ABSTRACT

UNDER ATHENIAN EYES:  
A FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS OF ATHENIAN IDENTITY  
IN GREEK TRAGEDY  

by Zhi-Zhong Wang

The purpose of this thesis is to use Aeschylus’ The Persians as an example for exploring the facet of Athenian tragedy as part of the emerging civil discourse which rewrote Athenian identity in the fifth century BC. Through French philosopher Michel Foucault’s theories concerning power and discourse, I will illustrate how the Athenian tragedy was not merely an artistic form which expressed or/and reflected the philosophical ideas or political climate in the fifth-century Athens, but an institution of the Athenian governmentality (as Foucault would describe it) in terms of modeling a new Athenian identity accordant with the martial democracy. Through the mechanics, the strategies of power exercise, of the festival of Great Dionysia and of the tragic competition, Athenian tragedy disciplined the Athenians. In this aspect, the dynamics between the theatrical practice and its society were fully perceived.
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To Professor Howard Blanning, my advisor,
my supervisor in terms of my assistantship, my children’s best friend,
with all my respect and thanks.

To Teresa, Oscar, Sophie, and Ian
with love.
Introduction

By employing the French philosopher Michel Foucault’s theory concerning power and discursive formation, this thesis aims to explore the aspect of the fifth-century Athenian tragedy as a disciplinary institution of consolidating the city. Considered as one of the most important heritages of western civilization, Athenian tragedy has long been canonized and studied in academic institutions; however, not until the past few decades has the relationship between Athenian tragedy and democratic ideology been emphasized. Needless to stress, the posing of new theories accounts for the new focuses of Athenian Tragedy study coming into view.

In Literary Theory: An Introduction British culture critic Terry Eagleton brings up again Marx's question about Art and its relation to time: Marx wondered why ancient Greek art retained an "eternal charm," when the social environment (the fifth-century Athenian democratic polis) produced it had ceased to exist. And Eagleton’s answer is: "how do we know that it [ancient Greek art] will remain 'eternally' charming, since history has not yet ended?" (12)

It certainly could be a scholarly waste to simply argue whether or not people will still be fascinated by Greek tragedy in the future. It has been recognized now that if we want to discuss whether art has transcendent, eternal value, we had better define what we mean by "art" first, and make sure what kind of value(s) we are talking about. Here, what Eagleton's somewhat skeptical response implies is that since the consciousness of men is determined by their social being, not the opposite1, the place where we should look for the answer is the politico-economic ground where the flowers of art grow, and that since we do not live in a vacuum, our own preoccupations have always led us to new understandings of the past. What we think is art does not necessarily correspond with the judgments of our ancestors living three hundred years ago (though we, without thorough consideration, often speak of the "essence" of art…), and what we think is not art might be in a few decades. Eagleton then raises a supposition: if in the light of a deepened knowledge about Greek tragedy which has been made possible by new archaeological discoveries, we find out that what Greek tragedy actually meant to its original audience was

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1 In The German Ideology and A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx twice mentions this concept, which is, probably, the first tenet of Marx's theory about history. Also see Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism 1-19.
completely remote from ours, what would happen? "One result might be that we stopped
enjoying them [the plays]." (12)

A deepened knowledge can come not only from new discoveries, but (and more likely)
from new perspectives as well. Fortunately, we have never stopped enjoying reading Greek
tragedy\textsuperscript{2}, but it does not mean we still think it of constant, eternal value. Generally speaking,
traditional philological and historical studies on Greek tragedy either regard tragedy as a self-
efficient aesthetic form or take historical events and philosophical thoughts as background upon
which Greek tragedy is found to be a reflection. Taking \textit{The Persians} as an example, a great
amount of scholarly endeavors has been devoted to questions such as what is the structural fawn
(or merit) of it, how does it identify the attitude to \textit{hubris} in ancient Greek society, how close is
Aeschylus’ narrative (probably compared with Herodotus’) to the historical facts, or how does
\textit{The Persians} reflect the rivalries between the political factions. Of course a lot of those questions
posed by the traditional philologists, historians and theatre researchers are of great importance,
but I would argue the categorization of Greek tragedy as an academic discipline or territory of
human science (as literature, history, or theatre) upon which these researches have built cannot
help us fully take hold of the dynamics of tragedy as an institution of the Athenian society.

In the past few decades, nonetheless, scholars have drawn concepts form other disciplines
and theories, such as sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, structuralism and
feminism to attain deeper understandings of ancient Greek society and tragedy.\textsuperscript{3} Among these
new approaches one is distinct for its focuses on the relationship between tragedy and the
Athenian (democratic) ideology, and that between tragedy and Athenian identity politics. For
example, in their groundbreaking work, \textit{Myth and Tragedy}, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre
Vidal-Naquet recognize that “Greek tragedy appears as a historical turning point precisely
limited and dated” (25), in which the democracy of the newly emerged \textit{polis} (characterized by its
legal system) and its conflicts with a religious tradition of monarchy, aristocracy or/and tyranny
were to be highly informative to the formatting of Greek tragedy, to both its form and its content.
The two authors proclaim:

\textsuperscript{2} Thanks to the recent study about Athenian-centrism, scholars now are inclined to replace Greek tragedy
with the more appropriate Athenian tragedy. I will use the latter term in the rest of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{3} For a brief introduction of recent approaches to Greek tragedy, see Simon Goldhill, “Modern Critical
Approaches to Greek Tragedy.”
The tragic turning point thus occurs when a gap develops at the heart of the social experience. It is wide enough for the opposition between legal and political thought on the one hand and the mythical and heroic tradition on the other to stand out quite clearly. It is narrow enough for the conflict in values still to be a painful one and for the clash to continue to take place. (27)

They argue that the tragic tension generates from where the traditional values and the new ideology of the city-state are contradictory. First, we could easily see that the chorus as an anonymous, collective being is often in a role to “express, through its fear, hopes, and judgment, the feelings of the spectators who make up the civic community” (24); on the other hand, the tragic hero, disguised with mask and often from ancient legend, is the one designed to encounter dilemmas and to be under examination before the public. Research done by other scholars also shows how closely tragedy and political rhetoric (used in the courts and the Assembly) were interwoven.4

Another good example of this new approach might be Edith Hall’s Inventing the Barbarian, subtitled as Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy. Roused by a conviction that “ethnic stereotypes, ancient and modern, though revealing almost nothing the groups they are intended to define, say a great deal about the community which produces them” (ix), Hall extensively explores the ethnocentrism in Athenian tragedy. According to Hall, after Greece’s involvement in wars with Persia the Athenian tragedians consciously embarked on the innovation of “inventing barbarians.” Two reverse operations were employed: on the one hand, they mythologized the contemporary “barbarian”—the Persians; on the other hand they barbarized the non-Greek characters from mythology. In this process an ethnocentric Hellenism was revealed and confirmed, becoming an important part, if not foundation, of Athenian democracy. At the core of Athenian ethnocentrism, values such as manliness (courage), wisdom, self-control, are very often marked as exclusive qualities of Athenians through a portrayal of barbarians (non-Greek, no matter ancient or contemporary) with the opposite characteristics.

Such new researches have set forth to show how Athenian tragedy sprouted from the same soil with the civil ideology of the polis and how they interacted with each other. Based on the same concerns with these works, the purpose of this thesis is, by doing a discursive analysis

4 See Ober and Srauss, “Drama, Political Rhetoric, and the Discourse of Athenian Democracy.”
of Aeschylus' *The Persians*, to provide a close inquiry of such relationship, and to answer how tragic practice took part in this civic discursive formation. And I shall demonstrate that by using Foucault's concepts about knowledge, power, and subjectivity, the mechanism of Athenian tragedy which contributed to model an ideal Athenian identity would be fully acknowledged.

In Chapter One I will introduce some of Foucault's theories, which would be employed later in Chapter Two and Three.
Chapter One: Methodology

1-1 Power

The key to Foucault’s revolutionary innovations on the study of human science is his concepts regarding power, knowledge and subjectivity. For Foucault “knowledge is power” in the sense that knowledge is actually generated from power exercise. And subjectivity is one the effects of this power-knowledge practice. What should be explained first is that Foucault’s concept of power is very different from its traditional convention. In the tradition of sociological or political studies, “power” is described as the very essence of governmentality: a governmental institution shall own absolute or limited “power” to execute its policy, no matter whether this “power” is guaranteed by gods, military force, or the agreement of people. Rejecting this conventional notion of power as ruling force, Foucault thinks that power, in terms of how it is generated and functions, is not something someone can “possess” in virtue of his personal quality or resources. On the contrary, Foucault regards power as something more like an ongoing relationship or force field. It is productive and of no essence, as Hunt and Wickham’s analogical clarification goes:

“Power” is a technical term involved in the always-incomplete operation of a machine. Just as the term “power” is commonly used to refer to the technical process by which petrol fuels an incomplete (imperfect) internal combustion engine for it to (imperfectly) drive a car, or the technical process by which coal, water or nuclear fission fuels an incomplete (imperfect) electricity grid to (imperfectly) drive any number of electrical appliances, so, we suggest, we should think of power in society. [. . .] [T]hey [engines and electricity] are not expected to operate perpetually in the exactly the same way, something always goes wrong. The only perpetual aspect of the process is the perpetual process of keeping the process going [. . .]. In these examples power is the process of “keeping things going,” it is not a “thing,” in the way fuel and electricity is. (qtd. in Kendall and Wickham 48-9)

Generated from an ongoing relationship between the given forces (individuals, political factions, completive discourses…), power is by definition the creating (or maintaining) of a relationship
between the forces. Let us illustrate this with a simple example: Athenia (abbreviated as A in the following passages) is physically stronger than Barbaria (B), and A takes advantage of the difference between their strength to control B. In common sense we would say that A has “power” over B, or A is more “powerful” than B. (The latter is an illogical conclusion because B is actually powerless in his situation.) But according to Foucault, power in this case is the differentiating between A and B’s strength (A waves his fist to beat up B), so that A’s physical dominance over B is the effect of A’s exercise of the difference of strength between them, not of the exercise of his strength. According to the rule (of physical strength), it is impossible for B to exercise the difference of strength, because what he has is negative, and that is why he is powerless. In the physical world A is “stronger” than B with or without their relationship. But “strength” is not equal to “power,” nor is the difference; only the differentiating (a process of creating relationship) of the difference is. Imagine that the same A and B now live in a society in which the most educated person rules the world and they are both illiterate. What would happen is that both of them become powerless, because now they enter a different relationship, a different field of power exercise. In other words, we say A is more powerful because in their (A and B’s) relationship (in which physical strength is the principle of differentiating people) A is stronger than B. From this point of view, we may notice that power and the relationship only exist simultaneously; that is, unless A actually beats up and controls B, which makes them enter a kind of relationship, power does not exist, even though we know that there is still a difference between their strength. We should also notice that it is not possible to distinguish power and the exercise of power because unless power is exercised (which means to create or maintain a relationship) there is no power (the creating or maintaining of the relationship), and that is what Foucault means when he states that power is of no essence. In this sense, power is always creative: in our miniature society of A and B, a special kind of governmentality is being created. Notice if we replace “strength” here in our example with “intelligence,” “natural resources,” or “access to the gods,” the result would be the same.

