs the performers out towards the orchestra and the audience, not back towards the *skene*. Freed of misconceptions regarding an unusable altar and the prominence of the backdrop and stage area, we have discovered that the orchestra provides the strongest position for performance in the theater of Dionysus, and that an altar placed at or near its center offers the key for staging suppliant plays. Of course, there is no single 'right' way to stage a Greek tragedy, just as there is no single answer to the related question, How did that tragedy work on its original audience? The evidence and argument presented here will, at least, help us pose that important question in a theatrically more intelligent way.¹³⁷

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¹³⁶ Aristophanes could have used a prop sheep, but a live one would, I think, have proved irresistible.

¹³⁷ I am extremely grateful to B. D. Wescoat, G. L. Huxley, M. W. Edwards, and the anonymous referee of this journal for their help in improving this article, and for research grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Emory University Research Committee.