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NEGOTIABLE IDENTITIES:
THE INTERPRETATION OF COLOR, GENDER, AND ETHNICITY
IN AESCHYLUS' SUPPLIANTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship on Aeschylus' *Suppliants* has typically focused on everything but the interpretation of the text itself. One reason for this neglect is the play's strange treatment of a very sensitive topic: the relationship between color and identity. This tragedy challenges audiences (ancient and modern) to think outside of fixed cultural categories (including such rigid distinctions as race and sex), even to interrogate the foundations and justifications for these social categories. In the process the play suggests the radical instability of cultural givens: attention to such instabilities makes it possible to unravel the play's complexities.

The *Suppliants* features a chorus of black (Egyptian) women who have recently arrived in Greece: they are fleeing marriage with their cousins, also Egyptians. In order to erase the ties between themselves and their suitors, these women change the terms of their identification: they redefine their *genos* (family) selectively in terms of more distant (Greek) ancestors. This change in the Danaids' identification has consequences not just for the Danaids and their rejected suitors, but also for the Argives: they must decide how to honor the women as suppliants while at the same time making sense of their ethnic identification in terms of existing ideological
categories. The result is an ambiguous status for the Danaids as simultaneously Greek and Egyptian, black and white.

The negotiation of their ethnic identity also has implications for their gender identity: in ancient Greece color was not only the marker of one's place of origin, it was also a marker of gender: blackness connotes masculinity, whiteness connotes femininity. Is a black woman really a woman? How does she prove/perform her femininity? What are the implications of black masculinity for the relatively pale-skinned Greeks? How do they secure their masculinity in the face of the Egyptian other? By raising such questions the play also questions the very meaning of masculinity and femininity. The contradictions embodied in the Danaids and the Egyptians challenge the basis for such categories as man and woman or Greek and Egyptian: ultimately the play raises more questions than it answers.
Dedicated to my nieces, Rachel and Sarah, and their mother and grandmother
I would like to thank my committee members for lending their expertise and intellectual support to me while I worked on this project. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to William Batstone, who was enthusiastic about this project from the beginning and has provided some of most challenging (and rewarding) learning experiences of my graduate career. I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to Sarah Iles Johnston, whose interest and energy inspired me to keep writing. Finally, thanks to Victoria Wohl, the ideal reader of this dissertation: her many engaging comments enabled me not only to complete this work but also to look forward to building upon its conclusions in the future.

And thanks to my family and friends (near and distant) for their affection and encouragement. I am especially grateful for the support of my dear friends Mary Bucholtz and Alex Tetlak: they both contributed in innumerable ways to this document’s completion.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Tempting Explanations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting Temptation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Concerns</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Modern Reception of the Supplicants</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Date of the Supplicants</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessments of the Supplicants before 1952</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempts to salvage old methodologies</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what is wrong with development</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Political Context</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reconstruction of the Trilogy</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Motive for the Maidens' Flight</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Passing in Argos: Color and Ethnic Identity</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Race Doesn't Matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorting Through the Terminology</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biological race (and racism) as anachronism</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politics and the illusion of precision</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new terminology: seeing ethnicity in genos</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Negotiation of Genos in the Supplicants</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how the Danaids initially define themselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(lines 1-234)</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
how Pelasgus perceives their difference  
(lines 235-599) ........................................... 108
how Danaus' good news integrates the Danaids  
(lines 600-709) ........................................... 127
how the herald of Aegyptus changes their status  
(lines 710-953) ........................................... 132
how Pelasgus' invitation assimilates them  
(lines 911-1074) ........................................ 135
Conclusion ......................................................... 139

Chapter 3: Looking at Bodies: Color and Gender Identity ....... 142
Femininity and Literary Whiteness ............................ 146
whiteness in Homeric epic ................................. 147
whiteness in lyric poetry ................................... 154
whiteness in tragedy ........................................ 157
Deviant Bodies and the Associations of Blackness .......... 168
Representations of Men and Women in the Suppliants ....... 179
the construction (and destruction) of masculinity ....... 180
Danaus and the performance of femininity ................ 190
blackness and the feminine:
desperation and agency ...................................... 202
bodyguards and the matrimonial imperative ............. 209
Conclusion ......................................................... 211
Violence and the Threat of Security ........................... 212

Appendices ...................................................... 216
A Patterns in the Occurrence of the Epithetic Phrase  
θέα λευκώλενος Ἡρη ................................. 216
B Patterns in the Occurrence of the Epithetic Phrase  
βοῶπς πότνια Ἡρη ................................. 217

Bibliography ..................................................... 218
INTRODUCTION

Aeschylus' *Suppliants* is probably not being performed by your local theater group.¹ One explanation for the unpopularity of this play (with actors, directors, and audiences) might be its strange treatment of sensitive topics like the relationship between color and identity: certainly some of its subtleties will be lost on an audience unfamiliar with Greek institutions. This does not account for its lack of popularity among critics, however, who, with their knowledge of the ideologies peculiar to Greece, might be expected to translate these for the uninitiated. The obstacle for critics (as we will see) is an old bias against the play because of another kind of strangeness: its chorus of black women insisting that they are Greeks. The combination of these two elements (the ambiguous identity of the chorus members and the extraordinary alienness of the ideology) certainly complicates the experience of the play for today's audience. The play also presents another challenge: it simulates the unsettling experience of having no safe place to stand.

¹ This play may even be the least performed of all of the reasonably complete extant tragedies: it is not usually mentioned in books on modern performances of Athenian tragedy. See M. McDonald, *Ancient Sun, Modern Light: Greek Drama on the Modern Stage* (New York 1992) and K. V. Hartigan, *Greek tragedy on the American Stage: Ancient Drama in the Commercial Theater. 1882-1994* (Westport, Conn. and London 1995).
If the play were performed in a theater today, some members of the audience might find themselves identifying with the plight of the chorus: they might sympathize with them as women who are objects of unwanted sexual attention, or even as people who find themselves homeless as a result of a difficult crisis at home. In short, they might sympathize with these women as victims -- of circumstance or masculine aggression. Other audience members might pity Pelasgus and the Argives since they are forced to decide whether to receive these women as suppliants and suffer losses in war, or to suffer punishment by the god who protects them. They might resent the intrusion of the weak who force the strong to suffer with them. It would also be possible, certainly, for an audience member to feel both responses at once -- to feel itself being pulled in both directions -- identifying now with one side, now with the other. This might be the most appropriate response to the Supplicants, since (as it seems to me) this tragedy is concerned with confounding all secure positions as it forces its audience to question the value and meaning of even such fundamental categories as man and woman, barbarian and Greek, blood relation and kin, citizen and metic, and strong and weak.

Today’s performance of the Supplicants would differ from an ancient one in another important respect: while in the modern context theater is entertainment, in the ancient context it was part of a civic and religious ceremony. The original context for the performance of tragedy was the City Dionysia, a public festival whose participants were (in the majority) Athenian citizens. Clearly the audience was a political community: “the audience sat in the open-air
theater below the Akropolis in wedge-shaped sections designated for each of the ten political tribes, just as they did for other city meetings." The festival's events included other civic events: ceremony, ritual, processions, sacrifices; all of these events seem to have been designed to create social cohesion, to re-create the community of citizens through ritual. Tragedy dramatized challenges to the existing order: such challenges seem to have been designed to force citizens to refine existing civic ideals. My reading of the Suppliants has convinced me that its purpose was to interrogate some very fundamental concepts: power, citizenship, kinship, and even desire.

Some Tempting Explanations

The fact that men were both performers and audience for these rituals suggests that this was not a place for women. and yet

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4 The question of whether or not women were in the audience at the City Dionysia has received a lot of attention, but the responses are not conclusive. From the absence of internal references (references within texts) to women in the audience it seems fair to conclude that even if they were present in the audience, "the dramatic productions were certainly not addressed to them." See Froma Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama," in Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature (Chicago 1996) 343, n. 5. This article first appeared in Representations 11 (1985) 63-94. There is a huge bibliography on this question: see, for example, A. J. Podlecki, "Could Women Attend the Theater in Ancient Athens?" Ancient World 1990 (21.1) 45-63; J. Henderson, "Women and the Athenian Dramatic Festivals," TAPA 121 (1991) 133-48; S. Goldhill, "Representing Democracy: Women at the Great Dionysia," in Ritual, Finance, Politics: Athenian Democratic Accounts Presented to David Lewis, ed. R. Osborne and S. Hornblower (Oxford 1994).
representations of female characters abound in the extant tragedies.\(^5\) Scholars have explained the function of these representations variously. For instance, A. W. Gomme argued that dramas provide evidence that women's lives in fifth and fourth century Athens were not as restricted as the laws suggest; in his view, the female roles played on stage reflected the lives of real women.\(^6\) In the last twenty years, critics have questioned this assumption, especially on the grounds that the images of women in literary texts or in legal documents are the products of the male imagination: we hear very little from women themselves.\(^7\) Thus it makes sense, according to Shaw, to interpret both kinds of evidence (literary and legal) as "the fantasy of the Athenians" since "neither literature nor the social documents are about women's place in society."\(^8\)

The study of the representation of women in ancient texts has thus become a study of the Athenian imagination. As such, it sometimes incorporates the further observation that these representations were created by men: the study of these

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7 Edwin Ardener would classify Athenian women as a 'muted' class: it is "muted simply because it does not form part of the dominant communicative system of the society -- expressed as it must be through the dominant ideology, and that 'mode of production,' if you wish, which is articulated within it." See E. Ardner, "The Problem Revisited," in Perceiving Women, ed. E. Ardner (London 1975) 22.

representations then becomes a study of the male imagination and the mechanisms by which men oppress women.\(^9\) It is especially tempting to use this approach in the study of Athenian tragedy, since tragedy very often featured a performance of femininity that was staged by and for men. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz stresses this function of tragedy:

> As a public art form, tragedy served the polis in part by describing, inscribing, and prescribing gender, transforming the biologically male and female into the socially masculine and feminine. The apparatuses of ideology present models of gendered behavior, particularly women's behavior, and give women reasons for complying with them.\(^10\)

According to her theory, tragedy often features female characters who resist their traditional feminine roles: this resistance is ultimately the cause of great destruction -- both of others and themselves.\(^11\) Tragedy reveals the threat and promises punishment: it reveals the dangers inherent in a woman's will if that will is allowed to express itself.\(^12\)

Other critics have likewise tried to explain how tragic drama (especially the representations of women) shaped masculine identity.


\(^12\) This theory does not take into account the fact that male characters also exert their wills with tragic consequences. See B. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964). More importantly, it assumes that the relationship between literary representations and social oppression is unproblematic. Such an explanation of literature as the basis for sexual oppression underestimates both the complexity of interpretation (it assumes that all readers will get the same thing from a text) and the role that women play in the construction and maintenance of ideology. These criticisms do not mark an end to speculation on the relationship between Athenian drama and ideology; rather, they suggest a basis for more nuanced speculation.
Michael Shaw has argued that tragedy revealed the flaws inherent in any complete separation of the *polis* ("purely masculine") from the *oikos* ("purely feminine"). He described the function of the tragic poet:

> By dramatizing the points of conflict between the *oikos* and the state, the artist could chart the limits and shortcomings of the civic virtues. By showing the opposition of oikos and state, the artist illustrates the need for that harmony between *Realpolitik* and concern for the weak between practicality and poetry, between discipline and freedom, which was always the Athenian ideal. The harmony we find so eloquently described in the Funeral Oration of Pericles.\(^\text{13}\)

Froma Zeitlin has likewise theorized that the spectacle of females on the tragic stage functioned for the cathartic good of the male members of the audience. She asserts that "theater uses the feminine for the purposes of imagining a fuller model for the masculine self, and 'playing the other' opens that self to those often barred emotions of fear and pity."\(^\text{14}\) According to this theory, the spectacle has less to do with women, and more to do with men and the construction of the masculine identity.

Although I have so far been discussing only representations of gender, this theory has applications for the study of representations in general: the racial 'other' functions in the same way in tragedy as the gendered 'other.' For instance, it has recently become popular in classics to study the significance of non-Greek characters on the stage as foils for Greek characters.\(^\text{15}\) According to this logic, the non-Greek

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\(^{13}\) Shaw (above, note 8) 266.

\(^{14}\) Zeitlin (above, note 4) 363.

\(^{15}\) This approach is exemplified in classics by Edith Hall’s book on representations of the barbarian in Greek tragedy: she argues that "Greek writing about barbarians is usually an exercise in self-definition. For the barbarian is often portrayed as the
character ('the other') provides the Athenian citizen with an image of what he is not: it allows him to identify (temporarily) with another and also to bolster his own self-identity. This theory has also enjoyed some prominence in the racial discourse in American literature:

The language of white thought has had to create the boundaries of its existence and to determine what will not be allowed inside. The white subject has spoken to itself, and in so speaking has created its own racial consciousness. To follow Jacques Lacan’s formulation in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 'the consciousness is the sum of the effects of speech on a subject, at the level of which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier.'¹⁶... The signifier of whiteness continues to rewrite itself as a discourse into our institutions, including our literature, and we, as racial subject, continue to read it, to recognize it, to privilege it, and to enjoy its power.¹⁷

Toni Morrison has recently urged literary critics to become aware of the construction of what she calls literary 'whiteness' and literary 'blackness': "We need studies of the technical ways in which an Africanist character is used to limn out and enforce the invention and implications of whiteness. We need studies that analyze the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters."¹⁸

Such a study of the *Suppliants* would necessarily address both gender and ethnic identity, since the 'self' and the 'other' are defined by both of these categories in this play. According to this theory, the opposite of the ideal Greek"⁹¹. See E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford 1989); and F. Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: the representation of the other in the writing of history*, trans. J. Lloyd (Berkeley 1988).

¹⁶ This translation is by J. A. Miller (New York 1981) 126.


male representation of women and the Greek representation of non-Greeks provide the Athenian audience with a doubled image of what he is not.

Resisting Temptation

Although the neatness of these categories is certainly appealing, they also fail to describe the experience of reading tragedy. The Suppliants, it seems to me, is especially resistant to any attempts to make neat distinctions between self and other or masculine and feminine. As a text that dramatizes the process of changing identity, the Suppliants especially confounds all binary systems. I do not offer a structuralist reading of this play because the text won't stand for it: categories are constantly in a state of flux as the Danaids look everywhere for a secure position and cannot seem to find it.

The identity of the Danaids is especially complicated since they are not only female, they are also 'black' -- thus they might seem to be "the 'other' of the 'other'".19 The interpretation of this blackness, though, involves us in a new set of problems, since we must resist the temptation to interpret it with modern theories that associate color and race: such theories are not only problematic in their own right, but they are also discontinuous with ancient ideas about color, gender, and ethnicity.

19 Wallace argues that if white women and black men are the 'other' in relation to white men, then black women are the 'other' to the 'other'. See M. Wallace, "Variations on Negation and the Heresy of Black Feminist Creativity," in Reading Black. Reading Feminist ed. H. L. Gates, Jr. (New York 1990) 53.
The task of discussing identity within this play becomes more complicated when one reflects upon the extent to which color was linked to gender in ancient Greece: color always potentially indicated both geographical origin and gender. An explanation for this potential comes from the theory of performativity which explains both gender and race as the effect of discourse.20 Judith Butler makes connections between the discourses that produce race and gender. She argues that:

the social regulation of race emerges not simply as another, fully separable, domain of power from sexual difference or sexuality, but that its 'addition' subverts the monolithic workings of the heterosexual imperative as I have described it so far. The symbolic -- that register of regulatory ideality -- is also and always a racial industry, indeed, the reiterated practice of racializing interpellations. Rather than accept a model which understands racism as discrimination on the basis of a pre-given race, I follow those recent theories which have made the argument that 'race' is partially produced as an effect of the history of racism. that its boundaries and meanings are constructed over time not only in the service of racism, but also in the service of the contestation of racism.21

Other theorists have stressed more plainly the similarities between gender and racial identity: they are both "from one perspective performative, neither constituted by nor indicating the existence of a 'true self' or core identity" but they are also both "bound by social and legal constraints related to the physical body."22 Since both gender


22 E. K. Ginsberg. introduction to Passing and the Fictions of Identity (Durham 1996) 2.
and racial identities are related to the physical body, they are also related to specularity: creating or changing identities involves making certain aspects of the body visible and invisible. The fact that racial and gender identities are changeable (some blacks pass for white, some women pass for men) draws attention to the constructedness of the normative categories. Thus, work influenced by performance theory focuses on “the relationships and the dissonance” between the exclusive categories of normative gender and racial systems and “the actuality of ambiguity, multiplicity, abjection, and resistance within these same systems.” If the ‘self’ is a performance, all assumptions of (racial, gendered) essence are troubled.

Such assumptions are even more troubled when one considers them in the context of a literal performance: for when the chorus of ‘black women’ enters the stage, they are ‘really’ white men. The fact that such a performance was even feasible to Athenian citizens supports the distinction between performance and essence. As we will see, even the chorus’ identification as ‘black women’ is not secure. The multiplicity of their identification becomes clear in the course of the play: they are at once abject fugitives, long-lost relatives, vulnerable Greek women, desperate foreigners, unwed daughters, and the lost property of the Egyptians.

Motivating Concerns

As I mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, the Suppliant has not been popular with literary critics: the modern

\footnote{Morris (above, note 20) 570.}
reception of play has been limited by a preoccupation with details external to the text. In the first chapter, I will demonstrate the lengths to which critics have gone in order to avoid addressing the significance of details from the text. Because the plot (with its focus on the foreign and the female) was considered to be unworthy of classical Greece, an early date for the play was assumed and the play was ignored. Even the publication of a didascalic notice (announcing that the play had won first place in Athens twenty years later than had been supposed) did not bring new interest in the interpretation of the play. I will suggest that the play has suffered neglect because critics have lacked the theoretical tools needed to make sense of the complex dynamics it explores.

I will address the problem of finding the right tools for this job in chapter two. Here I will discuss the problems that result from attempts to use modern notions of race in order to interpret references to blackness in this ancient text. I will propose, instead, that we adopt a model of subjective ethnicity: this model emphasizes the importance of describing an ethnic unit in its own terms: it also allows for possible changes in ethnic identity. Only with such a model will we be able to appreciate the complexities and ambiguities of ideological constructs peculiar to ancient Greece. In the second part of this chapter, I will chart the negotiation of the Danaids' ethnicity. By examining those contexts in which their ethnicity is contested, I will show how they conceive of their identity (selectively, in terms of their genos), how their self-identification changes in response to
political and social pressures, and how this change necessarily involves
them (and others) in contradictions.

Questions of color and gender intersect in the third chapter. In
the first part of this chapter I will consider the meaning of whiteness
in ancient Greek culture. I will argue that the conventions by which
women were associated with whiteness and males with blackness
were an important part of the discourse that constructed gender in
ancient Greece. Whiteness was connected to the ideal of female
beauty and behavior. I will also consider the meaning of blackness in
Greek culture, especially when that blackness was on a female body. I
will argue that deviance such as this, although it did not suggest that
the black female was really a male, did cast doubt on her femininity.
This explains why the performance of femininity was so important for
the Danaids: since their external appearance suggested a lack of
femininity, they needed to compensate for this by carefully performing
their femininity (whiteness). This disparity between their appearance
and essence also raises questions about the meaning of blackness on a
male body. As the Egyptians and the Argives prepare to fight one
another for the sake of women, the text even raises questions about
the meaning of masculinity. How would an audience of Athenian men
have responded to the performance of a tragedy such as this one?
How do we respond?
CHAPTER 1
The Modern Reception of the *Supplicants*

From our present vantage point, modern scholarship on the *Supplicants* organizes itself around the year 1952, when a fragment of the didascalic notice (2256, fr. 3) for this play was found at Oxyrhynchus. Prior to this discovery, most scholars had assumed an early date for the play’s composition. Based upon this assumption, those concerned to trace the origin and ‘development’ of tragedy had usually begun their discussions with our play, only to cite it (and then dismiss it) as a ‘primitive’ and ‘undeveloped’ example of a genre that was later to be perfected. In the words of Lloyd-Jones, it had been “easier to patronise the *Supplicants* as a monument of primitive drama rather than to understand it.”

Indeed, considering the sizable bibliography on this play, it is rather surprising that so many critics deal with issues external to the play and so few deal with internal issues. In this chapter I will

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4 Those who work on internal issues are often concerned with establishing lines within the text, so the bibliography of this play naturally includes many short textual notes: A.
simplify matters only a little when I divide the issues which are addressed in recent scholarship into four groups: the date of the play, its political context, the reconstruction of the trilogy, and the motive for the maidens' flight. As will become evident, these issues often occur in pairs, for scholars who are interested in the play's date are often also interested in the political context of the play: scholars who reconstruct the trilogy need to explain the maidens' flight. Unfortunately, these pairings have tended to produce circular argumentation: scholars have often allowed their assumptions about one issue in the play to influence their thinking about another issue, and then, in turn, have applied these conclusions as proof of their assumptions about the first issue. Another regrettable feature of much of this scholarship is the neglect of the play's actual text: too often these discussions do not address the play's complexity.

**The Date of the Suppliants**

The question of the Suppliants' date certainly dominates the scholarship on the play, and for this we have Aristotle (or, rather, a misunderstanding of Aristotle) to blame. For in the *Poetics* he indicates that "Aeschylus first brought the number of actors (ὑποκριτοι) from one to two and he changed the lyric element (τὰ τοῦ χοροῦ) and he made dialogue (λόγος) the protagonist" (1449a 15 ff.). Scholars had

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long interpreted this as meaning that previously the chorus had been the protagonist but that the actor gradually took over this role. Based upon this interpretation, scholars then assumed that the Suppliants must have been an early play. In 1896 A. E. Haigh wrote: "The prominence of the chorus throughout the play, the slightness of the dialogue, and the insignificance of the second actor, are decisive on this point." But this interpretation and corresponding conclusion seem misguided. For, as Garvie points out.

Aristotle is concerned here not with the relationship between actor and chorus as actor, but with the relative extent of the dialogue and lyrics. The previous protagonist was not ὁ χορος but τὰ τοῦ χοροῦ. He is using the word 'protagonist' in a metaphorical sense. This is the only natural interpretation of his words. As the dialogue expanded, so the relative extent of the lyrics decreased; and we have no reason to dispute it. Never for a moment does Aristotle suggest that the chorus was normally the protagonist of early tragedy in the sense that it was the principal character in the plot.

Even as late as Euripides there are tragedies that feature choruses as the protagonists (e.g. The Trojan Women). In fact, to make a chorus of women the protagonist changes the nature (weight) of logos without changing it as 'protagonist.' In this arrangement, the male characters on stage express themselves individually and the women band together as a chorus with one (shared) voice. As such, the chorus of women is an image of weakness in itself. Such a chorus becomes prominent in a play that is particularly concerned (as the Suppliants is) in the relationship between the weak and the strong.

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7 Garvie (above, note 3) 107.
This brings us to the other piece of evidence gleaned from the passage from the Poetics: Aristotle makes Aeschylus responsible for introducing the second actor. Equipped with this piece of information scholars then assumed that this tragedian only gradually became comfortable with his invention and that they could derive evidence useful for dating the plays from their estimation of Aeschylus’ use of that second actor in individual plays. Unanimously they agreed that, not only was the chorus unusually conspicuous in the Supplicants, but the second actor was unusually inconspicuous. From this they drew the conclusion that Aeschylus had not yet learned how to use the second actor for optimum dramatic effect, and that this play must represent an early effort. In 1953 Earp still articulates this opinion: “At what stage in his career Aeschylus added the second actor we do not know. But it is a practically certain inference that he wrote the Supplices soon after. . . . The poet has invented the second actor but not yet learnt to make full use of him.”

Earp (and others) imagines the character of Danaus hanging about the stage and standing idly by while the Chorus pleads its case before the King. He describes this as “awkward.” But if it is ‘awkward’ to have a second actor on stage with no speaking part during a long exchange between an actor and the chorus, then is it not more awkward for an entire chorus of twelve individuals (or fifty!) to remain silent during an exchange between two

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9 Scholars disagree on the number of chorus members (and the number of choruses) that Aeschylus used in this play. Pollux (4. 110) says that the tragic chorus originally numbered fifty. Since this play was long assumed to be early, scholars assumed that there would have been fifty chorus members; this number gained favor since it corresponded to the number of daughters of Danaus. Now that a later date has more support, scholars normally assume that twelve chorus members must have represented
actors? At some point it seems necessary to reevaluate our criteria for what makes a performance awkward. And let us keep in mind that, if the didascalic notice be true, this particular play did win first prize. The audience present at that occasion did not seem to find its presentation objectionable.

Rather than explain the silence of the second actor as a mark of early composition, perhaps we ought to understand it in its particular tragic context. As we have discussed above, the demands of this particular play require that the chorus of maidens be the protagonist; the fact that they play the key role in the story would naturally demand less from Danaus (who would, in essence be third in importance after the Chorus and the King). The roles of the Chorus and Danaus in the *Suppliants* depend upon the demands of this particular dramatic treatment of the myth, and therefore do not offer any special proof of the play's early composition.

This misunderstanding of Aristotle would have stood unchallenged had it not been for the discovery of *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 2256, fr. 3. This didascalic notice, although fragmentary, suggests that the trilogy to which the *Suppliants* probably belonged was produced during the 460's rather than the 490's B.C.E. The first five lines of this text reads roughly as follows:

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the fifty daughters. For a summary of this discussion, see Lloyd-Jones (above, note 2) 365-69. Wolff imagines the most elaborate presentation as she suggests that there were four choruses: the Danaids, handmaidens, Egyptian soldiers, Argive soldiers. See E. A. Wolff, "The date of Aeschylus' Danaids tetralogy." *Eranos* 56 (1958) 127.

10 Garvie makes this point well: he challenges those who treat the introduction of the first actor as the "descendent of the exarchon of the dithyramb" to consider the fact that Danaus is actually the first actor (since he is the character who brings news to the chorus) and Pelasgus the second character. Would anyone argue that Pelasgus (as second actor) was handled clumsily? See Garvie (above, note 3) 127-8.
during the archonship of... OR at the time of Archidemides. Aeschylus was victorious [with the Suppliants, the Egyptians.] the Danaids, and the Amy[mone. a satyr play:] second was Sophocles. Mesatos [was third]... The rest of the fragment is unintelligible. Assuming that the Suppliants was a member of this particular trilogy.\(^{11}\) and that the Sophocles referred to here is the famous tragedian from whom we have extant plays. this notice then suggests a date not earlier than 466. If the first line is restored to read "at the time of Archidemides." it suggests a date during his archonship at approximately 464 and 463. If, however, we admit to the uncertainty of that reading, then we must depend upon the mention of the participation of Sophocles for our date. Unfortunately, various sources provide incomplete and sometimes contradictory information about the date of Sophocles' first competition. For instance, the Marmor Parium (56) states that Sophocles won a tragic victory in the archonship of Apsephion (i.e. in the early part of 468 B.C.E.). This was probably Sophocles' first victory (since it was customary to record a playwright's first victory), but not necessarily his first competition. Plutarch (Cimon 8.7) and Pliny (N. H. xviii. 65) tell us that Sophocles produced his first set of plays and won the first prize with the

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\(^{11}\) Von Schlegel first supposed that the order and names of the trilogy were the Suppliants, the Aegyptoi, and the Danaids; see A. W. von Schlegel, Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur (2nd ed., Heidelberg 1817). Others have generally approved of these names and this order.
Triptolemus in the archonship of Apsephon (468 B.C.). Since we know that Sophocles won the competition in 468 and Aeschylus won with the Septem and accompanying plays in 467, that means that the date of the Suppliants cannot have been earlier than March 466. Eusebius (Chronica ii. 101-3), however, indicates that Sophocles made his debut as tragic poet in the first, second, or third year of the 77th Olympiad, so the performance of the Suppliants could have been "as early as 470 or 469 (not 471, for the victorious tragedian of that year had a name ending in the letter v: I.G. ii. 2318)." Thus Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 2256, fr. 3 suggests that the earliest possible date for the Suppliants is 470 and that the next earliest date is 466 B.C. E..

Since the publication of the fragment, there have been three kinds of responses. Some, those who had spent their scholarly lives believing in an early date, have defended their earlier claims by challenging the authority of the fragment. In a monograph devoted to this subject, Garvie considers six such challenges: (1) perhaps the fragment was written by an 'ignorant'; (2) perhaps the Sophocles referred to in the fragment is someone other than the famous tragedian; (3) perhaps the Suppliants did not belong to the tetralogy mentioned in the notice (which included the Danaids and Amymone); (4) perhaps the fragment should be discarded due to the confusion of lines 5-7; (5) perhaps the notice refers to a performance of the tetralogy after Aeschylus' death; (6) perhaps the Suppliants was

composed at some time earlier than its production. Of course, in the present state of our evidence none of these objections is entirely unreasonable -- the same questions might be asked of many other plays and the evidence for their performance date; but one wonders if they would have been asked at all if the evidence from the fragment had confirmed the majority view of the play's early date.

More interesting than these objections are their motivations. What is at stake in this challenge to traditional opinion? Professional reputation? Certainly. But even more than this, the papyrus fragment challenged current methodologies and cherished beliefs. As we will see, rather than admit the inadequacy of their method, defenders of the early date for the play continue to argue from the strength of the internal (i.e. structural and stylistic) evidence; this so-called evidence is the result of circular argumentation beginning with an assumption of and ending with 'proof' of the play's archaism. Perhaps more significant is the fact that the papyrus fragment challenged scholars' image of classical Athenian tragedy: many were reluctant to accept a later date for the play since such an acceptance would force them to reconsider their assessments of the nature of tragedy and its relationship to the Athenian polis. The sections that follow feature a careful look at the impact that this fragment has had on the study of Aeschylean tragedy: by examining critics' positions before and after the publication of the fragment, we will be able to see that acceptance

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Garvie considers each of these suggestions in some detail. See Garvie (above, note 3) 12-28.
of the fragment required a reassessment of the nature of scholarship and tragedy.

**assessments of the Supplicants before 1952**

In 1948 (four years before the publication of the didascalic fragment) Earp published a book on Aeschylus' style; in this book he attempted to present solid 'scientific' evidence that would confirm his chronological ordering of the extant plays of Aeschylus. For example, commenting on a list of compound words used in the seven plays, Earp states: "In the earliest play, the Supplices, the ratio [of hapax legomena to total number of compounds] is almost identical in dialogue and lyric, and though it rises later, the Choephoroi alone shows less than a ratio of a half." When a certain criterion of style does not yield the desired results, he deems it an insignificant criterion. Never does Earp acknowledge that the number of extant plays is small or that those seven remaining may not even represent the wide range of styles of the whole corpus. Likewise he never seriously contemplates the legitimacy of assuming the "development" of the playwright's style.

Yet, scholars referred to Earp's *The Style of Aeschylus* as an "exhaustive stylistic analysis. In every one of his statistical tables

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15 Earp (above, note 14) 9.

16 Earp assumes, as many have, that the *Prometheus Bound* was written by Aeschylus. Others have suggested that Aeschylus left it unfinished at the time of his death, while still others deny its authenticity altogether. See W. Schmid, *Untersuchungen zum Gefesselten Prometheus* (Stuttgart 1929; compare M. Griffith, *The authenticity of Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1974).
the *Supplices* comes out on top, indicating -- if such evidence has value -- that it is the earliest of the seven."\(^{17}\) But if one carefully examines the argumentation in this book, one sees evidence of hesitation of Earp's part, as he admits that stylistic variations "depend on the dramatic requirements of the play as well as on the date."\(^{18}\) He also admits that the *Suppliants* does not always fit into his general schema: "In some respects the *Supplices* stands alone, and the reader should be warned that some of the general statements made elsewhere in this book do not apply to the *Supplices*."\(^{19}\) Even though he makes these admissions, Earp never concedes that the stylistic evidence does not prove an early date for the play.

Aside from his chronological assumptions about the extant plays of Aeschylus, Earp also frequently betrays assumptions about their relative value. Earp considers the *Oresteia* as the standard of excellence and, consequently, cannot appreciate features of the earlier plays. Thus, in his conclusion, Earp writes, "As I have tried to show, his style develops in a way which makes it gradually more effective and more fitted for drama, and that seems to indicate conscious purpose."\(^{20}\) Earp frequently cites the *Agamemnon* as a model of what drama ought to be, and cannot appreciate a play as different from the *Agamemnon* as the *Suppliants*.

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17 Kitto (above, note 5) 1.
18 Earp (above, note 14) 10.
19 Earp (above, note 14) 68.
20 Earp (above, note 14) 167.
In the later plays, and especially in the *Oresteia*, we could find epithets in abundance, and sometimes more highly piled than here. But, as already noticed, those epithets usually add something vital to the sense, and any ὑκός which they lend is quite subordinate. The inference suggested is that Aeschylus in the *Supplices* lays on ὑκός for its own sake; in the *Oresteia*, though the ὑκός remains, it is subordinate to other ends. The contrast is clearest between the *Supplices* and the *Oresteia*.

Thus, Earp can appreciate the place of epithets within the thematics of the *Oresteia*, but in the *Suppliants* he finds epithets to be without significance. He makes this comment about the first twenty-two lines of the *Suppliants*: "The order is not obscure or unnatural, but lacks strength, for none of the words added anything very essential." Clearly Earp's bias against the *Suppliants* prevents him from appreciating the network of themes and images in that play.

This failure to really engage with the text of the *Suppliants* can be attributed to the fact that until recently the modern critical audience has not been prepared to account for the prominence of gender and ethnic issues in this play. This lack of interest explains the devaluation of the *Suppliants* in particular, since it features a chorus of, by all appearances, non-Greek women. Norwood's comment is particularly illuminating:

> Viewed not historically, but aesthetically, especially by a reader already familiar with the *Oresteia*, the play must be confessed bald and monotonous. Many of Aeschylus' most splendid attributes, it is true, are to be discerned, but their fire too often sinks into smouldering grimness. The only really fine passages

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21 Earp (above, note 14) 64-65.

22 Earp (above, note 14) 91.

23 Studies that focus exclusively on these types of details in the *Suppliants* include B. H. Fowler, "Aeschylus' Imagery," *C & M* 28 (19647) 1-74; and T. A. Tarkow, "The Dilemma of Pelasgus and the Nautical Imagery of Aeschylus' *Suppliants*," *C & M* 31 (1970) 1-13.
are those portions of the lyrics which bear the impress of the poet’s masculine and profound theology. Such strictures, however, are merely one way of saying that the Supplices is an early work. It would be fairer (were it only possible) to compare it with the drama of Phrynichus rather than with the Agamemnon. The choice of vocabulary in this description is amazingly revealing: the play is only interesting because of the poet’s “masculine and profound theology.” otherwise it is “bald and monotonous.” Norwood further exposes his bias when he says that “[t]he chorus are simply distressed damsels (save for their vivid and strong religious faith)” and that “Danaus, however, shows some interesting traits.” Norwood never questions his impressions of these characterizations or asks whether there might have been some dramatic purpose for them. He simply uses his aesthetic judgements to support his assumption of the play’s early date. As we have seen, it is precisely this sort of uncritical aestheticizing that the fragment challenges, since it demands that the Suppliantes be taken seriously as a tragedy performed maybe only eight years before the Agamemnon. The fragment requires a shift away from general analyses of style to more self-aware readings of individual plays; ultimately these readings will also take into account tragedy’s relationship to Athenian ideology.

**attempts to salvage old methodologies**

Naturally there was initial resistance to such a challenge. In addition to denying the significance of the didascalic fragment.

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25 Norwood (above, note 24) 86.
another typical response to it has been to accept the new date but to try to salvage the old methodologies by using them to substantiate the new date for the play. The emphasis on chronological development continued; the only difference was that the Supplicants was now placed after the Persians.

In 1936 (before the discovery of the didascalic fragment) E. C. Yorke had offered structural evidence for the dates of the plays. He counted the number of trisyllabic substitutions (disyllabic iambus resolved into tribrach, anapest. or dactyl) in the iambic trimeters (excluding lyrical trimeters) of Aeschylus. His results indicate a consistent proportion of substitutions in the three plays of the Oresteia (the proportion of trisyllabic feet to trimeters is 1 to 19 in the Choephoroe and 1 to 20 in both the Agamemnon and Eumenides): this led him to suggest that “the frequency of resolution may be expected to be the same in plays composed at about the same date.”

The proportions for the remaining plays are as follows: Persae 1:9; Supplices 1:11; Septem 1:12; Prometheus Vinctus 1:21. One must ask at this point whether the difference in the proportions of trisyllabic feet to trimeters is significant when the numbers differ by only two? Yorke thinks so, as he suggests that “the Supplices might be posterior to the Persae, while the P.V. should be very close to the Oresteia. Of course, we must not apply this test rigidly or by itself; but

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26 Yorke (above, note 1) 117.

27 On the authenticity of the Prometheus Bound, see Griffith (above, note 16).
the results are suggestive and can be used as corroborative evidence."\textsuperscript{28}

Although he was rather tentative before the discovery of the didascalic fragment, after the fragment confirmed his suggestion, however, Yorke forgets his caution. He now states:

\begin{quote}
A good many years ago some metrical evidence was adduced . . . for dating the \textit{Supplices} after the \textit{Persae}, and this dating seems now to be confirmed. Since the same evidence also suggested that the \textit{Supplices} was slightly earlier than the \textit{Septem}, I should be inclined, in default of indications to the contrary, to attribute the \textit{Supplices} to 470 or 469 rather than to 466 or later.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Thus Yorke chooses to interpret the differences between the three earlier plays as highly significant. This confidence in the results of the scientific analysis of the plays leads to an end to the caution that warned that a very small difference in the numbers might not be statistically significant. Also, Yorke continues to assume that Aeschylus' development in this regard was linear; that is, he assumes that as the poet matured, he consistently substituted fewer trisyllabics for iambi. This assumption is problematic, since, as Kitto suggests, "closer inspection suggests that the dramatic quality of a scene had something to do with the incidence of these resolutions -- as is certainly the case in Sophocles."\textsuperscript{30} Thus, although Yorke accepts the new evidence from the papyrus fragment, he nevertheless still maintains the assumption of the author's linear development when interpreting his statistical evidence. In the end he does not use the

\textsuperscript{28} Yorke (above, note 1) 117.

\textsuperscript{29} Yorke (above, note 12) 11.

\textsuperscript{30} Kitto (above, note 5) 2.
metrical evidence as corroborating evidence, but instead uses the papyrus evidence to corroborate his interpretation of the metrical evidence.