In addition, we should be wary that forces are simultaneously defined by power. (Now A is the leader or master, and B is the follower or slave.) For instance, a monarch, his subordinates (forces) and monarchy (power) exist simultaneously; it is impossible to separate one from the other.
It need not be stressed that historically, Athenian democracy was not only the result of power struggle of the democratic system over aristocracy; in the light of Foucault’s points of view, it was itself a power exercise. In this process of power exercise, not only a new relationship was introduced, but also was a new system of governmentality. To the concern of this thesis, what was more important is that the identity of Athenians was also redefined (as citizens of the polis of Athens).

1-2 Knowledge and Power-Knowledge

Another significant aspect of Foucault’s theory of power is that he recognizes that one result of power exercise is the generating and disseminating of knowledge. Quite different from the conventional concept of the political or sociological study that “true knowledge” should be disinterested and “power-free,” Foucault considers that knowledge at its very nature has more to do with imposing more control and management (categorizing, locating in a relationship) than simply discovering things. As Foucault puts it in an interview: “What struck me, in observing the human science, was that the development of all these branches of knowledge can in no way be dissociated from the exercise of power.” (Foucault, Politics, philosophy, culture 106)

Foucault’s concepts of the power-knowledge are best demonstrated in his two latter works—Discipline and Punishment and the first volume of The History of Sexuality. A short introduction to these two books should help us grasp his ideas more firmly. In Discipline and Punishment, the central question that Foucault tries to pose is how (not why), during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, public executions gradually subsided and prisons (imprisonment) started to become the major punitive measure. Traditional liberals or sociologists (such as Durkheim) are inclined to regard this transformation as a social (judicial) phenomenon, marking the progress in civilization and humanity. On the other side, Marxists (such as the Frankfurt School) explain that it is the fact that individuals are alienated into labor forces that ultimately makes imprisonment the dominant punitive form. Foucault rejects such approaches because both of them would diminish the significance of this transformation. For Foucault, the shift of the punitive focus from criminals’ bodies to their souls is a mark of the newly emerging mechanisms (or power technologies, in Foucault’s phrase) of power through the remodeled prison and other institutions. Foucault emphasizes that:
Beneath the increasing leniency of punishment, then, one may map a displacement of its point of application [from body to soul]; and through this displacement, a whole field of recent objects, a whole new system of truth and mass of roles hitherto unknown in the exercise of criminal justice. A corpus of knowledge, techniques, “scientific” discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish. (22-23)

For Foucault, “the birth of prison” signified the birth of a territory of new discourses (systems of knowledge) and practices exercised by a “whole army of technicians” (11), which included warders, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, and educationalists along with the institutions which they represented. Foucault asserts:

We must analyze rather the “concrete system of punishment,” study them as social phenomena that cannot be accounted for by the juridical structure of society alone, nor by its fundamental ethical choices; we must situate them in the field of operation, in which the punishment of crime is not the sole element; we must show that the punitive measures are not simply “negative” mechanisms that make it possible to repress, to prevent, to exclude, to eliminate; but that they are linked to a whole series of positive and useful effects which it is their task to support (and, in this sense, although legal punishment is carried out in order to punish offenses, one might say that the definition of offences and their prosecutions are carried out in turn in order to maintain the punitive mechanisms and their functions). […]

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relation. (24, 27)

Back to our topic on Athenian democracy, if we agreed with Vernant and Vidal-Naquet’s opinion (as mentioned in the Introduction) that Athenian tragedy took its shape from the uncertainty of the “paradigm shift” (borrowing Thomas Kuhn’s phrase), we may say that
Athenian tragedy was a new branch of knowledge which was generated from the power exercise of democracy. But we should be reminded that the wars against Persia were soon to happen early in the fifth century BC, and that this new power exercise (the redefining of the relationship between Athens and Persia with wars) to a great degree modified the quality of Athenian democracy. In short, we should keep in mind that both the two major power exercises were crucially informative to the generation of Athenian tragedy as a form of (power-) knowledge.

1-3 Subjectivity

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault questions the conventional concepts of “sexual repression,” which traditionally characterized the Victorian Period (1837-1907). He makes visible that behind the mask of sexual repression, new forms of discourses of sexuality were extensively emerging. People living in the Victorian Period might mentally or physically be restricted in terms of sexual activity; however, institutions such as school, the army, family, police, prison, and the judicial system were actively involved in generating new scientific discourses. In fact, they created the new territory of the science of sexuality on one hand and redefined the subject (the “Victorian Man”), both its body and behavior on the other. For Foucault, the “sexual repression” formula should be: “power creates sexuality to say no to sex.” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 190) In other words, power is productive. The “sexual repression” was more like one of the effects or arguably the destination of this power exercise; it was by no mean seen as the whole process of power exercise.

Along this line, it is reasonable to say that all knowledge is power-oriented. As Ransom suggests, “one way to understand power—potentially to destabilize it or change its focus—is to take a firm hold on the knowledge that is right there at the center of its operation.” (Ransom 23)

And what is exactly the relationship between power-knowledge and the subject? Foucault clarifies,

This political investment of the body is bouillon bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument
meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (Foucault, Discipline and Punishment 25-26)

As mentioned in 1-1, power is productive, and one of the products of the exercise of power is creating new subjects. But this is by no means a repressive process; on the contrary, compassed by the new power-knowledge and discourse, individuals are usually eager to learn knowledge and skills, which obviously appear to them as positive and useful in terms of fitting in the society (through all kinds of institutions). They might or might not be aware of the discursive formation or power mechanisms behind their “socialization;” nevertheless, as a result, new subjects are thus created.

[T]he subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domain of knowledge. (27-8)

Foucault further elaborates his theory by presenting the idea of “bio-power”: the knowledge, technologies, discourses, and practices used to produce or manage human resources. He says in an interview with Lucette Finas:

What I am trying to do [in The History of Sexuality] is to show how power relations can get through to the very depths of bodies, materially, without having been relayed by the representation of subjects. If power affects the body, it is not because it was first interiorized in people’s consciousnesses. There is a network of bio-power, of somatic-power, that is itself a network from which sexuality is born as a historical and cultural phenomenon within which we both recognize and lose ourselves. (Foucault, Foucault Live 209)

Foucault uses the term “bio-power” to designate “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (Foucault, The History of Sexuality 143). And as Ransom suggests, the importance
of bio-power is over that of knowledge in terms of power’s functioning in the pre-industrial contexts (Ransom, 61).

In the context of fifth-century Athens, “Athenian” was a new subjectivity emerging with the democratic polis. From Foucauldian points of view, this new subject should be regarded as a convergence of power exercise. However, in order to answer how exactly the festival of Great Dionysia (and the tragic contest) as an institution participated in this process of modeling new identity, we need to further explore Foucault’s concepts regarding institution and “truth.”

1-4 Institution and “Truth”

As we should notice from the description above, Foucault puts a lot of stress on institutions (for example, prisons and hospitals), and the reason is obvious: institutions do not only play functional roles (let alone “disinterested”) of govermentality; in actuality, they should be defined as “comparatively enduring and stable set of relationships between people, and between people and objects” (Nanaher, Schirato and Webb 36), whose function is also to manipulate practices and generate disciplinary discourses. In a given society, institutions are usually the representatives of the notions of “truth,” and truth(s) is the very content of people’s subjectivity (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 30-45). In other words, for Foucault, like knowledge and discourse,

“Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements.

“Truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it—a “regime” of truth. (Foucault, Power 132)

To certain degree Foucault’s concept of “truth” is very like what the French philosopher Louis Althusser calls “ideology”, which he defines as “a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”5 (Althusser 109). The significance of “truth” or Althusser’s concept of ideology is that it draws the boundary of “the sayable,” which means it regulates what is sensible and what is senseless, and what is allowed

5 Of course, the fundamental difference between Althusser and Foucault is that Althusser, as a Marxist, believes that this “representation of the imaginary relationship” is ultimately defined by the economical base or infrastructure of the society; however Foucault explains it as the result of power excise.
and what is not. Within this limited territory, the subjects are normalized without knowing the boundary (or spontaneously regard the territory outside the boundary as abnormal).

Foucault’s theory of power reminds us that things like truth, value, knowledge, and subject (traditionally regarded as the possessor of free will and the doer) are all the results of discursive formation. They are the convergences (sometimes the equilibriums) of all kinds of power from other areas. For example, knowledge is, in a way, not the things we know, but the framework (conventionally termed as “truth”) by which we categorize things. The production of knowledge is partly of discovering new phenomena, but more importantly of a process of categorizing these newly found phenomena. And knowledge-ness doesn't exist in the phenomenon itself; instead it is derived from its relation to the other phenomena, which is defined by the framework we employ. More important, the framework (“episteme” in Foucault’s words) is defined by the microphysics of power. Besides, for Foucault, knowledge is not what we possess, but to a great extent, what we are. That means we, as subjects, are subject to the framework of knowledge. In our own time, Foucault argues, that means scientificism or technologism (arguably the only “truth” in the modern era). We should also bear in mind that the subject-ness of human to knowledge is not something like false-consciousness as some Marxists propose which eventually dominated by the economic structure. To summarize, “truth,” as a system of knowledge generated from institution(s), is important because it functions at the level of people’s consciousness, and it could be seen as the traces or trajectories of power, which make the analysis of discourse possible.

From this perspective, the festival of Great Dionysia may not as what we thought simply an occasion of deviating from the political routine of Athenians’ life. On the contrary, as an institution it actively functioned as a mechanism of consolidating the polis through political resources (judicial regulations and censorship), rituals and ceremonies (bio-power), and discourse(s) as well. Also from this prospect, we may explore the new facet of Athenian tragedy as discursive formation through the statements it made.

1-5 The Author and Discourse formation

In “What Is An Author?”, Foucault suggests that the first step to embark a discursive analysis is to abolish the author-oriented approach, or more precisely, to reexamine our concept
of “author.” For a Foucauldian analysis, the reason why authors are important is not because they are the creators, the only source of meanings, but (1) their existence as subjects, obeying their episteme, and (2) the essence of the media (as institutions) which they employ need to be explored.

To summarize, a discursive analysis of Athenian tragedy may include:

1. the recognition of a discourse as a corpus of “statements” whose organization is regular and systematic;
2. the identification of rules of the production of statements;
3. the identification of rules that delimit the sayable;
4. the identification of rules that create the space in which that new statements can be made;
5. the identification of rules that ensure that a practice is material and discursive at the same time.6

In the following two chapters, I will regard the Great Dionysia as an institution and Aeschylus’ The Persians as a corpus of statements (which forms a special kind of discourse) to explore the discursive formation behind them, and, more importantly, the effects of this discourse. By clarifying its rules and territory, the power strategies employed by it, I would argue the theatre and The Persians (exemplifying the discourse of Athenian tragedy) could be viewed as part of what Simon Goldhill calls "Athenian civic discourse," which disciplined Athenians’ (the subjects) behavior, and created a new kind of Athenian identity.

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6 These five steps are suggested by Kendall and Wickham. See Kendall and Wickham 46.
Chapter Two: The Festival and the Theatre

2-1 The Athenian Martial Democracy and Anonymous Individualism

In terms of establishing and disestablishing the democratic polis, the history of Athens in the sixth and fifth centuries was extremely eventful. In 594 the reformer Solon came to power and the notion of citizenship came to exist; in 560 Peisistratus established a tyranny; in 510 the tyranny was overthrown; but not until the reforms of Cleisthenes were fulfilled (between 509 and 507) did Athens make the Assembly the place where all matters of significance were submitted and decided. Moreover, as Paul Cartledge points out, “[t]he fledgeling democracy depended on a twofold liberation: from dictatorship at home, and from foreign control” (Cartledge 23). In 490 and 480 Athens won two decisive battles against the eastern power of Persia, respectively in Marathon and Salamis. In 431, the Peloponnesian war broke out; in 430, plague prevailed in Athens; Pericles died in 429; between 415 and 413, the Athenian expedition set off to Syracuse, which led to a disastrous loss; democracy was abolished for the first time in 411; in 404 BC, Athens finally surrendered to Sparta, and democracy ended. Between the Persian and Peloponnesian wars Athenian democracy reached its prime under the leadership of Pericles, and Athens evolved from an agricultural society ruled by an aristocracy into a powerful commercial-democratic polis. Remarkable in this process was how, under the influences of democracy and the Persian wars, Athens was to embrace what I would call “anonymous individualism.” The basis of the anonymous individualism was the egalitarianism asserted by democracy, but with an emphasis on the benefits for the city, the collective self, instead of that of the individuals. This anonymous individualism is best demonstrated in the Athenian concept of liberty. In “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns,” Benjamin Constant comments:

The latter [the liberty of the ancients] consisted in exercising collectively, but directly, several parts of the complete sovereignty; in deliberating, in the public square, over the war and peace; in forming alliances with foreign governments; in voting laws, in pronouncing judgements […]. But if this was what the ancients called liberty, they admitted as compatible with this collective freedom the complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the community. (Constant 311)
We should notice that as a kind of governmentality, Democracy was not simply some neutral technical rules employed by Athenians; nor was it a political “thought” based on egalitarianism. From a Foucauldian perspective, Democracy was a power exercise resulting from the political struggles against aristocracy. It redistributed political resources and redefined the subjects (as citizens), and at the same time it also confirmed the preeminence of the *polis*. This “new world order” is exemplified in Constant’s description about Athens:

[W]e found there [in Athens] too the trace of the liberty proper to the ancients. The people made the laws, examined the behavior of the magistrates, called Pericles to account for his conducts, sentenced to death the generals who had commanded the battle of the Arginusae. Similarly ostracism, that legal arbitrariness, extolled by all the legislators of the age, [...] proves that the individual was much more subservient to the supremacy of the social body in Athens, than he is in any of the free states of Europe today. [...] Everybody, feeling with pride all that his suffrage was worth, found in this awareness of his personal importance a great compensation. (316)

One would observe that a whole set of new power technologies, the new rules of governmentality, was developed through creating new or remodeling old institutions in order to generate discourse accordant with the anonymous or collective individualism. In her groundbreaking study, Nicole Loraux observes that in the Athenian funeral oration (a newly established institution which was held yearly and devoted to the war dead), people dying for the state would be glorified, but no single individual would be named. She further notes in another practice—what was called the casualty list—the names of the war dead were deliberately inscribed without remarks as to their lineage and tribes, which was of prominent importance in terms of one’s identity. In short, those who died in war should be remembered; however they should be remembered by nothing but their contributions to the city and their one and the same identity as citizens (Loraux, *The Invention of Athens* 263-327).

Through these examples we learn how the new power technologies operated to ensure the anonymous individualism in order to encourage the Athenian martial democracy. In the rest of this chapter, by examining the context and practice of Athenian tragedy I will explore the facet of tragedy as part of this kind of power exercise.
2-2 The Great Dionysia

It is well known that the Athenian tragic competition was part of the festival of Great Dionyisa (sometimes called the City Dionysia), the largest festival held by Athenians to pay their respect to the god Dionysus. The relationship between the great Dionysia and the Athenian civic ideology has been exemplarily studied by Simon Goldhill. In this section, I will draw on some of Goldhill’s conclusions, along with my comment, to explore how Athenian society was recruited during the festival and, at the same time, how the new technologies of power were operated in order to mold a new communal identity of the Athenian martial democracy.

The activities held prior to tragic competition in the previous days of the festival, as Susan Guettel Cole summarizes, basically were processions, sacrifices, and, probably, a revel (Cole 25-8). A wooden statue of Dionysus was brought from Eleutherai, which was on the border with Thebes, into the city, specifically to a hearth of Dionysus near the Academy, where a sacrifice was offered. Then the statue was once again carried in a greater evening procession to the sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus near the theatre in the center of the city. A bull was sacrificed in this evening ceremony. A celebratory revel seemed to follow, but little about it is known.

As Goldhill points out, there were several moments in the festival right before the tragic competition which indicated that the theatre was not a place only for entertainment, but also a place where power was exercised to consolidate the city-state of Athens. First, before the contest, the libations were poured by the ten most powerful military and political leaders, the stratēgoi. There is evidence which suggests that the number of occasions on which all the generals acted together like this was no more than four, and that most of the occasions were more obviously linked to their civic functions. The fact that “the most influential and important representatives of the state [. . .] involved in the opening religious ceremony” of course can be regarded as a feature of the institutionalization of the originally popular festivals, but what deserves more consideration is that such institutionalizing in its effect can also be regarded as an appropriation

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7 See Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia.”
8 As for the procession and celebration of the Great Dionysia, also see Csapo and Slater 103-15; Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia” 98-99.
10 Actually, distinct from other festivals related to Dionysus, the Great Dionysia was institutionalized form the outset. See Csapo and Slater 104.
of the popular identities (which were often plural) into civic (citizen) identity (which was now always singular). This monopoly of identity paralleled the reconstruction of the polis at the advent of democracy. As Christian Meier observes, in the “old order,” the earlier stage of polis around the eighth century to Cleisthenes’ reform, people of Attica first belonged to their families, then to their clans (gene) and cult communities (thiasoi), then to their phratriai (brotherhoods), then to their tribes (phylai; there were four tribes at that time), and then, at last, to the city-state. But in Cleisthenes’ reform Attica was re-devised in a curious way:

He [Cleisthenes] divided Attica into three regions—the city of Athens and its environs […], the rest of the coastal area, and the hinterland. In each region he organized the demes into ten groups, known as trittyes, generally paying attention to neighborhood ties and geographic units. This gave thirty groups of demes; from these Cleisthenes constituted ten phylai by combining three groups of demes (selected by lot), one from each region, into a phyle. (Meier 60)

In other words, each region now was represented in every phyle; inversely, no phyle would represent only local interests. After these ten phylai became the substantial components of the polis in terms of political operation, the result of this new power practice was that the old political hierarchy (a political hierarchy but essentially based on popular lineages) and the identities derived from this hierarchy were diminished, and the singular identity as Athenian citizens was amplified.

Secondly, unlike other festivals dedicated to Dionysus, the ambassadors from allied city-states were present in the Great Dionysia, and the tributes of those cities were displayed in the orchestra.11 Goldhill comments: “[I]t was a demonstration before the city [emphasis added] and its many international visitors of the power of the polis of Athens, its role as a force in the Greek world. It was a public display of the success in military and political terms of the city. It used the state festival to glorify the state” (Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia” 102). What also needs to be noticed is that, resulting from the Athenian’s military operations against Persia (plausibly started with Ionia revolting in 499 BC, then followed by the Persian Wars), Athens and these allied cities (they were not always constant) were united in an imagined identity of “the Greek” to fight

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11 Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia” 101-03.
against Persia. This Greek Self (featuring Athenians) not only redefined the characteristics of Persians (often the opposite of the Athenian), but also the concepts of Xenoi, the foreigners. What is significant is that, in tragedy, these concepts were radically informative on the characterizations of the non-Athenian characters from mythology, and that this polarization (a discourse) between Greek (Athenian) and Persian (non-Athenian) also contributed to singularizing the old popular identities.