In addition to structural matters, some scholars, accepting the later date for the *Suppliants*, cite the playwright's treatment of philosophical and theological matters in the extant plays as a confirmation of this date. For instance, C. J. Herington argues that the Danaid trilogy, the *Oresteia*, and the *Prometheia* "are not merely chronologically a compact group, but that they are so artistically as well. Even more: that in these last three surviving works Aeschylus created a new art-form. something that differs in kind from any work that was staged under the name of tragedy." This seems a bold statement, indeed, considering the present state of the evidence about early tragedy and its 'development.' Later Herington rather fancifully describes the sort of artist he imagines Aeschylus to have been, and admits that this impression is a working assumption. He writes: "We cannot at any stage of Aeschylus' life say that tragedy is; we can only say that tragedy is becoming. Aeschylus' thought, and the technique to match his thought, are dynamic and evolutionary, receptive always to what is new." The image of the 'evolution' of tragedy is troublesome, since, as we know, many different playwrights were competing at the festivals and they presumably had many different styles which might

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32 Herington (above, note 31) 388. This is an interesting contrast to the image of Aeschylus that we get in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. 

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also have been constantly changing -- and not necessarily in the same direction.

Such discussions are sometimes broadened in scope to include the development of philosophical ideas in tragedy in general, and similar evidence is sought in the extant plays of Sophocles and Euripides. For instance, O'Sullivan sees in the work of the these three famous tragedians a reflection of the change in some Athenians' attitudes toward the traditional Olympian gods. He summarizes:

Aeschylus, the earliest, worked within the framework of traditional mythology. Sophocles was orthodox, one might even say pious, regarding the traditional gods, but his interest lay elsewhere. His tragedies display a transition of emphasis from the gods to men, and they are frequently men who have more individuality than Aeschylus' characters. Euripides, finally, was critical of the old mythology.

O'Sullivan proceeds to illustrate his generalizations by examining one play of each tragedian. He makes no explanations for his methods: he does not acknowledge his working assumptions or anticipate any objections to these. One wishes that he had. For instance, he dismisses Aeschylus quite perfunctorily, although that playwright's attitude toward the gods is, in the first place, impossible to discern from an examination of the remaining plays (presumably an atheist could write a pious play if he found theological and metaphysical questions compelling). And even assuming for a moment that his attitude could be discerned from the plays, even in the six extant plays it is complex and sometimes contradictory. Any attempt to generalize

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about the development of philosophical ideas from three extant plays will be more deceptive than instructive.

The old assumption that tragedy developed along a strict linear path survives even in the arguments of those who denounce it. For instance, as Burnett pointed out in her review of Garvie's book on the *Suppliants*. "[He] points at the outset to the patent absurdity of the first assumption on which stylistic chronologies are built -- the assumption of a 'straight-line development' in poetic style that will proceed at a fairly constant rate." But rather than dispute the arguments of scholars with this critique alone, he instead shows that even if this assumption were valid, their stylistic analyses would not provide conclusive evidence for the play's early date. Burnett senses a degree of confusion in this stance: "At some moments [Garvie] announces clearly that style is determined by subject matter and by poetic intention . . . but at other times he slips, in his own argument, into the developmental fallacy." He occasionally reverts to the familiar assumption of a steady stylistic development toward 'maturity.' For instance, he, like others before him, examines the seven extant plays of Aeschylus in order to chart the frequency of resolved feet in the iambic trimeters. The resulting figures, he states,

show a steadily increasing restraint in the use of resolved feet, and in this development the *Supplices* appears after the *Septem* and before the *Oresteia* and *Prometheus*. The fact that the figures for the three plays of the trilogy are practically identical should warn us against attributing this progression to chance. It

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35 Burnett (above, note 34) 56.
is noteworthy that in Aeschylus, unlike Sophocles and Euripides, the development is from freedom to restraint.\textsuperscript{36}

As is betrayed by the language in this passage, Garvie certainly seems to be assuming a chronological development with respect to at least this feature of Aeschylean style. Burnett likewise points to other occasions in the book when Garvie adopts the theory of strict linear development in order to argue for a later date for the \textit{Suppliants}.\textsuperscript{37} Clearly the theory of straight-line development has had a pervasive influence on the conception of the genre.

In sum, this response is characterized by a tendency to assume the linear development of both the individual poet's work and the genre, to adopt the new chronological order for the plays, and then to seek evidence or criteria to confirm this order. These scholars have learned nothing of healthy skepticism from the papyrus find: they still attempt to find evidence of development in the extant plays of Aeschylus even though they number only six. Page reminds us of the paucity of our knowledge: "At least seventy-three, and perhaps as many as ninety, of his plays survived into the Christian era; and we, who possess so small a portion of his work, done in so short a period of his life, can make no useful inference about the development of his art and his thought."\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36}Garvie (above, note 3) 33.

\textsuperscript{37}Burnett takes special offense to the section of the chapter on structure wherein Garvie argues that "the protagonist chorus, far from being the early rule, was in fact impossible in primitive drama, and that its presence is therefore a sure sign of a late tragedy" (Burnett (above, note 34) 57. Garvie's error stems from the assumption of the inferior dramatic quality of choral lyric poetry.

\textsuperscript{38}D. Page, in his introduction to J. D. Denniston and D. Page, \textit{Aeschylus, Agamemnon} (Oxford 1957) xviii.
what is wrong with development

A third response to the new date has been to accept it and to interrogate those methods that once 'proved' an early date for the play. One very important result of this is the new critique of the idea of a straight-line development. As we have seen, it is easier to critique this theory than to seriously break with it. In the first of two articles examining the internal and external evidence for the date of the Suppliants, Emily Wolff cursorily dismisses the idea of strict linear development: "It would be childish to assume that the course of an author's development proceeds like a 45-degree angle, from immature and imperfect efforts to a zenith of perfection. We must allow for experimentation, variation, setbacks and failures, periods of stagnation, unfinished or careless work, exceptional circumstances."®

While all that she says is true, she does not account for the enormous influence that this assumption has had especially in stylistic dating. As we have seen, it is not enough to reject the assumption: we need to understand where it comes from, why its influence has been so pervasive, and whether it can produce anything of value.

Once again we can trace this assumption to a misunderstanding of Aristotle. On the subject of the origin and history of tragedy, Aristotle (Poetics 1449 a) states: "Tragedy developed little by little as men improved whatever part of it became distinct. Many changes were introduced into tragedy, but these ceased when it found its true

® Wolff (above, note 9) 120.
Aristotle, as a student of Plato, has taken over the belief that every person or thing is what it is because of its participation in a given form. This belief was joined with his own interest in biology and the development of each species toward its full realization, and applied to various subjects, including poetry. In the *Poetics* Aristotle clearly indicates that tragedy 'found its true nature' only at the time of the composition of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*; those tragedies composed before *Oedipus Tyrannus* were viewed by Aristotle as merely stages in the development of the ideal form of tragedy. Lloyd-Jones comments: "Aristotle must have thought of Aeschylus, when he thought of him at all, as an imperfect struggler towards the ideal, the Sophoclean pattern." Yet, we might be suspicious of such a definition of the 'nature' of tragedy, since Aristotle's synthesis of the history of tragedy is one person's invention: another could equally well decide that a different play (maybe a later, Euripidean play) best exhibited the qualities of tragedy in its pure, developed form. We must also remember that Aristotle was not a contemporary of Aeschylus, and that his judgements and syntheses were also made from a position of hindsight. Thus, although the schema for the development of tragedy is instructive, it should not be misread as final or exhaustive.

Yet Aristotle's schema has been accepted by the great majority of those scholars who sought information on the earliest forms of drama, its 'origin.' Clearly there is much more at stake here than a changed

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40 This translation is by G. M. A. Grube (New York 1986).

41 Lloyd-Jones (above, note 2) 372.
date in the handbooks: the didascalic notice in fact presents a forceful
call to the application of Aristotle's theory of development. Earp
himself recognized this, when he wrote this pained exclamation:
"Scholars have hitherto regarded the Supplices as the earliest extant
play of Aeschylus; if we now consent to put it late it makes all attempts
to study literature futile."^42

Earp's exasperation is understandable, because the new date for
the play did in fact nullify a portion of his work. What he failed to see
was that, although the didascalic notice did in fact invalidate the
stylistic method of dating, it did not necessarily render meaningless
the image of generic changes as a sort of evolution. It is important,
however to recognize that this model is an artificial, though appealing,
image for the generic changes: the logical development that it maps
should not be confused with strict chronological development.
Webster makes this point well in his discussion of stylistic dating in
both art and literature. He isolates five steps in this process:

First, we make a general assumption of the direction in which
the series is going; these general assumptions are normally
correct -- tragedy does change from oratorio to drama, sculpture
does become more realistic. Secondly, we use every external aid
we can find to date individual members of the series. Thirdly we
examine those dated members of the series and decide what
characteristics in them show the direction that we have
assumed and are therefore valid criteria for dating the undated
members of the series. . . . Fourthly we arrange dated and
undated works in order by the increase or decrease of the
characteristics which we have decided are significant. Fifthly,
we decide that this order is the chronological order of their
creation.^43

^42 Earp (above, note 8) 119.

^43 T. B. L. Webster, "Recent Scholarship on Greek Tragedy," Diogenes 5 (1954) 87.
Webster then concludes that the process is problematic only in the fifth step, since it alone involves the assumption that "the creator creates in an absolutely regular way, that each work is an advance on its predecessor in the direction given by a comparison of early and late dated works."\textsuperscript{44} Webster later states that the last step is flawed because it tries to convert the logical order of the series development into a chronological order.\textsuperscript{45} Thus Webster contends that the developmental model is only useful if we are careful to separate logical development\textsuperscript{46} from chronological development. Others have chosen to abandon the developmental model on the grounds that its connection to chronological order is too strong. We might prefer to describe the changes in the genre, with Burnett, as "a series of discrete artistic innovations."\textsuperscript{47}

The most important result of the fragment's discovery is that is has forced scholars to rethink their task: full acceptance of the new date for the 
Suppliants also entails a reconsideration of the meaning of literary study. Since the 
Suppliants is the play that suffered the most neglect because of the model of chronological development, it is especially deserving of reconsideration and new appreciation.

\textsuperscript{44} He continues: "No allowance is made for special circumstances, brilliant work, repetitive work, or careless work." See Webster (above, note 43) 87.

\textsuperscript{45} Webster (above, note 43) 88.

\textsuperscript{46} 'Logical development' describes trends in generic change divorced from temporal considerations.

\textsuperscript{47} Burnett (above, note 34) 57.
The Political Context

The matter of the date of the *Suppliants* has also loomed large in discussions of the political context of the play. This sort of discussion has great potential since it continues to be important to fit Greek tragedies into a social context. But rather than consider context as political in this larger ideological sense, many historians tend instead to concentrate on details from the play in an attempt to link them with specific historical events. By examining some of these attempts, I hope to demonstrate their futility and thereby make a case for the more general study of political (ideological) contexts.

Historians tend to examine the text of the play for references to what they imagine might be external or political events; they then look to what they know of the history of the period for possible referents. There are four primary issues from the *Suppliants* that are treated as clues for the play's political context: Athens' relationship with Argos, the description of a democracy, the identification of the suppliant, and hostility toward the Egyptians.\(^{48}\) There are two key obstacles to this

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\(^{48}\) Other secondary issues include a possible references to Anaxagoras (explanation of the flooding of the Nile), to a contemporary shrine (lines 145-7), to an earlier mode of representing Io, and to the absence of a stage building. Diels argues that Anaxagoras published his view on the flooding of the Nile in 468/7 and that Aeschylus' familiarity with this theory (line 559) indicates that the play was composed after that date. Unfortunately the date of this theory's publication is uncertain. It is also possible that Aeschylus got his information from some other source. See H. Diels, "Seneca und Lucan," *Abh. Berl. Akad.* ii (1885) 8 n. 1. It has also been argued that the deictic reference to a goddess in lines 145-7 referred to some building or temple of a goddess near the theater. Recent discoveries in archaeology have debunked Bucheler's theory that this was a reference to Athena and the Parthenon (since construction on that building seems not to have begun until after Aeschylus' death. Since this discovery, other possible identifications have been suggested. See Garvie (above, note 3) 156-7 for full discussion and bibliography. Evidence for the play's date has also been sought in the representation of Io, since there seemed to have been a change in her iconographic representation around 470 B.C.. This change (from cow to maiden with horns) has been connected to the stage, since the difficulties in staging the former are considerable. The fact that Io nowhere appears in the *Suppliants* seems to exclude it from this discussion; if her representation was in flux, the playwright apparently had the freedom to represent her as he wished. See R. D. Murray, *The Motif of Io in Aeschylus' Suppliants*.
endeavor: first, the references in the play can be interpreted in a number of ways; second, our knowledge of the social and political conditions during this period is incomplete. Also, as we will see, such inquiries are inevitably influenced by an assumption of the play's date (early or late). Finally, these efforts do not really help with the interpretation of the play. Often a piece of information is gleaned from the play and connected with actual historical events or institutions; these connections are never made directly relevant to the play itself. That is to say, the claim of interest in the date of the play in order to put it in an historical context is usually false.

Podlecki has argued that the fact that Aeschylus set this trilogy in Argos indicates that its production must have taken place during a period of peace between Athens and Argos. He maintains that the choice of this particular myth could not have been apolitical since it was chosen and performed in a specific political time and space. His critics counter that when Aeschylus "decided that the story of the Danaids made a suitable theme for a trilogy, he was bound to set that trilogy in Argos. And there is no compelling reason to believe that it was political rather than dramatic considerations that influenced that

(Princeton 1958) 91 ff. Finally, the fact that no background building is referred to in the play has been cited as evidence that this is an early play. Of course, the lack of such a mention does not mean that it wasn't there; frequent mention of an altar seems to have have better suited the drama. On this, see M. Bieber, The History of the Greek and Roman Theater (2nd ed., Princeton 1961) 22 and 57. Although suggestive, none of these arguments are conclusive.

49 For example, hostility toward Egypt is not unqualified, since it is the place of origin for both the daughters of Danaus and the sons of Egypt.

50 Garvie (above, note 3)143 n. 2.

Still, Garvie concedes when he states that the treatment of Argos indicates that the play was composed and produced at a time when Argos and Athens were at least not on hostile terms. He urges caution even here, though, since the remainder of the trilogy could have depicted Argos in a slightly less flattering light.\footnote{Garvie (above, note 3) 143.}

When were Argos and Athens on friendly terms? The fact that Argos had submitted to the Persians until just before the battle of Salamis (Herodotus 7.138 ff.) argues against any date in the 470's: we have only, then, to consider the 460's. Furthermore, Focke points out that throughout this period friendship with Argos necessarily involved hostility toward Sparta.\footnote{F. Focke, "Aeschylus' Hiketiden." NGG (1922) 165-188.} Athens' relationship with Sparta was gradually changing. Forrest suggests that there was in Athens by 463 considerable democratic opposition to Cimon's conservative policy of friendship towards Sparta, and an alliance with Argos may have already been advanced as an alternative policy.\footnote{W. G. Forrest, "Themistokles and Argos." \textit{Classical Quarterly} 10 (1960) 239-40. Also on the subject of Athens' response to Cimon's relationship to Sparta, see Plutarch's \textit{Cimon} xv-xviii.} Böckh (as early as 1808) had argued that the treatment of Argos was similar in the \textit{Eumenides} and the \textit{Suppliants} (since the former refers explicitly to an alliance between Athens and Argos\footnote{These references are at lines 289 ff., 669 ff., 762 ff.} and the latter contains the elaborate praise of Argos); this similarity suggested to him that the two plays

\footnote{This is Garvie's constant refrain throughout this chapter: see Garvie (above, note 3) 144.}

\footnote{These references are at lines 289 ff., 669 ff., 762 ff.}
might belong to the same period.\textsuperscript{57} The favorable representation of Argos led Boeckh to conclude that the \textit{Supplicants} was produced during the time of the Argive alliance, i.e. towards the end of the 460's (Thucydides I.102.4). Although the interpretation of the representation of Argos in the play does suggest a later date for the \textit{Supplicants}, it does not contribute to an assessment of the play's wider ideological significance.

The references in the play most often discussed are to what many describe (perhaps anachronistically\textsuperscript{58}) as a democracy. Scholars have long been struck by the fact that Pelasgus does not accept the full burden of the Danaids' request but rather refers it to a vote of the demos. This raises many questions. First, is this move a function of the plot: is Pelasgus simply avoiding full responsibility for a situation which will inevitably have a tragic outcome?\textsuperscript{59} Is it a function of the drama: is Pelasgus' decision to refer the vote to the demos strictly a suspense-building move?\textsuperscript{60} Will the power of the demos become significant in the subsequent plays of the trilogy?\textsuperscript{61} Or, alternatively, is Aeschylus depicting a democracy? And if so, what is his model?

Should we assume that the constitution depicted is anachronistic and

\textsuperscript{57} A. Boeckh, \textit{Graecae tragoediae principum} (Heidelberg 1808) 54.

\textsuperscript{58} Debrunner, a linguist, argues that there is no evidence for the word \textit{δημοκρατία} earlier than the middle of the fifth century. See A. Debrunner, "\textit{Δημοκρατία}," \textit{Festschrift für Edouard Tieche} (Bern 1947) 11-24.


\textsuperscript{60} H. G. Robertson, "\textit{Αίκτι} and "\textit{Τρυγίς} in Aeschylus' \textit{Supplicants}.," \textit{The Classical Review} 50 (1936) 106.

\textsuperscript{61} Garvie (above, note 3) 153.
that it represents Argos' current form of government? Or should we assume, rather, that Aeschylus is projecting onto a mythical Argos the form of government current in Athens? Or is this not a democracy at all, but a constitutional monarchy? Some of these positions are more persuasive than others, but none can be proven beyond a doubt. Due to a lack of certainty about the play's date and the value of its historical references, scholars are left to construct tenuous arguments based on the little evidence available to them. Aside from the occasional references to the dramatic value of Pelasgus' position, none of these arguments contributes to the interpretation of the play.

Another common approach to placing the play in a political context has been to argue that the suppliant women in this play recall an historical figure who had recently been in a similar situation. Unfortunately (and somewhat predictably) a possible referent for the suppliants can be found regardless of what date one posits for the play. Early in this century, when an early date was assumed for the play, scholars linked Aristagoras with the suppliant characters in the play since he had come to Greece in 499 in order to get help for the Ionian revolt. After Sparta denied his request, Athens granted it: Aristagoras


64 Lloyd-Jones notes that the position of Pelasgos resembles that of the Homeric king: see Lloyd-Jones (above, note 2) 358-9. Dover likewise argues that Pelasgus is portrayed as a constitutional monarch because Aeschylus was writing for an audience that was sympathetic to democratic ideas. See K. J. Dover, "The political aspect of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957) 234.
had claimed ties of kinship between Athens and Ionia.\footnote{Herodotus 5.49 ff. and 97.} Mueller believed that the *Suppliants* must have been meant to suggest just this situation, since they likewise use kinship as the basis for their appeal.\footnote{Mueller (above, note 62) 66 ff..} Garvie objects: "But it could hardly be maintained that there is any close equivalence between the Danaids seeking protection from their unwelcome suitors at Argos, and Aristagoras at Athens seeking help in a revolt against Persia."\footnote{Garvie (above, note 3) 154-55.} While the fact that in both cases the aggressors are 'barbarians' and that they seek to dominate their unwilling victims makes the theory somewhat compelling, the identification of Aristagoras with the suppliants ignores the fact that the suppliants in the play are women fleeing the unwelcome advance of their suitors. Once femininity, desire, and marriage are figured in, the situation of our suppliants does not at all resemble that of Aristagoras.

Even after the discovery of the didascalic notice, Diamantopoulos has argued for an early date of composition (and later date of production, both in Athens and Argos) for the *Suppliants*, based primarily on the references to a democratic form of government at Argos, the emphasis on the antiquity of this form of government, and the theme of marriage.\footnote{A. Diamantopoulos, “The Danaid Tetralogy of Aeschylus,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957) 220-29.} First he stresses that the Argive claim to the seniority of their dynasty is directly relevant to confrontations between

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\footnote{Herodotus 5.49 ff. and 97.}
\footnote{Mueller (above, note 62) 66 ff..}
\footnote{Garvie (above, note 3) 154-55.}
Sparta and Argos when there was a question of who would lead an alliance against Persia (Herodotus 7.148). Next he claims that something like a democratic state existed after the battle of Sepeia (494) during which Argos lost six thousand men: Herodotus (6.83) and Plutarch (Virt. Mul. 4) tell us that this necessitated marriage between Argive women and slaves or peroi\textit{kioi}. For this reason, Diamantopoulos would like to link this event with the \textit{Supplicants}. He finds the example of Hypermnestra particularly appropriate since she presents a model of a good woman who submits to marriage because of her desire for children. He concludes that the Danaid Trilogy is the "slogan" against the adhesion of Athens to the Spartan league and for an alliance between democratic Argos and Athens.\footnote{Diamantopoulos (above, note 68) 228.} He puts the date of composition in the 490's but concedes that it was not performed until Ephialtes' time -- when the political climate was again tolerant of such a sentiment.

Diamantopoulos himself admits that there is no evidence at all for an Athenian-Argive reconciliation at the end of the 490's. yet he thinks it probable. His argument also suffers from constant assumption that the play is political propaganda aimed at Argive and Athenian audiences. Although the incorporation of the theme of marriage into his reconstruction of the political context is commendable, one wonders about the appropriateness of many details of the play, especially the characterization of the suitors as violent aggressors. One imagines that an Argive performance of this trilogy in the 490's would be extremely ill-timed, since the audience there
could only be horrified to watch the deaths of 49 more men at the hands of unwilling wives. Although his reconstruction is creative, it requires both the invention of political alliances for which we have no evidence and also a more sympathetic portrayal of the suitors. My fundamental objection to this sort of identification is that its focus is on narrow historical relevance; it does not really help us get back to the play.

Supporters of the later date for the play argue for a possible identification of Themistocles with the suppliant characters, since after his ostracism from Athens he supplicated and was received at Argos. Most recently Forrest has expounded upon this possibility: he says that the theme of the *Suppliants* "is the dilemma of Argos -- should she accept a suppliant even at the risk of war? In 470 Argos had been faced with just this dilemma and had answered it, as she does in the play, by accepting the suppliant and by risking war, with Sparta certainly and perhaps, as it then seemed, with Kimonian Athens as well." Forrest's argument is weakened by his lack of attention to the drama. He becomes so involved with the historical details that he forgets the dramatic circumstances: at one point he says that "the praise of democratic Argos in lines 605-24 . . . is totally irrelevant in any mythological situation." It seems rather desperate to deny the coherence of a passage in a drama (this particular passage contains the praises of all aspects of Argos, but especially the *demos*,

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70 E. Cavaignac, "Eschyle et Themistocle." *Revue de philologie* 45 (1921) 102-6. Cavaignac consequently dated the play at 470 -- that is, shortly after Themistocles' ostracism.

71 Forrest (above, note 55) 239.
since they have been directly responsible for the women's deliverance) in order to support a theory that the passage alludes to a specific historical situation.

This strategy of identifying the suppliant often involves the assumption that Pelasgus' dilemma is 'the theme' of the play. Scholars who make such a statement ignore the fact that the crisis originated with the chorus of women in a situation peculiar to women. It is careless to isolate one theme because of so-called historical parallels to the extent that both its significance for the play and other details of the mythical story and trilogy are ignored.

This whole matter of isolating one historical referent for the suppliants is difficult for yet another reason. For, as Livingstone reminds us, the reception of suppliants was probably a rather familiar event in fifth century Athens:

The audience in the Theatre were witnessing in this drama an incident like many on which they had voted in the Assembly. The application of the Supplicants was a recurring incident of the ecclesia -- the appeal of a weak and persecuted state for help. If we review the history of Athens in the fifth century and consider how often such requests were made, beginning with the year 498 B.C. when Aristagoras asked Athens to help the Ionians against Persia, we shall realise how familiar the problem was to the ordinary Athenian.72

Although Livingstone assumes that the play was produced in the 490's and referred to Aristagoras, his discussion reminds us that there need not be a specific referent. Since the audience had been made aware of the cases of many suppliants,73 the general situation and not a specific

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historical figure was all the play necessarily recalled. In any case, the identification of a historical supplicant does nothing to establish the date of the play, since whatever date one assumes, there were probably numerous suppliants who would be candidates for the allusion's referent. As Garvie comments: "It is not easy to see why the supplicant theme must have a parallel in fifth-century politics at all. No one is likely to argue that the subject of the Septem must have been suggested to Aeschylus by a real duel in which two brothers had recently killed each other."\(^{74}\)

Most participants in this discussion anticipate the inevitable objection that this is drama not political allegory. Indeed, they unanimously argue against stretching the parallels between reality and the drama so that the sons of Aegyptus would 'stand for' Themistocles' enemies.\(^{75}\) Podlecki argues especially against worrying about the consequences of the rest of the trilogy for this identification: he maintains that "once the similarity of situation had lodged itself firmly in the audience's mind, the dramatist was free to develop his mythical plot however he liked."\(^{76}\) He is careful to note that there is a "general similarity of situation between Themistocles and the Danaids," but denies pressing for their equivalence.

But if there is no specific resemblance between these characters and Themistocles, then why must we assume that this specific

\(^{74}\) Garvie (above, note 3) 155.


\(^{76}\) Podlecki (above, note 51) 56.
historical figure should be called to mind and not another? If the playwright depicts Argos receiving a suppliant, are we simply to recall the Athenians' treatment of Themistocles and not look for any further similarities between the women and Themistocles aside from the fact that they are both homeless and in danger? And if the similarity of their situations was "lodged" firmly in the Argives' minds, how would they feel when the Themistocles figures murdered their aggressors? This point of view must consider one further question: would a Greek man be represented as an Egyptian woman? and if so what are the implications of this representation?

One last strategy for placing the *Suppliants* in a political context is to focus on the apparent hostility toward Egyptians in the play. Can we assign this attitude to any historical event? The Egyptians had a rather large contingent in Xerxes' fleet in 480: Athens may have been aware of and distrustful of the Egyptians at this time. On the other hand, Athens had been in direct contact with Egypt since the time of the Egyptian revolt from Persia; in fact, Athens had sent help to Egypt at the time. Athens' attitude toward Egypt seems to have changed dramatically between the 480's and the 460's.

Scholars writing in the 1800's were more likely than contemporaries to conclude that the play represented an existing tension between Greeks and Egyptians (and other non-Greeks): they generally accept this tension, as if it were natural. For example, Weir Smyth argued that the Danaids were representatives of a Hellenic culture against a barbaric one.\(^\text{77}\) Gruppe thought that the murder of

the 49 cousins was justified because the sons of Aegyptus were strange and foreign.78 Comments such as these are interesting because of the way that they simplify the complicated matter of the ethnic identity of the Danaids: these critics colonize these women in order to carry out their own aggression.

More recently there has been discussion about whether or not Egypt as a nation is presented in negative terms at all. Some argue that it is not at all clear that we should identify the sons of Aegyptus with the Egyptians. Garvie reminds us that "Ἀγύπτιον γένος (741) clearly means the family of Aegyptus not the Egyptian people."79 Also, we must bear in mind that, although only the ethnicity of the women is ever contested, both the women and their suitors are descendants of Io whose family had lived in Egypt for two generations. Questions about ethnic identity may be raised again in the plays that followed. In fact, if Hypermnestra is praised in the third play for having spared her husband, then it may be that at least one of the sons of Aegyptus is portrayed as something other than a hubristic aggressor.

Thus the complexity of the play and the uncertainty of the trilogy render the available historical evidence inconclusive. At best, these discussions indicate merely that the Suppliants was composed at a time when Athens was on friendly terms with Argos and when democratic changes were in the air (at least in Athens, but possibly at Argos as well). Connections between the suppliant of historical

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78 O. F. Gruppe. Ariadne (Berlin 1834) 79.
79 Garvie (above, note 3) 156.
figures and the Danaids are extremely problematic unless one simply ignores the differences in the two situations, especially the suppliants' gender and ethnicity. Also, this play cannot be expected to communicate an assessment of Athens' attitude toward Egypt at the time of the play's composition; as we will see in chapter two, the relationship between Greeks and Egyptians is extremely complex as not only the aggressive suitors, but also the helpless suppliants come from Egypt. In the end, discussions of each of these four major historical issues ignore more details in the play than they actually illuminate.

The Reconstruction of the Trilogy

Sir Richard Livingstone, in an article published during World War II, compares the situation of the ancient drama to a modern problem:

The subject of The Suppliants is whether the weak have rights, whether the claims of religion and humanity are to prevail over the violent and arrogant self-assertion of the strong which the Greeks called Hubris, and whether it is worth while risking a war in the interests of justice. Mutato nomine de nobis fabula narratur.

An American recently asked my opinion on the attitude of the U.S.A. to the war, and I advised him to read The Suppliants of Aeschylus, feeling that I was giving him an answer not unworthy of the Delphic Oracle, remote but relevant, obscure but definite.\(^\text{80}\)

Livingstone's interpretation of the play's subject and the application of this interpretation to a modern situation are attractive; obviously the play meant a lot to him. In his discussion, though, he neglects some

\(^\text{80}\) Livingstone (above, note 72) 65.
problematic details: this play was one play (probably the first) from a trilogy, and that events in all three plays most likely complicated this conception of 'the weak.' In other words, he isolates this play (as time has), simplifies its presentation of the Danaids, and ignores its probable place in its trilogy. Although such a consideration of the Supplicants served Livingstone's political purpose at that particular moment in history, it is insufficient for those who attempt to understand the play's connotations for an ancient audience. Close analysis of the text of the Supplicants alone complicates any discussion of the tension between the strong and the weak in this play.

The opposite approach is also possible, and is actually quite common. Many have not been content to study the only extant play of the trilogy, but instead have devoted themselves to reconstructing the trilogy. They seem eager to rush past the one surviving play with its complexities and contradictions (perhaps because it is too troubling to be made to feel sympathy for future murderers?) and to get on with the rest of the story (filled, they imagine, with things that will be easier to understand: marriage, murder, and punishment). Although it will be impossible for scholars to anticipate events in the trilogy in any meaningful way, they still persist in the project. Predictably, the Supplicants suffers neglect and oversimplification yet again, as critics take from the text only what they can use to support their predictions for the lost plays. By examining the texts that form the bases for predictions about the trilogy, I will demonstrate both the allure and the futility of the project.
Reconstructions are based on the few fragments of the Egyptians and the Danaids, the different versions of the myth current in antiquity, and hints of future events in the Suppliants. The first piece of evidence (Fr. 5 Nauk) comes from a grammarian who, under the entry for Zagreus, states that in the Egyptians Aeschylus calls Pluto himself "the hunter (τὸν ἀγραῖον), the most hospitable (τὸν πολυξενώτατον), the god of the dead (τὸν Δία τῶν κεκυκτῶν)." This phrase, however, closely resembles lines 155-7 in the Suppliants (τὸν γαῖον, τὸν πολυξενώτατον Ζηνα τῶν κεκυκτῶν), and so it appears that the grammarian may have either miscopied the quote or remembered it wrong, and then attributed it to the wrong member of the trilogy. Hermann has suggested that Fr. 5 N was the result of a scribe's errors while copying lines from the Suppliants. Wolff rejects this, since she judges that "the differences between the two passages do not look like the kind that would be caused by mechanical errors in copying."82 Instead, Wolff entertains the possibility that the quote may be authentic: "the fragment implies that, although the Egyptians honored Dionysus, a god of fertility -- as the Danaids honor Earth -- they associated him with the hunt, with the pursuit and slaying of their enemies; the prayer is intended to dedicate their victims to the gods of the underworld."83 She suggests that this passage may have depicted the moment of the Egyptians' approach when in a mood of

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82 Wolff (above, note 9) 124.

83 Wolff (above, note 9) 124.
"fierce determination" they hunt their victims. The choice of this epithet (ἀγραῖον) for Pluto instead of the more usual ones suggests (at the very least) the continuation of the hunting/fleeing metaphor from the Suppliant. Because of the difficulty of this piece of text (and the possibility that it is a corruption of lines from the surviving play) it seems wise not to base any reconstruction of the trilogy on this evidence.

The next possible piece of the trilogy is Oxyrhynchus Papyri XX. 2251, which Cunningham has claimed for the Aigytioi. The author of this fragment is uncertain, but it has been assigned to a group that has been classified by Lobel as Aeschylean, as written in the same hand as other fragments which may be positively identified as Aeschylean. In defense of this classification, Cunningham observes that Zeus is called ξένος only in Aeschylus' Suppliant 627 and 671; Agamemnon 61, 362, 748; and in Euripides' Cyclops 354: and it seems likely that Zeus would have been invoked in this capacity by the Danaids in the following plays.

The text of this fragment is difficult, but some general sense of its meaning can be discerned. Cunningham presents her reading of the fragment:

The first intelligible couplet, lines 2-3, calls upon Zeus, the god of hospitality (Zeů ἡξένει), to look upon (ἰδὲ) a man of hospitality (ξένοδοκον). The next couplet contains some reference to the favour (χάρις) shown by the gods towards the just (τοῖς δικαίοις). Then follow four lines of wild lamentation, almost certainly a


dirge, sung by a female chorus or soloist... These four lines are linked to the preceding passage by τοιγαρ which seems to carry with it a causal force.\textsuperscript{86}

Cunningham suggests that since the logical relationship between the lamentation and the prayer to Zeus is causal, the missing lines must announce the death of the ξενοδόκος.\textsuperscript{87} This is where conjecture comes in. The most likely candidate for this position is Pelasgus, since many of the widely conflicting accounts of the myth agree on this point: that Danaus was at one time king over Argos. Pelasgus' death in the battle with the Egyptian men would both allow the succession of Danaus to the throne and provide a circumstance for the surrender of the maidens (and Danaus' alternate strategy -- the murder of the suitors).

Still, as Cunningham admits, identification of the fragment must be “extremely tentative.”

The only text of any length from this trilogy is the one (Fr. 44N) quoted by Athenaeus (13, 600 b); he is most helpful in that he announces that it is from Aeschylus' play the Danaiids and that the speaker is Aphrodite:

\begin{verbatim}
έρα μὲν ἄγνος οὐρανος τρώσαι γῆνα,
ἔρως δὲ γαῖαν λαμβάνει γαμοὺ τυχεῖν,
ὀμβρός δ᾽ ἀπ᾽ εὐνάεντος οὐρανοῦ πέσων
ἐκυσε γαῖαν, ἥ δὲ τίκταιε βροτοῖς
μῆλων τε βοσκας καὶ βιον Δημητριον,
δενδρώτες ώρα δ᾽ ἐκ νατέζαντος γαμου
τέλεσος ἐστι· τῶν δ᾽ ἐγὼ παραιτείος.
\end{verbatim}

the hallowed sky desires to wound the land,
and desire takes the earth to obtain marriage:

rain falling from the bed of the sky

\textsuperscript{86} Cunningham 1953 (above, note 84) 224.

\textsuperscript{87} She offers plausible restorations for lines 2-3. Cunningham 1953 (above, note 84) 224-8.
struck the earth, and she bears for mortals
the foods of flocks and Demeter's life;
and from the dampening marriage the wooded season
is the goal; and of these things I am the partial cause.

Since Welcker first popularized Hermann's interpretation of the
trilogy, most scholars have usually assumed that Aphrodite spoke these
words in defense of Hypermnestra and that Hypermnestra was
acquitted because of the eloquence of her defender.\(^{88}\) The idea that
the trilogy should end with a trial was formed on the analogy of the
\textit{Oresteia}. The idea found support in Pausanius' testimony since he
three times refers to the trial of Hypermnestra.\(^{89}\) Although Welcker
simplified Hermann's theory by eliminating the second trial. Hermann
himself had theorized that this last play also included a trial of Danaus
and the other forty-nine daughters for the murders.

Some scholars more recently have argued for the trial of Danaus
and the forty nine daughters, rather than of Hypermnestra. They state
that it is ridiculous to assume that Hypermnestra would have gone to
trial since she was the only daughter innocent of murder.\(^{90}\) Also, they
suggest that Hypermnestra's crime was of a private nature and would
not have merited an official public trial. Further, they find it difficult

\(^{88}\) Hermann "De Aeschyllo Danaidibus," \textit{Opusc.} 2 (1820) 319 ff. and F. G. Welcker, \textit{Die
Aeschyleische Trilogie Prometheus} (Darmstadt 1824) 405 ff..

\(^{89}\) Pausanius first mentions the trial when he explains that a certain wooden image of
Aphrodite was a votive offering of Hypermnestra after her acquittal (2.19.6); he later
explains that a piece of land is known as the Place of Judgement (Krithyrion) because it
was the location of Hypermnestra's trial (2.20.7); he also indicates that a sanctuary of
Artemis was another offering of Hypermnestra after she won the trial (2.21.1).
Pausanius makes Danaus responsible for pressing charges in the first place.

\(^{90}\) Winnington-Ingram admits that he finds the analogy with the pattern of the \textit{Oresteia}
"seductive" but argues that this would be "one-sided trial in which one party only has
divine support: yet no god or gods can have prosecuted Hypermnestra." See R. P.
Winnington-Ingram, "The Danaid Trilogy of Aeschylus." \textit{Journal of Hellenic Studies}
1961 (81) 142-3.
to imagine what sort of court would try both the women who participated in the murder plan and the one who refused to participate. D. S. Robertson argues for the inclusion of a trial of Danaus and his forty-nine obedient daughters:

In this trilogy, as in the *Oresteia*, the villains of the first play became the victims of the second; and the last play of this trilogy, like the last play of the *Oresteia*, must surely have raised and solved the question of the guilt or innocence of those who had wiped out their wrongs in blood. The trial of Hypermnestra for disobedience cannot have raised or solved this question in a satisfactory way.\(^9\)

The "lonely and romantic figure" of Hypermnestra held great appeal for later writers so the story of her trial and acquittal may have been invented later.\(^2\) A passage from Euripides' *Orestes* (lines 871 ff.) reveals that there was a version of the myth contemporary with Aeschylus in which Aegyptus went to Argos in order to prosecute Danaus for the murders. Thus, according to this reconstruction, Aphrodite speaks these lines about the significance of marriage during the prosecution of Danaus and his obedient daughters.

The text does not indicate the context of this speech, but it certainly does imply a turn in the direction of the plot. Obviously Aphrodite here speaks a sentiment quite in contrast with that of the Danaids in the first play of the trilogy. Thus we can safely assume that a major theme in the trilogy was marriage and desire (we might have known this without the fragment), and that, presumably, the Danaids got a lesson from the mistress herself. Stoesssl argued that this scene


\(^2\) D. S. Robertson (above note 91) 52. Famous examples are Ovid's *Heroides* XIV and Horace's *Odes* 3.11.
comes from the moment wherein Aphrodite persuaded the Danaids to marry their cousins.\textsuperscript{93} If this be true, one wonders whether the second play would have narrated only details of the battle between the Argives and the sons of Aegyptus; and would the Danaids both marry and murder their husbands in the final play? Would this have been a satisfying conclusion to the play? Those who would rather see a reconciliation of some sort at the end of the trilogy have conjectured that Aphrodite speaks these words at the Danaids' second marriage:\textsuperscript{94} Evidence for a second marriage occurs in Pindar's ninth \textit{Pythian} (lines 120-7) and Pausanius 3.12.2).