Thirdly, before the tragic contest, names of those who had greatly contributed to Athens were announced before the city. Interestingly enough, however, there are sources that suggest the proclamation of the names of those benefiting the city had more to do with modeling examples of citizens rather than enthroning individual glory13. The public praise actually appealed to “a fundamental and well-known tenet of democratic ideology, namely, that a man acts and should act to benefit the city [. . .]” (104). Goldhill writes, “The proclamation of the names of those who had benefited the city was another way of asserting the ties, connections, and duties between individuals and the cities. Above all it stressed the moral and social imperative of doing good for the city as a key way of defining behavior in the democratic polis” (105). We should be wary about two things: first, from a power-strategy perspective, the emphasis and amplification of individual contribution to the state in such ceremony led to a monopoly of the concept of a citizen; and consequently, other obligations and potential engagements such as the duties in the oikos, the household, were downplayed or completely overlooked in the making of an Athenian.

Besides, there was another moment right before the tragic contest in which the rewriting of Athenian identity could be seen. When the orphan ephebe (adolescents on the verge of manhood who had been brought up at the expanse of the city) reached the end of their childhood, they, dressed in full military uniform, were provided with special seats in the theatre and were to be paraded and honored. A herald would proclaim what the city had done for those young men and what they would do for the city.14 This practice would remind us that in fifth-century Athens the notion of becoming an anēr, a citizen, was strongly related to participation in wars. Scholars such as Nicole Loraux and PierreVidal-Naquet notice how crucial the status as a soldier was for

12 The reason that I use “imagined” here is because among the characteristics of this identity, few can be explained by ethnical features. For further discussion, see 2-3.4.
14 Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia” 105-06.
an Athenian citizen.\textsuperscript{15} “Marriage is to a girl what war is to a boy,” J.-P. Vernant’s well-known statement, probably is the most concise summary.\textsuperscript{16} And the importance of this practice (a power strategy) was, as Goldhill suggests, that it provided a notional and ritual partition between adult and child, citizen and non-citizen. To put it more clearly, significant in this transition, a boy did not only become an adult when he grew up: he became a citizen and a soldier. Additionally, Goldhill also marks that the case of the orphan \textit{ephebe} should bring our attention to an ongoing slant of the city’s appropriation of the vocabulary of the family in the fifth-century Athens.

For the city “nourished”; the citizens were the “children” of the laws; the city became a “father,” a “mother.” The term “father-land” was extended in its connotations. To attack one’s city was like patricide; to reject the laws was to reject that which gave one life and upbringing. [.] [T]his appropriation may be viewed as a product of the tensions between public and private felt in the (sometimes) competing claims of the democratic city and the more traditional \textit{oikos}. (112)

Through the examination of these moments in the pre-contest ceremonies it should have been demonstrated that the Great Dionysia, or at least the pre-contest activities, was highly institutionalized and military-political-oriented. Not only do the ceremonies provide a good example for explaining how the new technologies of power were taken up to regulate the concept of Athenian (citizen); they also shed light on the study of the theatrical practice which followed in the festival.

\textbf{2-3 The Tragic Contest}

The tragic contest is now conventionally regarded as the major event in the Great Dionysia; however, little attention has been given to how the form of tragedy as a set of rules was informed by the power strategies of Athenian martial democracy. I propose that the form of the tragedy—the rules of the contest, the constitution of the chorus and tragic hero and the almost exclusive focus on enacting mythical themes—should be deemed as an active part of the comparatively new festival, which was both institutionalized and urbanized through the city-

\textsuperscript{16} Cited in Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia” 107.
state’s power strategies. In this section, I shall explore how the form of the theatrical practice was in favor of the emerging civic ideology.

2-3.1 The Rules of the Tragic Contest

How was the civic ideology inscribed in the tragic contest? Oddone Longo in his “The Theatre of the Polis” remarks,

In the total machine of this “polis theatre,” the author is but one of the mechanisms of dramatic production, located between two acts of selection: the preliminary selection (we would perhaps hesitate to call it preventive censorship) administrated to his text-outline, on which depends the possibility that his text, when perfect in a script, will see the light (be realized on the stage), and the subsequent selection made by the public (or more precisely the jury, chosen from the public according to procedures strictly analogous to those used for political proceedings.) (Longo 14)

From Longo’s description we may notice that the atmosphere in the theatre was scarcely different from that in the Assembly or in the courts. And the awareness of the audience of being citizens (one should always bear in mind that the major body of the active audience consisted of citizens) was accelerated by the fact that members of the audience were divided by their belonging to the political phylai. And this, once again, was just exactly the same practice in the Assembly and the courts. It is reasonable to say that the theatre was an epitome of the political Athens, by which I mean not only was the social structure of the polis maintained in the theatre, but also the rules of the political operation of the democracy. Moreover, because of the special essence of the theatre—usually, it was not involved with direct political debates and the subsequent conflicts and political factions—it was the best place to idealize the polis. Actually, the theatre was organized as an ideal epitome of the polis to confirm and encourage the political structure and rules of the polis.

2-3.2 The Chorus and the Tragic Hero

Longo, in the same article, also suggests a hypothesis that the separation of the chorus from the public as the only members of the performance bore the trace of the urbanization of the
festival. “[A]s dramatic performances emerged from that early limited context [of the rural communities] and gradually came to involve an ever-larger and more diversified community [of the polis], they demanded a more diversified structure, one better suited to their changed circumstances” (16). If this was the case, one should notice that the chorus not only replaced the collective participation of the public in the primitive rituals but also assumed the imagined collectiveness or unity of the people. What is noteworthy here is that, by transplanting the collectiveness of older rituals into the chorus, the theatre (the chorus) legitimated its representation of the city. Thus a collective identity of the Athenian was imagined through the representative of the chorus, and, needless to stress, the collective identity with its major concern for a polis was resonant with the effects of the pre-play ceremonies: the chorus remained anonymous under the sovereign of the city.

But what makes the Athenian tragedy extremely attractive is probably the extension between the chorus and the tragic “hero,” the extension between the norm and the transgression. As Longo and many others point out, the fundamental situation of the tragic hero is that of contradictions with norms of his city. This made the appreciation of tragedy a rather complex experience for the contemporary Athenian audience. On the one hand, a spectator was called into identification, as an individual, with the tragic hero confronting all the contradictions. It is on this level that katharsis would work. On the other hand, the other level of collective identification through the function of the chorus would be simultaneously activating “through the theatre as collective institution, as a heightening of the audience’s consciousness of its social integration, its determinate membership in a group, a corrective and a check on the escape into individuality that is prompted by identifying closely with the dramatic hero’s personal destiny” (Longo 19). Namely, the conduct of the hero is simultaneously under the scrutiny of the city through the collective eyes of the audience. For example, in Antigone, the dramatic tension seemingly results from the conflict between Antigone and Creon, but through a close study we shall find out that the conflict between them is the conflict between one transgression and another, not between transgression and norm. The element that makes the conflict matter more than at a personal dimension is the presence of the chorus. The chorus set the undertone of the collective consciousness, with which the audience might identify. In other words, when watching the play, the audience was very likely involved in a search for a norm along with the chorus: the chorus
was the reference of seeing. I want to stress that I am not suggesting a uniformed response from the audience. What I am trying to demonstrate is that the conventions (the form and the context) of tragedy would, to a certain degree, act in limited ways on the imaginations of the audience; that is, I suggest, under the climate of the festival and through the agent of the tragic chorus, the theater formed “a civic presence” (even though the subject-matter of most extant plays are from mythology), which represented and enforced the anonymous individualism of the democracy, and was not different from those in the Assembly or the courts. But to the interest of this thesis, what is more importantly demonstrated here is that the rules of the tragedy should be conceived as trajectories of the power technologies, not merely the formal characteristics of a genre; by which I mean these rules were ultimately generated from the power exercise of the new democracy, not merely some conceptual aesthetical inventions.

2-3.3 The Bans of Memory

Beside the rules of the contest and the antithesis between the Chorus and the tragic hero, there were still other “rules” of Athenian tragedy, even if invisible, that were inscribed within the ideology of Athenian martial democracy. One of them is what Loraux calls “the bans of memory.” This rule not only revealed some characteristics of the Athenian episteme, but was also influential on the subject-matter of tragedy.

In “Of Amnesty and Its Opposite”, Loraux suggests that the limited subject matter of Athenian tragedy could not be simply explained as coincidence or artistic preference. It should, at least partly, be ascribed to the censorship of civic ideology: “the bans of memory of misfortunes” (83-91). In recounting the Ionian revolt, which was supported by Athens, and the Persians’ crush of the rebels by sacking Miletus in 494, Herodotus records the well-known punishment of Phrynichus’ play Capture of Miletus in the aftermath of the revolt: “Phrynichus, having produced a play, the Capture of Miletus, the whole theatre broke into tears, and he was fined a thousand drachmae [sic] for having reminded them of their own misfortunes [. . .], and they ordered no one [. . .] should ever make use of the play” (qtd. in 85). This official decree did not only sink Phrynichus’ play into oblivion, Loraux argues, but introduced an eminent paradigm of “the Athenian status of civic memory, and the Athenian definition of the tragic” (85). Hence
the Athenian tragedians consciously embarked on a very different direction—the adaptations of myths.

Of course the theatre was not the only institution that should be monitored on its discourse output. Loraux gives another example of another sort of ban of greater extent: in 403 BC, after the military defeat of Athens and the oligarchy of the Thirty, a ban on “recalling the misfortunes” sealed the democratic reconciliation.

The decree proclaims the ban: [. . .] “It is forbidden to recall the misfortunes”; the oath binds all the Athenians, democrats, oligarchs, important people, and “quiet” people who stayed in the city during the dictatorship, but it binds them one by one: [. . .] “I shall not recall the misfortunes.” (87)

At least one execution resulting from violating the ban was recorded. (90)

This “invisible” rule was of prominent importance because it essentially changed the extent and direction of Athenian tragedy—it made tragedy apolitical. (Though from Foucauldian concept of power, to make something apolitical is still political.) Playwrights might consciously use mythical subject-matter to address political issue, or/and unconsciously reformat the mythical in accordance with civic ideology; but under the censorship of the misfortunes of the city the tragedians were forbidden to dramatize themes involved with recent traumatic memory, which might cause questionings or disturbances to the unified city. Consequently they sought sanctuary of the mythical, which created a safe distance between the tragic representations and the contemporary political reality. Both what was forbidden and what they adopted guaranteed the interfering against the city’s solidity would be prevented. The bans of the unfortunate memory might not be directly involved with the formation of the anonymous individualism; they nevertheless shared the same destination—to consolidate the polis as a whole. In Phrynichus’ example, the sympathy towards people of the same ethnicity probably was the cause which brought the audience into tears, but it was also likely that some of the audience were grieving for their personal reasons, for their loss of families or/and friends. (This play was possibly produced in the following year of the real event.) From this perspective, we might say that the ban of the play not only discouraged the collective mourning of the city, but also the personal mourning of individuals. The significance of the latter is that it substantially was a discouragement of the personal connection to the political practice. If we compare this discouragement with the funeral
oration or list of the war casualties, they were like the two sides of the same token: both contributed to erase the personal in the public political arena.

2-3.4 “Inventing the Barbarians”

The concentration on the mythic world benefited the city-state, at least, on two aspects: first, the mythic had already formed a communal heritage of the Greek world, namely, it could readily serve as a “natural” call for the integration of the state. Secondly, the tragedians took advantage to enact the charismatic heroes of the archaic myths to address the contemporary political issues without “recalling the misfortunes” of the city-state.

Doubtlessly, the conversion of subject-matter, the focus on the mythical world, of the tragedy in the early fifth century was not a gesture of passive succession. Deviations could be witnessed in the new practice. As mentioned in last chapter, Edith Hall points out that after the Persian wars, the tragedians embarked on a process of “inventing barbarians,” which included two reverse operations. On the one hand tragedians mythologized the contemporary “barbarians”—the Persians—to fit the concept of the tragic; on the other hand they barbarized the non-Greek characters from mythology to formulate (no matter consciously or not) the Hellenic (mostly and especially Athenian) superiority. “[A]lmost all the extant plays at least refer to barbarian customs or inferiority” (Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* 1). In the process, an ethnocentric Hellenism was becoming an important part of Athenian democracy. The strikingly high interest in the exploitation of “barbarian” characters might not be counted as a rule of the theatrical practice; it nevertheless severed as an agenda to summon patriotic enthusiasm at first, and then justified the Athenian self-image of the super power and its ambition to expand into an empire. Such binary opposition enhanced the anonymous individualism by creating an enormous Athenian Self. In other words, the process of an individual becoming a subject (a citizen) was a process of his becoming an anonymous member of this Self, a process of monopolizing identity. The use of imaginary political “others” also testified as to how thoroughly the tragic theatre as an institution was exercised to generate discourses that modeled the Athenian identity in accordance with the ideology of the martial democracy.

Though I put a lot of stress on the “political” dimension of the Great Dionysia and the tragic contest, I do not proclaim that Athenian tragedy is nothing but politics. Tragedy to a
certain degree undoubtedly was an autonomous cultural creation: the crafts of poetry and playwriting, the arts of chorus singing and dancing, all of these were the elements which made tragedy fascinating. But these cultural achievements could not efface the fact that tragedy was an institution of the Athenian martial democracy, which generated discourse such as anonymous individualism to maintain the consolidation of the *polis*. What I have been attempting is to clarify how the power strategies of the democracy such as adopting the contest format, employing the chorus, forbidding the catastrophic memory, and stigmatizing political others were exercised in the tragic venue to model a communal identity. In the following chapter, a textual examination of Aeschylus’s *The Persians* will be provided as an example to show how these rules were followed in a production.
Chapter Three

3-1 Outline of the play\textsuperscript{17}

Generally, \textit{The Persians} is a story about how the defeat of Persia in Greece reached Susa, the capital of Persia. The play begins with the chorus’ foreboding of the failure of the young king Xerxes’ expedition of Athens. Consisting of Persian elders, the chorus is perplexed by the fact that there has been no news of the Persian troops reporting back for a long while, stressing that “all of the might born of Asia/ has departed […]” (12-3), and only the old men and women were left (115-25). In reminiscence of the consistence of the Persian host, they deliver a long list of the great kings and generals in the Persian force and come up with greater confidence of their mighty army (21-92). The confidence, however, is short-lived. Soon the chorus plunges into its foreboding again and proclaim, “But what mortal man can avoid/ being cunningly deceived by god?/ Who is so swift-footed that he has the power to leap easily aside?” (93-95)\textsuperscript{18} They decide to take seats in front of the palace in order to ponder the proceeding situation, but they are interrupted by the arrival of the mother queen, Atossa, in great pomp on a chariot. Atossa comes in anxiety because of the omens in her dream, in which her son Xerxes tries to yoke two women in his chariot, who are two “sisters of the same race” (186), representing Persia and Greece respectively (183-84). The Persian one “towered proudly in this gear;” the Greek one, however, “struggled, tore the harness from the chariot, […] and smashed the yoke in the middle” (192-96). Her dream ends with “My son fell out. His father Dareios stood close by, pitying him. When Xerxes saw him he tore the robe around his body” (197-99). The queen subsequently reveals another omen which she saw earlier in the same day: while she was conducting a sacrifice to the god, she saw an eagle being chased and then torn apart by a smaller hawk (206-09). Though she is terrified and seeking advice from the chorus, she states firmly at the end of her speech, “For you are well aware that if my son were to succeed he would be a man to excite great admiration,

\textsuperscript{17} The writing of this chapter is much inspired by Thomas Harrison’s year 2000 work, \textit{The Emptiness of Asia: Aeschylus’ Persians and the History of the Fifth Century}, especially Part 2. By paralleling the similarities (instead of differences) between Aeschylus’ \textit{The Persians} and Herodotus’ \textit{Histories}, Harrison at times insightfully points out the cultural and ideological preoccupations which were commonly shared by the fifth-century Athenians and make them valid evidences to reject some conventions about the play.

\textsuperscript{18} The text quoted and referenced to in this chapter is that of Edith Hall; see Hall \textit{Aeschylus’ Persians}. 

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but that if he fails—he is not accountable to the community. Provided that he has survived he is still sovereign of this land” (213-14).

The chorus fails to give any exact response to the omens which the queen has seen (“We do not want, mother, to say anything either to frighten you too much or to make you over-confident;” 215-17); instead they suggest that Atossa should supplicate the gods and the dead, especially Dareios, to avoid bad fortune (215-26). The queen agrees with them, but before she departs she unexpectedly asks, “But there is something I want to find out, my friends. In which part of the world do they say that Athens is situated?” (230-31) And then a sequence of questions follow, in which Atossa is told some facts such as that Athens is of crucial importance to the whole Greece, that Athenians are slaves of no man and possess sufficing wealth of silver treasures and that they once vanquished Dareios’ host (232-45). Their dialogues are interrupted by the arrival of a Persian messenger with the confirmation of the overall defeat of the Persian host. The chorus bursts into fierce lamination, and the queen, at first shocked and silent, then begins to ask questions in detail, which lead the messenger to reveal the survival of Xerxes and deliver a lengthy recollection of the slaughter of the Persian generals and host at Salamis and the island of Psyttaleia and the miserable flight of Xerxes from Europe (248-514). In the messenger’s account, Atossa learns that despite of the disproportion of the military forces, Athens was protected by the gods and “some vengeful spirit or malignant deity” who caused the defeat of Persia (338-55). Surprised by the fact that Athens remains sound, Atossa cries out, “So is the city of Athens still not sacked?” The messenger answers, “While men remain to a city its defences are secure” (348-50). After the messenger exists, Atossa reproaches the chorus for poorly judging the omens she saw in her dream, and then leaves for palace to prepare a sacrifice. The chorus is left on stage alone. In lamination, they attribute the blame to Xerxes and are anxious about the Persian sovereign over Asia. They forecast,

Not for long now will the inhabitants of Asia abide under Persian rule, nor pay further tribute under the compulsion to the King, nor shall they be his subjects, prostrating themselves on the ground; for the kingly power is destroyed.
Men will no longer curb their tongues;
for people are released to talk freely
when a strong yoke
has been removed. (584-94)

The queen reenters without her chariot and finery this time and summons Dareios’ ghost from the Underworld. In the awe of Dareios, the chorus dares not speak to their former king. Dareios then asks Atossa the reason why they raised him up. He learns the truth from his widow and recalls oracles that such events would happen, but he confesses that he did not know that the oracles would fulfill so soon (681-752). To emphasize the harm that Xerxes has done to Persia, Dareios accounts the achievements of his ancestors, stressing on the gods’ blessings on them (759-87). He also forecasts the Persian defeat at Plataea and accounts the cause to their hubris and godless conduct (787-842).

After Dareios leaves, the queen, following his advice, departs for the palace to fetch a new garment for Xerxes (845-52), because Xerxes has rent his clothes out of the agony of defeat. The chorus continues with reminiscence of the golden age of Dareios’ reign, his dominance of Asia and the Greek Ionia after Atossa has left (853-904). Xerxes arrives before Atossa comes back again and appears in his rags and with his empty quiver. The chorus plunges into questioning the outcome of a huge group of Xerxes’ retinue, which apparently has been eliminated in the failed expedition (909-1004). The play ends with a display of frenzied emotion by Xerxes and the chorus on their way back to the palace (1005-78).