Others have supposed that just as the \textit{Oresteia} ended with the founding of an institution (the Areopagus), so the \textit{Suppliant} trilogy probably ended with one. As luck would have it, Herodotus mentions that the Danaids brought the Thesmophoria from Egypt (2.171). This theory imports the Thesmophoria\textsuperscript{95} into the trilogy and connects Aphrodite's appearance with the founding of the Thesmophoria: Aphrodite converted the Danaids with the promise of associating them with the institution of this festival which celebrates the dignity and cultural importance of married women.\textsuperscript{96} By this point we have strayed pretty far from the seven line fragment: too much of the rest of


\textsuperscript{95} For a compilation of all the ancient evidence about this festival, see K. Dahl. \textit{Thesmophoria: En graeske Kvindefest} (Copenhagen 1976).

this is based on analogies with the Oresteia and imaginative conjecture. Although Herodotus does connect the Danaids and the Thesmophoria, he does not associate this story with Aeschylus or with Aphrodite. The Thesmophoria was a festival of Demeter and Persephone; its association with Aphrodite (and this fragment) seems pretty unlikely.

Each of these conjectures has the support of some version of the myth, so none can be adopted or rejected solely on the basis of tradition. Our sources indicate that many institutions and geographical landmarks were associated with Danaos and/or his daughters: it is impossible to know for certain whether the stories associated with these local sites were familiar to Aeschylus or whether he knew them all and chose to ignore some elements of some versions of the myth. Yet from the many versions of the myth in our sources we can reconstruct the basic shape of the myth as it was probably told in this trilogy: Aegyptus and Danaus were brothers, descendants of Io, each of whom had fifty children, the former sons, the latter daughters; the brothers were quarrelling; the male children of Aegyptus eventually married their female cousins; by the order of their father, all of the brides killed their grooms on the wedding night except Hypermnestra who spared Lynceus.\(^9\) Important details of the story vary in the extant sources: the reason for the quarrel between brothers; the ultimate cause for the arrangement of the marriage; the reason Hypermnestra spared her husband; the consequences of the

\(^9\) Garvie (above, note 3) 164.
murder for all involved. Thus, while we can safely assume that Aeschylus' trilogy included the murder of the bridegrooms, the circumstances that resulted in the marriage itself are far from obvious. Any sense of how the trilogy ended (and even whether any of these issues was ever resolved) continues to elude us.

Some scholars have tried to link details from the *Suppliants* with one version of the myth in order to hypothesize about details for the rest of trilogy. For example, Cunningham notes that only Hyginus agrees with Aeschylus in making the Danaids flee to Argos in order to avoid marriage; other versions make the proposed marriage part of Aegyptus' plan for reconciliation with his brother. Others consider ps.-Apollodorus to have been more faithful in reproducing the plots of tragedy. But, in fact, both Hyginus and ps.-Apollodorus were compilers of mythological stories who probably gathered together the sources that were available to them at the time of composition (late in the Alexandrian period); it would be dangerous to assume that either one related the exact version that Aeschylus followed in the trilogy.

There is agreement about only the most general outline of the trilogy; details within this outline are contested, and are based entirely on analogy and conjecture. Critics generally agree that the action of the second play (the *Aigyptioi*) probably included the war which

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98 Other seemingly less important details also vary: the identity of the parents of the brothers Danaos and Aegyptus; the location of the quarrel; the location of the murders; the identity of the king of Argos; the identity of the agent who arranged the marriages.

99 Cunningham 1953 (above, note 84) 229. Croiset likewise believes that Aeschylus' version resembled most closely Hyginus' version: see M. Croiset, *Eschyle* (Paris 1928) 47.

100 F. G. Welcker, *Die Aeschyleische Trilogie Prometheus* (Darmstadt 1824) 395.
seemed inevitable at the end of the *Suppliants*; they argue about who
died in that war. Critics generally agree that marriages were arranged
and celebrated at the end of this second play; the circumstance for
the arrangement of marriage is far from clear. Critics generally agree
that the Danaids murdered their bridegrooms before the third play:
the consequences of this act are debated.

As I have indicated above, the action of the final play in the
trilogy is actually the most obscure, since the fates of those involved
differ in the versions familiar to us. Apparently, Hypermnestra’s
refusal to follow her father’s plan would have been revealed during the
course of the play. The reason for this refusal is far from obvious. A
passage in the *Prometheus Bound* provides one explanation for her
behavior: μίαν ὀδε παιδῶν ἱμερος θηλξι (865). This sentence does not
provide the tidy explanation many hope for, since it may be
interpreted in two ways -- either “desire charmed her alone of the
maidens” or “the desire for children persuaded her alone.” The
choice between these two interpretations depends largely upon one’s
assumptions about the function of desire in the trilogy (cf. Aphrodite’s
speech). This indeterminacy itself may be significant: the text
confounds the audience’s desire for an explanation by making it
ambiguous.

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101 Von Fritz suggests that the *Aiguptioi* ended at nightfall as the brides and grooms
retired to their chambers and the *Danaids* began with the announcement of the
murders. See Von Fritz (above, note 94) 128.

102 Once again, the question of the authenticity of the *Prometheus Bound* complicates
the interpretation; see Griffith (above, note 16). If the play was written by a near
contemporary of Aeschylus (as seems likely) then it may still be expected to resound
with Aeschylus’ Danaid trilogy; if not, then it may be part of another tradition and
have nothing to do with Aeschylus’ trilogy.
As I indicated in the discussion of Aphrodite's speech, the ending of the trilogy is disputed. Versions of the ending of this story range from the one in which Lyceus avenges his brothers' deaths by murdering the guilty wives\footnote{This version is related by the scholiast at Euripides' Hecuba 886.} to the one in which marriages to the Danaids are established as prizes for a foot-race. All of the characters involved in the myth were later honored by being associated with local sanctuaries and statuary: Pausanias tells of dedications to a sanctuary of Artemis, surnamed Persuasion, associated with Hypermnestra (2.21.); he also describes a grove with statues of Demeter, Aphrodite, and Dionysus that was said to have been dedicated by the Danaids; likewise, a sanctuary of Athena by the Protinus was made by Danaus (2.37.1-2). According to some versions of the story the Danaids clearly were reformed and forgiven. And yet the most famous story of their punishment in Hades -- forever trying to fill leaky water pitchers (e.g. Horace 3.11.25-32) -- suggests that they were never reconciled.

No reconstruction of the trilogy will be satisfactory unless it is firmly grounded in an appreciation for the complex thematics of its first play. In his discussion of the trilogy Winnington-Ingram adopts an obvious and yet novel strategy: he assumes that the other plays in the trilogy elaborated upon the same themes as the Suppliants: and he proposes that "if any feature in the extant play seems to lack relevance or to receive emphasis disproportionate to its dramatic value there, it may look forward to the missing sequel."\footnote{Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 141.} This is a refreshing change in direction, especially as compared to the scholarship by

\footnotetext[103]{This version is related by the scholiast at Euripides' Hecuba 886.} 
\footnotetext[104]{Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 141.} 

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those who reject full passages of the play on the grounds that they are insignificant.

Winnington-Ingram suggests that the assignment of a bodyguard to Danaus in the first play might foreshadow his changing status in the second play of the trilogy. The description of the city of Argos as "well-walled, named for its deep mechanism of towers" at lines 955 ff. might have hinted at a situation in the second play in which the city was under siege by the sons of Aegyptus; a siege would explain the fact that the Argives were defeated in battle and yet "were not deprived of all liberty of action." He also theorizes that Danaus' characterization in the Suppliants as the advisor and counselor of the Danaids implies that he was the one who arranged for the marriages and the murders. Winnington-Ingram further suggests that the matter of the Danaids' lodging in Argos (lines 957 ff. and 1009 ff.) becomes significant when considered in light of the trilogy: their place of residence determines whether they are to be guests of the city or guests of the king. According to this theory, when Danaus becomes king (in the second play), welcomes the bridegrooms into his own home, and then plans their murder, he is offending Zeus Xenios, as surely as previously the sons of Aegyptus had offended Zeus Hikesios. Winnington-Ingram finally suggests that the theme of the sovereignty of the people (which received much emphasis in the Suppliants) would have resurfaced in the final play of the trilogy. He notes that the number of passages in the Suppliants wherein Danaus or Pelasgus worry about the reactions

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105 Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 145.

106 Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 146.
of the Argive people: he suggests that these passages prepare the audience "for a situation later in the trilogy in which a king is repudiated by the people." He continues: "My basic hypothesis is that, asked to condemn Hypermnestra, the people of Argos instead condemned Danaus and his other daughters." He suggests that lines 7-8 of the Suppliants contain a full description of the Danaids' punishment: they were found guilty and 'banished for bloodshed by vote of a city'. It is at this point that Aphrodite intervenes and "reconcile[s] them to the destiny of marriage."

Although this reconstruction is fascinating for the way it integrates details from the text of the Suppliants, it is still necessarily based on conjecture. One can certainly isolate themes from this play that might be taken up in the two remaining plays of the trilogy: it remains impossible, however, to predict exactly in which direction these themes will be taken. Who could have predicted (on the basis of only the text of the Agamemnon) the pacification of the Erinyes at the end of the Eumenides? While the task of reconstructing the trilogy is fascinating, it is still primarily a matter of invention. It would certainly be nice to have the rest of the trilogy; but, if one takes the Suppliants seriously, it isn't necessary. The play should not be read only for what light it can shed on the trilogy or the date: it can (and should) be read for its own merits.

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107 Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 148.
108 Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 149.
109 Winnington-Ingram (above note 90) 150.
The Motive for the Maidens' Flight

The fourth topic which has received attention in modern scholarship is connected to the reconstruction of the trilogy, for in order to conceive of possible terms for their reconciliation (whether that be the mock reconciliation that occurred before the arrangement of the marriages or a real one at the end of the trilogy) one must formulate some idea of the motivation of the Danaids. This topic -- the motive for the Danaids flight -- is incidentally the only topic which requires both reference to the text and attention to the female characters in the play.

An irrational current runs through this discussion of the Danaids' rejection of marriage. Those writing on the play routinely assert that the women deviate from normality in their rejection of the grooms -- without ever critiquing the idea of a 'norm' or giving any clear indication that they are speaking of the 'norm' as a social construction of fifth-century Athens. Since the Supplicants is so much concerned with destabilizing such social norms, such an absence of self-awareness is particularly problematic in work on this play. For example, one scholar writes: "the violent approach of the sons of Aegyptus has warped the feminine instincts of the Danaids and turned them against marriage as such. At the end of the trilogy, then, they must be restored to normality and made freely to accept their destiny of marriage."\textsuperscript{110} Some seem almost to resent the women because of the rejection. Another scholar writes:

\textsuperscript{110}Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 144.
There is actually no valid reason for their reluctance to these marriages. They say nothing bad about Aegeus' sons except that they are lustful men intent on marriage. This is only what may be expected of any man. 'Escape from a heartless marriage' is mentioned to Pelasgus. This could imply that they flee from a marriage without love. But it hardly makes sense to assume that among twenty-five hundred possible combinations there could not be found one hundred reasonably compatible marriage partners.\textsuperscript{111}

The fact that this scholar has even figured the odds for the compatibility of these fictional characters is just one indication that he is not really considering the text on its own terms. His mind is wandering ahead to the events in the next trilogy: as he reads the \textit{Suppliants}, he is already identifying (as a man) with the Egyptian men as future victims of women. As a result of this anticipatory identification, Spier is unable to appreciate the complexity of the first play: he cannot see (with Pelasgus) that the Danaids are both pitiable and threatening. Unfortunately, anxiety about events in the following plays influences many discussions of the Danaids' motive.

These discussions also suffer from a need to identify 'the reason' for their flight: that is, scholars seek to find in the text one explanation for their reluctance to marry.\textsuperscript{112} But the text supports four possible explanations: they hate this particular marriage (they just don't fancy these particular suitors); they hate the idea of marriage to their cousins (they prefer exogamy to endogamy); they hate this

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
marriage because it is being threatened by force; they hate marriage in general. The fact that it is possible to find support for any one of these readings of the text suggests that perhaps scholars are asking the wrong question: we should not ask why they hate marriage, but instead why they say that they hate marriage and to whom do they say it. Even then the indeterminacy of the text confounds the issue more than it illuminates it: the reason for their flight may not be as important as its consequences.

The simplest possible explanation offered for the women’s flight is their hatred of this particular marriage. This is the choice offered to the women by Pelasgus as an unacceptable explanation (line 336): πότερα κατ’ ἔχθραν, ἦ τὸ μὴ θείως λέγεις “Is it because of hatred you say this, or are you speaking of an unlawful act?” With this question, Pelasgus communicates to the Danaids that he is in a position to defend them only on the basis of legality, not personal enmity. This may be the reason that the Danaids are so elusive in the verses that follow: they want Pelasgus’ help but are unable to meet his criteria for people deserving of help.

This brings us to the second possible motive: hatred of marriage to cousins. Interestingly, Pelasgus separates issues of personal feeling and religious law. This has indicated to some that he is asking about the propriety of marriage between cousins. At work here is the assumption that the men (being Egyptian) desire a marriage with their cousins (endogamy), but the women (being Greek) reject marriage with their cousins in favor of the normal Athenian custom of

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exogamy. Spier rejects this briefly: "There is no flight from criminal incest. In their native Egypt incestuous marriage, even between siblings, was sanctioned. In Greek mythology cousins marry each other as a matter of course." In fact, endogamous marriages were practiced among the elite even in Greece. Although the idea that the Danaids hate incestuous marriage must be rejected, it is important because it attests to the confusion surrounding issues of kinship and ethnicity in this play.

Ridgeway maintains that the relationships in this play represent a shift in Greece from exogamy to endogamy, especially in the case of an heiress. The situation of the heiress (the daughter of a man with no sons) made endogamy desirable because only marriage within the clan enabled the man's material goods to remain in the family. Ridgeway has argued that in this play the Danaids offer two reasons for refusing this marriage: first, they regard the union as incestuous (implying that they trace descent through the male rather than the female kin); and, second, they resent the practice of endogamy since it made them (along with their inheritance) the property of the next of kin. He notes that they argue the two points consecutively, rather than simultaneously:

But, although in the fore-part of the play they protest that they do not want to wed their cousins because such unions are

115 Spier (above, note 111) 315.
unholy, yet later on, when they are cross-examined by King
Pelasgus, they abandon the arguments based on incest, and
confine themselves to their right to marry other than their
cousins, who simply want to acquire their property.\textsuperscript{118}

Thomson adopts only part of Ridgeway's theory. He thinks that it
would "be a mistake to infer . . . that the dispute in the \textit{Supplicants} has
anything to do with the conflict between matrilineal and patrilineal
inheritance."\textsuperscript{119} Yet he believes that the Danaids reject this marriage
because it is "unlawful, unholy -- what we should call incestuous."\textsuperscript{120}
He suggests that the audience would have interpreted the situation in
contemporary Athenian terms as a conflict between two aspects of
Athenian marriage law -- general exogamy except for the possibility of
endogamy in the special case of the marriage of an heiress:

If a daughter inherited, as she did in default of sons, she was
claimed in marriage by her father's next-of-kin -- his brothers or
their sons; and there was nothing to prevent the father from
bestowing his presumptive heiress in this way before he died.
Consequently, the match proposed by the sons of Aegyptus is
already permissible and proper, and, as soon as Danaos dies, it
will become a legal claim. In fleeing from Egypt to Argos, the
daughters of Danaos are plainly seeking to evade their
obligations.\textsuperscript{121}

Thomson asserts that a clear statement of the maidens'
motivation exists in the \textit{Prometheus Bound}: there Prometheus
predicts that the Danaids will come to Argos "fleeing a marriage with
their kinsfolk" (\textit{φεύγουσα συγγενῆ γάμον}, 855). We must once again
keep in mind the possibility that this play was not written by the same

\textsuperscript{118} Ridgeway (above, note 117) 127.

\textsuperscript{119} Thomson (above, note 96) 303.

\textsuperscript{120} Thomson (above, note 96) 302.

\textsuperscript{121} Thomson (above, note 96) 302.
author that wrote the *Suppliants*; its value as for our reading of Aeschylus' version of the myth is therefore dubious. But there is an additional problem here: this text is no more clear about motives than the text of the *Suppliants*. As the narrator (Prometheus) describes the situation, he does not indicate from whose point of view he envisions the situation. Especially troublesome is the adjective *συγγενής*: as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the *Suppliants* features the Danaids' negotiation of their ethnic identity. According to them, marriage with the sons of Aegyptus would not be marriage to people of the same *genos*. Since the focalizer of the adjective is anyone but the Danaids, the passage tells us nothing about their reason for fleeing.

Thomson also cites several passages in the *Suppliants* in order to support his theory. None of these, however, provides the support that he seeks since the lines are either spoken by a character other than the Danaids or the text is highly corrupt. Most contested is the passage in which the women answer Pelasgus' most direct question (336): "Is it because of hatred you say this, or are you speaking of an unlawful act?" The text containing their response is corrupt (337): τίς δὲ ἄν φιλοῦσ ὡνοιτο τοῦσκεκπηκένους; ("Who would buy loved ones to be their owners?"). An alternative reading has also been proposed for the same line: τίς δὲ ἄν φιλοῦσ ὡνοιτο τοῦσκεκπηκένους; ("Who would object to owners that they loved?"). The meaning of their response is significantly changed by one vowel sound: the difference to their audience is only the difference between the long omega and the short omicron. The second reading provides a better answer to the
question that Pelasgus had asked about personal feelings. Thomson chooses the first reading since it emphasizes the economic transaction involved in a marriage arrangement. He interprets their reluctance to "buy owners" as a reference to the reluctance of these heiresses to lose their wealth and autonomy. Since the difference in the Greek is so slight, I believe that it is entirely possible that the Danaids are again giving an ambiguous response. In this way they appear to answer Pelasgus' question while they also indicate a hidden motive.

Thomson emphasizes the the prominence of legal concerns as Pelasgus considers the possibility that a law code might apply to their situation (387-91):

If the sons of Aegyptus control you, saying that by the law of the city they are your next of kin (genos), who would wish to oppose them? You see, it is necessary for you to flee according to the laws of your home so that they have no authority over you.

In fact, both of these seemingly contradictory scenarios are in evidence: the sons of Aegyptus claim the Danaids as the nearest of kin at the same time that the Danaids claim Pelasgus as the nearest of kin. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the Danaids are attempting to change their identity precisely because they do not wish to be claimed by the Egyptian men as "the nearest of kin." In the terms of their new identification, they are fleeing according to laws; for this

reason they will seem to deserve the protection of Pelasgus. Although tensions between kinship and guardianship are in evidence here, this does not necessarily imply the more specific situation Thomson for which argues: there does not seem to be adequate proof for his claim that the Danaids flee from the marriage because they object to the endogamy which their status as heiresses makes necessary.

Others have objected to Ridgeway and Thomson on these and similar grounds. H. G. Robertson has stressed that Pelasgus does not refer to an Athenian law of endogamy, but (and rather emphatically) to the "possibility that Egyptian law may give the suitors a lawful claim."\textsuperscript{123} Macurdy has pointed out that Athenian law would not have operated in the case of the Danaids, since their father was still living. She cites Danaus' second speech to his daughters (222 ff.) and his question (227): πῶς ἐὰν γαμήσαν ἄκουσαν ἄκοιτος πάρα ἀγνός γένοιτ' ἄν; ("And how could one taking an unwilling bride from an unwilling father be free from stain?") Macurdy suggests that the emphasis in this question is on the father's disapproval: "What Danaos says of the madness of the attempt to force the marriage is fully supported by the Attic law by which a father has the right to give his daughters in marriage to the man of his own choice, not necessarily to one who is next of kin."\textsuperscript{124} Two separate codes of law are being invoked here: the Egyptian men are laying claim to the Danaids on the basis of their laws and their understanding of kinship, while Danaus is maintaining his

\textsuperscript{123} H. G. Robertson (above, note 60) 106 n.2.

\textsuperscript{124} Macurdy (above, note 122) 96. This point had been made earlier; see J. Vurtheim, \textit{Aischylos' Schutzfleheende} (Groningen 1928) 183.
right as father and guardian (according to Greek law) to choose or refuse grooms for his daughters. This is a problem for Pelasgus because both sides have the law on their sides -- just different laws.

This brings us to the next suggested motivation: hatred of a forced marriage. H. G. Robertson stresses the prominence of the theme of *hubris* versus *dike* in this play.\(^{125}\) He concludes that “the contrast in the play is rather between civilized marriage based on *dike* and primitive forced marriage.”\(^{126}\) According to his interpretation the Danaids reject marriage to the Egyptians because it is being threatened by force. Thomson objects to this interpretation: “It is not merely that their suitors are proud and violent. These qualities have been manifested only in consequence of their refusal, and it must be remembered that the contrast in this play between the righteousness of the women and the wickedness of the men is to be followed in the next with an act of even more violent retaliation.”\(^{127}\) Thomson’s second point is an important one. The Danaids (those who object to their cousins’ violence) will resort to violence in the next play; this does not seriously undermine Robertson’s suggestion, however, since reciprocal violence (punishment justified by divine vengeance) is somewhat more defensible. His first point, however, is unfounded. Nowhere in the text of the play is it implied that the cousins were peaceful gentleman until they were rejected by their chosen brides.

\(^{125}\) Robertson offers a list of the lines in which the word *hubris* or its synonyms appears; see H. G. Robertson (above, note 60) 107 n.2.

\(^{126}\) H. G. Robertson (above, note 60) 107 n.3.

\(^{127}\) Thomson (above, note 96) 302.
As we will see, any attempt to distinguish neatly between the righteous and the insolent will be confounded during the course of the play.

Finally, many scholars have suggested that the Danaids have no special aversion to their cousins, but rather loathe the idea of marriage in general. This is certainly a common motif in Greek mythology: the resistance of young girls (potential brides) must be overcome in marriage; virgins must be tamed. The hatred of marriage in general has also been further refined based on specific lines in the play. For instance Spier argues that the maidens are really concerned to guard their virginity since "they claim virginity as a sacred privilege granted by the gods and derived from their virginal ancestress Io." In support of his theory Spier cites the many instances in which the marriage is termed "impious" as well as the prominence of Io's story throughout the play. Meautis has argued that the story represents the maidens' aversion to the suffering of childbirth.

Winnington-Ingram suggests that an aversion to marriage with the cousins manifests itself as aversion to marriage in general: "The distinction between a forced marriage and hatred of marriage in general cannot be pressed too far, since, indeed, in the dramatic situation, force is the only guise under which marriage presents itself to the Danaids, as an act comparable to war or to the preying of bird

128 Pindar's *Pythian 9* features a very memorable example of this: as a maiden Cyrene was wild (she even wrestled lions!) but Apollo tamed her with marriage. This motif is especially common in maiden songs; see C. Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece*, trans. D. Collins and J. Orion (New York and London 1997) 240-42; Redfield (above note 113); and M. Detienne, "Les Danaides entre elles ou la violence fondateur du mariage," in *L'écriture d'Orphée* (Paris 1989) 41-57.

129 Spier (above, note 111) 315.

on bird.” Since there is no alternative peaceful marriage for the Danaids, they equate marriage with force and consequently hate the whole idea of marriage.

The fact that the text of the play allows for so many interpretations suggests that there might be significance even in this indeterminacy. Clearly, the Danaids do not answer Pelasgus’ question directly because they do not want to risk losing his sympathy. On another level, Aeschylus may not have wanted the characters to specify a single reason because this would also simplify his audience’s response to the crisis. An argument could also be made that, by not specifying a single reason for their hatred of marriage, Aeschylus accurately represents the experience of a victim of such pursuit: the text is as complex as would be their emotional response.

I suggested in the beginning of this discussion that scholars who ask what the motive of the suppliants was might be asking the wrong question. As Pelasgus’ response to their appeal indicates, more important than the reason for their flight is the question of whether or not that reason will be defensible within the law. The play investigates the difficulties that such an appeal presents to Pelasgus, who is concerned to respond to the Danaids only insofar as the law will permit. But whose law should he honor? Whose definition of kinship (genos) should he accept? What will the consequences of the modification of this term be? Can the Danaids be accepted into Argos

\[^{131}\text{Winnington-Ingram (above, note 90) 144. Levy similarly argues that hatred of specific men led to a hatred of men in general; see E. Levy, “Inceste, mariage, et sexualité dans les Suppliantes d’Eschyle,” in La Femme dans le monde méditerranéen, ed. A. M. Verhilhac (Lyons 1985) 29-45.}\]
as members of its genos? Answers to such questions can only be obtained by a close reading of the text of the Suppliants.

The purpose of this chapter has been to summarize the treatment of the four main issues in scholarship on the Suppliants. I have argued that there is a common theme running through much of this work: a reluctance to deal with the complexities of the play itself. Scholars tend to reach beyond this play to the remaining plays in the trilogy: they are more comfortable constructing imaginative resolutions to the trilogy's tensions than they are in exploring the basis for these tensions in the one extant play. The search for the passage that will explain the reason for the maiden's flight also involves the reduction of the crisis in the play. Likewise, investigations into the play's date and political context allow scholars the opportunity to talk about something safe -- something at some remove from the text itself. I hope to avoid making these same mistakes in the pages that follow as I address a topic that has perhaps made the play seem most unsafe: the relationship between identity and color in Aeschylus' Suppliants.
Those historians who study the presence of people of African
descent in the ancient Mediterranean commonly consider mythical
figures among their subjects. Although some others have objected that
it is a mistake to confuse myth and history, there can be little doubt
that the stories the Greeks tell about such mythical figures reveal
something of their perception of people of foreign nations and even
more about their perception of themselves as a nation. The value
contained in these stories has been for the most part overlooked,
having, because historians have tended to consider references to
non-Greeks in literature as if they were merely descriptive, as if all of
these sources were transparent texts. For instance, they commonly
quote the lines from the Suppliants in which the Danaids state that
they are "the black sun-smitten genos" (154-5) as a simple indication
that these characters were 'black' in terms of modern racial
categories.¹

But what is the significance of the blackness of Aeschylus' 
Danaids? A common response to this question is a denial of their
blackness; genealogies are drawn up to figure the Greekness (hence.

¹ For example, Bacon concludes her section on the physical appearance of barbarians in
Aeschylus as follows: "The darkness of the Egyptians is referred to often enough in the
Supplices to be, like the strangeness of their speech, a consistent part of their
characterization. We cannot infer much else about this topic" (26). See H. H. Bacon,
Barbarians in Greek Tragedy (New Haven 1961).
the whiteness) of these mythological characters. But the ancients believed that differences in skin color and other physical characteristics were caused by differences in environments: the Danaids were born of parents also born in Egypt, thus Aeschylus imagines that they were black. The question still remains: what is the significance of this blackness, especially on the Athenian stage where it would have been silently and constantly dramatized by masks? In the chapters that follow, I will begin to answer this complex question.

My approach to the issues of ethnicity and the depiction of color in the Suppliants is to a great extent a response to two problematic tendencies in the recent discussions of such issues. The first is the tendency for critics to conceive of identity in terms of modern racial categories. Such a conception is clearly anachronistic. These critics forget that the 'scientific' notion of race has no absolute value; they allow the modern concept of racial identity to stand in the way of an understanding of the ancient concept. The second problem is linked

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2 The ancients also drew up genealogies, but they freely included native inhabitants of the Nile region in their versions: for example, pseudo-Apollodorus notes that Epaphus married Memphis, the daughter of the Nile, and she bore Libya to him; Libya in turn had two children by Poseidon: Agenor and Belus; Belus married Anchinoe, daughter of the Nile, by whom he had twin sons. Aegyptus and Danaus. This source also lists the mothers of the fifty Danaids (Danaus had many wives) including many who are referred to only by name, but one who bore seven daughters described as an Ethiopian woman (The Library 2.1.4).

3 The environmental theory is derived from the following passages: Hippocrates, de Aeribus 12.28-44: 16.3-34; 23.13-41; and Herodotus 2.22: 3.12: 7.69-70. For a discussion of these passages, see F. M. Snowden, Jr., Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience (Cambridge, Mass. 1970) 171-76. This ancient theory corresponds somewhat to modern explanations of color: as Stepan reports: "Some scientists now believe that dark skin colour is associated in some way, either directly or indirectly, with a hot climate... although the selective advantages of darkness are complex and still not clear. Hair colour may be related to skin colour in its adaptive function and/or genetic basis, but the adaptive significance of hair type, if any, remains unknown" (180). See N. Stepan, The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800 - 1960 (London 1982).
with the first. It is the failure to recognize the imprecision of the modern notion of race. Indeed, although anti-racists and racists (and others in between) still find modern racial categories useful for discussions of identity, these cultural categories don't have absolute, fixed meanings. In the current social and political discourse 'black' is an imprecise designation that allows for various interpretations (either as a means of inclusion or exclusion). Within these discussions of color, identity, and race, it is easy to lose track of the fact that the Suppliants is a text that was created in its own ideological context.

We can learn from these mistakes. The object of the first part of this chapter is to think through modern definitions of race and to devise a subjective definition of ethnicity. This will prepare us for the second part. There we will refine our understanding of the concept of genos in Aeschylus' Suppliants and recognize it as a category that is constantly negotiated. We will return to blackness in the next chapter, where it will become clear that in ancient Greece color was very often linked with gender identity.

Why Race Doesn't Matter: Sorting Though the Terminology

Sixty years ago, Grace Hadley Beardsley drew the attention of classicists to these problems in terminology. In the introduction to her work on the 'Ethiopian' type in the art of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, she presented a most lucid presentation of the problems of terminology due to a discrepancy between "the popular and the scientific understanding of the word 'negro'":

Science limits the name 'negro' to one group of African races, the Ulotrichi, the determining factor being, not the skin, but the crisply curling so-called wooly hair. The principal representatives of this group are the stock of Senegambia and Guinea, and its other outstanding characteristics are a short, broad nose, thick, projecting lips, a prominent jaw and abnormally long arms. So complicated are the racial and tribal subdivisions in Africa with their varying characteristics that the classification of the art types according to racial origins is too difficult for the archaeologist. America, with a delicate race problem on her hands, has long since disregarded any scientific distinctions between the various African types, and the popular usage in this country defines a negro in the terms of the color line. Generally speaking racial feeling is directed against skin, and variations of the hair and features are not taken into account. The use of the word is further complicated by existing legal definitions such as that of the State of North Carolina, which declares any person a negro who has in his veins one-sixteenth or more of African blood.  

Although Beardsley’s commentary on the problem of terminology is insightful, even she does not appreciate its full complexity. By noting that the scientific term Negro only describes one particular population in Africa, she anticipates science’s own rejection of the term. Racial categories are now considered obsolete: since the 1950s anthropologists and social biologists have withdrawn from the practice of classifying populations according to race.

And yet the word ‘race’ and its categories persist in the English language. Almost fifty years after the first publication of Beardsley’s book, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. reminds us that “when we speak of ‘the white race’ or ‘the black race,’ ‘the Jewish race” or ‘the Aryan race.’

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5 Beardsley (above, note 4) xi-xii.
we speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, in metaphors." Gates continues:

these metaphors have sought a universal and transcendent sanction in biological science. Western writers in French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, and English have tried to mystify these rhetorical figures of race, to make them natural, absolute, essential. In doing so, they have inscribed these differences as fixed and finite categories which they merely report or draw upon for authority. It takes little reflection, however, to recognize that these pseudoscientific categories are themselves figures. Who has seen a black or red person, a white, yellow, or brown? These terms are arbitrary constructs, not reports of reality.

The fact that racial categories still seem to have meaning, despite science's renunciation of them, reflects the appeal of these cultural constructs to contemporary society. Part of their appeal, certainly, lies in the fact that they can be easily manipulated: they have been used both to justify and to challenge the uneven distribution of power among people of color.

My aim in this section is not to argue that the category of race should be erased from our collective vocabulary. It is rather, to demonstrate that the concept of race is a cultural construct of a particular historical context. For this reason we must not assume that the concept of race is transhistorical and force its categories on cultures removed from us in time and space.

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7 Gates (above, note 6) 6.

8 This argument is made by political activists involved in anti-racist work. For instance, the philosophy behind the journal Race Traitor: Journal of the New Abolitionism advocates the recognition that "the white race is a historically constructed social formation" and that the "key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race, that is, to abolish the privileges of the white skin."

9 M. Banton in his book entitled Racial Theories (Cambridge 1987) discusses the various
biological race (and racism) as anachronism

In her book on the idea of race in the natural sciences, Nancy Stepan documents the rise and fall of the racial category between 1800 and 1960. Stepan points out that human races became objects of systematic investigation only at the end of the eighteenth century, but because of the authority of science, the idea of race soon seemed to be a natural concept. Stepan reveals that throughout the idea's history, biologists were largely divided between those who believed that the human species was comprised of more than one race (the polygenists) and those who maintained the existence of only one human race.

meanings that the word 'race' has had at different moments in history: "From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, in English, the principal use was that of race as lineage, to refer to a group of persons, animals, or plants connected by common descent or origin. . . . The beginning of the second phase was signalled by the use of race in the sense of type, in which the word designated one of a limited number of permanent forms. . . . The second phase . . . contained a contest in which race as type was overcome by a Darwinian conception of race as subspecies, and then that conception was enriched by discoveries about the genetics of inheritance and the ways in which these were related to selective agencies in particular environments. . . . Both the biological and the sociological theory of the second period led to an understanding of human diversity which can be summarized in the notion of race as population. The third phase began with studies furnishing much better descriptions of black-white relations in the United States and which in their interpretations relied upon the idea of race as an indicator of minority status. . . . Their prescriptions can be designated, inadequately perhaps, by writing of race as class." (xi-xii).

10 A recent volume in the series "Race, Gender, and Science" investigates the processes by which science has determined what is deviant and what is normal:Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture, ed. J. Terry and J. Urla (Bloomington 1995). The editors explain that they take from Foucault "the now almost commonplace axiom that the modern life sciences and medicine -- and, indeed popular perceptions to which they give rise -- have not merely observed and reported on bodies; they construct bodies through particular investigatory techniques and culturally lodged research goals" (3). They further explain: "The idea that science is objective usually obscures the fact that scientists too have bodies, and those bodies are integrally involved in establishing norms and deviations. Those who speak in the omniscient language of science, medicine, and truth are deeply enmeshed in the process by which deviance is supposed to be discovered. Even though his postures, perceptions, and desires are disguised by the protocols of clinical observation, a scientist's gesture in taking measurements places his body in the frame of observation and representation" (12).
In contrast to this division among biologists, there was a general consensus among anthropologists that racial differences existed; race had gradually attained the status of a “natural” category, a “biological given.” But even despite this agreement in theory, the practice of classifying individuals in distinct racial categories was always problematic. Stepan explains:

The goal of anthropology was to classify mankind into its fundamental racial types, using on the whole the slight morphological variations discovered in the species, variations which were assumed to be non-adaptive, in the sense of unchanging. The problem was that anthropologists from the beginning found it difficult to divide up individuals and populations into distinct racial categories which would meet with universal or even parochial agreement. Anthropologists and biologists normally worked in relative isolation; they did not collaborate or participate in common forums of debate.

The development of genetics put an end to this separation; it forced anthropologists to utilize new systems of classification as well as new categories of classification. For observations of morphology and behavior alone could no longer be used to define ‘races’; instead calculations from genetics and statistics defined ‘populations.’ This collaboration presented a challenge to the idea of race, since “the genetically defined population did not always correspond to the old anthropological idea of race.” Not only were the morphological

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11 Stepan (above, note 3) 178.
12 Stepan (above, note 3) 178.
13 Stepan (above, note 3) 176-7.
14 Stepan (above, note 3) 177.
observations inconsistent with the genetic findings, but the genetic findings by themselves were found to be widely interpretable. At this time, because of both the incompatibility of anthropological typology with genetic systems of classification and the obvious subjectivity of racial categories, the idea of race was transformed. "Many scientists even claimed that the very word 'race' was unnecessary for the scientific analysis of human diversity."  

And yet, although science has rejected its own invention, the idea of biological race still exerts a powerful hold on the imagination. This seems especially true when we observe what critics and historians have written about color in the ancient world. The biological concept of 'race' and its categories are frequently invoked in these discourses, although clearly their application in this context is anachronistic. This misapplication of the term 'race' is, to my mind, responsible for the hostility that characterizes the current debate.

While writing about identity issues in the *Suppliants*, scholars on both sides of the debate unapologetically impose modern racial categories (as if they had some kind of absolute, cross-cultural value) on this ancient text and thereby simplify what might have been a rich and complex discussion. Key issues in the play are simplified by those who would classify the Danaids as either Greek (i.e. 'white') or Egyptian (i.e. 'black'). For instance, Cheikh Anta Diop claims that

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15 In 1950 one scientist used knowledge of blood groups "to divide mankind into six genetically defined races. In 1963 he increased the number to thirteen, reflecting the gains in knowledge of the genetics of blood proteins made by that date. But in essence, each scientist found as many 'races' as he wanted." Stepan (above, note 3) 178-9.

16 Stepan (above, note 3) x.
several mythical figures (including Danaus and Aegyptus) were black Egyptians;" in response, Lefkowitz states: "Even though Danaus' family had been in Egypt for several generations, when they wanted to escape they went to Argos in Greece, because they were Greeks." Both positions are far too simplistic: in order to make their points, both Lefkowitz and Diop need to ignore one of the real crises in the drama and depend only on the briefest plot summary. Neither scholar accounts for the complications inherent in the Danaids' claim to be Argive or the fact that the sons of Aegyptus could have made the same claim. In the end, this simplification of the Suppliants does not serve either side well. By claiming these mythical figures as ancestors of the modern black 'race,' Diop may add a small chapter to the history of black Africans in the Mediterranean, but he also forfeits an opportunity to explore the meaning of identity and color in an ancient culture. Lefkowitz, on the other hand, misrepresents the very issues that make the text most meaningful. It is ironic that she is so committed to discouraging this use of the text even as she claims to promote the classics.

By discussing details from this myth at some remove from its performance context, both sides in this debate ignore the fact that this is a tragedy: the play should not be expected to present an uncontroversial picture of the average Athenian's opinion of ethnic

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identity. As we will see, *genos* is a category as easily manipulated as 'race' is for us today.

**politics and the illusion of precision**

Lefkowitz only recently felt compelled to enter this debate and defend the classics from alleged 'misuse' by Afrocentric scholars. Discussions of color and race in the ancient Mediterranean basin have only become common in classics since the publication of *Black Athena* in 1987. Prior to this date, traditional scholarship on the subject of the status of blacks in antiquity was the province of one man, a scholar at Howard University who has published a number of works on the subject. Snowden provides a general survey of the evidence for the interactions of Greek and Roman people with the populations of Africa, primarily Ethiopians. In his *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks*, he is especially concerned to exonerate the ancient Greeks and Romans: he demonstrates that those attitudes and circumstances that led to the enslavement of black Africans by white colonialists in the United States did not exist in the ancient Mediterranean.

Before 1987, Snowden tended to use the term 'black' rather loosely, especially when translating from a Greek or Latin source. For

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20 These publications include a chapter entitled "Iconographical Evidence on the Black Populations in Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *The Image of the Black in Western Art I: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Vercoutter et al. (New York 1976) 133-245, as well as *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (above, note 3) and *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983).
instance in discussing the attitude toward black-white racial mixture in classical mythology, he notes that "Epaphus, the child that Io, the daughter of the primeval king of Argos, bore Zeus, was described by Aeschylus (ca. 525-456 B.C.) as black and was said by Hesiod (fl. ca. 700 B.C.) to have been the ancestor of the Libyans and Ethiopians."

He also mentions that in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* "the daughters of Danaus were black and smitten by the sun, seven of them, according to a later version of the legend, born to Danaus by an Ethiopian woman. (Aeschylus *Supplices* 154-55; Apollodorus *Bibliotea* 2.1.5.)."

Snowden's point here is to show that children born of one white and one black parent were acknowledged so openly that there seems to have been no objection to such unions. What is perhaps more interesting is the fact that Snowden does not comment on the use of these color terms; he does not attempt to distinguish here the difference between the ancient and modern use of the term 'black.'

The publication of Bernal's *Black Athena* in 1987 drew new attention to issues of color and race in the ancient world. Bernal planned this ambitious three-volume work to correct the received version of the history of people of color in the Mediterranean. Bernal argued that this corrective was necessary because the story had been distorted by classical historians whose racist biases influenced their

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21 Snowden 1983 (above, note 20) 94.

22 Snowden 1983 (above, note 20) 94.

23 See Bernal (above, note 19). I summarize the work very briefly here because its argument addresses the interpretation of the *Suppliants* (pages 84-98) in a discussion of Greek traditions of colonization: Bernal points out the Egyptian attributes of the Danaids.
work. Although Bernal did not claim the legitimacy of racial categories in his work, he did argue that racial categories had exerted a powerful influence on ancient historians. To assert that ‘race’ is a socially constructed (rather than an inherently meaningful) category is not to deny that it has had very real social and political consequences.

The most vocal response to this challenge has been a denial that scholarship has suffered from any racial bias. This response insists on the objectivity of the historians’ standpoint. In order to prove their objectivity, some return to the biological categories of race. Clearly, the return to these categories does not prove any such thing, since the scientific categories themselves are cultural constructs with no absolute value.

This new insistence on the precise use of scientific terminology has taken some odd turns. Although Bernal denies the absolute value of racial categories and is more interested in the harm that has been done due to their strict enforcement, Snowden criticizes Bernal for his lack of precision. Snowden asserts that, while colloquial English is imprecise about its color designations, the ancient Greeks and Romans were more precise:

Greeks and Romans differentiated between the various gradations in the color of Mediterranean peoples darker than themselves, and made it clear that only some of the dark- or black-skinned people, those coming from the south of Egypt and

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24 Bernal himself writes: “I am very dubious of the utility of the concept of ‘race’ in general because it is impossible to achieve any anatomical precision on the subject. . . . Research on the question usually reveals far more about the predisposition of the researcher than about the question itself” (241). See Bernal (above, note 19).

25 An issue of Arethusa that was dedicated to responses to Bernal’s work. The contributions range from those who accept and those who deny the charge. See Arethusa: The Challenge of Black Athena, special issue (Fall 1989).
the southern fringe of northwest Africa were *Ethiopians* (Aithiopes, Aethiopes), a term the Greeks and Romans used regularly to designate peoples with black or dark skin, flat noses, wooly or tightly curled hair, thick lips and variations thereof: in other words when ancient authors meant Negro or black in the twentieth-century usage, they used the word Ethiopian. The physical traits regularly associated with the classical word Ethiopian are in general the same characteristics included in modern anthropological classifications of Negroes: 'dark pigmentation ... a broad, low-bridged nose, thick everted lips and kinky or curly hair.'

Indeed the clarity of classical authors in their descriptions of African blacks they called Ethiopians provides a model for many modern commentators who are imprecise and often inaccurate in their use of the terms Negro, black, and African as applied to populations of the ancient world.”

Snowden’s argument is circular: he has isolated one or two passages in which the author lists the physical traits of an Ethiopian; he notes that these physical traits correspond to those traits belonging to the ‘scientific’ category Negroid; he assumes that Ethiopian is the same as Negroid; he then requires all ancient texts which describe an Ethiopian to imply these same physical traits.

Snowden assumes that the modern scientific system of classification has absolute value and he attempts to utilize that system in order to clarify ancient color designations. Even as he suggests that modern commentators are less precise than classical authors, he imposes a ‘modern’ system of classification upon the ancient authors; nowhere in his discussion does Snowden consider that this imposition might be problematic. Clearly, Bernal and Snowden cannot find common ground, because they are not using the same vocabulary in the same way. While Snowden acknowledges that there is some

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27 Snowden (above, note 3) 84.
confusion about what 'black' means in modern usage, he does not seem to understand that science will not provide objectivity. The terms of the debate are necessarily political.

In contrast to Snowden’s insistence that the classical Greek and Roman authors were more precise than modern commentators, Lefkowitz makes the following statement: “The Greeks and Romans were less precise in their use of color terms than we would wish, because skin color to them was no more important than the color of a person’s eyes or hair.” Lefkowitz proceeds to explain that the Greek word *melaina* “can simply describe the dark coloring of some Mediterranean faces.” But even as she explains that color designations in classical Greek and Latin texts do not necessarily imply race or ethnicity, Lefkowitz betrays her investment in the modern categories. Lefkowitz did not simply state that the Greeks and Romans did not assume that race and color were synonymous; she said that they “were less precise in their use of color terms than we would wish” (my emphasis) — thus clearly indicating an investment in categories that make a clear distinction between black and white. This wish for scientific precision is one of the barriers that prevents her from understanding the positions of Bernal and especially Cheikh Anta Diop. Lefkowitz does not recognize the political nature of the modern terminology. She assumes that she is understood by all when she says “‘black’ in the modern sense of the word.”

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28 Lefkowitz (above, note 18) 31.
29 Lefkowitz (above, note 18) 44.
30 Lefkowitz (above, note 18) 32.
Certainly the insistence on precision in such matter is also politically motivated, since it seems designed to deny Afrocentric historians the right to assert the presence and even prominence of their ancestors in the ancient Mediterranean. As a political category and metaphor, the meaning of blackness is constantly being contested.\textsuperscript{31} Within this current cultural and historical moment, there will be no agreement about who gets to define what ‘black’ means in terms of individual and collective identity. In illustration of the many possibilities of subjective or self-identification, Lisa Jones (daughter of Amiri Baraka and Hattie Jones) tells this story:

I like to think of Eduardo Mejia ... as a multiculturalist and a global citizen cut from the cloth of a W. E. B. Du Bois. To Eddie ... black embraced every ethnic community that wished to claim it (a belief he shared with the Pan-Africanists of the sixties and the British Asian-Caribbean-African coalitions of the seventies). Would it surprise you that Eddie was a fair-complexioned Puerto Rican? A gay man and nurse, ‘the Queen,’ as we called him, was a shrewd street philosopher who studied race all his life. He identified as a black, as a person of color, as Latino, as Puerto Rican, as a New Yorker. No one identity canceled out the other.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{new terminology: seeing ethnicity in \textit{genos}}

Since race does not exist except as an ideological construct for local political needs and since color confounds the racial distinction, clearly we need an approach to identity issues that will enable us to


\textsuperscript{32} L. Jones, “is biracial enough? (or what’s this about a multiracial category on the census?: a conversation),” in \textit{bulletproof diva: tales of race, sex, and hair} (New York 1994) 63-4.
study the Greeks' own ideological constructs. This is especially important in the case of the *Suppliers*, since the play is largely concerned with identity and political rights in the ancient Mediterranean. For this reason I will concentrate throughout this section on the *genos* -- that category that was most central to the identity of the Danaids. *Genos* is perhaps best translated in English as 'lineage.' Yet membership in a *genos* is not simply an assumed identity; rather, since they occupy an "intermediate position," throughout this play their *genos* is always in the process of negotiation. Membership in a *genos* is a presumed identity, made necessary because of their particular social circumstance -- their desire to flee from aggressive suitors. In other words, they carefully identify themselves in the terms (paternity, maternity, geography, theology and even gender) that will be most effective for them when they seek asylum in Argos. Thus this negotiation of *genos* is a self-conscious political strategy.

This notion of *genos* as a category defined by those within it and the very idea that a *genos* is not a fixed but rather a fluid category accords with new theories of ethnicity by contemporary theorists. In discussions of what is meant by the term ethnicity some anthropologists have questioned the traditional, 'objective' definition of an ethnic group. Isajiw explains:

> In contrast to the objective approach by which ethnic groups are assumed to be existing as it were 'out there' as real phenomena, the subjective approach defines ethnicity as a process by which individuals either identify themselves as being different from

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others or belonging to a different group or are identified as
different by others, or both identify themselves and are
identified as different by others.\textsuperscript{14}

In other words, whereas the objective approach tended to assume that
all ethnic groups were identified by the same criteria, the subjective
approach allows for a process of identification, either by self or others
or both. Fredrik Barth (1969: 14-15) has argued that "we should
assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and
cultural similarities and differences. The reason is that 'the features
that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences,
but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant.'\textsuperscript{15}

Like Barth, Max Weber also emphasizes the importance of the self-
identification for ethnic groups:

We shall call "ethnic groups" those human groups that entertain
a subjective belief in their common descent because of
similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of
memories of colonization and emigration; this belief must be
important for the propagation of group formation; conversely it
does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship
exists. Ethnic membership (Gemeinsamkeit) differs from the
kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a
group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense
ethnic membership does not constitute a group: it only
facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the
political sphere.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus Weber makes an important distinction between ethnic and
kinship membership, as the former involves the presumption of
common descent; ethnic group formation is facilitated by the belief


\textsuperscript{15} Isajiw \textit{(above, note 34) 115}.

that peoples with similar cultural characteristics share a common lineage.

Like Weber, Keyes also observes that ethnicity derives from a "cultural interpretation of descent." Keyes further remarks upon the circumstances for and the process of ethnic change:

I maintain that the process of ethnic change, set in tow by a radical shift in the social situation in which people act, is a dialectical one. In radically changed circumstances, pre-existing patterns of social action often prove to be no longer viable. New patterns are then evolved and these, in turn, stimulate either consciously or unconsciously, a reassessment of the appropriateness of the functions of ethnic group identities upon which these affiliations are predicated. Concomitant with the necessary changes in social patterns, those living in new circumstances may also have to adopt new cultural meanings and practices. The experiences of change themselves may be subjected to cultural interpretation and both these formulations and the newly adopted cultural characteristics may be utilized in the reassessment of ethnic identities.38

This subjective approach to the concept of ethnicity provides us with a useful tool for the study of ancient Greek culture.39 Since this approach does not impose categories for ethnic membership from without, but rather allows ethnic groups to define membership in their own terms, it avoids the problematic assumption that all such categories have the same meaning and value cross-culturally. Even more important for our present discussion, this approach to ethnicity recognizes that change in ethnic identity is possible, that it is, in fact.

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38 Keyes (above, note 37) 15.

39 See J. Hall, Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity (Cambridge, 1997). By examining evidence from literature, archaeology, and linguistics, Hall demonstrates that ethnic groups in Greek antiquity were not racial groups. He too emphasizes the discursive construction of ethnic identity.
often made necessary by a radical shift in circumstance. Such a conception of ethnic identity recalls the fluidity of the Greek concept of genos, especially in this play. Because of a radical shift in their circumstance (their geographical shift from Egypt to Argos), the Danaids presume a new identity (e.g. membership in the Argive genos). This first play in the trilogy dramatizes the negotiation of their ethnic identity: it depicts their ethnic change as a dialectic process -- a conversation between their cultural past and future.

The Negotiation of Genos in the Supplicants

In the second part of this chapter I will trace the negotiation of the ethnic identity of the Danaids and note both when a definition of their genos corresponds to an explicit mention of color and when it does not. I will argue that while several references to color occur in contexts related to the negotiation of genos, they are not necessarily limited to that negotiation: conversely, discussions of the ethnic difference of the Danaids are not always accompanied by a reference to their physical difference.

Since ethnic change is represented as a process, it seems logical to organize this section in five parts to correspond to important encounters and events which inform their self-definition. In the first section I will be interested in how the women initially define themselves in the parodos and in dialogue with their father. In the next section, I will discuss the articulation of the women's ethnic identity in the encounter between Pelasgus and the women: I will note how Pelasgus perceives their difference and the terms of his
interrogation: I will also consider if and how the women's self-definition changes in the presence of this stranger. The third section will examine Danaus' report of the Argive people's decision to defend the women, and their subsequent reaction: I will note the absence in this scene of any discussion of their contested ethnicity in their celebration of Argos and its people. In contrast, the scene immediately following (the topic for the fourth section) begins with Danaus' announcement of the approach of the sons of Aegyptus and the women's reaction to this news: in this section the color of the women and their pursuers becomes quite significant. In the final section, I will examine the final scene in which Pelasgus welcomes the women and their father into Argos. I will note how this scene develops naturally out of the previous one; how the encounter with the sons of Aegyptus has resolved (for now) the question of their contested ethnicity.

I will argue that this crisis (the aggression of their cousins) necessitates a new ethnic self-definition for the Danaids. The fact that they choose to celebrate the myth of Io (and their cousins do not) indicates that they are creating a criterion for ethnic group membership that they will not share with their male cousins. By defining themselves in terms that their cousins will not share, the Danaids effectively erase the bond (kinship) that forms the basis of the Egyptians' claim. This erasure is complicated by the fact that the cousins share a physical resemblance: their blackness, the result of living in close proximity to the sun, marks them as similar to their enemies. But while their appearance (this shared blackness) supports
the Egyptians' claim on the women, certain other cultural traits (claim of descent from Io, and respect for the Argive land, laws, and customs) suggest that the Danaids are not members of the same *genos*.

**how the Danaids initially define themselves (lines 1-234)**

Many important themes are established in the *parodos* (lines 1-175) by the daughters of Danaus. The very first word of the play is Zeus (line 1), and in the first strophe alone of the *parodos*\(^{40}\) he is invoked as protector of suppliants (line 1), patron of Egypt (line 4), ancestor for the *genos* descended from the gad-fly driven cow (line 18), and savior of the righteous and punisher of the insolent (line 26). They address Zeus and define themselves in relation to him: in each of these occurrences, his name is in an emphatic position in the line and is enmeshed in an ideological complex favorable to the Danaids' cause. Each of these occurrences merits further consideration.

Zeus' role as protector of suppliants is mentioned in the first line, but his relationship to the Danaids is only gradually elaborated. The Danaids establish their claim to him in the intervening lines. They address Zeus as *Aphiktor* (protector of suppliants) and then proceed to remind him of their other ties to him, both because of geography and distant kinship (1-5):

\[
\text{Zeus μὲν Ἀφικτωρ ἐπίδοι προφρόνις}
\text{στὸλον ἑμέτερον καυν. ἄριν}
\text{ἀπὸ προστομίων λεπτομαμίων}
\text{Νείλων Διαν δὲ λεπτοῦσαι}
\text{χθόνα σύγχροτον Συριαὶ Φεῦγομεν}
\]

\(^{40}\) For an examination of technical details in this play, see J. N. Rash, *Meter and Language in the Lyrics of the Suppliants of Aeschylus* (New York 1981).
May Zeus the Suppliant look with favour upon our company that has voyaged by ship; it put to sea from the fine-sanded foremouths of the Nile: we have left Zeus’ land whose pastures border on Syria, and are now fugitives.

They do not address him as patron of Egypt, but only mention his association with their place of origin as they ask him to oversee their voyage away from this place: the Danaids initially associate themselves with Zeus, on the grounds that they are presently fleeing a land that is dear to him. They proceed to clarify that although the exile is not enforced by the vote of their city it was chosen for them as “the best of evils” by their father as an alternative to marriage with the sons of Aegyptus. This change of place is clearly being undertaken because of necessity. As they make this necessary transition between their life as Egyptians and their life as Greeks, they use Zeus as a bridge: they make fond reference to Egypt (Zeus’ land) even as they appeal to him as protector of suppliants (a defining Greek practice). Thus, in these first five lines of the tragedy, there is already evidence of tension in their identity: they emphasize their Egyptian origin even as they appeal to a Greek god.

The Danaids next mention Zeus as ancestor of their genos (lines 14-18):

φεύγειν ἀνέδην διὰ κύμα ἀλιον,
κέλσαι δ’ Ἀργοὺς γαῖαν, ὅθεν ὅη

---

41 I will refer to the text and translation of the Suppliants prepared by H. Friis Johansen (Copenhagen 1970).

42 The Danaids do not explain why the land is dear to Zeus; they do not explicitly connect this statement with the story of the wandering of Io and the conception of Epaphus. This may indicate either that his association with the land preceded Io; that the connection would have been understood by the audience member; or that Zeus’ fondness for the land became separated from the story of Io. But this line is in the opening strophe: the fact that the connection is not made emphasizes Zeus’ connection to geography regardless of the status of the story.
that we should flee without restraint over the waves of the sea and land in the country of Argos, the very place from where our race has sprung, the race which claims to have sprung from the gad-fly driven cow by Zeus’ touch and breath.

The lines preceding this passage credit Danaus with the plan to relocate the band of women in a place to which they could also claim ties on account of Zeus. Notice that here the women do not yet claim to belong to the Argive genos. rather they assert that the Argive land is the place where their genos originated. The distinction is fine, but quite significant. Their conception of genos is, at this point in the drama, tied only loosely to geographical places since they are essentially a people with no place -- suspended in a liminal space between their former homeland and their future (and ancestral) homeland. Also highly significant is the fact that the noun genos is modified by a possessive adjective: this suggests that they think of the genos as something that they own and control: it is also something that sets them apart from their cousins. Finally, the participle (ευχόμενον) modifying genos makes explicit the process of re-claiming an ancestor and ancestral land: This idiomatic use of the verb ευχόμαι emphasizes the constructedness of their identity: they ‘boast’ or ‘claim’ to have been descended from Zeus.

The women next mention Zeus as the last of several gods whom they invoke. This placement is emphatic since it puts him at the beginning and end of this prayer (26-33):

καὶ Ζεῦς Σωτῆρ πρῖτος, οἰκοφιλαῖς
δόσιν ἄνδρῶν, δέξασθ᾽ ἱκέτην
τὸν δηλωγενὴ στολὸν αἰδὸινε
and, as the third. Zeus the Saviour, who guards the homes of righteous men, receive as suppliant our band of women, breathing respect from the land; but the insolent swarm of men born of Aegyptus -- before they set foot on this muddy soil with their swift-oared vessel. send them seaward

In this prayer Zeus is invoked in his capacity as Savior and 'guardian of the homes of righteous men.' The fact that these women who at the present time have no homes invoke Zeus as the protector of homes may seem inconsistent: but the additional modifier ('of righteous men') clarifies their meaning, since they proceed to make a contrast between righteousness (27) and reverence (28) and insolence (30). This passage reveals for the first time a sense of the competition in the women's minds between potential claims to this land: it is a competition for the right to call this home. Thus they request that Zeus 'receive them' (δέξατο ἰκέτην) but send the men to sea (πέμψατε πόντονδ'). The Danaids emphasize the fact that the claim they are making is exclusive: the sons of Aegyptus do not belong here. They are trying to prevent the Egyptians from even making contact with the land -- especially from defining themselves in terms of the land as they themselves are attempting to do. The successful arrival of the Egyptians would mark the end of the women's attempt to create their new identity and new homeland.

The most significant feature of this passage is the fact that the Danaids cast the conflict in terms of the reverent (αισθοῖα) versus the insolent (ὑβριστής): they rearrange other defining categories under the
terms of this opposition and thereby simplify complex relationships. They describe themselves as a suppliant, a band that reveres the land, and a *genos* of females; in contrast they represent their cousins as a masculine crowd, an insolent swarm, and the *genos* of Aegyptus. The women come as suppliants: their approach will be orderly (*στόλος*) and in accordance with the rules for suppliancy. In contrast, the men’s approach is characterized as disorderly (*ἐφυός*) and aggressive. Thus they align the Greek institution of suppliancy with righteousness, and the hostility of these foreign men with insolence. They likewise align females with the right, and males with the wrong.

The Danaids describe the two groups as distinct *gene*: the Danaids themselves belong to the female *genos*; their cousins belong to the *genos* of Aegyptus. According to this formulation, the two *gene* are absolutely distinct: the criterion for membership in each group excludes members of the other group. This is important for the Danaids because they want to eliminate any grounds for the Egyptians to claim them as kin. This formulation also has the function of making the marriage the Egyptians propose an explicit violation of their (female) *genos*. According to the terms that the Danaids set, marriage is a problem since it would require a violation of the boundaries they have set.

It is noteworthy that the Danaids identify their cousins as the *genos* of Aegyptus, and not (in a formulation that would mirror their own female *genos*) a male *genos*. This is a deliberate attempt to separate the Argive men (the righteous) from the Egyptian men (the insolent). The exclusivity of the designation (*genos* of Aegyptus) along
with the other modifiers complicates any identification between the Egyptians and the Argives on the grounds that they have their identities as males in common. The Danaids indicate at the beginning of this particular invocation that Zeus is the guardian of 'righteous men:' it is clearly in their interest to represent the conflict in terms of right and wrong instead of male and female.

In this first strophe, then, interwoven within the many references to Zeus, we find the earliest evidence for the women's conception of their genos and its connections to Io, Zeus, the Argive land and their common identity as women. Significantly, they acknowledge no connection with actual living people: here, early in the play and early in their self-identification, they indicate that they consider themselves to constitute their own genos. A single word in line 7 hints at this: here they insist that they are fleeing men by their own act (αὐτογενῆ φυλανορίαν) rather than by the order of a demos. But αὐτογενῆ might also mean more than this: it might also mean "of the same genos" or "of our own genos." This one word summarizes the central conflict of the play: it suggests the difference between determination by others (from the perspective of the Egyptians the Danaids belong "to the same genos") and self-determination (the Danaids' conception of themselves as members of their own genos -- an identity that they have constructed for themselves and to which only they belong). The ambiguity of αὐτογενῆ is the very thing that is being negotiated.

The Danaids do not admit kinship with their pursuers: although the brothers Aegyptus and Danaus are mentioned (even contrasted) in
lines 9 and 11, their relationship is not clarified until line 38 -- at which point it is revealed that the Egyptians are trying to usurp what belongs to their uncle (οφετερεξάμενοι πατραδελφείαν / τὴνδ'). Even though the women finally acknowledge that Danaus is the brother of Aegyptus and the uncle of the Egyptians, they never make any reference to their own relationship to either Aegyptus or his children. As they flee their birthplace and reinvent their identity, they attempt to erase their former and undesirable ancestral ties. According to the terms of their self-identification, they accept some kin and deny others: they select and celebrate ancestors who strengthen their claim to Argos.

The next strophe begins with a new addressee: the son of Zeus and Io, Epaphus. He is invoked as their “champion from beyond the sea” -- thus he is clearly acknowledged as their ancestor on the other side of the sea, the first of their genos to be born in the land near the Nile. The fact that they invoke Epaphus before Io reflects their present orientation: they seem to identify most strongly with Epaphus, since it is he who was born in Egypt. Their identification with Io is more tentative, as they are only just beginning to associate themselves with her and her ancestral land.

They cut short their comparison of themselves with Io and (in the antistrophe) instead refer to Tereus’ wife. Procnè (63-64):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{αἱτ' ἀπὸ χώρων ποταμῶν τ' ἐργομένα} \\
\text{πευθεὶ νέον οἰκτον ἡθέων,}
\end{align*}
\]

who, kept away from the lands and rivers\(^\text{43}\), voices a novel kind of lament for her wonted haunts.

\(\text{43 Manuscripts ME read } χωρων \text{ but editors revise, thus Johansen reads } χλωρων \text{ and so}\)
It is tempting to emphasize the further description of Procne as the murderer of her child and of her status as "an unnatural mother" (δυσμάτωρος - 67) and to link Procne with the Danaids who also fail to fulfill the role of wife and mother: certainly a connection between the retaliatory violence done by Procne and the Danaids is suggested. What is less obvious is that the initial point of comparison is a profound sense of alienation: the experience of being deprived of a former identity (family, homeland) because of masculine violence. The language in this passage stresses the fact that the aggression of a man motivated the women's distress and lamentation. Note that Procne is not named, but is described in relation to Tereus: she is described as "Tereus' wife, piteous in her counsel, the hawk-chased nightingale" (60-61). In this way, Tereus is made responsible for her grief: his act of violence (the rape of Philomela) prompted Procne to retaliate by murdering their son. The metamorphoses of Tereus into hawk and Procne into a nightingale crystallizes their relationship as predator and prey, and prefigures the relationship between the Danaids and Egyptians (also described with bird imagery by Danaus in line 224). Procne's endless flight from Tereus resembles the Danaids' flight from the Egyptians: as a result of this flight from the violence of males, both suffer the loss of their homeland and their former identity. There is a further point of comparison implied in this simile: her misery began when Procne, the daughter of a king of Athens, was taken by her new husband to distant Thrace. By comparing themselves to Procne, the

translates the phrase "green-leaved rivers."

44 I will consider the significance of this aspect of the simile in more detail in Chapter 3.
Danaids align themselves with a Greek woman whose marriage to a foreigner resulted in disaster.

The Danaids conclude the comparison and resume their lamentation with the following utterance (69-76):

τῶς καὶ ἕγω φιλόδυρτος ἱαονιοιοι νομοιοι
δάπτω τάν ἀπαλάν
Νειλοθερῆ παρεῖαν
ἀπειρόδεκτῳ τε καρδίᾳν.
γοεδνα τί ἄνθεμιζομαι,
δειμαίνομαι ἄφιλον
τάσσε φυγὰς Ἀερίας ἀπὸ γᾶς
ἐῖ τίς ἔστι κηδεμὼν.

Even so I, indulging my wailing, sing my Ionian melodies and tear my soft cheek coloured by the Nile-summer, and my heart which is unused to tears. I cull the flowers of lament, in anxiety whether there is a guardian here to vouch for this friendless flight from the land of Aeria.

This passage emphasizes the fact that the main cause of anxiety for these women is that they have no people, no homeland, no identity. This is most clear near the end of the stanza, where they express fear because of 'friendless exile' and the absence of a 'protector' or 'guardian.' The juxtaposition of the Greek and Egyptian references in this lament (᾽Ιαονιοιοι νομοιοι and Νειλοθερη παρειαν) emphasizes the doubleness of their identity: they are at once Greek and Egyptian. The reference to the Nile clearly implies that their skin color is dark on account of the heat of the sun near the Nile; their color is thus attributed to their previous environment. The reference to Greek song implies an acquaintance with cultural traditions. Neither

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45 This is based on the reading in Johansen's text: Page reads δειμαίνομαι, φίλος, "fearful whether there be a friendly guardian." This ambiguity (hearing the lines would make a distinction even more difficult to make) is again significant: the line might indicate that the Danaids are apprehensive about succumbing to anyone's rule.

46 We do not have to reach very far to get from Ionian songs to Greek culture, since the word nomos may also mean law or custom.
reference claims priority: both the knowledge of Greek song and their skin color are acquired traits; neither criterion absolutely determines their ethnicity. At the same time, their identity as Egyptians is clearly written on their bodies. Their familiarity with Greek culture will not be so easily read by the Argives: their Greekness (whiteness) will have to be demonstrated.47

In the remainder of this lament they emphasize the fact that they have only recently returned to this ancestral land. They illuminate further the irony of their situation: they are both familiar and unfamiliar. For instance, in lines 117-8 (and repeated in 129-30), they address the Apian hills: "well you know my barbarous voice, o land -- and many times, with linen-tearing rent. I fall upon my Sidonian veil." Thus the women suggest acquaintance with the Greek land, but indicate that they still bear the marks of their foreign birth, both in their language and in their dress.

The skin color of the women is emphasized just once more (lines 154 ff.) in this opening ode. Still in a context of lamentation, the women refer to themselves as they contemplate death as an alternative to marriage with their suitors (151-161):

σπερμα σεμνάς μέγα ματρος
εώνας ἀνδρὼν, εἶ,
ἀγαμὸν ἀδαμάτον ἐκφυγεῖν.

εἰ δὲ μῆ, μελανθές
ἡλιόκτυπον γένος
τὸν πολυξενώτατον,
Ζήνα τῶν κεκυκκοτών,
ιζόμεθα σὺν κλάδοις,

47 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the significance of gender references in this passage, especially the link between femininity, suppliance, and implied whiteness.
May the seed of a highly august mother escape the beds of men -
- ah me, ah me! - unmarried, unvanquished.

If not, we the black sun-smitten race, will come with our
boughs to the earth-dweller, the most hospitable, Zeus of the
dead: we will die by the noose. This we will do if we are not
heard by the Olympian gods.

Although the women had not explicitly described themselves as black
(they had only hinted at their color with the word Νειλοθερή, "colored
by the Nile sun"). the phrase "black, sun-smitten genos" clearly
emphasizes the permanent mark that their previous home has made
on their bodies. More importantly, this passage links their color and
their place of origin to their genos: their genos is actually modified by
the word μελανθες. Thus as they consider their desperate
circumstances, the Danaids abandon their claim that their appearance
is not an indicator of their identity. When they imagine the possibility
that they might be forced to surrender to their suitors, they give up
their task of assuming a new identity: they concentrate exclusively on
what they have in common with their cousins. It is this bond with
their cousins (the thing that they have been trying to erase) that
dooms them. They concentrate on their blackness when they feel
most hopeless, as if at the moment of death corporeality asserts its
claim.

Danaus' dialogue with his daughters in the next scene further
complicates the negotiation of their identity: he does not remind them
of any ancestral rights to this land or encourage them to consider

48 Here I am only interested in color because it is linked with their foreign origin and
their genos. I will explore other associations of their blackness in greater detail in
Chapter 3.
themselves as kin to the Argives, but instead tells them that they are simply newcomers to a land of strangers. Throughout this dialogue Danaus concerns himself with advising the women on how best to approach the Argives (194-196):

address words of pitifullness, lamentation, and sore need as answers to the strangers, as becomes newcomers, and tell them in clear language about this your flight which was not brought about by bloodshed.

Danaus stresses that they should conceive of the relationship between the Argives and the Danaids as one of hospitality (xenia), not kinship (genos). Danaus refers to the Argives as 'host-friends' (ξένους) and the Danaids simply as 'newcomers' or 'ones who have come' (ἐπηλυδας). Danaus predicts that the relationship between the Argives and Danaids will be determined by their claims to the land: the present inhabitants are in the superior position simply because they presently occupy the land (they will be the hosts), while the women (as fugitives and newcomers) will not appear to have a claim to any land.

The meaning of Danaus’ insistence on their position of relative powerless is explained at the end of his lengthy speech (200-203):

moreover, do not be forward in your talk, nor lag behind: the race here is ready to take offense. And remember to be pliant: you are a fugitive from abroad in need of help. Arrogant speech does not become the weak.
It is clear from the first two lines of this passage that Danaus anticipates that their arrival may be unwelcome. He describes the Argive people as a *genos* that is *epithénon*; with this adjective Danaus suggests that the Argives might feel envy for the Danaids because of their prior claim on the land. As we will see, the present inhabitants (called the Pelasgians) were autochthonous (born from the land itself), but the Danaids' ancestor, Io, is a much earlier inhabitant. In these lines, then, Danaus warns the Danaids that they should not boast overmuch about their ancestral rights to this land. Instead they should approach the present inhabitants cautiously and construct themselves as *xenoi* although they are -- in a sense -- natives.

As he prepares his daughters for their encounter with the Argives, he also indicates that he thinks of the Argives as a separate ethnic unit; at this point he does not acknowledge any possible connection between the Argive genos and their own *genos*. Instead, he reminds them to conceive of their position as one of absolute powerlessness: needy, in a foreign land, an exile. Note that the predicate adjective is in an emphatic position: a more accurate translation of the phrase might be "you, a foreigner and exile, are in need." He reminds them that their lack (of protection, of a home, of a *genos*) will make them seem inferior to the Argives. Danaus finishes this speech with the proclamation that "brave speech does not become the weak" and that final word in emphatic position (ἦσσοναί) resonates.

Danaus not only does not encourage the women to exploit their connections to the land of Argos and its people, he (unlike the
women) still considers the Egyptians as their relations. As I noted above, in the first speech the women twice refer to themselves as comprising a *genos* of their own, separate and not related to the *genos* of the Egyptians; they admit their father's relationship to his nephews but acknowledge no connection between the Egyptians and themselves. Now Danaus, on the other hand, does not acknowledge the women's relationship to Argos, but is mindful of their relationship with his brother's sons. As he directs the women to take seats near the altar, he compares them to birds (222-25):

\[
\text{πάντων δ' ἀνάκτων τῶν δε κοινοβώμιαν}
\]

\[
\text{σέβεσθ', ἐν ἀγνώ δ' ἔοιμι ὡς πελειάδων}
\]

\[
\text{ἐξοθέ κύρων τῶν ὄμοπτέρων φόβως,}
\]

\[
\text{ἐκθραὶ ὄμοιμι καὶ μιανοντων γενος}
\]

And pay worship to the common altar of all the ruling powers here: take your seat in the holy place like a swarm of doves fearing the hawks, their feathered fellows, related to them by blood but enemies and polluters of their race.

The relationship between the Egyptians and the Danaids is thus compared to the relationship of birds who are predators (hawks) and birds who are prey (doves).\(^{49}\) The interesting and important part of the comparison, however, is that the hunter and hunted appear to be of the same kind:\(^{50}\) Danaus says that the enemy-hawks are 'of the same-plumage' (*ὀμοπτέρων*) as the doves. This adjective emphasizes physical

\(^{49}\) This recalls the comparison with Procne and Tereus, and also the description of their cousins as an insolent swarm (line 30).

\(^{50}\) In the great majority of similes in the *Iliad* the hunter and the hunted are compared to two different species of animals (e.g. 22.188-92). An exception occurs at *Iliad* 22.139-142: in this simile Homer compares Achilles to a hawk and Hector to a dove. Perhaps the choice of two birds was meant to indicate that this was more or less a match of equals: both were mighty warriors. Notice, however, that Homer does not emphasize the similarity between the birds so much as the aggressive flight of the hawk and the quick agility of the fleeing dove.
(not spiritual) resemblance. Although Danaus acknowledges that the Danaids appear to be similar to the Egyptians (they are related by blood), he continues by making a distinction between blood relations (όμαίμων) and ethnic identity (genos): he asserts that these enemies who share the same blood pollute the race (genos). He dwells on the relationship between the cousins (and their physical similarity) in order to emphasize the difference between them: the hawk and the dove both have feathers, but their essential natures could not be more different. Danaus indicates that the erasure of the bond between them (this insistence on the separateness of the gene) was made necessary by the Egyptians' violent pursuit of the Danaids: Danaus indicates that marriage to such a group of men would pollute the genos of the Danaids.\(^{51}\)

Throughout this dialogue with Danaus, the women are characterized by obedience, and they say nothing contrary to the advice of their father. There is, however, one small indication that they continue to value the story of their ancestor Io and their special relationship with Zeus. Before Danaus encourages them to pray to each of the gods represented at the altar 'according to Greek customs' (line 220), the women remember Zeus and invoke him especially: Ζεύς δὲ γεννητῷρ ἰδοὺ. ("May Zeus, our ancestor, look upon us!" - line 206). The Danaids indicate that, despite their father's warning that they should adopt a submissive posture and not be boastful about their prior

\(^{51}\) The Danaids themselves, however, maintain a more extreme position: as a genos of women (line 28), marriage to any man would constitute a pollution.
connection to Argos, they still maintain their hope for a future identity in this land.

**how Pelasgus perceives their difference (lines 235-599)**

I noted above that the women’s foreign dress and appearance probably would have been dramatized visually by their costumes and masks, and yet Aeschylus also chose to have his characters make verbal references to this physical difference in key moments in the drama. In this section I discuss the passage in which Pelagbus first encounters the women. This passage is especially important because in it Aeschylus dramatized an initial encounter between a Greek and a supposed non-Greek. In this section I will consider the following questions: what are the differences upon which Pelagbus chooses to remark? in what ways does he comment upon their physical difference without using specific color terminology? how are the terms of the Danaids’ ethnic identification changed by this encounter?

The very first words spoken by Pelagbus, the only character in the play who claims to be indigenous to Greece, concern the different appearance of the women (234-37):

ποδαπὸν ὃμιλον τὸν ἀνέλληνοστολὸν
πέπλοισι βαρβάροις καμπυκώμαιν
χλιστα προσφωνοῦμεν, οὐ γαρ Ἀργολίς
ἔσθης γυναικῶν, οὐδὲ ὧν Ἐλλάδος τοπῶν.

Where does this band come from that I address, with its un-Hellenic attire, luxuriously clad in barbaric robes and headbands? These women’s dress is not Argive, nor from the lands of Greece.

Pelasgus observes the dress of the women, and -- since it is not the dress of women of Argos or of other places in Greece -- concludes that
they are certainly not Greek, and must come from another land. Pelasgus only mentions clothing here, not any other physical feature; he implies that his judgement of their foreign origin is based not on skin color or some other aspect of culture, but only on their dress. The fact that their foreignness manifests itself in such a superficial criterion as costume implies this same foreignness could be easily taken off. Pelasgus' evaluation of them could be undone. Pelasgus himself admits this several lines later, when, after puzzling over the logistics of their travel, he notices their supplicant boughs (241-3):

Yet boughs are lying near you before the assembled gods, such as is the custom of suppliants, and this is the only point where Greece will be in harmony with my guess.

Although their dress is not typical of Greek women's dress, they do follow the Greek tradition of carrying supplicant boughs to the altar. Thus he notices two cultural habits of the women and concedes that while one sets them apart from the Greeks, the other is shared with the Greeks. Just before he abandons his attempt to judge them by their physical appearance (since they are present and able to inform him themselves), he notes that 'there is still much that it would be reasonable to make conjecture about.' The verb (eikásoi) translated as 'to conjecture' literally means 'to infer from comparison.' Thus, with

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52 Sourvinou-Inwood argues that clothing defines Medea as Greek in representations done before 431; but after the production of Euripides' Medea her clothing marks her as foreign. On the significance of foreign dress in the dramatic and iconographical images of Medea, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Medea at a Shifting Distance: Images and Euripidean Tragedy," in Medea, ed. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (Princeton 1997) 253-96.
this verb Pelasgus implies that there are other notable differences between these women and those with whom he is familiar (i.e. native Argive women).