3-2.1 Politicizing of the Mythical Religion

One of the most notable features of The Persians is the politicization of the Greek religion, or, to put it inversely in Edith Hall’s phrase, the “mythologizing” of the contemporary events. From the perspective of the Foucauldian power, one could observe two operations of power technologies in this process: on the one hand, The Persians could be regarded (or functioned) as a writing of contemporary events into Athenian history, which was religious or mythical in tradition; on the other hand, the religious or mythical tradition was simultaneously reoriented and politicized in the process of the writing. The divine punishment against the human hubris is often ascribed as the theme of The Persians. Indeed, throughout The Persians, from the
foreboding of the chorus at the beginning of the play to the reports of the messenger, from Dareios’ reproach on Xerxes’ disastrous conduct of yoking the great Bosporos to his account of the Persian defeat at Plataea to their godless deeds, from the mentions of names of gods such as Zeus, Pan and Poseidon to the unpredictable weather changes which deteriorate the Persian flee from Europe, Xerxes’ “defeat at the hands of a force numerically so inferior could be explained only on the assumption of punitive intervention by some god or gods” (Adams 46). Such religious fervor (often with patriotic tone) was one of the characteristics of Aeschylus’ works.19 As John Herington formulates, “An Aeschylean dramatic work tends to progress:/ from verbal to visual;/ from ambiguity to clarity;/ from human to divine” (Herington 67). Or as Thomas Rosenmeyer has noted, “In Aeschylus, as in Homer, the two levels of causation, the supernatural and the human, are co-existent and simultaneous, two ways of describing the same event” (Rosenmeyer 15-16).20 The problem of both statements quoted here is that they are but descriptive, not analytic. I will argue, nevertheless, in The Persians, to “exalt the contemporary story to a legendary greatness”21 (by introducing the divine intervention) should be seen as a new power technology engendered to appropriate the traditional mythical religion in order to address democratic ideology. It should be emphasized that this strategy is a habitué of the Athenian mentality, not an innovation of Aeschylus. Herodotus’ Histories records a famous story about Themistocles when he led an Athenian force tracking down the flight of the Persian host. Themistocles at first was planning to cross the Hellenspont, but when he found that the majority (most of the Peloponnesian commanders) was against him, he changed his grounds and addressed himself to the Athenians, who “of all the confederates were the most vexed at the enemy’s escape, and were anxious to go on to the Hellenspont alone” (8. 109, 484). He says,

I know very well that people who are beaten and cornered will often hit out again and make amends for their previous failure to play the man. Now we’ve had the luck to save ourselves and our country by the repulse of this great force, which seemed, like a cloud, to darken the sea. That force now in flight—let it go. Indeed it was not we who performed this exploit; it was the gods and the heroes, who

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19 See Anderson167.
20 Also cited in Bloom 15. It should be noted that the similarity between Homer and Aeschylus mentioned by Rosenmeyer here is only superficial and is an evidence of The Persians’ appropriation of mythical history. As for the differences between the two authors see below 3-3-1.
21 This is Gilbert Murray’s evaluation of the play; see Murray 125.
were jealous that one man in his godless pride should be king of Asia and of Europe too—a man who does not know the difference between sacred and profane, who burns and destroys the statues of the gods, and dared to lash the sea with whips and bind it with fetters. At the moment, all is well with us; so let us stay where we are, in our own country, and look after ourselves and our families.”

(8. 109, 484-85)

Herodotus supplements the event with “Themistocles’ idea in saying this was to lay the foundation for a future claim upon Xerxes, in order to have somewhere to turn to in the event—which did in fact occur—of his getting trouble with the Athenians” (485). The similarity between Aeschylus and Themistocles of accounting Greek victory to the gods’ will reveals the characteristic of the Athenian episteme of mythologizing political-military conduct. In his study of Athenian religious history, Robert Parker makes it clear that one of the crucial changes of Athenian religion in the fifth century was that the motivation of the introduction of new cults and the evolution of old ones was highly political and military based (Parker 152-98). One can observe that on the one hand, “Asclepius was introduced to bring health to the Athenians, Aeacus to help them to conquer Aegina, Theseus (possibly) to aid them against Skyros[. . .]” (186), and that on the other hand, the struggles against Persia to a great degree politicized the Athenian religion: “[t]he cults of Artemis Agrotera, Zeus Tropaios, Pan, Boreas, Artemis Aristoboule, Eukleia, Theseus (possibly), Nemesis, Zeus Eleutherios, Athena Nike, and (eventually at least) Ajax on Salamis all in different degrees testify to the unique intensity with which the national crisis and triumph were experienced” (187). Parker concludes, “In this perspective Greek religion does not appear as a mechanism for controlling the world; it is rather a celebration of achievement—that achievement in the face of Persian hordes which for the Greeks was almost heroic in the literal sense—an affirmation of value” (187). The role of gods in The Persians to a great degree demonstrated these changes.

3-2.2 What was The Persians about?

If we keep this Athenian perspective of religion in mind, especially in the context of the Great Dionysia, what The Persians meant to the Athenians shall be easier to trace. I should emphasize again that the Great Dionysia was a highly politically institutionalized religious
festival in which the whole city was ideally displayed according to its democratic ideas and the citizens were consciously and actively taking part of it. The best description of the relationship between the people and the god at the Great Dionysia, in the light of Parker’s study, probably is that they glorified themselves to glorify the god. S. M. Adams suggests that it is a wrong assumption that the purpose of the play was to show the Athenians that the Persian defeat was the punishment of Xerxes’ *hybris* (but with a weaker reason that “it is surly most unlikely that an Athenian audience needed to be shown the application to Xerxes of a doctrine with which the city had been more than familiar since the time of Solon.”). Instead he states, “It is very different matter if he [Aeschylus] is exhibiting to his audience the way in which a *truth* already known to them was made known to the persons in the drama [Italics added]” (Adams 47).

Actually, *The Persians* has long been accused of a lack of dramatic action. The structure of the play is simply based on the gradual revelation of the Persian defeat. But it would be interesting if we ask that what the detailed, vivid, lengthy revelation meant to the audience—among them, some had fought in the battles, some had family or friends who had died in the battles, and most of them had witnessed the sack of Athens by Persian troops during the wars. Harrison reminds us that there is another plot “runs in parallel to it: the play’s gradual striptease of Athenian virtues and achievements” (Harrison 115). Adams does not clarify what he means by using the term “truth,” but by virtue of the Athenian attitude toward god, it is plausible that the “truth” unfolded to the audience was not only the fact of the Persian defeat, but also the concept of gods’ favor of Greek victory. It is evident that the redirection, if not appropriation, of the divine or mythic world is one of the most important characteristics of the Great Dionysia and the tragic contest. By transcending the Athenian victory against Persia up into a divine order (within the context of the religious celebration of the state)—that is, by politicizing the mythical religion—*The Persians* apoliticized and monopolized the interpretation of the meaning of the Persian wars, by which I mean that it diminished the political aspects of war, erased the variety of different political opinions regarding the wars against Persia, and found its way, resonant with the aura of the festival, to consolidate the city.

22 Adams 46.
3-3 The Self and the Other

As mentioned above, one important dimension of *The Persians* is the confirmation of the Athenian values. What is remarkable is that these virtues are confirmed with a contrast of a distorted delineation of the Persians, the political other. Edith Hall observes that though different peoples are depicted in the world of the Homeric poems, “it separates not groups of different ethnicity or language, but the aristocrats and the common people” (Hall *Inventing the Barbarian* 14). “The story of the invention of the barbarian is the story of the Greeks’ conflict with the Persians [...]” (56). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said reminds us that the practice of the binary oppositions which, corresponding with the military actions, almost always dwells at the core of nationalism and imperialism, was first demonstrated by the Greek, or specifically, the Athenian. Actually, Said in his influential and controversial *Orientalism* lists *The Persians* as the first example of the West orientalist tradition (56). Under the influence of Said, Hall assigns *The Persians* as “the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism, the discourse by which the European imagination has dominated Asia ever since by conceptualizing its inhabitants as defeated, luxurious, emotional, cruel, and always as dangerous” (99). From this perspective, a distinctive line was drawn between the (Athenian) Self and the (Persian) Other, “each quite settled, clear, unassailably self-evident” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 60). But we should be wary that orientalism was not an invention of Aeschylus: there are many anecdotes and stories in Herodotus’ *Histories* revealing the same tendency of the ethnic polarization. Through the lens of Foucauldian power, it is evident that such “Persian Study” or the documenting of the Persian in the fifth century was a discursive formation generated by the practice of power (the war against Persia). Along this line, the orientalism in *The Persians*, a product of and a production in the Great Dionysia (an institution of Athenian democracy), is best regarded as discourse generated by the very institution to confirm and encourage the dominant military and democratic ideology by modeling specific images of the Self and the Other. But probably we would also like to remind ourselves that to confirm the prejudices towards the political others revealed in

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23 As mentioned in the introduction, Edith Hall’s extensive study of the ethnic aspect of Athenian tragedy, *Inventing the Barbarian*, greatly illuminates the writing of this section.

24 See Introduction xxv.

25 Adams in his work cites many of such anecdotes, especially in Part 2.
Aeschylus’ The Persians “is not to make out Aeschylus and the Athenians as uniquely chauvinistic,” borrowing Adams’ phrase, “—but only as unexceptional” (Adams 115).

3-3.1 The Athenian Self

Throughout The Persians the most important Athenian virtue which is confirmed and made distinguished through the contrast with the Persians in the play is democracy. It is beyond Atossa’s imagination that how an army can be strong without subjecting to any single man:

Queen Who leads them and is sole commander of the army?
Chorus They are called neither the slaves nor subjects of any single man.
Queen So how they can withstand hostile invaders?
Chorus Well enough to have destroyed Dareios’ large and excellent army.
Queen What you say is terrible for the parents of our men to contemplate. (241-45)

Individual isonomy and freedom, as the cornerstone of the Athenian democracy, are proclaimed here. And in the famous passage delivered by an anonymous Athenian military leader (supposedly) right before the naval combat, this individualism is illustrated at its best: “O sons of the Greeks, come on, liberate your fatherland, liberate your children, your wives, the shrines of your ancestral gods and the graves of your forefather. Our struggle now is on behalf of them all!” (401-06) David Rosenbloom suggests that one characteristic of the fifth-century Athenians is their “ideology of freedom” (Rosenbloom 91). Of course now we know that the freedom was at the expense of women and slaves, probably the poor classes as well, as a result of the political take-over against the aristocratic. However, such Athenian democratic individualism of freedom, as introduced in the preceding chapter, should be modified with the attributive “military.” At least from the beginning of the fifth century, Athens had been deeply involved with international warfare. Such continuous warfare, especially the wars against Persia in the first three decades of the fifth century, to a certain degree defined the quality of the Athenian democracy. One of the major differences between the Trojan and the Persian wars is the former basically was a battle between heroes (even its cause was personal), yet the latter between nations. In other words, we see every single individual warrior with his characteristics in the Homeric epics, but anonymous collective Athenians in The Persians. Both passages quoted above could testify to this military
facet of the Athenian democracy. According to the dialogues between Atossa and the chorus, it probably is overstated to say the democratic individualism is the reason why the Greeks win the war; it will be safe to say, nevertheless, that democratic individualism is able to generate strong military power, and works better than the Persian tyranny (“Well enough to have destroyed Dareios’ large and excellent army.”). In the second passage we can see that the traditional values and vocabulary of the household were employed and appropriated (father-land) to summon the Athenians into war. It demonstrates how the individual subjection to the collective city is achieved: by making the national combat personal, which was again to apoliticize the political, the democratic ideology commanded its each “son” to fight for his country. It is also notable that when Dareios is asked by the chorus why Persia should never invade the Greek territory again, the fatalist defeatism revealed by him (“For the very soil of Greece is their ally,” 790-92) arguably echoes the theme of the gods’ favor of the Greek victory on the one hand, and amplifies the collectiveness of the Greek as a whole on the other. Goldhill points out that the techniques of war (namely, the employing of a hoplite phalanx or/and a naval fleet) acquired the values of collectivity (Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia” 97-129), and that under the circumstance of the constant involvement of wars, “it was important for the democratic polis in general and for the citizen army as a key element in the democratic polis that [. . .] the individual was seen in an essential way as being defined by his contribution to the polis (Goldhill, “Battle narrative and politics” 192)”.