The fact that the Danaids do not look like other Argives puts them at a disadvantage. Pelasgus does not specify their other differences until after the Danaids claim to belong to the Argive genos (274-75). In response to this claim, Pelasgus is incredulous. He lists the names of countries that are more likely places of origin for them (279-90):\

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Λιβυστικαίς} & \text{γάρ} \text{ μάλλον} \text{ εμφερέστεραι} \\
\text{γυναῖκιν} & \text{ ἐστε} \text{ κούδαμως} \text{ ἐγχωριάς} \\
\text{καὶ} & \text{ Νείλος} \text{ ἀν} \text{ θρέψει} \text{ τοιοῦτον} \text{ φυτὸν} \\
\text{Κυπριοχάρακτος} & \text{ τ’} \text{ ἐν} \text{ γυναικείοις} \text{ τύποις} \\
\text{εἰκών} & \text{ πέπληκται} \text{ τεκτόνων} \text{ πρὸς} \text{ ἄραξέων} \\
\text{Ἰνδάς} & \text{ τ’} \text{ ἀκοῦσ} \text{ νομάδας} \text{ ἅπασας} \\
\text{ἴνα} & \text{ καμηλοεις} \text{ ἄστραβησομασ} \text{ χώνα,} \\
\text{παρ’} & \text{ Αἰθιώπων} \text{ ἀστυγειτονομέναις} \\
\text{καὶ} & \text{ τὰς} \text{ ἀνάνδρους} \text{ κρεοβοροὺς} \text{ [8’]} \text{ Ἀμαζώνας,} \\
\text{εἰ} & \text{ τοδοτευχεῖς} \text{ ἢστε,} \text{ καρτ’} \text{ ἀν} \text{ ἥκασα} \\
\text{ὑμᾶς.} & \text{ διδαχθεῖς} \text{ [6’]} \text{ ἀν} \text{ τὸ} \text{ ἐδείην} \text{ πλέον,} \\
\text{ὅπως} & \text{ γένεθλον} \text{ σπέρμα} \text{ τ’} \text{ Ἀργεῖον} \text{ τὸ} \text{ σῶν.}
\end{align*} \]

You are more like Libyan women, and by no means like the women of this country. The Nile, too, might foster such a plant; and of Cyprian stamp is the image impressed on your female forms by male artisans; and in India I hear that there are nomad women who ride over the country on saddled camels that move like horses, women who dwell in the neighbourhood of the Aethiopians; and the man-shunning flesh-eating Amazons -- if you were armed with bows, assuredly I would have likened you to them (?). But if I receive further information I might know how your race and seed can be Argive.

In the first line quoted above. Pelasgus carefully limits the value of his conjecture about the Danaids' foreign identity: he admits that he is

\[ ^{53} \text{This passage resembles other scenes in tragedy where conjecture about identity circles around the truth. See, for example, the opening of Aeschylus' "Eumenides" (also discussed in Chapter 3); in this example, too, the physical appearance of the black females confounds the identification.} \]
basing his conjectures only on physical resemblance. But while he is tentative about proposing a positive identity for the women, he is not at all tentative about proposing a negative one: they are not at all (οὐδὲμῷς) like the women of his country (εὐχωρίας). This distinction between the Danaids and the 'inhabitants' of Argos is important to Pelasgus since he clearly values relationships to land; this distinction also reflects the idea that one's environment shapes one's appearance. And yet, although Pelasgus alludes to a difference in the Danaids' physical appearance and he is more inclined to believe that they come from Africa than Greece, he does not point to their skin: he does not specify what aspect of their appearance seems more typical of a Libyan woman than a native Argive.54

Pelasgus continues his conjecture by suggesting the Nile as the area of their birth. Since the Nile was traditionally associated with dark muds and fertility, Pelasgus may also be referring to their color with this remark. His language, however, continues to be vague: the fact that he likens them to a plant (a strange one: τολούτον φυτὸν) suggests that he is no longer referring to their dress or customs anymore, but probably to their physical form -- skin color, facial characteristics, body shape. Pelasgus next compares the women to

54 The key to this might be the fact that Pelasgus specifies that he is not comparing the women to Greeks in general, but more specifically Greek women (the noun is in emphatic position of the line at 280), even though it would be understood from the context and from the gender of the adjectives. Pelasgus does not say that the Danaids do not resemble Greeks: he says that they do not resemble Greek women. The fact that these women have dark skin (as they themselves describe in the parodos) make them unlike Greek women who, because theirs is the private sphere, do not experience the darkening of skin caused by the sun. Thus, in a sense, the Danaids are unlike Greek women, thus twice strange: they are unlike Greeks and unlike women. I further explore the relationship between color and gender in Chapter 3.
artistic representations (282-83) made by male artisans; the 'image impressed on their female forms' is 'of Cyprian stamp'. Again, this comment may suggest that Pelasgus' knowledge of actual Cyprian women was small, but that he had seen artistic depictions of them: he may be connecting the Danaids with Cyprus because of his familiarity with their statuary. Still, this explanation does not account for the prominence of the statue image: Pelasgus describes the Danaids as if they themselves are plastic creations. The translation offered above does not convey the richness of this image. The words translated as 'female forms' (γυναικείους τύπους) normally refer to impressions made in metal or stone: this image suggests that external form is shaped by external forces (the stamp); by using the image, Pelasgus carefully distinguishes between internal and external form. He avoids making conclusions about their essence on the basis of their appearance.

Pelasgus also notes another unwomanly aspect of their behavior: the fact that they roam the countryside. But even this comment on their nomadic existence being uncharacteristic of Greek women does not

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55 The references to gender in this comparison are (I will argue) extremely significant. See Chapter 3.

56 This allusion to Aphrodite suggests that the women, although non-Greek, are still viewed as objects of desire. On the metaphor of the female body as a tablet, see P. DuBois, Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women (Chicago and London 1988) 130-66; and A. H. Sommerstein, "Notes on Aeschylus' Suppliants," BICS 24 (1977) 67-82.

57 The relationship between Cyprus and Egypt may provide another explanation for this comparison. Snowden explains that many 'Negroid' stone figures have been found in Cyprus: one explanation for their presence there is that "the sculptures were portraits of Ethiopians in the civil and military service of the Egyptians during Egyptian occupation of the island under Amasis (568-525 B.C.)." According to Herodotus (3.17-26) one component of the Cyprian population was Ethiopian. See Snowden 1970 (above, note 3) 122. Thus, it may well be that with this reference to Cyprian statuary, Pelasgus is referring to representations of Ethiopians. He may actually be commenting on specific physical features.
not stop there: Pelasgus also mentions that these nomadic, camel-riding Indian women are neighbors to the Ethiopians. Thus, he again implies their resemblance to women of any other land but his own. The reference to the Ethiopians must also be a reference to their skin color, since these people were said to have the curliest hair and the darkest skin.58

It is fitting that Pelasgus' final comparison involves the mythical Amazons, since the knowledge of non-Greek women that he draws upon has become increasingly sketchy. His information has come from statuary, rumor (\'Ινδάς τ' ἀκούω νομάδας'), and now myth. The text of this line is uncertain (as is Pelasgus' comparison) but the sense is that, although he is tempted to compare them to the man-less (ἀνάνορος) Amazons, the fact that they do not carry arrows prevents him. There is some debate about the second adjective modifying the Amazons: the manuscripts have κρεοβρότους (M) and κρεωβρότους (E), a word of uncertain meaning that might be translated as 'with mortal flesh;' Abresch has suggested that this might be an error for κρεοβόρους, or 'flesh-eating.' Together with the reference to wandering, this mention of eating flesh implies the activity of hunting and eating the kill. The two adjectives together connote behavior that is regarded as unfeminine, i.e. unlike that deemed normal for Greek women.59

Pelasgus has already indicated his wonder that the women are not accompanied by guides (line 238-240); their independent wandering

58 Herodotus 7.69-70.

59 Compare the activities of the Bacchants in Euripides. Phaedra's inappropriate wish that she be able to spend her time engaged in the hunt like Hippolytus, and Hecuba's desire to eat Achilles' heart raw in the \textit{Iliad}. 
has given him cause for pause. And the second Amazonian attribute is new: it certainly implies that they engage in the unfeminine task of hunting; but it may also suggest a lack of civilization. It communicates his belief that these women are from a region at the furthest edges of the known world.

In sum. Pelasgus' initial reaction to the Danaids is characterized by a strong feeling, based on his knowledge of Argive natives, that these newcomers are not Greek. He interprets their external characteristics as evidence that they come from a distant land. Although Pelasgus never explicitly comments on their color, the comparisons he makes do address their different physical appearance and their likely remote origin (in countries where people were closer to the sun). Still, Pelasgus is willing to be persuaded that their appearance does not clearly indicate their identity: he invites them to proclaim their version of the story. For him, their color and physical dress are only external markers, stamps imposed by the environment: they might have no significance for the internal identity of these women. Their bodies might be marked by Egypt, but their spirits might still be Greek.

The Danaids themselves acknowledge that Pelasgus has correctly evaluated their appearance (246): εἰρηκας ἀμφὶ κόσμον ἀφευδῆ λόγον (“As for our attire, you have not spoken falsely”). They indicate that the things with which they decorate their bodies do come from a foreign place: they will still maintain that these are mere decorations (kovsmon) and are easily shed. These physical characteristics do not reveal their identity.
Before they say any more about themselves, they ask Pelasgus who he is: he identifies himself as the son of "earth born" (γηγενος) Palaechthon (250). Only after he expands upon this, dwelling in particular on the places over which he rules, does he ask the Danaids' to proclaim (ἀν ἐγεύσωτο) their genos. This formulation is the same one that we saw in line 18, where the Danaids initially identified their genos in relation to Argos: here too it clearly is used idiomatically, emphasizing the Danaids' claim to be someone different than they appear to be. They use the very same formulation in their response (274-75):

βραχύς τορός θ' ὁ μύθος. Ἀργεῖας γένος ἐξευχόμεθα σπέρμα τ' εὔτεκνου βοὸς

Our tale is very brief and clear. We proclaim ourselves to be Argives by race, seed of the cow with the divine child. At this moment it becomes clear that both the Danaids' and Pelasgus' identities are invented. Neither story has greater credibility: birth from the land does not seem immediately more plausible than birth from a cow impregnated by a god. In fact, the birth stories of these characters rely on different versions of the same fiction: the birth of Pelasgus (from the earth) did not require a woman; the descent of the Danaids (from Io) diminishes the involvement of a man. In this respect both of their claims are suspect. Pelasgus and his people are more secure in their identity because they are well established in Argos.

When asked to supply proof of their ties to Argos, the Danaids begin by establishing Io as a former inhabitant: Pelasgus, in turn, asks a series of leading questions and the women, in answer, retell the story of the mating of Zeus and Io. Thus, in contrast to their rehearsal of the story in the *parodos* when they traced their ancestry backwards beginning with Epaphus, the ancestor-hero of the Nile-region, now in the presence of Pelasgus, they begin their story at its beginning in Argos (with Io) and only gradually cross the oceans with Io to the land of Epaphus' birth. They do not acknowledge the value of any of Pelasgus' conjectures as to their country of origin. Their foremost concern is to claim Argos as their ancestral home; only once they have convinced Pelasgus of their ancient tie to Argos do they describe the circumstances that forced them to leave their more recent home (328 ff.).

As Pelasgus' questions lead the Danaids closer to their own birthplace, the Danaids gradually reveal their familiarity with these regions. For instance, when they describe how Hera punished Io with 'a cow-driving sting, they add: οἷστρον καλοῦσιν αὐτὸν οἱ Νεῖλοι πέλασ. ("Gadfly he is called by those who live by the Nile": 318). Once Pelasgus and the Danaids reconstruct together the story of Io's long journey to Memphis and Canobus, the structure and nature of Pelasgus' questions change: in the earlier part of this exchange he phrased questions that led to the next event in the narrative (e. g. "Now what further did she contrive against the unhappy cow? (306)): he communicated a degree of familiarity with the story, as if he was checking the details of their story with the story he knew. He
acknowledges this at line 310: καὶ ταῦτ’ ἐλεξας πάντα συγκόλλως ἐμοί. ("All this too, that you have now said, accords with my version.") This acknowledgement marks a turning point in the story, as it now moves from the land familiar to Pelasgus, to the land familiar to the Danais. For in the latter part of the exchange (line 314 ff.), Pelasgus asks questions that expect only names as answers: he asks for details of ἴο’s successive genealogy since these details of the story are unfamiliar to him.

In this section of the play the Danais are attempting to make the transition from a people whose unwilling exile and forced homelessness comprised their identity, to a people whose ancestral ties confirm their identity as Argives. Even as they mention their father and his brother as the two sons of Belus, descendants of Epaphus and thus ἴο, they claim for themselves the special designation of ‘Argive.’ The last name requested by Pelasgus is Aegyptus: with this name their family history is complete. Immediately after providing this name, the Danais make their request: εἰδὼς δ’ ἀμόν ἀρχαῖον γένος / πράσσοις ἂν ὑς Ἀργεῖον ἀνστήσαι στόλον. ("Now that you know the origin of my race, I pray you to act so as to take under your protection a band that is Argive" (323-4)). As the Danais move backward with Pelasgus to the Nile region, they remember their cousins: the very mention of these men renews their commitment to being Greek, and thus under Pelasgus’ protection.

Even though the women have related the full genealogy and not omitted the names of their uncle or his sons, they do not claim that these men -- or all their blood relations -- are essentially Argive by
**genos.** For this is simply not the case. The Danaids choose to emphasize their ties to Greece because it is politically expedient. They have been forced to flee their native land because of the aggressive pursuit of their cousins: they trace their ancestry beyond Danaus, Belus, Libya, and Epaphus to Io because it enables them to claim an affiliation with the Argives. The sons of Aegyptus, on the other hand, have no such need for safety or protection: since they have no political motive for claiming an affiliation with the Argives, they simply do not, and thus are not Argive. The fact that the women again modify the noun *genos* with a possessive adjective (cf. 323 and 15) clearly indicates that they consider themselves to be a political entity separate from their cousins. A further indication that the women consider the sons of Aegyptus to constitute a *genos* distinct from their own occurs at line 335. Here the Danaids explain to Pelasgus the reason for their flight: ὥς μὴ γένωμαι ὅμως Αἰγύπτου γένει. ("In order that I may not be a slave to Aegyptus' race.") The verbal play (γένωμαι and γένει) suggests again the Danaids' desire not to be absorbed into the Egyptian *genos*. Clearly the Danaids do not consider the Egyptians to belong to the same *genos* simply because they are sons of their father's brother.

Although the women state their identity in positive terms, their status in Argos is constantly being negotiated. Pelasgus never fully affirms their claim to be Argive; in response to their claim and their genealogical proof, Pelasgus says (325-27):

δοκεῖτε [μὲν] μοι τῆσδε κοινωνεῖν χθόνος
tάρχαῖον ἀλλὰ πῶς πατρίδα ὅμως
λυπεῖν ἐτήσιο τις κατέσκηψεν τύχης:
True, you seem to me from ancient times to have part in this land; but how did you come to submit to leaving the home of your fathers? What misfortune fell upon you?

Pelasgus does not use the same terms as the women do. He does not accept their claim to be Argive by *genos*; he merely states that they seem to have an old connection to the land. Even in making this statement he is cautious: he does not even use the word *genos*; he qualifies the statement as his own judgement and not general truth (*δοκεῖτε μοι*). He admits that they have a share in the land (*κοινωνεῖν*), but not that they have a common identity with its present inhabitants.⁶¹

Rather than welcome them as members of the Argive genos, Pelasgus is suspicious. He concentrates on the fact that they have a dual status: they have ties to two lands. After being convinced of their ancient tie to Argos, Pelasgus asks to hear about their more recent tie to Egypt. They had told about an ancient, maternal tie; he wants to hear about their paternal ties to Egypt. Pelasgus does not fully accept the claim of the Danaids to be Argives: in line 365 he calls the Danaids his citizen-guests (*ἀστοξένων*); the compound clearly connotes his impression of the Danaids’ ambiguous position in his land.

The Danaids respond to Pelasgus’ interest in the home of their fathers (*πατρίως δῶματα*) by insisting that they share an identity with the Argives. When he asks why they left Egypt, they twist the emphasis away from Egypt and again toward Greece: they stress that their arrival in Argos has been a homecoming (330-32):

for who would have believed that this unexpected flight would bring to shore in Argos genos-relations of earlier times, by scaring them into changing their abode through hatred of marriage?

They stress the priority of their relationship with Argos. The Danaids need for the Argives to honor the shared identity (ἐγγενές) which they themselves are privileging for two reasons: if the Argives accept them as members of their genos, any similar claim from the Egyptians would be diminished; additionally, inclusion in the genos would make the Argives responsible for the Danaids' safety.

Pelagius tries to evade responsibility for the Danaids by proposing that the sons of Aegyptus, if not of the same genos, might be the nearest of kin (line 387-89):

εἴ τοι κρατοῦσι παιδες Ἁγγυπτου σέθεν,
νάμω πόλεως φάσκοντες ἑγγυπτα γένοισ
ἐλναι, τις δ' ἂν τοίοδ' ἀντισώηναι θέλει:

If the sons of Aegyptus have power over you on the plea that, by the law of your city, they are your next of genos, who would be willing to contest these claims?

While the Danaids' identification as Argives was politically expedient, so is Pelagius' refusal to fully accept their identification. Both sides try to use the vagueness of the terms of kinship to their own advantage.

In this section of the play the Danaids again stress the independence of their genos from the genos of their cousins. The fact that they consider themselves to be a separate political unit is especially well indicated in an appeal to Pelagius, wherein they ask
him to become their "god-fearing patron" (προξενος, line 419). The institution of proxeny, as Herman explains, probably developed out of xenia during the rise of the city-states. In contrast to xenia, which is an arrangement between individuals, proxeny involves an individual's relationship with a community: "The grantor of a proxeny decree is always a community, mostly a city but sometimes a civic subdivision or cult association";62 he explains that the significance of proxeny "lay in the representation of a collectivity of people as an individual person wielding authority and conducting international diplomatic activity."63 Thus although the word xenos used by other characters elsewhere in the play (e.g. lines 195, 277, 491) indicates that a form of ritualized friendship is being negotiated, the word proxenos resonates more strongly because its use implies that the Danaids consider themselves as a separate community, a group with an identity of its own. Their word choice stresses the political aspect of their self-identity.

The Danaids only once more acknowledge that they share a lineage with the sons of Aegyptus, and this acknowledgement occurs as Pelasgus considers the complexity of the situation before him, and bids the women to allow him to consult with the people before he reaches a decision. In response to his refusal to reach a swift decision, the Danaids remind him that Zeus will honor their side of the issue (lines 402-4):

\[ \text{άμφοτέροις όμαίμων τάδ' έπισκοπεῖ} \]
\[ \text{Ζεύς ἐτερορρηπής, νεμὼν εἰκοτώς} \]
\[ \text{ἀδικα μὲν κακοῖς, δία δ' ἕννομοις} \]

62 G. Herman, Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City (Cambridge, Mass. 1987) 130.

63 Herman (above, note 62) 132.
He who is related by blood to both parties. Zeus who weighs out the lots of either, watches over this matter, laying, as is meet, unjust doings in the scale of the wicked and righteous doings in that of the lawful.

Even in this case the Danaids do not say that they belong to the same genos as the sons of Aegyptus, or even state unequivocally that they are related by blood to them. What they do say is that Zeus is a blood-relation of both the Danaids and the Egyptians. Thus, while the Danaids obliquely concede that the Egyptians are blood relations, they insist that the two groups are distinguished by natures: they again align themselves with Zeus on the side of the righteous (cf. the parodos). They make a distinction between relationship by blood (διαμοιος) and their conception of genos. Since their self-identification emphasizes their shared identity with the Argives, the Danaids do not refer to the sons of Aegyptus as members of the same genos.

The thought of going to war makes Pelasgus think of his own blood relations. He expresses his reluctance to endanger them for the sake of these newcomers (449-51):

\[ \text{διανοομον \ α\ ι\ μα \ υ\ γεν\ \ η\ ο\ ε\ ται,} \\
\text{δε\ ι\ καρ\ τα \ θυ\ ε\ ι\ ν \ και \ πε\ ςε\ ι\ ν \ χρ\ η\ στη\ ρια} \\
\text{θε\ ο\ ι\ ν \ πο\ λ\ λο\ ι\ ς\ πολ\ λ\ λ\ α. \ η\ μ\ ο\ ν\ η\ \ η\ ι\ ν \ η} \]

but in order that kindred blood may not be shed one needs great sacrifices, the fall of many victims to many gods as cure against calamity.

Since he values his blood relations, he cannot understand the animosity that the Danaids feel for theirs. In order to avoid endangering his people in this conflict, Pelasgus continues to press the Danaids about the importance of blood relationships. He indicates
that this relationship should not be violated, especially not at the expense of men's lives (474-77):

\[
\text{el δ' αὐθ' ὁμαίμως παισίν Ἀγύπτου σέθεν}
\text{σταθεῖς πρὸ τεῖχεων διὰ μαχῆς ἥξω τέλους,}
\text{πῶς οὐχί τάναλωμα γίγνεται πικρόν,}
\text{ἀνδρας γυναικῶν οὔνεχ' αἵμαξαι πέδον;}
\]

on the other hand, if I take my stand before the walls and go through the issue of battle with your blood relations, the sons of Aegyptus, how can it be avoided that the expense runs to a bitter total -- men staining the ground with blood for women's sake?

Thus, because their assumed new identification brings with it only the promise of disaster for the Argives. Pelasgus is not eager to accept the Danaids on their terms. He (like the Egyptians themselves) continues to emphasize the importance of the consanguine bond between the two groups. Pelasgus does not recognize any relationship with either of these groups of people from Egypt.

As a representative of a people whose claim to Argos is more immediate, Pelasgus is not interested in entertaining any stories of origin that might displace his own. As the Danaids tell it, their claim to the land is older than the Pelasgians' claim: Io left Argos much before the present inhabitants of the land were born from it. Thus, although both groups claim ties to the land, they actually have no common ancestors. Pelasgus does not affiliate himself with the Argive genos and their connection to Zeus via Io. Rather he identifies himself (at line 250) as "son of the earth-born (γη-γενός) Palaechthon." Also in this initial introduction Pelasgus refers to the people of the region as Pelasgians (line 253): "and from me, their lord, the race of the Pelasgians, who reap the fruits of this land, draw their name with good reason." The fact that he privileges the story of his ancestor's
autochthonous birth may explain his tendency to emphasize the importance of appealing to the inhabitants and gods of the land for acceptance. For three times in this passage he instructs the Danaids to make special appeals to the gods of the people (482, 520) or tells them of the importance of receiving the favor of the inhabitants of the country (517). This emphasis on local customs, people, and gods stresses yet again the distance between the Danaids and the genos to which they claim to belong.64

When Danaus finally speaks to Pelasgus and requests access to the city along with bodyguards, he anticipates that he may encounter difficulties because of his foreign appearance. He cautions (496-99):

\[
\text{μορφὴς ὁ ὁγὺς ὁμοστολος σοι.}
\]
\[
\text{Νεῖλος γὰρ ὁγὺς ὁμοιον Ἰναχως γενος}
\]
\[
\text{τρέφει φυλαξαν μὴ ἡρασος τεκνι φοβοιν}
\]
\[
\text{kai δὴ φίλον τις ἐκταν ἄννοιακ ὑπο.}
\]

My natural aspect is not of the same appearance as yours; for the race which the Nile rears is not similar to that of the Inachus. Take care lest confidence beget fear: formerly too, people have killed a friend through ignorance.

In this speech, Danaus acknowledges how deceptive apparent difference can be. He recognizes that external form (μορφή) is the result of a process of growth (σοι): in Egypt the nurturer (τρέφει) of this process is the Nile: in Greece it is the Inachos. A difference in the process of nurture (although it may cause a difference in external appearance) does not necessarily entail a difference in internal essence. Ignorance (ἄγνοια) of this has caused people to mistake a friend (φίλος) for an enemy. Fear of an ignorant response to his foreign appearance.

64 The conflict between old earth gods and new sky gods resembles the one in the Oresteia, although in this particular play such distinctions seem to break down: aren’t the gods that Pelasgus prays to new earth gods?
appearance motivates this speech: Danaus comments on his physical
difference because he is afraid that, if misinterpreted, it could lead to
his daughters' deaths.

When the Danaids are left alone on stage, they also express fear.
Their method of defense is prayer to Zeus: they comfort themselves by
celebrating their relationship to Zeus and distinguishing themselves
from the Egyptians (524-37):

εάναξ ἀνάκτων, μακάρων
μακάρτατε καὶ τελέων
τελειωτάτον κράτος, ὀλβιε Ζεῦ.
πιθοῦ τε καὶ γένει ὦι
ἀλευσον ἀνδρῶν ὕβριν εὖ στυγῆσαι:
λύμαι δ' ἐμβαλε πορφυροειδεῖ
tὰν μελανόζυγη ἀταν.

tὸ πρὸς γυναικῶν {δ' ἐπίων,}
pαλαίφατον ἀμέτερον
γένος φιλίας προγόνου γυναικός,
νέωσον εὔφρον' ἀινον,
γενοῦ Πολυμηνήσωρ, ἐφαπτορ᾽ ἱούς,
Δίαι τοι γένος εὐχομεθ' εἴναι,
γὰς ἀπὸ τάυδ' ἐνοῖκου.

Lord of lords, most blessed of the blessed, most powerful fulfiller
of fulfillers, mighty Zeus! Hearken, and in just abhorrence ward
off from your race the insolence of men: plunge into the purple
sea the black-benched bane.

Look upon the women's side of the cause, upon our
ancient race sprung from an ancestress dear to you, and renew
the tale of kindness: Show that you remember well, you who laid
your hands on Io! It is to Zeus that we claim to belong by
descent, sprung from her who inhabited this land.

This prayer is full of references to the origin of their genos, and their
direct connection through Io to Zeus. Significantly, as they address
Zeus, they modify the word genos with two possessive adjectives (γένει
ointment and ἀμέτερον γένος): the genos is both yours and mine. Here they
also mention Io's role as their ancestress: they play with cognates of
the word γινομαι, and acknowledge Io's role as the πρόγονος of the
genos. In lines 536, the Danaids even claim (note the idiomatic use of εὖχωμαι yet again) to be the genos of Zeus.

This is a very different version of the myth from the ones recounted previously. In the parodos the Danaids only briefly allude to Epaphus and then remember Io’s distressed wanderings in Argos. In the version reconstructed with Pelasgus, the Danaids began the story with Io in Argos and emphasized her relations there with the immortals; they only briefly mentioned names of non-Greek places and people. In this version the Danaids begin with Io in Argos but quickly proceed to describe more fully her travels, trials, and the favor of Zeus. Here foreign lands, rivers (esp. the Nile - 561), and mountains are mentioned, even celebrated; thus the women reveal their present orientation: their loyalty does not entirely belong to Argos, as they represented in their interaction with Pelasgus. Their ties to Egypt cannot be so easily undone: they are both Egyptian and Greek.

While the Danaids again reveal the doubleness of their identity in this ode (524-99), they also return to their ultimate ancestor. They connect Io’s suffering and deliverance to the birth of Epaphus, fathered by Zeus:

φυσιζόου γένος τοδε
Ζηνός ἐστιν ἄληθώς.

This is in truth the genos of life-growing Zeus. (584)

Διὸς τὸδ’ ἔργον καὶ τὸδ ἃν γένος λέγων
ἐξ Ἐπάφου κυρήσας.

This is the work of Zeus; and if you say that this our genos is sprung from Epaphus you will hit the truth. (588-9)

πατήρ φυτουργός αὐτός αὐτόχειρ ἃναξ,
γένους παλαόφρων μέγας

126
Our father, lord, and planter by his own hand, great artificer of our genos, Zeus who sends fair breeze, is our remedy in all things. (592-4)

Thus, despite their public claim to belong to the Argive genos, the women still privately consider themselves to belong to a genos separated from physical boundaries: they belong to the genos of Zeus. Having traced their ancestry through Epaphus and Io, they settle on a more powerful ancestor. Although it had been important for them to stress their relationship to Pelasgus for political reasons (recall their appeal to dike), now they focus on their relationship with Zeus in order to merit protection for religious reasons.

how Danaus' good news integrates the Danaids (lines 600-709)

Danaus returns from the assembly in order to update the Danaids on their status in Argos. He reports that Pelasgus appealed to the people on the grounds that the Danaids were in a position to make two special claims on the locals, because they are guest-friends and fellow-citizens (κενικον ἀστκόν ὑ · ἄμα - 618). But rather than emphasizing the weakness of their position -- the fact that they are not wholly citizens or guests (cf. 356) -- he turns their ambiguous identity into both a double advantage for the Danaids. and a double threat (διπλοσ μίαμα, 619) for the Pelasgians. The inhabitants of the land decide unanimously in favor of defending the women entirely out of fear for what might happen if they do not.

Even though by this decree the women are welcomed to live among the locals, they still remain a distinct class of people. Both
Pelagius in his decree and Danaus in his report continue to emphasize the relationship of the locals to their land. For example, the very first words that Danaus says to his daughters upon reporting back, emphasize this opposition between kinship and habitation (line 600):

οἱ ἀδελφοὶ σαϊτεῖς, εὖ τα τῶν ἐγέρμων:

Be of good cheer, my young children: concerning the inhabitants of the country, matters stand well.

The language of the decree also stresses the difference in their status (609-12):

ἡμᾶς μετοικεῖν τῇδε γῇς ἐλευθέρους
κάρπωσάστους ξυν τ' ἁυλλάι βροτῶν,
καὶ μητ' ἐνοίκων μητ' ἐπηλῦσαι πινα ἄγείν:

That we be settlers in this country, free, subject to no seizure, and inviolable by any mortal; that no one, either among natives or among aliens, may carry us off as captives:

The locals decide to accept the responsibility of defending the Danaids, but they nevertheless do not accept them as people with an equal claim to the land: they are allowed to be resident aliens (metics). In contrast to their newly acquired status are the other categories of people as specified later, especially the natives or current residents (ἐνοίκων - 611) and the landholders (γαμορων - 613). Although the Danaids acquire the protection of the city and new status as metics, their assimilation is not complete -- they remain a distinct group.

In response to the Danaus' announcement, the women sing a prayer of blessings on Argos. They pray for the protection of the Pelasgian land -- the very thing which their acceptance into the community threatens. They celebrate first (and especially) the genos (630 ff.):
Now is the time for you, gods of Zeus' *genos*, to give ear to us as we pour forth prayers for the *genos*: May the Pelasgian land never be destroyed by fire by him whose cry is insatiable, wanton Ares, he that harvests mortals in fields ploughed by others!

Here the Danaids directly address gods who are (like them) members of Zeus' *genos* (*θεοὶ Διογενεῖς*). In this blessing, the word *genos* is not modified by the possessive pronoun, although earlier the women stated firmly that they belonged to the Argive *genos*, and twice referred to 'our *genos*.' The absence of such a qualifier suggests either that they feel more cautious about proclaiming membership in the same *genos* (since their new status makes them intermediary members of this society) or perhaps they consider the news sufficient confirmation of their membership in this community so that they no longer need to insist on that membership. Their ambiguity may also contain an equivocation.

The lines that follow clarify this indeterminacy somewhat, as the Danaids seem to separate themselves from the group that has so recently decided their fate (639 ff.):

For they pitied us and cast a vote of kindness: they respect Zeus' suppliants, our flock that no one envies.
The presence of the personal pronoun marks the contrast between us and the *genos*, us and the Pelasgian land. This suggests that when referring to the *genos* in line 633 the Danaids did not mean to include themselves. As suppliants of Zeus, as a group deserving of pity, they do not belong to the group that is their benefactor.

Even this interpretation, however, must be modified as the chorus continues. For, at lines 652-3, the Danaids slightly modify their self-presentation: ἄξοντας γαρ ὰμαίους / Ζηνος ἤκτορας ἀγνοῦ. ... ("For they revere their blood relations, holy Zeus’ suppliants: ..."). Here (for the first time) they actually state that they are related by blood to the Pelasgians: this statement is paired with a mention of their status as suppliants. The Danaids again stress their relation to the Argives as they draw attention to the cultural practice that united them from the beginning: suppliancy.

An explanation for this shift may be found in the lines intervening; the pattern of ring composition at lines 641 and 652-3 also mark these lines as significant. And significant they are, since they re-establish two important points. First, they stress that the Argives chose to honor the women (γυναικῶν, 645) in their conflict with the males (ἀροτενων, 643). The very mention of their enemies and their difference from them (especially the difference in their desires) increases their sense of connection to the Argives. Second, this celebration of the might of Zeus provides a sense of comfort: for this undeniable force seems to represent safety for the Danaids and is the basis for the bond between the Argives and Danaids. Thus, as they
respond to Pelasgus’ promise of protection, the Danaids remember that this Argive *genos* which they celebrate includes them.

Since this prayer is a direct response to the news of their acceptance into Argos, it seems reasonable that it would contain references to the continued acceptance of *xenoi* in the future. The Danaids advocate a balance between honor for the natives and respect for strangers: they specifically invoke Zeus of the strangers (Ξενοι - 627 and 670-1) and even prescribe a right way to receive *xenoi* (701-3):

> ξένοι τι εὐξημβόλους,
> πρὶν ἔξοπλίζειν Ἀρη,
> δίκας ἀτερ πτωματὼν διδοῖεν.

…and to strangers, before arming Ares, may they grant the right of process according to just covenants, not inflicting injury upon them.

Thus the Danaids stress the traditional Greek custom of *xenia*, since their personal experience as exiles from their country has reinforced its importance. And yet this reference to *xenia* also complicates their situation in two ways. First it suggests (once again) their double bind: they cannot stress *xenia* without stressing their lack of kinship. As members of the same *genos* they should not also have had to rely on the Greeks’ hospitality. Second, there is irony in their prayer that the Argives receive strangers rightly, since, the very next *xenoi* whom the Argives will encounter will be the Danaids’ own enemy, the very men for whose deaths the women have prayed. This apparent inconsistency will be resolved when, in the next scene, the herald shows that he does not respect the institution of *xenia*: he does not know how to (or care to) act like a *xenos*.
The lines immediately following these emphasize the importance of local gods (704-6):

\[
\text{θεοὺς θ', \ οἱ γὰν ἔχουσιν, \ ἀεί}
\]
\[
\text{τίλεν ἐγχωρίους πατρώιας}
\]
\[
\text{δαφνηφόροις βουθύταισι τιμαῖς.}
\]

And their native gods, those who possess their land, may they worship forever, honouring them, as their fathers did, with the bearing of laurel boughs and slaying of oxen.

These lines stress the relationship between gods, land, and ancestors; note especially the collocation of the words native and father (ἐγχωρίους πατρώιας). In this way the women celebrate that institution that made their protection possible as well as the customs and gods long dear to this land’s inhabitants.

Interaction with Pelasgus has changed the Danaids’ status -- from suppliant to non-resident visitor (xenos) to resident alien (metic). Although they were not fully integrated into the citizen body, they did receive a share in the land. The assembly voted unanimously not to allow anyone to force them to leave. This change in their status was celebrated by a prayer for Argos that honored its people and customs. Even within this prayer, though, the terms used to describe the relationship between the Argives and the Danaids continue to reflect the ambiguity of the situation.

**how the herald of Aegyptus changes their status (lines 710-910)**

When the arrival of the Egyptians seems imminent, Danaaus and his daughters begin to discuss their strategy. In all of the references to the sons of Aegyptus in these lines, there is no mention of them as the Danaids’ kin: they are not described as members of the same
genos or even acknowledged as blood relations (ὁμαίμοι). Instead, they are described as the genos of Aegyptus and even the male genos. This differentiation is not accomplished only by terminology: the Danaids also repeatedly stress the internal (spiritual) difference of the Egyptians. The arrival of the herald of the Egyptians confirms all that Danaus and his daughters had said about them. It strengthens their claim that they and the Egyptians are not the same.

Although Danaus assures his daughters of the Argives’ willingness to fight for them, they respond by reminding him of the nature of the Egyptians (741-42):

εξωλές ἐστι μάργυν Αἰγυπτοῦ γενος
μάχης τ᾽ ἀπληστον καὶ λεγώ προεὶδότα.

Abominable is the furious genos of Aegyptus, and insatiable of war; you know what I mean.

As the herald approaches them, the Danaids again describe the essential nature of these men and again they use exclusive designations to describe them (817-21):

γένος γὰρ Αἰγυπτοῦ ὑβριν
δύσφορον ἀραγεγενείς
μετὰ μὲ δρομοί διόμενοι
φυγάδα ματαιοὶ πολυθροῖς
βίαια δίξηνται λαβεῖν.

For the male genos of the genos of Aegyptus, intolerable in their insolence, come running in pursuit of me, the fugitive, and with manifold lustful howling seek to ravish me!

The repetition in these lines has caused some to doubt their authenticity, but the double identification of their aggressors fits this climactic moment (right before the herald’s entrance): the Danaids stress the profound difference between these two groups just before
these profound differences are dramatized on stage. While earlier (line 28) the Danaids had referred to themselves as the ὠνυγενὴ στολον ("female-born band"). here they call their undesirable suitors a γενος ἄρσενογενὲς ("male-born genos"). According to their identification, the two groups are (and should remain) absolutely distinct. According to these terms, the Egyptians are by nature arrogant (male) aggressors: they could not be more different from the Danaids.

And yet, as they face their aggressors, the Danaids recall aspects of their homeland. Even as they try to distinguish themselves further from their cousins, they do not yet renounce their homeland: in the midst of their confrontation with the herald of Aegyptus, they call on the river Nile as their ally (lines 879-80) and ask that it repel their aggressors. As they stare at the dark skin of their enemy, they become increasingly conscious of their physical similarity to them.\textsuperscript{65} But, despite the fact that they were reared in the same place, the Danaids and the Egyptian herald seem totally different. Again, the major point of contrast between the two groups of cousins is familiar from the parodos: the distinction between righteousness and insolence. In contrast to the reverent attitude of the suppliants, the Egyptian herald states that he feels no responsibility to respect the local gods, people, or customs. He links his lack of respect to the fact that he was not reared here (893-94):

\begin{quote}
οὐτοί φασίν υμεῖς δαίμονας τοὺς ἐνθαδε
οὐ γάρ μ᾽ ἔθρεψαν οὐδ᾽ ἐγνρασαν τροφῆς.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{65} I am not discussing these references in this chapter since color is not explicitly linked with the terms of their identity. Color will be the topic of Chapter 3.
Mark you. I am not afraid of the divine powers here: they have not reared me and not sustained me until my old age.

This lines mark a huge contrast between the attitude of the Egyptians and that of Danaus (cf. lines 496-99). Whereas Danaus had acknowledged the foreignness of his external appearance as the consequence of his rearing by the Nile, he denied that this rearing had influenced his nature or essence. In contrast, the sons of Aegyptus counter that their essence matches their appearance: what you see is what you get.

The refinement of the Danaids' identity in this section depends upon the negative image of the Egyptians that is presented. The Danaids do not offer any more positive formulations about who they are or why the deserve the protection of the Argives; the appearance of the Egyptians does more to distinguish the Danaids from their cousins than their words ever could.

**how Pelasgus' invitation assimilates them (lines 911-1074)**

The assimilation of the women seems complete only after Pelasgus acts in the women's defense in the encounter with the herald of Aegyptus. It is only then that the women completely renounce the Nile and choose instead to sing the praises of the Greek landscape. The decisive moment occurs not when the women themselves interact with the herald, but when Pelasgus interacts with the herald. In this situation, the herald's profound disrespect for Greek cultural institutions strengthens Pelasgus' commitment to defend the Danaids.

The encounter between Pelasgus and the herald of Aegyptus revolves primarily around the question of how to behave decently as a
xenos (cf. lines 917, 919, 920, 926, 927). The fact that the herald blatantly disrespects the institution of xenia and the customs local to Argos (vid. 919) convinces Pelasgus of the insolence of the aggressors. Unlike the Danaids who, when seeking out the Argives, attempted to address the local gods in order to win the local inhabitants' favor, the herald of Aegyptus does not revere the local gods: instead of adopting local customs to appeal to the Argives, the sons of Aegyptus profess belief in and reverence for only the gods native to their land (922).

Although the Danaids never acknowledge any sort of relationship with these men, the herald indicates that the sons of Aegyptus still consider the women as their kin. Only in this final and decisive scene are the women called the 'cousins' (αὐτανέψιον) of the men. Of course, it is not the Danaids who describe the relationship as such (they wouldn't, since they do not acknowledge any relationship with these men)\(^\text{66}\), but the herald of Aegyptus and Danaus (acting as the herald of the Argive people). The first instance occurs at lines 931-2 ff., when the herald asks Pelasgus: πῶς ὁ τῆς πρὸς τίνος τ' ἀφαιρεθεὶς / ἤκειν γυναικῶν αὐτανέψιον στόλον; ("when I am back, how and by whom shall I say that this band of their own female cousins has been taken from me?") The sons of Aegyptus identify the Danaids as, first, women (and so appendages of their masculinity) and second, as kin (which legitimates their violence). The kinship is important to them, since it is on the basis of it that they claim to have power over the women.

\(^{66}\) In fact, the Danaids continue to insist on the difference of the men by emphasizing that they belong to a different race: Within twenty lines of the end of the play the women voice the familiar refrain (1053): "May mighty Zeus ward off from me marriage with Aegyptus' race" (Ἀγυμπτογενή).
The second mention of a connection between the two groups is spoken by Danaus: this mention is complicated by the fact that it is not clear whether he is merely reporting what he has heard (using the Argives' terms) or describing (using his own terms) the Argive response to the arrival of the Egyptians (983-4): καὶ μοῦ τὰ μὲν πραξθέντα προστοὺς ἐγγενεῖς / φίλως, πικρῶς ὡς ἥκουσαν αὐτανεψιοῖς. ("When they heard from me what had happened, they displayed kindness regarding their kin (ἐγγενεῖς). but bitterness against your cousins (αὐτανεψιοῖς) . . ."). If Danaus is simply reporting the Argives' response, then the use of the word 'cousins' indicates that -- despite the fact that Danaids never specifically named the sons of Aegyptus as their cousins, and in fact deliberately avoided use of the term -- the Argives still acknowledge the relationship between the sons and daughters of the two brothers. If Danaus is describing the Argive response using his own language, then this line indicates that, although his daughters have re-created their identity, he still feels bound by kin relations to his brother's sons. We see the same indeterminacy in this reference to the Danaids' relationship with the Argives (as ἐγγενεῖς). Again, it is unclear whether this describes the relationship from the perspective of Danaus or the Argive. Positioned here at the end of the play, this indeterminacy is unsettling. It suggests that these relationships have not yet been defined to everyone's satisfaction.

What is clear by the end of the drama is that the Argives' tentative relationship with the Danaids does not imply one with the Egyptians. This relationship (as members of the same Argive genos)
would not even exist if the Danaids had not created it: the process of claiming this identity, proving it with a story of origins, and finally convincing Pelasgus to grant them status in Argos seems to have been successful for them. The Danaids’ assumed identity (membership in the Argive genos) is something that the Egyptians cannot share. The Argives do not refer to the sons of Aegyptus as their kin (εγγενείς) because they did not make the same appeal: the Egyptians did not come to Argos with the intention of refining any prior relationships; they came with the intention of resuming their control over “their women.”

Perhaps the most significant moment in their transition occurs when the Danaids announce their intention to sing no more of the Nile, but to celebrate local rivers instead (1023-1029):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{αἶνος δὲ πολὺν ταῦτῃ Πελασγῶν} \\
\text{ἐχέτω, μηδὲ ἔτι Νείλου} \\
\text{προχοὰς σέβωμεν ύμνοις.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ποταμοὺς δ’ οἱ διὰ χωρὰς} \\
\text{θέλεται πῶμα χευμαῖ} \\
\text{πολυτεκνοὶ, λυπανόις χευμασὶ γαῖας} \\
\text{τοῦτο μελισσοντες οὐδὰς.}
\end{align*}
\]

Praise shall rule over this city of the Pelasgians, and no longer let us pay homage in our hymns to the flowing waters of the Nile, but to the rivers which pour their benevolent draught through the country, producing rich offspring, bringing gladness to this soil with their fertilizing streams.

This passage strongly recalls two others which corresponded to different moments in the process of their negotiations. First, it recalls the encounter between the herald and the Danaids (879-80) when the women invoked the Nile as a protector: their tie to their homeland had not yet been severed at that point. not even when confronted with
their reason for leaving it. Second, it recalls the opening passage of
the play, when the Danaids identified themselves in terms of their
recent flight from their homeland, and especially Zeus' special
relationship to that homeland. In contrast, here at the end of the play,
as they exit the stage in order to be welcomed into the city, they seem
to abandon this final aspect of their foreign identity.

**Conclusion**

This chapter began with a discussion of the conflicts
surrounding the interpretation of 'black' bodies in Greek texts. There
we noted that it was a mistake to interpret these texts from another
culture using modern racial categories, both because the texts
participate in an altogether different ideological context and because
our modern systems of terminology are imprecise. For these reasons
it seemed important to adopt the idea of ethnicity as subjective
identification in order to determine the relationship between identity
and physical appearance in the *Suppliants*.

As the tragedy dramatizes this interaction between Greeks and
Egyptians, it draws attention to the appearance of the body, and it
imagines the possibility that appearance might not correspond with
essence. Although the bodies of the Danaids are marked as Egyptian,
their familiarity and respect for Greek customs reveals their essential
Greekness. In this way the play interrogates the value of external
appearance as an indicator of internal essence, as it charts the
Danaids' attempt to change their identity in response to political
pressures. Such a change in ethnic identity is dramatized as a gradual
process. The terms that the Danaids use to define themselves change in response to rhetorical and political pressures. They carefully construct their identity in order to exclude their blood relations (οὐαίμοι) but to include the inhabitants of Argos. Thus the Danaids deny the significance of their color (as only a sign of a different environment for their rearing), as they claim affiliation with the Argives because of a more remote ancestral and geographical connection.

This apparent contradiction is one of many that the play explores as it becomes clear that political identity goes beyond self-construction: certain (ideological) obligations and consequences reside in the terms of self-identity the Danaids choose. As they seek to change their association (from dependence on their cousins to dependence on the Argives), the Danaids force the Argives to respond to those terms of their self-identification that implicate Greek citizens and institutions. As the representative of the Argives and as the man whom the Danaids choose as their proxenos, Pelasgus is forced to evaluate the Danaids' dual claim that they come from Egypt but belong to Argos. Their invention of their status creates additional complications for him and the present inhabitants of Greece, since the Danaids make their appeal to him both as members of his genos and as suppliants. Pelasgus eventually receives them as citizens and guests: he grants them an intermediate status in order to maintain some distance between them. Pelasgus is reluctant to accept them as full

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members of his *genos* because of the obligations this acceptance would create for Argos.

As we consider the contradictions produced in this situation, we find ourselves back on familiar ground. According to this analysis, ancient ethnic concerns produced some of the same problems as contemporary concerns. Subjective identification necessarily requires the manipulation of available terminology and this manipulation does not happen without consequences. The Danaids' change in identity requires a response from the Argives: although the Argive response would normally be dictated by established institutions, the ambiguity of the Danaids' position (the doubleness of their appeal) allows Pelasgus to accept them into Argos without fully recognizing a shared identity.
CHAPTER THREE
Looking at Bodies: Color and Gender Identity

The argument of this chapter begins with three ancient sources that associate ideally feminine and masculine bodies with an exaggerated distinction of color: in these sources the ‘female’ is ‘white’ and the ‘male’ is ‘black.’ Artistic depictions of men and women in early Greek art almost always emphasize this distinction. This convention can be observed in Mycenaean wall-paintings and many archaic vases (e.g. Corinthian early sixth century vases and Attic black-figure vases), and may have been influenced by a similar Egyptian custom.1 This convention existed alongside another that represented the skin color of people from different environments with different colors: “Egyptian painters often used a carbon black color in their representations of Kushites, a reddish tint for Egyptian men and a paler hue for Egyptian women.”2 As Beazley points out, however, the color distinction was not strictly observed in the earliest remaining paintings;3 it only gradually became the rule. The fact that strict


3 “Male figures, and not only female, are often white in early archaic art; the Herakles of the New York centaur vase was white. Often, too, there is no reason why one male in a picture should be white or black rather than another; it is for variety, or to mark one figure well off from the next.” J. D. Beazley, The Development of Attic Black-Figure (Berkeley 1951) 9.
observance of this color distinction occurred over time speaks of its artificiality. Indeed, even common sense tells us that a color distinction between the male and female is highly artificial: the difference in color between an actual Greek woman and man would not be this extreme, and (since their skin tone would be olive) neither of them would be white. In her book on color terms, Irwin suggests “that this ‘artificial’ contrast is evidence of the Greek tendency to polarize sexual characteristics: that it describes a difference not merely of skin colour, but of texture as well; and that it reflects an antithesis between fine-skinned, fragile women and tougher and harder men.” Perhaps then, there is more to this artistic and literary convention than aesthetics.

There is other evidence that whiteness was an ideal to which real women (of the upper classes) were to aspire: a fair complexion indicated to the one who gazed at her (presumably her husband) that she kept herself indoors. Thus her whiteness was a marker of class as well as a marker of fidelity. In his Oeconomicus (7-10), Xenophon gives an indication of the influence this feminine ideal exerted on Athenian women. In this dialogue, Ischomachos relates to Socrates some details about his household, in particular his relations with his wife: he reports his instructions for her to remain indoors and send

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4 Of course, such an idealized standard of beauty influenced real women. A certain class of women may have even managed to achieve a stark shade of white with the aid of cosmetics (for which, see the discussion of Xenophon below). The color distinction although realized on an actual female body is still artificial.


6 See Irwin (above, note 5) 116.
certain of her servants to do the necessary work outside; he also reports that she once “had applied a good deal of white lead to her face, that she might seem to be fairer than she was.” Ischomachos complains about the artificial application of whiteness because this confounds his expectation that her complexion will reflect the success of her confinement. Rather than deceive him by faking her whiteness, Ischomachos would prefer to have his wife obtain the fairness of complexion through natural means (like performing household chores along with the servants indoors).

This difference in the color of male and female complexions was also acknowledged by the medical theorists and practitioners in ancient Greece. But rather than attribute this to exposure to the sun and the division of labor that assigned women to work indoors and men to work outdoors, they asserted that the difference had a physiological explanation. Their theories explain that a woman’s fair complexion is caused by the wetness of her body; variations in color are related to degrees of humidity and are linked with other differences in male and female physiology. Thus, science explains that female bodies are naturally white, and it marks deviations from this ideal as less than feminine.

Although these three sources (red-figure vases, a didactic treatise on home economics, and medical theories) may otherwise have nothing in common, each of them strengthens the association of

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7 These include Aristotle’s *HA* 583a12 and some texts grouped with the Hippocratic corpus, e.g. *Nat. Mul.* I (vii. 312. 3. 9-10) and *Mul.* II. (vii. 238. 16-17).

whiteness with ideal femininity. Science tells us that it is natural for women to be white: Xenophon gives us a character who complains that his wife has acquired whiteness by unnatural means; and paintings represent women, in stark contrast with men, as being white. The combination of these messages is confusing: the discourse imagines its ideal (a color that cannot be achieved naturally by any human), associates it with 'natural' femininity, and then challenges (even requires) women to try to achieve it by artificial means. The fashion for living women directs them toward death, for only a bloodless corpse can be truly white.⁹

In this chapter I reflect on the connotations of whiteness and blackness in early Greek literature. I examine examples of the use of color terms in early Greek literature to discern more precisely their associations. I argue that such color references work to enforce (in both positive terms and negative terms) a standard of feminine beauty and behavior. In short, I explain how these passages with color references construct Greek femininity. This discussion prepares the way for the key question of the chapter: why and when does color matter in the Suppliants? Irwin has suggested that there may be an "internal tension" at lines 70-71 when the maidens speak of their "soft cheek summered by Nile's sun." since their skin is at once soft (feminine) and dark(ened) (masculine).¹⁰ I argue that such a tension is

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⁹ This is unfortunately still a familiar notion, since current fashions encourage behavior that also endangers the lives of women and girls. Contemporary media images idealize bodies that are thin like drug addicts ("Heroin Chic") and thus glamorize starvation and substance abuse. Breast implants are another artificial (and dangerous) means of producing a 'natural' ideal.

¹⁰ Irwin (above, note 5) 130.
present throughout the drama as Aeschylus represents women who push the boundaries of what it means to be feminine.

**Femininity and Literary Whiteness**

Even in literature (a genre characterized by words and not pictures), a reference to whiteness conjures up a visual images. As a color term, the adjective gives details about a woman’s appearance. Just by using such an adjective, the author invites the audience to look at her. Since the adjective participates in a larger cultural discourse, when he describes her as ‘white’ the author invites the audience to look at her in a certain way. The adjective indicates that the audience member should read about her, imagine her, and desire her.

Feminist theorists have recently become interested in the fact that men have traditionally controlled the production of all images of women in art and literature; for instance, Laura Mulvey observes:

Women are constantly confronted with their own image in one form or another, but what they see bears little relation or relevance to their own unconscious desires. They are being turned all the time into objects of display, to be looked at and gazed at and stared at by men. Yet, in a real sense, women are not there at all. The parade has nothing to do with woman, but everything to do with man.\(^\text{11}\)

According to such theorists, these representations reflect men’s fears and fantasies more than they voice women’s aspirations. Thus the study of these representations becomes a study of the male imagination. These images become important insofar as they are recognized as part of an ideology that constructs and defines gender roles, for both men and women. Throughout the discussion of literary

whiteness that follows. I will stress the power that descriptive language has to direct the gaze of the audience. This language tells us how to look and how to feel about what we see. In short, it both reflects and prescribes cultural ideas about femininity and masculinity.

**whiteness in Homeric epic**

It is common in archaic Greek epic for the poet to use one particular color term in passages that mention women. In the Homeric epics the compound adjective λευκώλενος (or 'white-armed') is very often paired with the name of the goddess Hera and also (but less often) with the names of several mortal women (Helen, Andromache, Nausikaa, and Arete). The adjective paired with the name of the goddess completes 24 hexameter lines in the *Iliad*. The epithet always begins in the second syllable of the fourth foot: λευκώλενος Ἡρη. In nineteen of these lines, the epithet is preceded by the word θεία ('goddess'): in these cases the string of three words begins in the third syllable of the third foot. Another epithetic phrase occupying exactly the same number of syllables was available to the poet: βοώπελς πότνια Ἡρη occurs fourteen times in the *Iliad*.¹³ The fact that the poet had two possible ways to fill out the same metrical space suggests that the epithets may not have been entirely generic;¹⁴ indeed, they may

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¹³ *Iliad* 1.551, 1.568, 4.50, 8.471, 14.159, 14.222, 14.263, 15.34, 15.49, 16.439, 18.239, 18.360, 18.357, 20.309. There are no instances of this phrase in the *Odyssey*.

¹⁴ In fact, there are a few instances of lines that are identical except for the choice of epithet and other modifiers: compare 14.222 with 1.595 and 21.434; and 15.92 to 1.551, 4.50, 16.439, 18.360, and 23.309. Even in these lines wherein the beginning of the line is identical, the context may be different, and thus a different epithet may be required.
have carried distinct connotations, one of which was more appropriate to a particular context than another.\textsuperscript{15} My examination of the nineteen instances\textsuperscript{16} where the poet calls Hera 'white-armed goddess' and the fourteen where she is 'ox-eyed' has convinced me that the former is found in an altogether different context than the latter: leukwvlenoi describes Hera at those points in the narrative when the goddess, sympathetic to the suffering of the Greeks, rallies others to assist them or when she submits to the requests or orders of other immortals; bow`pi. on the other hand, describes Hera when she either acts rebellious or is punished for her rebellion.\textsuperscript{17} Thus Hera is 'white-armed' when she is playing a positive female role and 'ox-eyed' when she is playing a negative female role.

A set of examples from a book in which both epithets are used to describe Hera will demonstrate this point.\textsuperscript{18} At the beginning of book 1 of the Iliad, Hera feels pity for the Danaans and intervenes on their behalf. Here the narrator calls her leukwvlenoi three times (1.53-56):

\begin{verbatim}
εννήμαρ μεν ἄνα στρατόν ὄχετο κήλα θεόν,
τῇ δεκατῇ δ᾽ ἀγορηνὸς καλεσατο λαοῖς Ἀχιλλευς·
τῷ γὰρ ἐπὶ φρέας θηκε θεὰ λευκωλενὸς Ἡρᾷ,
κηδέτο γὰρ Δαναῖς. ὅτι ἤρεθα λυπόμενοι ὁ δὲ πρῶτο.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{15} See M. Nagler, Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer (Berkeley 1974).


\textsuperscript{17} Book 14 (the beguilement of Zeus) provides the most striking example of the use of this epithet and the most clear statement of its connotations. See Appendix B for a summary of the evidence.

\textsuperscript{18} I will be discussing several examples in an effort to prove this to the reader. Appendices A and B summarize the information for anyone who requires further proof.
Nine days up and down the host ranged the god's arrows, but on the tenth Achilleus called the people to assembly: a thing put into his mind by the goddess of the white arms. Hera, who had pity upon the Danaans when she saw them dying.¹⁹

In this passage Hera's intervention is explained by a reference to the emotion she felt when confronted with their suffering: she intervenes because the misfortunes of the Greeks trouble her. This concern is emphasized twice more in passages that also involve Athena. Here the narrator explains Athena's arrival (1.193-96):

εἶος ὁ ταῦθ' ὑψαίνε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν.
ἐκείνοι δ' ἐκ κολεόνοι μέγα ξίφος, ἠλέον Ἀθηνὴ
ὑπανάβεν πρὸ γὰρ ἦκε λευκώλευν Ἡρη,
ἀμφῶ ἀμῶς θυμῶ φιλέουσα τε κηδομενη τε.

Now as he weighed in mind and spirit these two courses and was drawing from its scabbard the great sword, Athene descended from the sky. For Hera the goddess of the white arms had sent her, who loved both men equally in her heart and cared for them.

Once again the narrator emphasizes the emotional connection that Hera feels for the Greeks -- this time for both Achilles and Agamemnon. The participles (φιλέουσα τε κηδομενη τε) modifying 'white-armed' Hera emphasize the fact that she is motivated by sympathy and affection. This connection is stressed when Athena explains her appearance to Achilles: an only slightly altered version of the same two lines appears in her utterance there (1.208-9).

Later on in the narrative (still in the opening book) the narrator twice uses the epithet βουτις to modify Hera. At line 551 the narrator introduces her response to Zeus, who has just scolded her for

¹⁹ All translations of the Homeric epics are by R. Lattimore: Iliad (Chicago 1951) and Odyssey (New York 1965).
inquiring into his affairs: there the narrator calls her 'ox-eyed'. In the same exchange, when Zeus orders her to sit in silence and threatens her with physical violence, the narrator describes her response (568-9):

\[\text{ἐφατ', ἔδεισεν δὲ βοῶπις ποτνία Ἡρη, καὶ ἐκέουσα καθῆστο, ἐπιγνάμφασα φίλον κηρ.}\]

He spoke, and the goddess the ox-eyed lady Hera was frightened and went and sat down in silence wrenching her heart to obedience.

In both of these examples Hera dares to question Zeus and is disciplined as a result. It is interesting that when Hera displeases her husband and her punishment enforces a separation from the society of the gods, she is no longer called 'white-armed' but 'ox-eyed'.

Significantly, the scene ends with an attempt by Hephaestus to cheer up his mother. In this brief passage (just lines after Zeus' disciplinary action) Hera is called 'white-armed' twice more. Here Hera is again portrayed in a positive light: first (line 572) Hephaestus plans to comfort her; then (595-6) she smiles at her son and is reintegrated into the society of the gods:

\[\text{ἄφαιτο, μείδησεν δὲ θεά λευκωλένος Ἡρη, μείδησασα δὲ παιδὸς ἐδέξατο χειρὶ κυπέλλοιν.}\]

He spoke, and the goddess of the white arms Hera smiled at him, and smiling she accepted the goblet out of her son's hand.

Thus when she has been significantly cheered, she again enters into a positive exchange with someone, and once again is 'white-armed.' When she becomes an integrated participant in her society, the narrator calls Hera 'white-armed.' The audience is made aware of her whiteness whenever she performs a positive feminine role (obedient
wife, agreeable mother, concerned guardian) in relation to those around her.

I should anticipate some objections to my argument: some may find problematic my attempts to locate the poet's preference for one epithet over another in particular contexts, especially since the circumstance of the composition of this poem is too much unknown: if the poem was indeed composed as part of an oral tradition (or even as the crowning achievement of that tradition) then one or another epithet may have been attached to different episodes in the poets' repertoire. I must still insist on the significance of those contexts in which Hera is 'white-armed.' As I have demonstrated above, the narrator often calls her by different epithets even within the same episode: this would contradict the notion that an epithet might attach itself to an episode and thereby be merely conventional. And even if one should argue that the scene with Zeus and the scene with Hephaestus (both book 1) are in origin two distinct episodes, the fact that these epithets attach themselves to episodes so different in tone also attests to the connotations of the epithets.

Others may find fault with the fact that, while looking at those contexts in which Hera is described as 'white-armed.' I seem to be overlooking the fact that the other noun that is part of that noun-epithet phrase may also be important: perhaps the poet chose one phrase over the other because he wanted to emphasize Hera in her capacity as 'goddess' (θεά) or 'lady' (ποτνία). And yet it is very difficult to surmise what distinction is made with a choice between these two words: while it might be tempting to argue from book 1 that Hera is
'lady' (and not goddess) in her interactions with Zeus. Her consort.
the same clear distinction is not observable later on in the poem: Hera
is also called the 'ox-eyed lady' in interactions with Aphrodite
(14.222), Sleep (14.263), and Helios (18.239). So despite some
hesitation. I must insist that there is meaning here: the characteristics
associated with the epithet λευκόλενος are those of sympathy,
assistance, and acquiescence as these are manifested in the female
goddess.

Mortal women are also described (fifteen times) as 'white-
armed' (λευκόλενος) in the Iliad and the Odyssey. When it modifies the
name of a mortal woman, the adjective always occurs in the middle of
the line: it begins at the second syllable of the third foot and ends
before the fifth foot of the line. In these instances the adjective
certainly refers to the fairness of women who live their lives within
the household: in fact, in six of the fifteen instances the adjective is
explicitly linked with interior spaces within the home.²¹ For example,
Helen is 'white-armed' (Il. 3.121) when Iris (125) found her “in the
chamber: she was weaving a great web” (τὴν ὅ τε ἔφεν μεγαρφη ἢ ὅ ἐκ
μεγαν ἰστον ἔοαιν). This portrayal of Helen (renowned for her beauty)
occupied with the approved Greek woman's activity suggests that the

²⁰ Although the color distinction clearly coincides with a class distinction, the epithet
does not apply only to the highest class, since it also describes a general class of
maidservants, presumably those who attend the ladies of the house, and thus also work
and live primarily indoors (see 7.239. 18.198, and 19.60). Presumably there are varying
degrees of whiteness: the maidservants may be 'white-armed,' but when Nausikaa
stands among them she is whiter still.

²¹ In these lines the epithet is followed by the phrase ἐν μεγαρότουν or ἐκ μεγαρότοι: Iliad
6.371 and 6.377: Odyssey 7.12. 18.198, and 19.60: I am counting the example from Iliad
3.121 (discussed in the text above) as the sixth example.
epithet is connected with appearance, space and activity that is conventionally (and ideally) feminine.22

The other mortal women whose names are linked with the epithet (Nausikaa, Andromache, and Arete) are all likewise portrayed as positive examples of womanhood: the narrator draws our attention to their whiteness as they perform their feminine roles (whether that be laundering clothing, lamenting losses in war, or welcoming guests in the home) in the proper fashion. The Nausikaa passage seems worthy of more comment, since the associations of whiteness here are many. In this passage, the narrator invites us to look at this young woman as she frolics with her handmaidens (Od. 6.99-101): "But when she and her maids had taken their pleasure in eating, they all threw off their veils for a game of ball, and among them it was Nausikaa of the white arms (λευκώμενοι χείλες) who led in the dancing." The act of unveiling combined with the reference to Nausikaa's bare arms indicate that the epithet is meant to draw attention to both Nausikaa's vulnerability and her desirability.23 The combination of these two attributes in this context suggests a third: her nubility. Indeed, Nausikaa makes the trip to the river because she is concerned about having clean clothes for her wedding (6.25-70), Odysseus comments specifically on her desirability as a bride (6.158-161), and Alcinoos later offers her to Odysseus as a bride (6.309-316).

22 This passage has much in common with the Lucretia episode in Livy's Ab Urbe Condita (1.57). There too the emphasis is on the sight of the woman engaged in this traditional female activity. On the significance of the sight of women's bodies in Livy's history, see S. Joshel, "The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy's Lucretia and Verginia." in Pornography and Representation, ed. Richlin (Oxford 1992) 112-130.

23 On the erotic connotations of the act of unveiling, see Nagler (above, note 15) page 44-60, esp. 47.
The same associations are suggested in the passage in which we see Penelope after Athene has enhanced her appearance (Od. 18.195-96):

καὶ μὲν μακροτέρην καὶ πάσσουνα θήκεν ἱόσθαι,
λευκοτέρην δ' ἄρα μὲν θήκε πρώτοι ἐλέφαντος.

She made her taller for the eye to behold, and thicker, and she made her whiter than sawn ivory.

Again the narrator directs the audience’s gaze as we (like the suitors) size her up. As she shows herself to the suitors in this passage, her whiteness is linked explicitly to her nubility and desirability. At the same time, her name alone calls to mind another attribute: fidelity. As I suggested above (in the discussion of the Xenophon passage) the whiteness of a woman’s complexion also might be interpreted as a sign that she has not been sneaking out of the house to carry on an illicit affair. And so, the epithet seems to have had connotations for Penelope as wife as well as for Penelope as potential bride. In both roles she embodies the ideal feminine characteristics: fidelity, desirability, vulnerability, and nubility.24

**whiteness in lyric poetry**

Other poets (epic and lyric) also used this epithet to describe women -- immortal as well as mortal. Such poets as Hesiod, Pindar and Bacchylides regularly employ it as an epithet for Hera and other immortals including Artemis, Persephone, Selene, Cytherea, and

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24 Notice that this epithet is not used to describe any of the immortal females (e.g. Kirke, Kalypso) whom Odysseus encounters in his travels. It may be that those women were not characterized by their whiteness because (although beautiful) they transgressed the rules for conventional Greek womanhood in that they were the masters of their households and lived without the companionship (or guardianship) of men.
Calliope, or even the mortals Harmonia, Thyone, and Europa. Many of these instances are rather brief and thus it is difficult to determine the force of the epithet in context. For example, in a fragment from Pindar (fr. 29), the poet presents a catalogue of potential subjects for his hymn, the last of which (line 6) is 'the marriage of white-armed Harmonia' (γαμον λευκωλένου Ἀρμονίας). Once again the epithet connotes nubility. The fragment ends here, so nothing more can be gleaned from the use of the epithet in this context apart from an impression that its presence in a list of potential Theban honorees indicates that the epithet communicates some degree of approval (i.e. this is a positive quality of a woman). Indeed, another of Pindar's odes mentions the marriage of Kadmos and Harmonia as an example of mortal happiness (Pythian 3. 91). Remarkably, Pindar uses the epithet in this same ode to describe Harmonia's daughter, Thyona (Pythian 3.98): here Thyona is mentioned as the recipient of the god Zeus' sexual attention. Thus, in all three of these passages, the epithet is used to describe someone who is ending her life as a maiden and becoming someone's wife. By explicitly describing the bride with this color term, the narrator creates a specular image of the maiden. He presents her to the audience as an ideal object of desire.

Two passages from Bacchylides 5 corroborate this impression that the adjective λευκωλενος conveys a visual impression of a female figure who is performing a positive feminine role. The adjective

25 Hera (Pind. Paean 6.87-88 and Bacch. 9.7-8), Artemis (Bacch. 5.99), Persephone (Hes. Theognis. 913), Selene (H. Hom. 32.17), Cytherea (Adesp. fr. 975(c) PMG), and Calliope (Bacch. 5.176); and the mortals Harmonia (Pind. fr. 29.6, Thyone (Pind. Pyth. 3.98), Europa (Bacch. 17.54), and Iole (Bacch. 16.27).
occurs first at line 99, in a passage in which Meleager is describing his father’s unsuccessful prayers to Artemis (lines 94-102): “It is hard for mortal men to turn aside the purpose of the gods; for otherwise my father, horse-smiting Oeneus, would have checked the anger of august Artemis, white-armed (λευκώλενος), bud-garlanded, when he entreated her with sacrifices of many goats and red-backed cattle.” Meleager’s description of his father’s sacrifices contains the very words of the invocation: the three adjectives (καλυκοστεφανος, σεμνα, λευκώλενος) are words more appropriate in the prayer of a petitioner who seeks the help of a god than they would be in the complaint of someone whose requests have been denied. They describe the goddess when she is still perceived as (at least potentially) beneficent. More important, two of these adjectives are visually descriptive: they offer an image which reflects the desire of the suppliant. In the prayer, the suppliant imagines what a helpful female looks like. After his request has been denied, as he describes the wrath of the goddess, Meleager describes the goddess with a very different set of adjectives (lines 122-24): she has become “the fierce goddess of the hunt, Leto’s daughter (δαίφρων ... ἅγροτέρα / Λατοῦς θυγατηρ). Another goddess is described with this epithet (‘white-armed’) near the end of the poem (line 176): with this single epithet he invokes the muse Calliope, and bids her to redirect the song. Once again the narrator uses the epithet to create a visual picture of the goddess as she grants his request. He describes her as white as imagines her acting on his behalf. Whiteness is clearly associated with the visual picture of women who please men.
**whiteness in tragedy**

Since tragedies were performed before an audience as a spectacle, it might seem that the visual words that occur in these texts are redundant: they repeat things that the audience already sees. But most of the passages that contain references to whiteness would not have been performed on stage: references to whiteness almost always occur in speeches that describe action offstage. Thus even in the context of a performance, visual description is important: it directs the imagination of the audience as that audience forms a mental picture of what is happening offstage. As we will see, visually descriptive words tell the audience both what to look at and how to feel about it as they look: they direct the audience’s interpretation of the mask.

The compound epithet (λευκόκρος) is not found in extant tragedy, but the color term (λευκός) is often used in descriptions of women. As in lyric and epic poetry, the adjective is rarely used by female characters to describe themselves; more often someone else (often a messenger or servant) uses it to describe a woman. In tragedy, then, it does seem to signify a class distinction, and the servants who describe their mistresses with this adjective both signal this distinction and convey respect. The simple color term is never used to describe a woman (never ‘white Iphigenia’) but is very often seen in combination with a part of the body (‘the white cheek of Iphigenia’ - Euripides’ *Electra* 1023). In tragedy (especially in Euripides) the adjective is used to describe women’s body parts: neck
(or throat), cheek, hands. These are the parts of the body that were exposed even when a woman was fully dressed: thus they were the most visible parts of the body (associated with desirability) and, by virtue of their nakedness, also the most vulnerable. The white throat, as Loraux reminds us, is both a place of feminine beauty and the part of the body through which the knife pierces or by which a woman hangs.

The woman who is associated with the adjective in tragedy is very often a potential bride -- a young maiden about to be wed. She is also very often a character with no speaking part in the drama: rather she is a bride exchanged between two men. Thus the adjective seems to carry connotations of youthfulness and desirability as well as the attendant traits of passivity and submission: her whiteness signals that she is the appropriate object of male desire. But in tragedy the women described as white are unsuccessful brides -- very often they are women whose lives are cut short either before the ritual or before the fulfillment of the marriage in children. So the whiteness also conveys their status as youthful victims. Very often in tragedy these

26 The Greek words παρείς (an epic form, usually found in the plural) and παρην (an Ionic form, usually found in the singular) which are often translated as 'cheek' or 'jaw' literally mean 'the side of the face.' When the noun is used to refer to a part of a woman's body it often suggests that the woman being described has turned away from the speaker (or the speaker has turned away from her), and thus the speaker looks upon only the side of her face. This posture has at least two possible connotations: it might signal deference (as often when the gesture is accompanied by grieving) and/or it might signal concealment.


28 See V. Wohl, Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender, and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy (Austin 1998).
feminine body parts are described as white when the grief or death of 
a woman is described. Thus the adjective links the vulnerability and 
desirability of a woman.

There are four instances in extant tragedy where the adjective 
λεύκος is used to describe a woman's cheek. One example occurs in 
the well-known passage from Sophocles' Antigone, when a messenger 
reports on the death of the woman and her bridegroom (lines 1234-
41):

εἶδε ὁ ὄμομορος
αὐτῷ χολωθεὶς, ὡσὲρ εἶχ' ἐπενταθεὶς
ἡρεσε πλευρὰς μεσσον ἔγχος, ἐς ὁ ὕγρον
ἀγκῶν ἐτ' ἐμφύων παρθένως προσπτυσσέται,
καὶ φυσιῶν ὀξεῖοι ἐκβάλλει ῥοήν
λευκῇ παρείδα φοινικον σταλαγματος.
κείται δὲ νεκρός περὶ νεκρῆ, τὰ νυμφικά
τελὴ λαχῶν δεῖλαιος ἐν γὰρ 'Αἰδῶν δῶμοις

then the unhappy man, furious with himself, just as he was, 
pressed himself against the sword and drove it, half its length, 
into his side. Still living, he clasped the maiden in the bend of 
his feeble arm, and pouring forth a sharp jet of blood, he stained 
her white cheek. He lay, a corpse holding a corpse, having 
achieved his marriage rites, poor fellow, in the house of Hades.29

The audience imagines the scene that the messenger describes vividly 
because of his emphasis on the contrast between the color of her face 
(bloodless, hence white) and the color of his blood. The description of 
death is suffused with eroticism (the blood letting is described with 
sexual language (ἐκβάλλει ῥοήν): the bodies lie intertwined (κείται): he is 
said to have achieved his marriage rights (τὰ νυμφικά τελὴ). Their death 
is also their wedding:30 when the prince reaches for Antigone at the

29 This translation is by H. Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge, Mass. 1994).

30 On the parallels between the Greek wedding and funeral, see H.J. Rose, "The Bride of 
Hades," CP 20 (1925) 238-42; J. Redfield, "Notes on the Greek Wedding," Arethusa 15 
Marriage to Death (Princeton 1994).
time of his death, he reaches for a maiden (παρθένος). Thus the adjective describes the bloodless pallor of a corpse at the same time that it describes the beauty (fairness) of a woman at the age at which she become a bride.

The prominence of female characters in his plays explains the fact that all other examples of white cheeks occur in Euripides' work. One particular instance from his Electra has much in common with the Sophocles passage discussed above. In this passage, Clytemnestra describes the death of her daughter. Iphigenia (lines 1020-23):

κείνος δὲ παιδὰ τὴν ἐμὴν, Αχιλλέως
λέκτροις πείσας, ὑχετ' ἐκ δομῶν ἄγων
πρωμυνώχον Ἀυλὶν ἐνθ' ὑπερτείνας πυρὰς
λευκὴν δήμησε Ίφιγένης παρηδᾶ.

He took my child -- drawn by this lie from me, that she should wed Achilles. -- far from home to that fleet's prison, laid her on the pyre, and shore through Iphigeneia's snowy throat!31

Here again the girl whose cheek is being described as white is both bride and corpse: Clytemnestra intended to send her to her wedding but instead sent her to her death. This example differs from the Antigone example in one very important way: here the part of the body that is described as 'white' is also the part of the body that is wounded. Iphigenia's death is accomplished by cutting through this vulnerable (exposed) part of her body. The presence of the descriptive adjective invites the audience to look at this part of the bride's body (a place of beauty) at the same time as it marks this as the site of her death.

Iphigenia’s death is similarly described in *Iphigenia at Aulis.* Here an old servant tells Clytemnestra of her husband’s plan to kill her daughter (line 875): *φασάγαν λευκήν φονεύων τῆς ταλαιπώρου δέρην* (“severing with a sword your sad daughter’s white neck”). The adjective describes the most vulnerable part of the woman’s body in this prediction of her death. But in this play Iphigenia is much more than just a sacrificial victim: she is a bride who is denied her wedding: characters in the play make numerous references to the false pretenses (a wedding to Achilles) which led Clytemnestra to bring her daughter to Aulis (115 ff. and elsewhere). Thus the color term is used to describe a young woman about to married and (once again) she turns out to be a perpetual bride. The treatment of this situation takes an odd turn at the end of the drama: Iphigenia’s willingness to sacrifice her life for Greece makes her a model for womanhood (lines 1368 ff): Achilles envies Greece for its relationship with the maiden (1404-1416). Thus while her whiteness connotes that she exhibits a femininity of which Achilles approves, it also marks her as a perfect bride (desirable and vulnerable).