We should not forget that, as stressed in Chapter 2, the premise of Athenian democracy was the individual’s subjection to the polis, and that the democratization was of a process of power exercise: in the process, Athenians were not only equalized in ideal but also endorsed with citizenship, which is the combination of rights and obligations according to the traditional sociology or politics, but a corpus of disciplinary discourses in Foucauldian theory. To put it more clearly, democracy authorized Athenians the rights of participating politics and put them under the surveillance of other fellow citizens in various institutions; at the same time, they were oriented to focus themselves on the public domain and subjected by the democratic ideology when they performed their duties or/and right according to the rules set by these institutions, which include warfare, as described in *The Persians*.

### 3-3.2 Anonymity of the Athenians
What is also remarkable in *The Persians* is that this Athenian collective individualism is revealed and strengthened by the anonymity of the Greek force, especially when contrasted by the enormously large number of the Persian generals’ (mostly incorrect) names. As argued in Chapter Two, anonymity is one of the essential components of the Athenian military democracy and a trajectory of power exercise. Totally deviated from the world of Homeric epics, anonymity of the Greek in *The Persians* obviously was an innovation emerging with the Athenian democracy. Murray justifies this anonymity, in terms of dramaturgy, as a “right” technique which serves well to the playwright’s theme of moralizing the contemporary events: “If one Greek general had been named the play would have become modern and been exposed to all the small temporary emotions of the immediate present, the gratified vanity, the jealousy, the annoyance, the inevitable criticism” (Murray 126). What is significant in Murray’s analysis is that he points out, though indirectly, the dynamic interactions between the tragic contest and its audience: the anonymity prevented any polarization among the audience. What should be supplemented to Murray’s analysis, however, is that this anonymity in *The Persians* is not merely a dramaturgical device, but also a vehicle of the democratic ideology at the other level. As mentioned in 2-1, this anonymity can also be witnessed in the practices of other institutions. From a Foucauldian perspective, these practices disclose how these institutions narrow and monopolize the identity of the Athenians with political devices (the constant and broad using of lot) as well as discourses (the funeral orations and the tragedy).

What also needs to be stressed here is that anonymity was enforced by the convention of the anonymous collective chorus through audience’s identification with them. But in *The Persians*, the course of enforcement was more complicated and extremely interesting because the chorus are the enemy, the political other. A conflict could be observed between the thematic portrayal and the dramaturgical focus of the chorus. Thematically, in the play the chorus is the most powerless in the now powerless nation. They could not afford to fail Atossa’s expectation or to worry her (215-17); they would not dare to speak to Dareios or reproach Xerxes openly. They are thoroughly subjective to the royal (and of course the Persian tyranny accounts for their misery). Just like the Persian soldiers’ widows, except for mourning they could do nothing. However, dramatically, they are underscored in several ways. Though it is unlikely to claim that the Athenian audience would identify themselves with the Persian elders, let alone experience
catharsis in watching the play\textsuperscript{26} (in regards to the chorus’ inferiority and the fact that the wars against Persia in Asian Minor remained throughout the 470s), the chorus assumes a dramaturgical center: through their foreboding and its realization, through their suggestions and questions the play moves forward. What is more significant: among the major characters the chorus is the only one who is left unsatisfied with suffering at the end of the play: Atossa has known that Xerxes survives and has her son back (She says that “[w]hat you [the messenger] just said brings a great radiance to my household, anyway, and a brilliant day out of dark night” (300-01) after she learned of Xerxes’ survival, though she had known that the whole Persian host had perished); Dareios has long been held as a god by the chorus before and after he dies (a pseudo-god probably in the Athenian eyes\textsuperscript{27}): he prophesies and leaves; Xerxes out of any question should be responsible for the whole disaster: he is the last one with whom the audience would sympathize and empathize. Regardless of how the appearances of Atossa, Dareios and Xerxes would be spectacles in the production, the chorus lies on the very foundation of the play. Like those in many other plays, the anonymous chorus in \textit{The Persians}, no matter how thematically inferior they are, holds onto the privileged position of representing the majority, the collective consciousness. The Athenian audience might not be able to sympathize with the Persian chorus, but it is almost sure that they would watch the play from an equivalent position of the chorus, not from that of Atossa’s or Xerxes’. That is to say the Athenian spectators might not identify themselves with the Persian chorus at the aesthetic (or psychological) level, but they would do so at the ideological level. Dramatically, the chorus’ voices form the axis of the seeing in the play; they are the constant references upon which the Athenians would build their opinions. And there would be no problem for the Athenian audience to appreciate this dramaturgical focalization because it was they, the anonymous citizens, who possessed the same position (the representative of the collective consciousness) in their own \textit{polis}. And of course we know such representation was exactly part of Athenian military-democratic ideology, which was generated and confirmed through institutions such as tragedy.

\textbf{3-3.3 Inventing the Barbarian}

\textsuperscript{26} As for the problems of the theory of catharsis, see Conclusion.
\textsuperscript{27} Suggested by Adams; see Adams 76-91.
As far as this thesis is concerned, it is of prominent importance that in *The Persians* this collective consciousness is an imaged identity to a great extent built up against a series of contrasting pictures of the barbarian Persians. The Athenian democracy is highlighted by the contrast of the Persian tyranny; Athenians’ freedom is underpinned by the contrast of Persian serfdom. In the sea battle, Greek cunning wisdom outweighs the Persians’. During the combats, “[f]irst, in the lead, came the right wing [of Greek naval force], *in disciplined and orderly fashion*, and secondly the whole fleet came out against us [. . .; emphasis added] (399-400); while the Persian force “struck each other with their bronze-mouthed beaks, and shattered all the rowing equipment [. . .]. [. . .] Every ship was being rowed *in disorderly flight*—every ship, that is, in the *barbarian* fleet [emphasis added]” (414-15; 422-23).

Edith Hall points out three defects “in the barbarian psychology” repeatedly stressed in *The Persians*: the hierarchicalism, the immoderate luxuriousness, and the unrestrained emotionalism. What is significant is all three flaws could be regarded as direct or potential threats of the military democracy. The hierarchicalism not only distinguishes classes in a society, but also eliminates the public spheres: it is built upon the “curbed tongues” of the subjects. This is best epitomized in Atossa’s selfish behaviors as queen of a country. The last lines that she says in the play: “O god, numerous harsh pains are afflicting me, but the misfortune which hurts me most of all to hear about is that my son is disgraced by his by his clothes on his body. I shall go and get robes from the palace and try to meet him. For I shall not fail those dear to me in a time of trial” (845-52). Complemented with the strong declaration she made in the beginning of the play (“but that if he [Xerxes] fails—he is not accountable to the community. Provided that he has survived he is still sovereign of this land”), it is simple to see that in tyrannical hierarchicalism of Persia the (royal) personal is political, and only the royal personal could be political.28 The diminishing of the public spheres is the polar opposition of the Athenian democracy (at least in the Athenians’ minds) in a political spectrum. How can one (whether of Athenians or us) imagine Athens without the Agora, Pynx, courts, theatres or the Assembly?

The immoderate luxuriousness was arguably associated with the Greek concept of *hybris*, which eventually led to “deceptions of people,” a common accusation in political rivalries for a political figure. In *The Persians*, the exaggerated description of the splendid equipments of the

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28 Observed by Adams; see Adams 40-8.
Persian force was paralleled by their godless profaneness and their destruction; Attosa’s stunning appearance will be supplemented by Xerxes’ ragged clothes and the unprecedented disaster he brought to his people. In short, the Persians learn a Greek lesson and confirm this lesson in this play.

The forbidding of unrestrained emotionalism was best demonstrated in the case of the fine and ban of Phrynichus’ Capture of Miletus that I mentioned in 2-3.3. Mourning was dangerous in the Athenian mind because it could weaken the brave on the one hand, and lead to conflicts on the other. It is also interesting that mourning was more associated with women and the elders in Athenian society (the choruses in tragedy are good examples); apparently it was in conflict with the manly image of the Athenians. Women and the elders were regarded as socially or/and physically inferior and this association enforced such inferiority.

This stress on the unrestrained emotionalism above can also be seen as a technique to portray weaker images of Persia by effeminizing them.

The court is portrayed as lacking a strong adult male in control: Xerxes is too young, the chorus are old, and the character on stage for longest is the Queen. Repeatedly the marriage beds, cities, and the whole continent of Asia are described as “manless” or “unmanned” (117-19, 289, 579-80, 730), whereas “men remain” to Athens (349). The costume and the voices of Xerxes and the other Persian men are actually described in langue normally confined to the delineation of females […; 468]; the closing thrēnos shows them performing funereal actions normally identified as examples of female behavior […; 908-1078]. The play offers serial images of Asia as Women: the mourning maternal earth of the Asiatic continent […; 61-2], and the sexually deprived young widow, languishing on their soft-sheeted bridal beds […; 133-9]. (Hall, “Asia Unnanned” 13)

This effeminization was a double-fold strategy: it did not simply serve as a technique to portray a weaker image of Persia, but also confirm the inferior nature of women in the society. 29 If we do not forget that Athenian tragedy essentially was written, performed and watched by male citizens, it would be easier for us to imagine the impact of such characterization. We would also figure out that the same contour of the disciplinary orders represented in the play and enforced in

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29 For a discuss of the inferior image of women, see Case 1988.
the theatre were not accidental, because as a mechanism of power exercise, institution not only discipline people by force, but also with discourse.

As argued in Chapter 2 and above, the emphasis on the otherness should be regarded as a power technology to create a psychological distance where the justifications of the war could be located. In addition, the superior image of Athenians contrasted by that of the inferior Persians undoubtedly contributed to summoning Athenians to identify themselves with this image.