A scene in the *Hippolytus* features a description of Phaedra as white. As the chorus reports her death (lines 764-771), her whiteness is explicitly associated with desire and death:

```
ἀνθ’ ὤν οὐχ ὅσίων ἔρω—
tων δεινά φρένας Ἀφροδί—
τασ νόσω κατεκλαθῆ—
χαλεπά δ’ ὑπέραντλος οὐσα
συμφορᾶ, τεράμων
ἀπὸ νυμφιδίων κρεμαστῶν
ἀψεται ἀμοί βροχον
λευκὰ καθαρμούσα δειρα. . .
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The presage of the omen was true: Aphrodite has broken her spirit with the terrible sickness of impious love. The waves of destruction are over her head, from the roof of her room with its marriage bed. she is tying the twisted noose. And now it is around her fair white neck!32

The emphasis here is on Phaedra’s status as unsuccessful bride: she has chosen death as a substitute for the shame of her unrequited love for Hippolytus. In the passage preceding this one, the chorus had sung of the cursed arrangement between Phaedra and Theseus (line 757): she was led “to the benefit of a most unhappy wedlock” (κακονομοφοταταν ὀνασιν). That marriage was inauspicious: it created an impossible situation for Phaedra once she realized her love for her husband’s son. Here, just before the adjective describes her as white, she is presented as someone afflicted by the disease (νοσος) of desire: Aphrodite makes her white. As she ties the noose around her neck, the neck itself is described as white. Thus the adjective marks beauty (desirability) at the same time that it marks her for destruction. The vulnerability and beauty of her body is imagined as Phaedra becomes the victim of her own hand.

The Medea contains several occurrences of this adjective describing both Medea herself and the young princess. The first occurs at line 30. when the nurse reports on the extreme grief of her mistress:

\[
\text{κλυών άκουει νοσητῳμμενη φίλων,}
\text{ην μη ποτε στράφωσα πάλλεικοπ δέρνη}
\text{αυτη προσαυτην πατερ' ἀποιμωξῃ φίλων}
\text{καὶ γαλαν οίκους θ', οὺς προδοοσ' ἀφικετο}
\text{μετ' ἀνδρος ὡσφε νων ἀτιμάσας ἔχει.}
\]

This translation is by David Grene (Chicago 1942).
She is as deaf to the advice of her friends as a stone or a wave of
the sea, saying nothing unless perchance to turn her snow-white
neck and weep to herself for her dear father, her country, and
her ancestral house. All these she abandoned when she came
here with a man who has now cast her aside.\textsuperscript{33}

These lines invite the audience to notice Medea's whiteness (to
imagine her as a vulnerable and desirable woman) early in the play.

The position of the color reference in this report of her grief is
significant, since here Medea says that regrets all that she had done in
order to win the love of Jason: she regrets the violence that she did to
her father's family. In effect, the nurse describes Medea's "all-white
neck," as she reports Medea's wish to undo her transition from
maiden to wife.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, this passage also emphasizes the connection
between whiteness and youthful femininity. But the nurse's report
does not just convey her wish to be able to return to maidenhood; it
also emphasizes her suffering and extreme vulnerability. At this point
in the drama, Medea is still an extremely sympathetic figure: the nurse
describes her as the beautiful and helpless victim of recent decisions
and events.

The whiteness of Medea is noted only once more in the play.
Significantly, the speaker at this point is Jason. We see her through
his eyes as he comments on his wife's appearance (922-24):

\begin{quote}
\textit{αὐτή, τι χλωροῖς δακρύοις τεγγείς κόρας.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} All translations of the \textit{Medea} are by D. Kovacs (Cambridge, Mass. 1994).

\textsuperscript{34} The Greek concept of maidenhood differed from the contemporary one in a very
important way: it didn't include the idea of the hymen -- the barrier that sealed the body
of a virgin. Thus a woman was able to retain the status of maiden as long as she was
able to keep from her guardian knowledge that she had experienced sexual contact.
Widowhood was considered to be a second maidenhood: the loss of virginity was not
considered to be a permanent one. See G. Sissa. \textit{Greek Virginity} (Cambridge, Mass.
1990).
στρέψασα λείκην ἐμπαγεν παρηδο,  
κούκ ἀσμενή τονδ ἐξ ἐμοῦ δεκη λόγον;

You there, why do you dampen your eyes with pale tears and turn your white cheek away, and why are you not pleased to hear these words from me?

In this passage, Jason observes and interprets his wife’s grief and the the position of her body: he expresses surprise that his announcement has not caused her pleasure. As Jason looks at his bride, he sees her whiteness as a marker of beauty and passivity. These lines are ironic since he misreads her: he assumes that she will yield to his will. But the color term has another possible connotation, since what Jason interprets as a surprising lack of enthusiasm for his good news about his arrangement for the children, is actually Medea’s horror at the thought of the murder she feels she must commit. The paleness of Medea’s cheek signals her extreme sense of helplessness, distress and fear -- her utter vulnerability. Her physical gesture (and her whiteness) express both her strong emotions and her desire to conceal them.

The other references to whiteness in the Medea occur near the end of the poem, where the messenger describes the death of the princess Glauce. The princess, who has no speaking part in the play, is (like Iphigeneia) a positive model of conventional femininity. In the description of her death, the messenger describes her as ‘white’

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35 The combination of the two color terms (χλωρός and λείκος) suggests that the latter may have some of the same connotations as the former. See Irwin (above, note 5) 31-78.

36 Boedeker notes that both Medea and the princess are white: she places this observation in the context of a larger argument, contending that the princess resembles Medea as she might have been before she married Jason. See D. Boedeker, “Becoming Medea: Assimilation in Euripides,” in Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art. ed. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (Princeton 1997) 127-148.
three different times. The first reference occurs when Medea’s children deliver her gifts to the princess (1144-49):

δέσποινα δ’ ἦν νῦν ἄντι σοῦ θαυμάζομεν,
πρὶν μὲν τέκνων σῶν εἰσιδεῖν ἑτυμωρία,
ἐπίθυμον εἰχ’ ὀφθαλμὸν εἰς Ἰασονάς
ἐπείτα μὲν τοῖς προκαλύψιμοι ὄμματα
λείκην τ’ ἀπεστρεφ’ ἐμπαλν παρηῖδα,
παῖδων μύσαχθείσοι ἐισόδους.

Here the mistress we now honor instead of you, before she saw the two children, had eyes only for Jason. Then she veiled her eyes and turned her white cheek away, disgusted at seeing the children come in.

The princess, the woman whose cheek is described as ‘white,’ is a woman anticipating marriage: she is both young and feminine as she encounters her prospective bride-groom. At first she looks directly at Jason with unconcealed desire, then veils her eyes in a gesture of sexual chastity. Her whiteness is associated explicitly with this gesture, and hence with her status as a desirable maiden. The physical gesture is interpreted by the messenger as one that barely hides her disgust at this reminder of Jason’s children and wife. This concealment of her negative feelings about the children is significantly linked to her status as a marriageable woman: it broadcasts her modesty at the same time that it suggests animosity toward Jason’s former (barbarian) wife.

The adjective suggests the princess’s beauty when it occurs at line 1164: here it describes the lady’s foot as she gazed at herself dressed in the gown and crown (1163-66):

κάπετ’ ἀναστάσι’ ἐκ θρόνων διερχεται
στέγας, ἀβρόν βαίνουσα παλλεύκω ποδί,
δύρως ὑπερχαίρουσα, πολλὰ πολλάκις
τένοντ’ ἐξὸρθον ὄμμασι οἰκοποιμένη.
And getting up from her seat she paraded about the room, her white feet making dainty steps, entranced with the gifts, glancing back again and again at the straight tendon of her leg.

Here the compound adjective ('all-white') is especially emphatic: with it, the messenger invites the audience to gaze with him at the princess and to appreciate her beauty. There is room also in this text for audience members to identify with the princess and to look at her with her (σκοπουμένη). This participle suggests that the princess enjoys the sight of her own white body; she participates in the discourse that constructs her femininity.

The adjective occurs just once more in the Medea; here it describes the flesh of the Greek princess as she was dying (1188-89):

πέπλοι δὲ λεπτοὶ, σῶν τέκνων δωρηματα, / λευκὴν ἔδαπτον σάρκα τῆς δυσδαιμονος (“the fine-spun gown, gift of your sons, was eating into the wretched woman's white flesh”). Here again her whiteness connotes both the desirability of the young bride and the grotesque appearance of her body afflicted with pain. It emphasizes the connection between her beauty and vulnerability. Earlier in the same report, the messenger had described a transformation in the woman's appearance (1168-1175): "And then there was a terrible sight to behold. For her color changed (χρωταν γαρ ἀλλαξασα), and with legs trembling she staggered back sidelong . . . white foam (λευκον ἀφρόν) coming between her lips and her eyes starting out of their sockets and her skin all pale and bloodless (αἵμα τ᾽ οὐκ ἐνὸν χροί).” A change in the appearance of her skin occurred: the absence of blood made her skin look especially pale. Here the color 'white' -- the same color that had described Glaucce when she was lively and lovely -- now describes her as she lies.
dying. Now whiteness connotes not just beauty and vulnerability, but also lifelessness. Once again the ideal of beauty is met by a woman only at death: she only really becomes white (bloodless) when she ceases to live. This suggests that the qualities associated with femininity (desirability, vulnerability, submission) all direct women toward death.

The final example of whiteness in tragedy certainly supports conclusion. A maidservant describes Alcestis’ skin as white after the lady has agreed to die for her husband. In this passage the maidservant boasts that Alcestis is the most noble woman in the world: she reports on her preparations for death (159): “When she learned that the fated day had come, she bathed her white skin (λευκὸν χρώα) in fresh water.” With this reference to the color of her skin, the audience is invited to imagine (and desire) her naked body as she prepares herself to die for her husband. As a woman preparing for death, she also resembles a bride: she is as close to white as a living woman can get. As an ideal (submissive) wife, she becomes even more desirable.

There are several other references in tragedy to the whiteness of women’s hands, wrists, and arms. These references occur in passages describing lamentation and other expressions of extreme vulnerability: the chorus cries, ἐπὶ καρὰ τε λευκοπῆχες κτυπουσ χερῶν (“let blows of white hands rain down on the head!”) in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* 1351; as the victim of the attack of her son, Clytemnestra shrieked and beat her breast with her white arm (λευκὸν δ’ ἐμβαλόσα τῆχυν στέρνοις in *Orestes* 1467); Creusa complains that Apollo overpowered her by grasping her wrists (λευκοῖς . . . καρποίσιν.
Thus in each of these passages, the adjective describes the part of the body by which a woman is harmed: it connotes her helplessness and vulnerability, as it connotes her beauty.

In sum, references to 'whiteness' in Greek poetry are linked with those qualities that were associated with conventional femininity. We see the full range of associations in epic poetry: the term describes Hera when she was either helpful or obedient; it describes Penelope and Nausikaa when they were preparing for marriage. In each of these contexts, the adjective clearly connotes desirability and vulnerability. In epic poetry, the color term is very often linked with a woman’s nubility -- thus it has the connotations of youthfulness, beauty, desirability, and submission. In tragedy, we see these same associations together with a new one: in this genre whiteness is used to describe the color of a woman as she becomes a bloodless corpse. These texts make the disturbing suggestion that the feminine ideal can only be realized by a dead woman.

**Deviant Bodies and the Associations of Blackness**

Since whiteness is the marker of femininity (and all that word implies) in Greek antiquity, we might imagine that blackness is the marker of masculinity. But how should we interpret whiteness on a

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37 One additional example has an ironic force: in the *Bacchae* (line 1206), Agave describes what the thiasos did “with the white fingers of our own hands” (λευκοπτικες χειρων ἄκματοι). By using the adjective λευκος here, Agave emphasizes the incongruity of the delicacy of the women’s bodies and the violence of their deed.
male body? And how should we read blackness on female bodies? In this section I will examine deviations from the color norms; I will study passages from Aristophanic comedy (especially the *Thesmophorizousae*) to find out how to read whiteness on a male body. I will discuss the few black female figures who are represented in ancient art and literature: the assemblywomen in Aristophanes' play of that same name (the *Ecclesiazousae*), the Erinyes, and Lamia. I will argue that we should not assume that blackness simply marks a woman as masculine or that whiteness marks a man as effeminate. Rather, such deviations from the 'norm' (ideal) mark a body as both masculine and feminine. Such a body confounds the categories, and for that reason is often signalled out for comment, mockery, or even directions for how to look and act.

The opening scene in Aristophanes' *Thesmophorizousae* teaches us how to interpret the color of a man's body. Two exchanges in particular imply that blackness on a man marked masculinity, while whiteness marked effeminacy. The first exchange takes place between Euripides and his oafish kinsman, Mnesilochos. When Mnesilochos indicates that he is unfamiliar with Agathon, Euripides begins to describe him. Then Mnesilochos interrupts with this question (31): μῶν ὁ μέλας, ὁ καρτερός; (“do you mean the dark burly guy?”). The answer to the question (“oh no, quite different”) implies that, rather than being typically masculine (black and strong), this Agathon was rather effeminate. The second exchange occurs slightly

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38 Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae* is a male whose whiteness (λευκή line 457) marks him as effeminate, but does not make him a woman. For Pentheus' assessment of his appearance, see lines 453-59.
later in the play when Euripides and Mnesilochos are deciding which of them should dress as a woman: Euripides says to his companion: σὺ δ’ εὐπρόσωπος, λευκός, ἔξυρημένος / γυναικόφωνος, ἀπαλός, εὕπρεπής ἰδεῖν. ("But you've a pretty face. it's fair, shaved clean, soft and pretty, plus you've a woman's voice"). This exchange again emphasizes the visual aspect of femininity almost exclusively: Mnesilochos would make a good woman, because he is pretty to look at. His whiteness is listed as an important attribute of his "femininity."

Aristophanes also plays with the associations of color and gender in his Ecclesiazousae. In this play, a group of women plan to infiltrate the assembly (ἐκκλησία) and transfer the governing power of the city to its women. In order to gain access to the assembly, the women disguise themselves as men. It is precisely this putting on of masculinity that interests us: what does a woman have to do to become a man (or just look like one)? There are three elements of the women's disguise: they put on clothes, hair, and color. In their conversations with each other the women in this play reveal their strategy: they are letting their underarm hair grow (61-62, and 65-7). they are spending time outdoors tanning their skin (62-4), they are donning beards (68-72) as well as men's shoes, walking-sticks, and overcloaks (73-75). Thus apart from assuming the clothing and accessories typically worn by men, they also plan to change their bodies in two important ways: they cease to depilate and wear false beards on their faces and they expose their skin to the sun. The passage detailing this second strategy is worth quoting in full (62-64):

and when my husband started off to the market-place. I'd oil my body and stand all day decocting in the sun.

The implications of this passage were no doubt clear to Aristophanes' audience: nevertheless the scholiast provides the following comment:

ωστε μέλαινα γενέσθαι ώς ἄνηρ ("so as to become dark like a man").

Clearly this passage implies that darkness was associated with masculinity, even if that darkness was on a woman's body. In order to make her body "dark like a man" a women must engage in activity normally reserved for men: oiling the body (as before vigorous exercise) and exposure to the sun.

How successful is this strategy? Are we to think that masculinity is something so easily assumed? Two passages from later on in the play suggest an answer to these questions. For instance, when the women (posing as men) have taken their place in the assembly, some male assembly members comment that they (the pale members of the group) must be shoemakers (383-7):

πλείστος ἄνθρωπων ὁχλος, ὃς οὐδενομένος, ἢδε ἀδρός ἐς τὴν πυκνα. καὶ δήτα πάντας οὐκετοτόμοις ἡκάζομεν ὁρώντες αὐτούς. οὐ γαρ ἀλλ' ὑπερφυῶς ὣς λευκοπληθής ἦν οἷον ἡκλησία.

There gathered such a crowd about the Pynx, you never saw the like: such pale-faced fellows: just like shoemakers we all declared; and strange it was to see how pallid-packed the whole Assembly looked.
Thus it seems that despite the women’s best efforts to alter the appearance of their bodies and assume a masculine darkness, they had only partially achieved their goal: they resembled shoemakers -- a lower class of men who, because their work was done in the shade, had the lightest skin color.  

Less than forty lines later, the same assembly member comments again on the paleness of the crowd and a certain speaker in particular (427-33:)

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μετὰ τοῦτο τοίνυν εὕπρεπής νεανίας
λευκός τις ἀνεπηνότα, ὁμοίος Νικιά.
δημηγορήσων, κάπεξείρησαν λέγειν
ὡς χρή παραδοῦναι ταῖς γυναιξί την πόλιν.
εἷς ἑθορμήσαν κἀνεκραγον ὡς εὖ λέγοι,
τὸ σκυτωτομικὸν πλῆθος· οἱ ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἀγρών
ἀνεβοβοᾶριζαν.
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Then, after him, there bounded up to speak a spruce and pale-faced youth, like Nicias. And he declared we ought to place the State into the hands of (whom do you think?) the women! Then the whole mob of shoemakers began to cheer like mad: whilst all the country folk hooted and hissed.

This passage further emphasizes a distinction between two sorts of men: those who do men’s work (the country folk) and those who do work that is suspiciously like women’s work (indoors). The passage also indicates to us that women who try to pass as men will only be moderately successful: indeed, they will resemble only moderately successful men (i.e. men who themselves resemble real men only a little).

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*40 The act of looking (ἰδεῖν) at their bodies to make this judgement is emphasized here.

*41 See Xenophon *Oeconomicus* 7 on how the occupation of being καλος κάγωδος requires one to keep occupied in business outside of the house. This division of labor is presented as one that was created by the gods and sanctioned by law.
It may be useful to formulate an even more general theory from the evidence in Aristophanes. Clearly whiteness (or fairness) is associated with the feminine and blackness (darkness) with the masculine. Also clear from Aristophanes is that transgressions from the norm are always worthy of comment and ridicule: thus men who appear to be fairer than normal are somehow less than manly, but not quite womanly; conversely, women who appear to be darker than normal do not pass as men without comment, but they are compared to those men who themselves lack masculine qualities. My point here is that transgressions from the norm (in terms of the color conventions and their associations with gender) do not push the transgressor fully into a separate category (i.e. from man to woman) but they always push him/her into that place between categories where distinctions are difficult to make. Thus the women who dress up as men do not pass unnoticed in the assembly: instead they are conspicuously white and assumed to be effeminate men. A woman does not become a man by virtue of her blackness, but her blackness does suggest that she is not behaving as a woman should. Deviance from the color norm is always a sign of deviant gender.

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* provides us with a fascinating example of a group of females who are described as 'black' (μελας or κελαινος): the Erinyes. As we will see, the blackness of these female demons is

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Aeschylus associates the Erinyes with these adjectives several times in his extant work: in addition to the passages cited below, these include *Eumenides* 183, 370 and 832 and *Seven Against Thebes* 699 and 988. Thus blackness may be said to be a regular feature of their depiction in Aeschylus. The Erinyes are not described with these adjectives in Hesiod's *Theogony*, however. There Hesiod tells of the birth of these deities from the blood of Ouranos, and in this context he mentions not their color, but their strength (185): "for all the bloody drops which spurted were received by Gaia; as the year revolved, she bore the strong Erinyes and great Giants." The absence of these modifiers signals not so much an absence of meaning in the text of Hesiod, but an excess
consistently linked with their place between boundaries: they occupy a liminal place, between the conventionally masculine and feminine.\textsuperscript{43}

The chorus first mentions them in the \textit{Agamemnon} (461-467):

\begin{quote}
töv poluktonwv yap oýk
\äskopoi theoi, kelaì-
nai ò' 'Erinymes xronï

\textit{T}uχ\nu trov ònt' ònèv dikas
\pall}ntvxeì tvbaì bìov

\textit{T}hèiaì 'àmauron, èn ò' àì-

\textit{St}oiòs tēlē\vth}ntos ou}t}ìs àl-
\ka:
\end{quote}

The gods fail not to mark those who have killed many. The black Furies stalking the man fortunate beyond all right wrench back against the set of his life and drop him into darkness.

There among the ciphers\textsuperscript{44} there is no more comfort in power.\textsuperscript{45}

Notice that here, in their first mention in the trilogy, the Erinyes are described by the adjective \textit{kelaìnòs}. In this passage the chorus of old men only mentions the Erinyes in passing, and yet it mentions their blackness, their perseverance in the hunt, and their role in the levelling of those who rise too high. Thus the blackness of these avenging spirits reflects their role in bringing into obscurity the overly

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\textsuperscript{43} Their blackness is also a sign of their association with death, but this should not tempt us to neglect the Erinyes' gender identity, which is clearly a matter of emphasis in these passages.

\textsuperscript{44} The Greek is \textit{èn ò' àìt}òìs têlē\vth}ntos, which rendered literally means "among the unseen of the dead man:" this notion of the invisibility of the dead recalls the Danaids wish that they be come a black cloud and thus become invisible (cf. \textit{Suppliants}, lines 779 ff.)

\textsuperscript{45} This translation is by R. Lattimore (Chicago 1953).
successful person. Their association with death, the ultimate obscurity, is obviously related to this same role. The gender of these monsters is not a matter of emphasis in this passage, although it is clear from the adjectival ending.

After the death of Clytemnestra, the gender of the Erinyes becomes a point of emphasis. In opening lines of the Eumenides, the play for which they form the chorus, the Priestess describes the audience’s first view of the Erinyes on stage (45-59):

In front of this man slept a startling company of women lying all upon the chairs. Or not women, I think I call them rather gorgons, only not gorgons either, since their shape is not the same .... I saw some creatures painted in a picture once, who tore the food from Phineus, only these had no wings, that could be seen: they are black and utterly repulsive, and they snore with breath that drives one back. From their eyes drips the foul ooze, and their dress is such as is not right to wear in the presence of the gods’ statues, nor even into any human house. I have never seen the tribe that owns this company nor known what piece of earth can claim with pride it bore such brood, and without hurt and tears for labor given.

Thus the prophetess originally describes the Erinyes as women, but then thinks better of it, and revises her description: these are not women, really, but more like some kind of monster. Clearly, the
Erinyes are female and yet not feminine. Their appearance (including their blackness) and behavior complicates their assignment to a category.\textsuperscript{46} but these black women remain women: they are never compared to men. In a sense, this passage recalls the passages from Aristophanes quoted above: the color of these women indicates that they are not like women are supposed to be -- they are not white, desirable, and vulnerable. Even so, their color does not serve to push them out of the category of women altogether; their blackness does not make them into men.

As the speaker of these lines searches for the most appropriate comparandum, she creates suspense. She does not actually state what it is that is so startling about these creatures until line 52, where she describes them with two adjectives ('black and utterly repulsive') and then explains further with a series of attributes. By postponing the visually descriptive words, she gives them emphasis: the audience must listen to the priestess' struggle to place the Erinyes in a category before it can know the reason for this struggle. The description that follows certainly explains this, for the most striking feature of the Erinyes' representation is their tendency to escape place: their bodies

\textsuperscript{46} Similarities between this passage and Pelasgus' initial encounter with the Danaids are extremely suggestive. In both passages, details about the physical, visible appearance of black women are noted, and conclusions about their identity based on their appearance are proposed. Froma Zeitlin also notes some similarities: "Both groups constitute a collective of women at odds with the city, who will be integrated into the city's norms only through the persuasive force of a peitho that pertains to gender and politics alike" (170). Zeitlin never comments on the fact that both groups are described by Aeschylus as 'black'; in fact she omits this detail when she summarizes their description in the Eumenides (97). See F. Zeitlin, Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature (Chicago 1996).
leak (more than normal female bodies), their dress is appropriate neither in a god's or a mortal's house, they are not the children of people or of earth. The Erinyes clearly have a liminal status: they occupy a place at the edges of normative boundaries.

A bit later in the passage, when the Erinyes are still sleeping and dreaming, the priestess recounts some other rather interesting details about these creatures (67-73):

See now how I have overcome these raving creatures. The repulsive maidens have been stilled to sleep, those gray and aged children, they with whom no mortal man, no god, nor even any beast, will have to do. It was because of evil they were born, because they hold the evil darkness of the Pit below Earth, loathed alike by men and by the heavenly gods.

The language in this passage continues to emphasize the Erinyes' resistance to categories. Their description is characterized by references to the doubleness of their identity: they are both marriageable (κόραι) and repulsive (κατάπτυστοι): they are both old (γραῖαι παλαιαί) and young (παιδές). As the passage explains, the consequence of their association with death is permanent maidenhood: no one ("no mortal man, no god, nor even any beast") will marry them. Their blackness, then, connotes both their association with death and their consequent unfemininity: these two aspects of their identity are linked

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inextricably together. Therefore we should not ignore the fact that when this passage conjures up a visual picture of the Erinyes, it forces us to consider women who are not white -- not beautiful, not vulnerable, not desirable. This visual image (although clearly dependent on black’s association with death and obscurity) also participates in the convention of associating women with whiteness. If we consider them in these terms, the Erinyes clearly do not measure up: they push the boundaries of what it means to be a woman.

Lamia, a child-killing demon, is another creature of the Greek imagination who as a black female does not act as a female should. The simple fact that this female does not nurture the young but instead kills them places her outside the category of feminine. Other details from her representation on a vase painting confirm this placement. Sarah Iles Johnston describes and interprets this painting:

A lekythos dated to the fifth century shows a naked, ithyphallic woman who, tied to a palm tree, is being tortured by satyrs. Her belly sags out over her groin, her breasts are horribly pendulous, fang-like teeth make her appearance frightening as well as repulsive. Her facial features and hair follow the conventions used in antiquity to represent blacks. The palm trees and the negroid features suggest an African setting, which would align with the myths that made Libya Lamia’s home.

By stressing the fact that these females’ blackness reflects their status as unfeminine women, I do not mean to neglect the other obvious associations between blackness and death. These associations are undeniably present and find much support from these same passages: for example, notice that the Erinyes “hold the evil darkness (οἴκοτον) of the Pit below Earth” (line 72). But the association of blackness and death has been well-documented (see E. Vermeule, Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry [Berkeley 1979] and Irwin [above, note 5] 173-93). I am more interested in the implications of ‘blackness’ in these texts for the characters’ gender identity.


178
As a woman who is black (and so not beautiful and vulnerable). Lamia is already undesirable. This evidence that she was represented as a hermaphrodite obviously pushes her further out of the category of ideal woman: pictured with both phallus and breasts, she resists easy classification as either a man or a woman. Clearly, a very important part of Lamia's representation as a demon involves emphasizing the ways that she does not fit as a woman.

Although the examples of Lamia and the Erinyes were complicated by the associations of those demons with death,\textsuperscript{50} it is important to note how much the deviance of those creatures involved comment on their appearance, and consequently on their lack of femininity and desirability. The blackness of a female body marks it as profoundly unfeminine. Even in the case of these demons, their blackness does not move them out of the category of woman altogether, but it complicates their assignment to this category.

**Representations of Men and Women in the Suppliants**

The text of the *Suppliants* is remarkable in that it provides us with depictions of both men and women who are described as 'black': thus we can measure the accuracy and limits of our interpretation of the normal color conventions and their implications for both genders. In the discussion that follows I will consider three questions: first, can the interpretation of blackness on a male body ever be uncomplicated by factors such as ethnicity and environment? second, how and why is

the performance of femininity in the Suppliants directed? three, what is the significance of the blackness of the Danaids? when does their color matter? As the play advances, we will see that gendered categories cannot be easily maintained: over and over again characters interrogate the meaning and associations of color and gender, and the answers they find are not always the same.

the construction (and destruction) of masculinity

As we noted above, even among Greek males, blackness normally connotes masculinity, while fairness connotes effeminacy. The depiction of the sons of Aegyptus involves a further complication. However, since these 'black' men are also non-Greeks: their representation is also bound up in the commonplace association of non-Greek men (especially men from the East) and effeminacy.\(^{51}\)

Thus, their depiction will feature a clash of conventions -- with their blackness signifying two different (and even opposed) attributes.

The color of the sons of Aegyptus is mentioned several times in the play. In the first stasimon, the women mention their cousins' color as they pray for their death (524-30):

\[\begin{align*}
\text{άναξ} & \, \text{άνάκτων, μακάρων} \\
\text{μακάρτατε} & \, \text{καὶ} \, \text{τελέων} \\
\text{τελειότατον} & \, \text{κράτος}, \, \text{δήλω} \, \text{Ζεὺς,} \\
\text{πυθοῦ} & \, \text{τε} \, \text{καὶ} \, \text{γένεις} \, \text{οὐί} \\
\text{ἄλευσον} & \, \text{ἀνδρῶν} \, \text{βριθν} \, \text{εὐ} \, \text{συγγίος} \\
\text{λίμνιαι} & \, \text{δ᾽} \, \text{ἐμβαλε} \, \text{πορφυροείδει} \\
\text{τάν} & \, \text{μελανόζυγ} \, \text{ἀταν.}
\end{align*}\]

Lord of lords, most blessed of the blessed, most powerful fulfiller of fulfillers, mighty Zeus! Hearken, and in just abhorrence ward off from your race the insolence of men: plunge into the purple sea the black-benched bane.

Since the Danaids are referring to the general approach of the men in their ship as 'the black-benched bane' (certainly the ship without its passengers would not deserve such a description), the adjective must also have implications for our initial impression of the sons of Aegyptus. The fact that the women are carefully differentiating themselves from their stalkers in terms of biological sex (note the emphatic position of the noun 'men' (ἀνδρῶν - 528) and the contrast that is drawn in the next stanza) suggests that the associations of blackness and masculinity are at work in this context. Finally, while the compound word (μελανόζυγος - 530) technically refers to the men's ship, any reference to yoking in this context, may also suggest the yoke of Aphrodite. With this phrase, the Danaids associate the sons of Aegyptus with both marriage and an aggressive masculinity.

The associations become more clear when, about two hundred lines later, Danaus announces that he has caught sight of the men's ship (719-20):

πρέπουσι δ' ἀνδρείς ναύοι μελαγχίμοις
γυναικεῖοι λευκῶν ἐκ πεπλωμάτων ἰδεῖν

The men on board are plainly visible with their black limbs standing forth from their white clothing.

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52 Ships are very commonly "black" (μέλανς) in the Iliad: in the first book alone this noun/epithet combination occurs five times (1.141, 300, 329, 433, 485). Wallace (above, note 1) comments on this use of color in Homer: "Ships are regularly black, μέλανς. This probably refers to their appearance when at a distance on the sea. Any color looks black in such circumstances" (28). Another explanation, of course, is that ships made of wood probably turned black due to exposure to the elements.
This assertion that the blackness of the sons of Aegyptus makes the men conspicuous stands in contrast to the wishes of the Danaids that their blackness enable them to disappear (lines 776-824). The contrast suggests the possibility that the interpretation of blackness can be influenced: while the daughters of Danaus associate themselves and their blackness with invisibility, the sons of Aegyptus wear white clothing in order to enhance the darkness of their appearance. Thus, as black men, they are conspicuous. Their masculinity is also a matter of emphasis. Note that the word used to denote the sons of Aegyptus is next after the particle: here they are not described metaphorically as a 'bane' or even referred to as the cousins or even a 'swarm,' but they are 'men' (πρέπουσι δ' ἀνδρεῖς). The color term, placed in an emphatic position at the end of the line (μελαγχίμως), confirms this.

The blackness of the sons of Aegyptus becomes a point of emphasis again when the Danaids, left alone, lament the approach of their pursuers (888-890):

οιοὶ πάτερ, βρέτες ώρς
ἀταὶ μ' ἀλαδ' ἀγεὶ
ἀραχνος ώς βαδῆν ὅναρ ὅναρ μελαν.

Oh! Father! The gain of the images brings me disaster! (?) He carries me to the sea, like a spider, step by step, a nightmare, a black nightmare!

At line 890 they compare the sons of Aegyptus to a spider; the stated point of the comparison is the style of approach (the spider likewise approaches slowly and steadily), but certainly color is implicated, as the next comparison seems to confirm. For next they suggest that the

53 This verb (πρέπουσι) is in an emphatic position.
men are a bad ('black') dream: once again we find the color term in an emphatic position at the end of the line. The fact that the Danaids liken their cousins to two things commonly described as 'black' suggests that their color is significant here: it may be meant to reflect the Danaids' distracted state of mind and their obsession with their impending doom, but the men's blackness may also suggest the aggressiveness ('masculinity') of their approach.

So far I have only cited those passages in which a connection is made between the male cousins and blackness. I have suggested that in each of these there is an implied connection between this very blackness and masculinity or even aggressiveness. I have indicated that the costume of the sons of Aegyptus seems designed to emphasize their blackness, and hence their masculinity. We will now turn to those passages that complicate any simple interpretation of blackness as a reference to masculinity. A close look at these two passages will confirm the associations of blackness and masculinity even as it explores an additional complication: the association of the East and femininity. In the end, this discussion will have implications for our larger investigation of gender and color, in particular, the interpretation of the blackness of the Danaids.

As the significance of the fast approach of their aggressors is realized, the Danaids, despite their father's attempts to encourage them, voice their feeling of helplessness (741-47):

Χο· ἐξῶλες ἐστι μάργιν Αἴγυπτου γενος

54 Nightmares are commonly described with the adjective 'black' in tragedy: see, for example, Euripides' Hecuba 68-72 and 703-706, where the characters refer to a "black-winged dream."
Danaids: Abominable is the furious race of Aegyptus, and insatiable of war: you know what I mean. By timbered dark-eyed ships they have sailed hither in wrath-attended haste with their huge black host.

Danaus: Yes, but they will find a huge number of men with arms well-toughened in the heat of the noon.

Here the women remind their father of the character of the genos of Aegyptus: they list a series of adjectives, all of which emphasize their aggressive nature. They then mention other reasons for their apprehension, including the dark-looking ship, its haste, and its cargo: ‘a huge black host.’ With this final phrase the Danaids may seem to be repeating their father’s earlier report that these men were conspicuous on the boat because of their black skin and white garments. But if there was any doubt that the men’s blackness mentioned in that passage signified their masculinity, certainly Danaus’ response in this passage indicates that he is interpreting their color as a marker of masculinity. Indeed, this passage -- the Danaids’ statement and their father’s response -- suggests that the conventional connection of color to gender which was so much a part of the

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55 One of the same adjectives (μάργυρος) is used in a description of the Erinyes in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (67): καὶ νῦν ἄλουσας ταῦτα τοῖς μαργυροῖς ὀραίας. This fact interests me for two reasons: first, it seems that Aeschylus may associate blackness with this trait (or, even, this trait with blackness); second, this adjective, which seems to mean ‘raving’ or ‘mad’, is translated by Lattimore as ‘lewd’ when it is used in the *Eumenides* -- therefore when it is a negative attribute of females who are characterized as generally repulsive, he offers a translation thick with sexual overtones, as if to attribute their repulsiveness to their sexual aggressiveness. Needless to say, this translation is entirely inappropriate in this context.
ideology of ancient Greece is very much at work elsewhere in this play. Danaus' interpretive move confirms my theory (argued in the section above) that every mention of the blackness of these men also suggests their masculinity. As we will see, it also supports my argument that every mention of the blackness of the women casts doubt on their femininity.

This passage is important not only because a character presents us with an interpretation of this active signifier, but for the very reason that he felt that he needed to. Danaus only explains the signifier because he feels he needs to challenge its authority: in order to assure his daughters that the Greeks will be able to defend them from the 'large black host.' Danaus asserts that the Greek men are likewise dark -- but not because they are from a place that is close to the sun as much as because they spend their days outdoors engaged in the work of hardy men. Thus, Danaus questions the value of blackness as a marker for masculinity, since the acquisition of the color for Greek men required hard work; the sons of Aegyptus, in contrast, had been born into their color -- their ancestors had spent years in a country where the sun turned everyone's skin a shade of black. In a sense, then, Danaus marks the difference between the blackness of the Egyptians (something inherited) and the darkness of the Greeks (something earned). Danaus makes this distinction in order to comfort his daughters who seem terribly aware of the threat of the Egyptians. He makes this distinction in order to diminish the apparent advantage of the sons of Aegyptus: they appear darker, thus according to conventional wisdom they might seem stronger.
Danaus’ boast for the darkness and thus the masculinity of the Argive men is only the beginning of the contest of masculinity that characterizes the exchange between the sons of Aegyptus and Pelasgus.\textsuperscript{56} At this point in the play the boast functions to eliminate any apparent advantage for the sons of Aegyptus: with this remark, Danaus levels the playing field. Yet the references to masculinity (and its opposite) continue throughout this scene.

The Danaids initially react to the entrance of the Egyptians with resistance in the form of death wishes and noncompliance.\textsuperscript{57} The men begin by ordering the women to board their ships, but threaten the women with force when those orders are not obeyed. Although the women initially respond rather boldly (their responses at lines 843-6, 854-7, 866-71 all contain wishes for the death of these men), the form of their resistance changes after line 872. At this point, the herald mocks the women’s attempts to escape, commands them to obey his will, and then threatens to harm them if they will not complying. Each of these actions demonstrates profound disrespect for the autonomy of the Danaids, and seems to diminish their courage.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} For a discussion of how Greek masculinity is performed in a modern context, see M. Herzfeld. The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village (Princeton 1985).

\textsuperscript{57} Unfortunately the text also shows evidence of violence: the initial exchange between the Danaids and the Egyptians is very difficult -- many gaping holes remain: the lines that can be established with some certainty all seem to have the same tone of threat and response. Luckily the text is more clear after line 872, when the herald mounts the stage.

\textsuperscript{58} This stands in stark contrast to the Pelasgians’ decree with which they promised to defend the interests of the Danaids (lines 940-45): “As for these girls, you may carry them off if pious argument convinces them so that they follow you with sympathy and of their own free will (ekoukou): but such is the decree that issues from the state, passed by the unanimous vote of the people, never to surrender under compulsion this band of women (μηποτ’ εκουνα βασι / στολον γυναικη)."
When, in line 872, the herald with a string of imperatives commands the women to cry out (ὑνεὶ καὶ λάκας καὶ καλεῖ θεοῦς) and then asserts that this act -- the only thing they can do -- will accomplish nothing, he essentially dismisses the importance of the women's role in public lamentation. The women respond to this command with another wish that a god turn aside their insolence. At this point the herald begins to threaten to harm the women physically: in particular he threatens to drag or pull them to the ships by their clothing (904) and hair (884 and 909). Thus he threatens to use these emblems of their femininity as mechanisms to enforce their submission (femininity).

This contest of masculinity is played out through the medium of the women. Only after the first threat of physical harm do the women begin to call out to others for deliverance or assistance. They address Zeus, their father, and compare the men to a spider and 'a black nightmare' (lines 885-7). Thus, as I argued above, they draw attention to the men's color as the men become more aggressive. Soon afterward the Danaids also call upon the Argive men and Pelasgus (905-910).:

ΧΟ. ἰὼ πόλεωςάγοι πρόμοι, δάμναμαι.

KH. ἐξεῖν ἔοιτ' ἕμας ἐπισπάσας κώμης ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἀκούετ' ὧν τῶν ἐμών λόγων.

ΧΟ. διωλόμεθ': ἀεπτ', ἀναξ, πάσχομεν.

KH. πολλοὺς ἀνακτας, παῖδας Αἰγύπτου, τάχα ὀφεσθε παραιτ', οὖκ ἐρεῖτ' ἀναρχιαν.

Ch. Ηο, chief leaders of the city, I am being overpowered!

59 I have followed Johansen in re-ordering these lines slightly, for line 906 with its emphasis on the 'leaders' certainly seems to follow 908.
He. It seems that I shall have to pull you by the hair and drag you along since you are not quick to obey my orders!

Ch. We are lost! O lord, we are subject to unspeakable sufferings!

He. Lords in great number you will soon see: the sons of Aegyptus! Be of good cheer -- you will have no reason to complain of want of rulers!

The herald undermines the women again by intercepting their call upon the Argive men (especially Pelasgus) and pretending to be an answer to that call. By mocking them in this way, the herald robs them of their language: he deliberately misunderstands their call to the Argive ‘lord’ as assent to the control of these lords -- the Egyptians.

The herald’s response is not just an affront to the Danaids, however, it is also a deliberate challenge to the Argive men’s authority, as Pelagius’ entering lines indicate (911-15):

Hello there! What are you doing? What are you thinking of in dishonouring this land of Pelasgian men? Why, do you imagine it is a city of women you have come to? Barbarian that you are, you go too far in your insults against Greeks. Many are the faults you have committed, and nothing you devised aright.

Pelasgus emphasizes the masculine identity of his country, and assumes that the herald has mistaken this for a weak city or a city without leadership: ‘a city of women’ (γυναϊκῶν ἐς πόλιν). There can be no doubt that the substance of Pelasgus’ utterance is a direct response to the implicit challenge to the Argives’ masculinity: the words denoting gender occupy very emphatic places in the lines. More
significant still are the lines that follow: as they argue for Greek identity as defined as masculine and right-thinking, they suggest that non-Greeks are defined by the opposite characteristics.

Masculinity remains a point of emphasis. During the course of the exchange that follows, the sons of Aegyptus firmly establish (lines 930-937) that they think of the conflict as one between men and women -- between the male and female cousins. Pelasgus in turn announces only that the people of Argos have voted never to surrender the women under compulsion (lines 938-949): thus, even as Pelasgus reports the joint decision of the men assembled to maintain their position, in the eyes of the Egyptians Pelasgus is aligning himself with the female cause.

After the terms of the conflict have been firmly established in terms of the masculine and the feminine, both sides make their final vaunts and boasts (951-3):

KH ἐξ ἐν παχ ὡ ἀς τοῖς ἀρσεσιν.
BA ἀλλ' ἀρσενας τοι τῆσδε γῆς οἰκητορας εὑρήσετ'. οὐ πινοντας ἐκ κραθὼν μεθυ.

He. May victory and superiority be with the males!
Pe. Males, be assured, shall you find in the inhabitants of this land - not people who drink barley-brew!

The herald not only betrays his inclination to perceive of this as a conflict between males and females, but -- in his wish for victory for the males -- he also implies that the Greeks are somewhat less deserving of that label. This affront against the Greeks provides the occasion for a counterattack: Pelasgus questions the masculinity of these men from the East.
This identification of the sons of Aegyptus as the sole possessors of masculinity recalls the initial report of their approach. In that passage certainly Danaus (and the Danaids themselves) associated the darkness of these men with masculinity. But, as we have seen, in each of these exchanges, the defenders of the Danaids cast doubt on the convention that associated blackness with masculinity. In fact, they question the value of inherited blackness as an indicator of a man's worth at the same time as they invoke another convention by which men from the East are associated with effeminacy. Deciding the winner in a contest of masculinity such as this one will be no easy task, since both sides of the conflict define the term differently. Blackness, it becomes clear, is not a simple criterion for this decision either -- both because it is an aspect of appearance that is performed (recall how the white garments offset the blackness of the Egyptians' skin) and because its value is not absolute (as something that can be earned or simply inherited, it is not always the marker of masculinity or strength).

This complication of the association between blackness and masculinity will surface again in our discussion of the significance of blackness on the female bodies of the Danaids. Before we look at those passages in which the Danaids draw attention to their blackness, I would like to discuss the relationship between these maidens and femininity.

**Danaus and the performance of femininity**

Within their first encounter with Pelasgus, there is a telling reference to the performance of gender roles and, more specifically,
to the important role that men have in shaping women's performance.

The reference comes in the middle of a list of possible explanations for the women's appearance and identifications of their place of origin: Pelasgus speaks (lines 282-3):

Κυπριοχαρακτὸς τ.cycle γυναικείως τύπους
εἶκων πεπληκταί τεκτωνῶν προς ἄρα ἀρνῶν

and of Cyprian stamp is the image impressed on your female forms by male artisans:

Clearly with this remark Pelasgus is likening the appearance of these foreign women to images (whether on coins or statues) shaped by male artisans. The emphasis on gender surely must have significance. The reference hints at the ability of men to shape women: male artisans impose feminine forms on lumps of clay; male citizens (Greek) impose feminine forms on (foreign) beings who resist easy classification. As we will see, this brief reference resonates throughout the play, as Pelasgus tries to reconcile what he sees with what he hears, and as both he and Danaus try to manipulate the Argive audience by staging a performance of the Danaids' femininity.

Scholarly comments upon Danaus' role in this play have largely been limited to judgements upon the unsuccessful (and even awkward) employment of the second actor. What is overlooked by critics eager to make such judgements is the function of his character in the play -- that is, generally speaking, his position as interpreter for his exiled daughters. Indeed each of his three appearances involves him in some

60 This may be a reference to stamping on metals (as in coins): but the noun has an extended meaning that encompasses even the sculpting of marble.

61 I discuss these judgements inasmuch as they reflect an assumption of an early date for composition and a bias against it at some length in Chapter 1.
kind of interpretative posture. In the first (lines 176 ff.), he announces the approach of Pelasgus and his attendants; he then instructs his daughters on the best manner in which to receive them and later volunteers to speak on their behalf in the assembly. In the second (lines 600 ff.), he announces the approach of the sons of Aegyptus; he instructs his daughters and then ventures into the city to alert the Argives of this hostile approach. In the third (lines 980 ff.), he arrives after the departure of the suitors to advise the Danaids to be appropriately appreciative of the Argives' defence. When the function of each of these appearances becomes our focus, it becomes more clear that Danaus is acting throughout as an interpreter -- perceiving, interpreting, and instructing his daughters on every event to which they must react.

Since this father has the role of interpreter for his foreign daughters, it follows that some of his instruction will involve the proper way for them to behave as young unmarried women in this alien cultural context. Thus, Danaus fills the role of gender interpreter. But why does he need to repeat instructions that his daughters seem to have already learned? How convincing is their performance of femininity? An examination of Danaus' instructions to his daughters will enable us to reconstruct his version of the Greek concept of femininity and the success of the Danaids' performance of it.

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Danaus' very first words impress upon the audience his own sense of his role and his relationship to his daughters (176-79):

παῖδες, φρονεῖν χρῆ ἐν φρονοῦντι δ᾿ ἥκετε,
pistwì γέροντι τωίδε ναυκληρῳ πατρί:
kai tάπι χέρσου νῦν προμηθίαν λαβὼν
ainw φυλάξαι τάμί ἐπὶ δελτομένας.

My children, you must be prudent. With a prudent guide you came here, me, your trusty old father who was your leader on the sea. And now, having taken forethought as to what may happen on shore, I advise you to write my words carefully on the tablets of your minds.

Even as he begins to advise his daughters based on his interpretation of the current situation, he urges them to be 'prudent' like him. But this is a perfect first lesson on how to behave as a woman, since in Greece sophrosyne means something different for men than for women:63 consequently, Danaus urges his daughters not to appraise the situation for themselves and formulate a plan of action, but to be obedient. Danaus uses an image of tablets and note-taking64 here, thus suggesting the relationship between student and teacher: this image reinforces the impression that the women are not to do what he does, but to do what he says: they are to have the good sense to remain silent and follow orders.

His instructions are seemingly interrupted by signs of an army's approach. Here again Danaus is an interpreter -- he tells his daughters

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63 North defines sophrosyne as the "the harmonious product of intense passion under perfect control," and comments that for women this has always indicated chastity, modesty, obedience and inconspicuous behavior. See H. North, Sophrosyne (Ithaca, NY1966) 1.

64 The participle (δελτομένας) may also be a play on the word δῆλα, which in ancient Greek (as in English) describes an island formed by the mouths of a large river (and therefore shaped like the Greek letter). The participle might, then, refer to Danaids' place of origin.
what the new sights and sounds might mean (lines 180-3). He considers the possibility of a hostile approach, and consequently tells his daughters that it would be better for them to err on the side of caution as they prepare for this encounter (lines 184-189). The contents of his instructions are worth looking at in some detail. Almost like a stage director. Danaus delivers specific instructions; he directs both their physical movements and rhetorical postures (191-203):

Now, go there as quickly as possible, and solemnly keeping your white-wreathed suppliants' boughs, the ornaments of Zeus the Pitiful, in your left hands, address words of pitifulness, lamentation, and sore need as answers to the strangers, as becomes newcomers, and tell them in clear language about this your flight which was not brought about by bloodshed. And let your speech be accompanied, first of all, by no arrogance, and let no impudence proceed from gentle eyes in < ... > modest faces (?); moreover, do not be forward in your talk, nor lag behind: the race here is ready to take offence. And remember to be pliant: you are a fugitive from abroad in need of help. Arrogant speech does not become the weak.

As cultural interpreter. Danaus must surmise and teach local customs.

For this lesson, he lists appropriate as well as inappropriate behavior.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{65} This list of undesirable behavioral traits for suppliants resembles those traditionally ascribed to other foreign women as well: consider especially Euripides' depiction of Medea. Not all foreign women were said to have these characteristics, though: for instance, Tecmess. in Sophocles' Ajax is surprisingly like a Greek woman:
The women should display white: they should be appropriate: they shouldn’t act like they deserve help or take too much of the nice man’s time: they should be submissive. Clearly in this passage Danaus attempts to teach his daughters how to act as suppliants, but the passage as a whole suggests a stronger motive: Danaus seems also to be teaching his daughters how to act as women.

When the set of prohibitions is read against the set of instructions, it becomes clear that instructions for the suppliant are always also instructions for women. The subordinate position which the suppliant assumes before his would-be benefactor is always the appropriate position for the Greek woman. The fact that whiteness (commonly the marker of the feminine) is also the marker of the suppliant (λευκοτρεπείς) emphasizes this. Their behavior (as suppliants and as women) should always imply their whiteness (passivity). Thus this ritual practice (which requires a submissive posture) is marked as Greek and feminine, while the military solution (preferred by the sons of Aegyptus) is marked as foreign and masculine. This configuration suggests yet another way that cultural criteria could determine masculinity. Since these criteria differ from the ones named by Pelasgus or Danaus, it seems that masculinity is not an absolute concept, but one that is easily defined and refined to one’s advantage.

in that play it is Ajax himself who exhibits the characteristics of a non-Greek, an enemy of the people.

66 E. Belfore has likewise noted resemblances between the position of suppliants and brides, since both are led from the hearth by the right hand ("The Suppliant Bride: Io and the Danaids in Aiskhylos’s Suppliants" APA Chicago 1997): she relies primarily on passages from lamblikhos' Life of Pythagoras 18.84 and 9.48 for support of her interpretation.
Danaus' final words in this passage are especially telling: he reminds the women that as newcomers and exiles they must be pliant or yielding since speaking confidently does not become the weak. Their response to these prohibitions suggests that Danaus is telling them something they already know. And yet, in his attempt to be overcautious, he intervenes in their performance of femininity to make sure they do it well. These women may know many ways to behave: Danaus asks that they attend carefully to what they might at a moment of oversight do or say. Thus, Danaus sets the terms for their performance as he reinscribes passivity in his daughters. With this set of instructions and prohibitions, Danaus attempts to check any free expression of emotions and impulses; he aims to control the Danaids' self-presentation in order to ensure that it be acceptable to the local Argive king.\(^6^7\)

Danaus' cautious recommendation that his daughters maintain a submissive position through the interview with the king seems important. As it is, Pelasgus observes details of the physical appearance and situation of the Danaids and makes tentative conclusions about them based on his visual perceptions. Although, they have assumed the suppliant (passive, vulnerable, white) position, other details about their appearance contradict this. For instance, outward signs of their foreign origin already indicate to him that they might be women attempting to travel without the appropriate

\(^6^7\) This impulse to control a disorderly female response to grief has been widely attested in traditional cultures where women's laments were seen to pose a threat to the order of the social unit. See M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974); and G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London and New York 1992).
guardianship. Pelasgus remarks upon the boldness of such a venture (238-40):

δοσὶς δὲ χώραν οὔτε κηρύκων ὑπο
ἀπροξενοὶ τε, νόσοιν ἡγητῶν, μολέιν
ἐτηπὶ ἄτρεστως, τοῦτο θαμμαστον πέλει.

But how then did you dare, without fear, to come to this country with no heralds and no patrons to guide you? That makes me wonder.

It is only the sight of the (white) suppliant boughs (241-2) that convinces Pelasgus to doubt his initial impression of the women's boldness: he remarks that this is the only part of the first sight of them that he is able to understand (243). This passage further validates the importance of Danaus' role as the cultural interpreter. He understands that an appropriate performance of helplessness will be crucial for success of the foreign women's appeal for help. Their performance must counteract their appearance, and thus help Pelasgus distinguish their appearance from their essence. Although their blackness is not explicitly remarked upon in this exchange, it was one of the physical characteristics that betrayed their place of origin: since the bodies of these women were marked by a conventionally masculine color, their performance of femininity had to be especially convincing. In effect their performance is designed to erase the connotations of their bodies. Their behavior implies their essential whiteness.

Pelasgus joins Danaus in attempting to stage a show of the women's helplessness for the Argive demos. He urges the women to place the symbols of their arrival as suppliants on the altars of Zeus for
the people of the city to see: thus, he invites them to publicly perform their submissiveness in order to win favor. He explains (486-489):

καὶ γὰρ τὰχ’ ἂν τις οἰκτίσασιδῶν τάδε
οὕριν μὲν ἔχθρειεν ἄρσενος στόλου
ὑμῖν δ᾽ ἂν εἶη δῆμος εὐμενεστερος.
τοῖς ἠσσοσίν γὰρ πάς τις εὖνοιας φέρει.

You see, it may well be that someone will feel pity at this sight (ἰδών) and become hostile against the insolence of the company of males (ἀρσενος στόλου), and that towards you the people will be better disposed. For every man acts favourably towards the weaker.

Pelagius is staging this spectacle with a clear motive: to make the women appear to be weak, and thus to inspire pity for them, and hatred toward their suitors. It is a rhetorical strategy: he intends to move the assembly with pathos. With this strategy he simplifies the matter for the people of the assembly, with whom the decision ultimately rests. Pelagius reminds the Danaids to act submissive: he trusts that their cousins (the Egyptians) will continue to act out against these women, and thus the assembly will easily decide in the women's favor.

After this promise of intervention the Danaids look to Pelagius for direction on how they are to conduct themselves under the Argive protection. Significantly, when Danaus departs to ask the support of the assembly, they turn to Pelagius (line 505): ἐγὼ δὲ πῶς ὑπὸ θρᾶςος νέμεις ἐμοί; ("But what am I to do? Where do you allot me confidence?") Pelagius proceeds to further direct the performance of their submission (as suppliants and women: lines 506 ff.). Throughout the rest of the play, the male characters who assume control over
these women again and again urge them to be confident. This confidence is required to be grounded in the show of the women's complete dependence on them and the protection that they can offer. The performance of submission is required of the women in order for them to receive any support and protection: these women are encouraged to feel confidence only in their weakness.

I have argued that the reception of the Danaids was complicated by the appearance of their bodies (marked as foreign by their clothing and color): a flawless performance of femininity was required as a corrective to their initial visual impression. But this does not explain why Danaus and Pelasgus direct their performance so carefully. Why are the Danaids (who seem to know very well how to be submissive) reminded again and again to act submissive? Do they really need to be told to act like women? The answer, I think, lies in their threat that they will hang themselves if they are not protected from the sons of Aegyptus.

As this scene begins, Pelasgus is reluctant to receive the Danaids as suppliants: he cannot decide whether to risk the lives of many men in war with the Egyptians for the sake of women or to surrender the suppliants to their aggressors (lines 439-40). In order to force Pelasgus make a decision in their favor, the Danaids (who had been playing the part of the helpless supplicant) reveal that they actually have one remaining resource: their female garb (457) provides them with an excellent instrument (459: μηχανή καλή) -- the means by which they

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68 Pelasgus, Danaus, and even the Egyptian herald urge the women to be confident or 'cheer up' since everything is under their control (lines 505, 600, 732, 740, 907, and 955).
might hang themselves from the images of the gods (463 and 465). Those articles of clothing which are (as Pelasgus states at line 458) proper things for women to wear, will be used by the women to end their lives. In this extreme circumstance, then, the Danaids manipulate the terms of femininity in order to pressure this man to save them from the control of another.

The text clearly indicates that they threaten suicide ultimately in order to manipulate Pelasgus. Their threat is clearly formulated as the conclusion of a conditional clause: εἰ μὴ τι πιστὸν τῶδε ὑποστήσετες στόλων ("If you will not support this company with some trustworthy prop --"). They continue by presenting their threat in terms that Pelasgus describes (464) as riddling or enigmatic (465): νέοις πίναξι βρέτεα κοσμήσαι τάδε ("to adorn these statues with tablets of a novel kind"). As female corpses they will 'adorn' the statues, but like tablets their corpses will bear witness to the fact that they were not honored as suppliants. This neglect will be preserved as a permanent reminder of the Argive disrespect of the gods -- a pollution on the people (473).

While hanging is the way of death associated with virgins, there are elements of this death that distinguish it from a normal (tragic)

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69 Note too that that the Egyptians threaten to drag the women off by grasping other typically feminine articles of clothing (see lines 432 and elsewhere).

70 The choice of this verb is interesting here since it is often used of women dressing themselves with clothing and jewelry. In this passage the Danaids threaten to dress up the statues with themselves.

71 On the significance of this concept, see R. Parker, Miasma: pollution and purification in early Greek religion (Oxford 1983).

virginal death. To die by hanging is womanly: it is a silent (unspoken), private (in the house), bloodless (tidy) death. But to verbally threaten to kill oneself -- and out of the house (in a public place), and with the effect of polluting a temple -- is not womanly at all. With the hanging threat, the Danaids exhibit behavior that is at once unfeminine and hyper-feminine. They imagine a feminine death for themselves, but they do not accomplish it silently: instead they threaten its execution as a necessary consequence of Pelasgus' inaction. Their hanging death will not happen within the house either: instead they will accomplish it in a public (even sacred) place. Lastly, they do not imagine their deaths as the end of misery, but the beginning -- for Pelasgus and the Argive people. The sacrifice of their black bodies to Zeus is imagined as the most unacceptable sort of pollution.\(^{73}\)

The cumulative effect of the unfeminine aspects of their threatened deaths certainly does cast doubt on their femininity, but even those aspects of their behavior that draw on feminine ideals are taken to inappropriate extremes. Again, the very idea that they would use their feminine equipment in order to end their lives suggests a misuse of their femininity. The purpose of the threat likewise suggests their hyper-femininity: all they want is to become the possessions of men other than their cousins. They seem to know too well and not well enough how to be feminine: the hanging threat

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\(^{73}\) Dark victims were appropriate offerings to infernal (not Olympian) deities. See W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. J. Raffan (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 55-68.
complicates their identity as women, and explains why they need to be reminded of the proper way for women to behave.

blackness and the feminine: desperation and agency

After the Danaids have managed to convince Pelasgus of their ties to the Argive land, he does not comment on their strange appearance again. But they do. And Danaus does. The audience could not have forgotten it. In this section I will explore the significance of references to their color. As I noted above, as long as the Danaids perform femininity according to the rules for suppliants, their whiteness is implicit in their helplessness. References to their blackness occur only when these women are lamenting their situation and declaring their lack of hope. In these instances the women always reach a point of desperation: then their performance of femininity shifts, as they consider other plans of action that involve them in curses, prayers, and threats. Again, at these points in the drama their gender identity becomes complicated: they are too much and not enough like women. At these points they reject their performance of femininity (and its implicit whiteness) and remind us of their blackness. This reference to blackness also typically involves references to the possibility of death -- whether that be their own death or that of the sons of Aegyptus.

Although one imagines that the blackness of the Danaids would have been constantly dramatized on stage by the masks of the chorus, only two sections of the play feature references to their color; within these two sections there occur clusters of references, so that their presence (and absence elsewhere) gains significance. These
references occur before the first encounter with Pelasgus (when the Danaids are reflecting on their origins, predicament, and fate) and when faced with the approach of their aggressive suitors (when they must again confront the same set of issues). These references must be interpreted as references to their physical appearance and the place of their birth, but always also (as I have demonstrated above) as references to their gender -- that is, to the fact that they exist at the borders of the category of woman.

The first two references occur in the parodos. There the Danaids establish themselves as a character: they assert their independence, their abhorrence of marriage with the insolent sons of Aegyptus, and their desperation. They imagine that anyone hearing them will think that they are listening to the lament of Procnue (lines 57-67): they conclude the comparison with these lines (68-72):

\[
\text{τώς καὶ ἐγὼ φιλοδυρτος Ἰανίοις νόμοις}
\]
\[
\text{δαπτω ταν ἀπαλάν}
\]
\[
\text{Νειλοδερῃ παρειαν}
\]
\[
\text{ἀπειρόδακρυν τε καρδιαν.}
\]

Even so I, indulging my wailing, sing my Ionian melodies and tear my soft cheek coloured by the Nile-summer and my heart which is unused to tears.

Clearly in this passage the basis of the comparison is primarily lamentation: they cry as Procnue cried. But the cause of lamentation is also (if only indirectly) compared: she cries because, as the object of pursuit, she has arrived at a place far away from home, and also

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74 See Chapter 2 on the connection between physical appearance and environment. Also recall Prometheus' words to Io in the Prometheus Bound: "You will come to a far-off country, a dark race (κελαίνον σολον), who live near the waters of the sun, where is the river Aethiop." Clearly the color of this tribe is connected with its proximity to the sun.
because of an act (hateful to a mother) that she was compelled to commit. This last detail is interesting, especially because it is the final point of comparison: the child is said (in line 67) to have met with "the wrath of an unnatural mother" (δυσματορος κοτου τυχών). This adjective used to describe Procne indicates that her act of vengeance (the manifestation of her wrath against Tereus) was unmotherly, and thus (in effect) unwomanly. The chorus thus compares their cry to the cry of someone who has been forced (like them) to transgress beyond borders (real and metaphorical).

Immediately after the description of Procne, the women return to their situation: again the basis for the comparison is their friendless state resulting from their recent emigration. But here they also draw attention to their appearance: they reach a point during their performance of the traditional act of lamentation (wailing, singing, rending) when they refer to the difference in their skin-color. Notice that although the Danaids don't explicitly refer to their color here, they certainly hint at it: they make a point of contrasting the toughened appearance of their skin with its actual softness. The juxtaposition of these words marks their gender as rather confused: somehow the Danaids' cheek is both toughened (masculine) and soft (feminine). This reference also marks a transition between the appropriate (white) behavior they had exhibited earlier and a new more desperate attitude.

This reference (following upon the comparison with Procne) leads into a prayer (78 ff.) addressed to the local gods (the ones from
whom they claim to have sprung) in which they present a set of demands, and then a threat. The threat begins at line 154:

εἰ δὲ μῆ, μελανίθες
ἤλιοκτῆτον γένος
τὸν γαῖον,
τὸν πολυζευγότατον,
Ζῆνα τῶν κεκμηκότων,
ίζόμεθα σὺν κλάδοις,
ἀρτάναις θανοῦσαι,
μὴ τυχοῦσαί θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων.

If not, we the black sun-smitten race, will come with our boughs to the earth-dweller, the most hospitable, Zeus of the dead: we will die by the noose. This we will do if we are not heard by the Olympian gods.

Here the chorus not only contemplates death as an alternative to marriage with their suitors, but also threatens to perform the act of suicide if they are not heard. This threat obviously bears some resemblance to the threat (discussed above) that the chorus makes to Pelasgus when he seems reluctant to assist them. That passage featured some additional details that are not explicit here: there the women threatened to use their feminine clothing for this unfeminine purpose (457); in this passage the women threaten to hang themselves by means of a rope or noose (160). Yet, the same acknowledgement of an absence of conventional womanly attributes is here: the reference to their blackness, their skin “smitten by the sun,” accomplishes the same end. With this reference to their foreign, toughened appearance, the women acknowledge that they are not like Greek women -- that in this desperate circumstance they might attempt anything to save themselves. There is an additional

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75 This passage in particular resonates with Pelasgus’ comparison of the appearance of the Danaids to images made by male craftsmen (282-83).
point to make here. Here, at the beginning of the play, when the women have just recently arrived and are lamenting their fate, they refer to themselves as a “black genos.” Thus their identity is intertwined with that of their cousins who are described by their color throughout the play (and often with the attendant implication of masculinity, as I have demonstrated above). This reference indicates that, like their cousins and other non-Greeks, they may be capable of aggressive behavior.

The second passage that likewise contains a cluster of these references to color occurs nearer the end of the play, after the herald of the sons of Aegyptus has been spotted. Although the references to the women’s blackness are not so explicit as they were in the parodos, those earlier explicit references (as well as the performance of this color on stage with masks) established any necessary connection between the chorus and blackness. The result is that here, six hundred lines later, when the chorus is once again represented as realizing the desperation of their circumstance, they can refer obliquely to their difference and suggest some of its implications (lines 776 ff.):