Another issue concerning the image of the Persians in this play should be addressed: some scholars assert that the Persians are to certain degree heroicalized in this play—just as the greatness of the Persian force is emphasized, the dignity showed by Atossa and Dareios, the tough and invincible pictures of the Persian kings and generals drawn by the chorus, the incompatible status of Xerses are evidences of that the Persian court is an appropriate subject-matter for tragedy. But I want to point out that to stress the great number of the army is one thing, to praise their heroicness is very much another. It is no problem for us to imagine that in a post-event narrative the powerfulness of the enemy would be stressed or even exaggerated, because this could be a handy excuse for defeat or a proof of their own superiority. The Persians did work that way. The outnumbering Persian naval force is repeatedly mentioned, even though this is told by the Persian chorus. The number of each army was historic fact. It makes no difference by whom this was told. And what is more important is that this stress on the sheer great amount of the Persian host is not at all incompatible with the flaws which are attributed to the ethnic aspect of the Persians. But speaking of the "heroification" of the Persians, it would be a totally different case. We should be wary that not all the Persians are heroified in this play, at least as a major character the chorus is not. More significant, from a dramaturgical perspective the chorus is exactly the voice that heroifies other characters: no matter the playwright did this consciously or not, the heroicness of other characters is, and is only, seen through the chorus’ eyes, never from those of the second party in the battle. Additionally, through a closer study we would find out the essence of this heroification is sociopolitical, not moral or ethical. It mainly stresses the social status or/and the individual exploitations, not the virtues. The only exception probably is Dareios’ recollection of the gods’ favor for his ancestors. This positive portrayal

30 For instance, Murray asserts, “the Persians are treated in the heroic spirit. They are terrible men; full of pride, insatiable in their claims [. . .]. No Persian is in any way base; no remotest suggestion of what we now call “war propaganda” (Murray 127-8). But through a closer examination, such point is hard to hold throughout the play.
could be identified by Athenians because they knew that those ancient Persian kings had never
set foot on the Greek territory. Nevertheless, the positive picture is weakened by its remoteness
in time and by the fact that it is told by Dareios; and also dramaturgically this recollection
functions mainly to amplify Xerxes’ mistake and failure. Even though the audience would pay
attention to them, the focus would soon be shifted. From a power perspective, the “heroification”
is more properly described as an operation of translating the Persian politics into the traditional
mythical world by using the Athenian vocabulary. To answer the reason for this “heroification,”
we should be reminded of Phrynichus’ ban: a safe space between the theatrical presentation and
the political reality should be created, especially when the subject matter is drawn from
contemporary events. The Great Dionysia festival to a great extent was designed to consolidate
the Athenian identity, no interfering would be allowed at the level of the theatrical practice. Most
importantly, we see how the same power technology was operated within the context (the Great
Dionysia) and the text (The Persians).

To conclude, The Persians not only demonstrated that the rules which regulated the
festival of Dionysia and the society were followed in a production (the ban of misfortune, the
anonymous individualism, the Athenian-centrism), it also illustrated how a category of the
sayable was mapped out at the discursive level (“the Athenian” and “the Persian”). Along this
line, the production of The Persians in the Great Dionysia was probably the best demonstration
of Foucault’s bio-power: through the ritualistic ceremonies as well as discourse, the exercises of
power in every stratum of the theatre made possible Athenians a useful human resource for the
polis.
Conclusion

Aeschylus, son of Euphorion, an Athenian, is covered by
This tomb; he died in wheat-bearing Gela.
The famous grove of Marathon can tell his valor
As can the long-haired Persian who knew it.

—Aeschylus Epitaph

When publishing his study on Shakespeare in 1986, in the Preface Eagleton wrote a long apology to defend his analytic method of employing contemporary cultural theories:

Those who are sceptical of the relevance of contemporary critical theory to the Swan of Avon should remember that there are more anachronisms in Shakespeare’s plays than the clock in Julius Caesar. Though conclusive evidence is hard come by, it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida. Perhaps this is simply to say that though there are many ways in which we have thankfully left this conservative patriarch behind, there are other ways in which we have yet to catch up with him. (Eagleton William Shakespeare, xi-x)

The writing of this thesis is both an experiment and an effort trying to catch up with Athenian tragedy. I hope I have demonstrated that dynamics between tragedy and its audience is far more complicated than it has been recognized, and that without a new theory, a new understanding of the mechanisms of culture and history, we would never fully appreciate these dynamics. Needless to stress, this thesis is by no means a “conclusion” (no matter in what sense) of the study of Athenian tragedy. The recognition of some new aspects of tragedy, moreover, should invite a deepened conversation between the tragedy studies of now and past: not only need we catch up to Athenian tragedy, we also need to catch up with (in certain sense) the study

31 Reproduced from Dillon and Garland 189.
of Athenian tragedy as well. For instance, how do we respond to Winnington-Ingram’s evaluation of The Persians as he concludes his study as below?

In conclusion, Persae is not the greatest of the surviving plays of Aeschylus: it may well be the least great. The interpretation of the East-West relations which it embodies is interesting, but does not seem to go much farther than might be expected from an intelligent Greek of the time. Morally, it is a study of black and white, and so lacks subtlety. The theological doctrine is fundamentally the same as that of Aeschylus at his greatest, but it is not put to the severer tests—that is to say, it is not developed in a context which, like those of Oresteia or the Danaid trilogy, raises wellnigh insoluble problems about the nature of Zeus and his justice. (Winnington-Ingram 15)

First, we might recognize that when he says the characters are morally black and white (“The victims are all guilty!”32), his judgment is based on the modern theatrical convention of (psychological) characterization of the characters. The characters are not fully developed; they are one-dimensioned in one way or around. But is this criterion historically transcendent? Would it make sense to the fifth-century Athenians, or say, to the medieval theatre practitioners and their audience? (Or to what degree it would make sense to them?) We had better not forget the fact that Aeschylus won a title with a trilogy with The Persians in it. Was Athenian tragedy exceptionally a genre of “subtlety”? We know that this critical argument is based on the authority of Aristotle’s Poetics, especially his innovation of catharsis. But how many tragic plays did exactly fit in the frame of catharsis? Was it possible for a typical Athenian spectator (male, lawfully privileged as a citizen) to sympathize, say, with Clytemnestra, Phedra or Medea? From our new stand of opinions, we might be able to answer Winnington-Ingram that the black- and white-ness of the characterization of The Persians was not a theatrical flaw—it was (I might say) a clever strategy to create a cognitional distance between Athenians and Persians, where the justifications of wars could be safely located, and a vehicle for enhancing the celebration of the collective victory of the city, in which “the” Athenian identity found its way to be crowned and enforced. Athenians probably would have enjoyed fathoming the “insoluble problems about the nature of Zeus and his justice” as we do, but it was not likely for them to regard these problems

32 Winnington-Ingram 15.
as some fundamentally existentialist condition of human beings as we did, let alone for them to see these problems as the essential characteristic of tragedy.

More significantly, these questions would lead us to re-activating a new dialogue with Poetics, the first and probably still the most important theorization of Athenian tragedy, so that we might catch up with it. (These questions by no means imply that Poetics is just an out-of-date theory and should be simply replaced with new ones.) In a recent study Edith Hall describes, “There is indeed no polis [. . .] in Aristotle’s Poetics” (Hall “Is there a polis in Aristotle’s Poetics?” 306). From thematic as well as lexicographical perspectives, she surveys Poetics and asserts that Aristotle, while formulating his theory, deliberately dismissed three aspects of Athenian tragedy: the performative, the Athenian, and the political (297-304). This inclination is especially remarkable because Aristotle’s uses of tragedy in his studies on rhetoric, ethics, and politics make it clear that “he was as aware of the interpenetration of tragedy and all other civic discourses as any modern scholar [. . .]” (303). Hall further explores the potential of Poetics as a reaction against the Platonean poetics in Republic, and she suggests,

He [Aristotle] is, in fact, sidestepping Plato’s requests for a demonstration that poetry is both pleasurable and useful to political communities [. . .], by saying that this is not an appropriate way in which to evaluate poetry: poetry is a self-sufficient art whose own correctness or lack of it is éimmanent, internal to itself, and thus distinct from correctness in any other sphere of human activity. (302)

The innovation and fineness of Aristotle’s Poetics are unquestionable, and we might also analogically credit him as the first New Criticist (or modernist) before New Criticism (modernism). As Hall suggests, Aristotle’s depoliticizing the tragedy very likely was out of “a grasp of the cultural requirements of the future and of the direction in which tragedy need to move” (305). What was significant in Poetics was that Aristotle’s apolitical interpretation (or remodeling) of tragedy made tragedy and the theory itself open to “everyman,” and thus achieved a transhistorical influence (305-6). Nevertheless, as far as this thesis is concerned, Poetics obscures the sociopolitical aspects of Athenian tragedy, and limits (or reorients) the directions of the Athenian tragedy study. Furthermore, from the perspective of power exercise, we may further put Poetics in the context of the post-Athenian-empire Athens to ask the relationship between the collapse of political power (through the interfering of Sparta) and the
promotion of the value of culture (embodied in Poetics), and how the new rising Macedon as a political power of different quality was informative in this relation. We know that tragedy had been produced and consumed at different places other than Athens in the fourth century—it had no longer been a privilege of Athenians; how did these changes inform Aristotle, a non-Athenian with considerable experience of places other than Athens, on his writing?33 If we want to catch up with Aristotle or his Poetics, these are some of the questions that we need to answer.

Back to our example of The Persians and Aeschylus, I hope I have proved that now we can have a deeper understanding of why in Aeschylus’ epitaph (a private practice) it was his identity as a (Athenian) soldier that was stressed, rather than that as a tragedian. To this thesis’ concern, the epitaph is almost a miniature of The Persians. We might cherish Aeschylus as one of the greatest tragic dramatists, but it simply was not the Athenians’ priority. “Author” is a modern innovation; it does not simply mean the one who creates some works.34 When we unwittingly employ this concept to study Aeschylus (or anyone else) and his works, we risk to de-contextualize (or mis-contextualize) the “author.” It would be interesting that if we describe Aeschylus as a prize-winner, like those who won in running a marathon, would this lead us to some new understanding of Athenian society and tragedy?

The dialogue continues.

33 See Hall “Is there a Polis?” 305-6.
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