```
ω γά, βούνι, πάνδώκον σεβασ.
tι πεισόμεσθα: ποί ουγώμεν Ἀπιας
χθονός. κηλαινόν εἵ το κευθός ἐστὶ ποι:
μέλας γενοίμαν καπνός
νέφεσθι γειτονῶν Διως,
tο πᾶν δ' ἀφαντος ἀμπετῆς ἀδόνος ώς
κόνις ἀτερθε πτερυγὼν ὀλοίμαν.

ἄφωκτον δ' οὐκέτ' ἂν πέλοι κεαρ,
κηλαινόχρως δὲ πάλλεται μου καρδία
πατρὸς σκοπάμαι δὲ μ' ἐξελον οἶχομαι σοβιώ,
θέλομαι δ' ἂν μοραιμοί
βρόχου τυχεῖν ἐν σαργάναις,
πρὶν ἄνδρ' ἀπευκτον τῶιδε χριμοθῆναι χροί.
```
O earth, o land of hills, you whom we worship with all right, what is to become of us? Whither in the Apian land shall we flee, to find somewhere a dark hiding place? Would that I might become a black smoke, neighbor of Zeus' clouds -- that I might fly up from the ground, vanishing altogether, like wingless invisible dust, and perish.

No longer can <. . > be <. . >: of black hue, my heart (?) quivers: my father's lookout has caught me; I am undone with fear. Sooner may I meet my fate in the noose's braid (?) than suffer the man I abominate to touch my skin! May I die beforehand and come under the sway of Hades!

The text is badly preserved here (as the cruces indicate), but the presence of these three color adjectives is certain. Again in a state of anguish, the women threaten suicide immediately after referring to their color (785). This reference to their blackness has associations with death and obscurity, but (more importantly) with extreme vulnerability. Notice that in this passage they describe their skin as dark just before they declare that they would rather die than have their skin touched by their cousins. The color of skin is especially important here because skin is a site of both vulnerability and desirability. Significantly, a wish for invisibility precedes this: they would have this marker of their desirability erased. As a marker of their vulnerability, it indicates the extremes to which they would go to find a lord other than their cousins: even Hades is preferable. As a marker of gender, their blackness reflects their resistance to demands put upon them by their cousins: if (as we noted above) whiteness connotes nubility, blackness is here a sign of extreme hatred of marriage.
Two more references to color precede this threat: the women wish to hide in a dark place (778) or become a black smoke (779): I discuss the implications of these references in some detail in chapter two. The point I would like to draw out of these details here is that they appear in this cluster together with the suicide threat. I believe that this accumulation of color terms signals the moment when the women step out of the role they had been playing ever since they forced Pelasgus' hand. These references to color mark their transition from obedient passivity to desperate action.

This lament conveys a final and extremely important association of blackness: invisibility. This association of blackness has important implications for the Danaids' gender, inasmuch as key aspects of their predicament may be interpreted as dependent on their visibility. For instance, the sons of Aegyptus apparently pursue the Danaids because of their desirability: desirability is linked to sight. If the Danaids were not able to be seen, they would not be able to be desired. For this reason invisibility seems like the ultimate escape. But another aspect of their predicament is based just as much on sight: they have difficulty convincing Pelasgus of their membership in the Argive genos because of their obviously foreign appearance. If their difference were not marked so prominently on their bodies, they would have had an easier time gaining allies in the fight against the sons of Aegyptus. On a related note, if they had not appeared to be so different, they would not have been required to stage a spectacle of helplessness: the sight of them caused Pelasgus to interrogate them, and the sight of them
(exhibiting their whiteness) was necessary to convince others that they were worthy of sympathy.

**bodyguards and the matrimonial imperative**

The *Supplicants* ends with the exodus of Danaus and his daughters, accompanied by bodyguards. This brief scene (only about one hundred lines) creates a sense of foreboding and causes the audience to be suspicious of its response to the chorus in this first play. For, as Danaus himself warns, "only time brings an unknown company to proof" (line 993: ἄγνωθι ὡς ἠλέγχεται χρόνως)

When Pelasgus has left the stage, Danaus offers further direction to his daughters (lines 980 ff.). He warns them especially against attracting any sexual attention in Argos (996-1009):


> ὑμᾶς δ᾽ ἐπαινῶ μὴ κατασχύνειν ἔμε, ὦραν ἔχουσας τηνδ᾽ ἐπιστρέπτων βροτοῖς· τέρειν᾽ ὀπώρα δ᾽ εὐφυλακτος οὐδαμῶς, θῆρες δὲ κηράνουσι καὶ βροτοὶ· τί μην·
> .......(cruces).......
> καὶ παρθένων χλιδάσαιν εὐμορφοῖς ἐπὶ πάς τις παρελθὼν ὀμματος θελητηρίων
tοξευμὲν ἐπεμψεν, ἵμέρους μικρομένοις.
> πρὸς ταῦτα μὴ παθῶμεν ὡς πολὺς πόνος
> πολὺς δὲ πόντους αὖν ἣροτη ἤδῃ,
> μὴ δ᾽ ἀλαχοςτήμεν, ἱδονῆν δ᾽ ἔξθροις ἐμοῖς
> πράξωμεν.

So my advice is that you bring no shame on me, possessing as you do your prime of youth which makes people turn to look at you. The tender summer fruit is in no way easy to protect; animals spoil it, and men too of course. ... Likewise, whoever passes by girls of charming beauty shoots a seductive arrow from his eye against them, conquered by desire. Therefore, let us not suffer that which we have undergone so many troubles and ploughed with our ship so many waves to avoid, and let us not bring shame on ourselves and joy to our enemies.
This speech introduces several complexities, since it should not be necessary for Danaus to remind his daughters of their aversion to marriage. What is new here is the emphasis on the role women play in causing desire to overcome a man. And this changes everything: with this speech Danaus make the women responsible for causing desire and thus indirectly excuses the Egyptians’ aggressive pursuit.

Danaus does not seem to advise the women of anything that a Greek father would not -- a daughter’s virginity ought to be protected: it only becomes clear the Danaus and his daughters are interested in preserving this status indefinitely once the daughters themselves speak up. Only then do the bodyguards respond: they remind them that Kypris is a powerful goddess that should be honored (lines 1034-42). Their response suggests that Pelasgus and the Argives conceive of the conflict in different terms than do the Danaids: for the men it was never about protecting women from marriage, but rather about protecting themselves from the threat of pollution, and only to a lesser extent these newly-arrived ‘Argive’ women from the violence of barbarian men. Thus, when the bodyguards hear for the first time the women themselves talking about their aversion to marriage, they are dismayed. Only at this point, when Danaus does not act as an interpreter for the women, do the Argives directly interact with them. And they are deeply troubled, as Pelasgus was before them.

76 This is an important difference: Pelasgus never once states that he is defending women from marriage, whereas this is exactly what the Danaids want. Their hatred of this marriage is what motivated them to cross over to Greece: they mention their aversion to marriage (at least) twelve times within the play (see lines 9, 82, 107, 143, 153, 332, 394, 799, 805, 807, 1053, and 1063; there are, of course, other implicit references to marriage, for example at line 1032 ‘the rite of Cytherea’). And yet Pelasgus cannot defend them if the conflict is defined as such, since marriage is such an important part of his society. See F. Zeitlin, “The Politics of Eros in the Danaid Trilogy of Aeschylus,” in Playing the Other (Chicago 1996) 123-71.
This last exchange is unsettling as the Danaids pray for deliverance from marriage, and the bodyguards warn against maintaining this extreme position. As they talk, the performance of femininity that the Danaids had tried to perfect begins to look less convincing. As 'Argive women' they convince Pelasgus to defend them from marriage with barbarian men; but when they state their aversion to marriage even with Greek men, they are no longer acting like 'Argive women.' Their gender identity at the end of the play is no more stable than it was at the beginning.

**Conclusion**

It is impossible to reduce the significance of blackness in the *Suppliants* to an easy equation. The blackness of the Danaids and their cousins is as complicated as the notions of gender that Aeschylus explores in this play. Central to this exploration is the possibility (entertained by Pelasgus and Danaus) that appearance may not indicate essence: thus the play questions the idea that a black body is easily interpretable. In fact, as Danaus asserts, there are a couple of ways of coming upon this color -- one is by working hard in the sun, the other is by living the soft life near the equator. Beyond the significance of color, this play also wonders about the meaning of masculinity and femininity. As the exchanges with the Egyptians made clear, masculinity is not a natural quality of being a man but rather something that must be negotiated and proven again and again.

Although the color of the Danaids makes us (and Pelasgus) question their gender identity, in the course of the play they prove
that they are very capable of playing the role of the Greek (white) woman: they take up the boughs and make their submission a spectacle. Even so, in moments of desperation we see the Danaids slipping out of this role and exhibiting unfeminine or even hyper-feminine characteristics. They describe themselves as black when they are nearest to death: in desperate circumstances they use their femininity to manipulate or to imagine an alternative to being desired.

**Violence and the Threat of Security**

So far in this discussion of how apparent difference can be reconciled with actual familiarity, we have not mentioned the one thing that all of these characters have in common: a desire for security. The trouble is, as we have seen, not everyone can have this desire satisfied at the same time: the security of one group always upsets that of another. And so, ironically, the quest for security creates violence. In this respect, the text reveals, security can be threatening.

But this is true on many levels. The desire for security in interpretation likewise leads to violence. As I discussed in Chapter 1, scholars content to dismiss the play as an example of early (primitive) tragedy certainly did violence to the text in terms of its reception and interpretation. Likewise attempts to formulate a general theory about how the 'other' is represented in the *Suppliants* ultimately do violence to the text, since lines between the 'self' and 'other' are especially difficult to draw in this text. Those characters who are represented as 'the other' also possess attributes that may make them sympathetic
characters, if only temporarily. The play allows the audience to empathize with the Danaids as they emphatically reject the terms of this marriage; the audience of Athenian men is even more likely to identify with Danaus, the guardian (kurios) who is unwilling to give his daughters to these suitors; finally, they might identify as men with the sons of Aegyptus, who are so eager to claim these women as their rightful property. All three of these possible identifications may be proved to be untenable by the end of the trilogy, as the difference between Greek and non-Greek were reinscribed. Yet, the very similarity of their concerns (throughout the first play, at least) must have left some members of the audience with the uneasy feeling that they are more similar than different.

This uneasy feeling is created in part by shifts in alliances throughout the Suppliants. In the last two chapters I demonstrated how these shifts are made possible by negotiations within competing discourses regarding color, gender, and ethnicity. Such negotiations allow someone to identify (or be identified) as someone different than they appear to be. For instance, the Danaids, whose bodies are marked by blackness, secure a protected place for themselves in Argos by performing the role of Greek (white) women. And blackness on a male body (although normally a sign of masculinity) becomes a sign of effeminacy (a marker of his origin in the East) when it is worn by an Egyptian male. The disruption of such basic associations has important consequences, both for characters within the drama and for members of the audience, since it challenges them to re-evaluate their conceptions of color, gender and ethnicity.
When the Danaids voice their vehement opposition to marriage, they specifically reject the role of slave to a husband who will be their owner and master. This resistance, even if it was foreclosed by the end of the trilogy, still questions the necessity of such arrangements. In particular, it sets the will of one man against fifty — since Danaus, the father and guardian of these women is unwilling to agree to the marriage. As such the play raises questions about the importance of the will of the kurios. What power should an individual man -- a man with only daughters -- be able to have, especially when his interests are in direct conflict with those of the state?

The Danaids' request for protection and Pelasgus' hesitant response also suggests a tension surrounding traditional gender roles. As he considers the cost of this war in terms of men's lives (lines 472-77), Pelasgus momentarily identifies with the Egyptian men. With this identification, he questions the obligation that his concept of masculinity creates for him: Must men protect women in order to be masculine? Does it make sense to value a femininity that requires the death of men? An encounter with the Egyptians helps him to separate himself from these other men and redefine himself in terms of Greek manhood -- as a citizen of a (democratic) polis. And yet, doubts about the cost of such a role remain. What are the obligations of masculinity? What does it mean to be a Greek man? What responsibilities does citizenship imply? How flexible are such binding ties as those of citizenship, kinship, friendship? How can one respect such bonds and still protect the interests of both the individual and the community?
Even if the trilogy allowed some members of the audience to leave satisfied with its reconciliation of key tensions within the play, not everyone could have been so unaffected. Certainly some members of its audience must have left the theater still reflecting on the play’s significance for themselves and for Athens. This sort of reflection was part of the purpose of the City Dionysia and was an essential part of the operation of Athens’ democracy.
APPENDIX A
Patterns in the Occurrence of the Epithetic Phrase
θέα λευκώλενος Ἴρη

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>summary of context</th>
<th>position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assistance (intervention to</td>
<td>she inspired Achilles to call assembly</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benefit mortal men)</td>
<td>intervened on behalf of Achilles and Agamemnon</td>
<td>1.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spoke to Athene on behalf of the dying Argives</td>
<td>5.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>journeyed to Troy</td>
<td>5.775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appeared with Athene in battle</td>
<td>5.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pitied Achaians</td>
<td>8.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gave voice to Xanthos as comfort for Achilles</td>
<td>19.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>smiled at Athene after successful intervention</td>
<td>21.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summoned Athene to retaliate</td>
<td>21.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obedience and acquiesence</td>
<td>she accepted the cup offered by her son</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asked Zeus' permission to retaliate against Ares</td>
<td>5.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>did not disobey Zeus</td>
<td>5.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>did not refuse compliance (to Athene)</td>
<td>8.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>granted requested favor to Sleep</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>did not disobey (Zeus)</td>
<td>15.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>silent at Zeus' command</td>
<td>15.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>resigned to Zeus' rule</td>
<td>15.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>acquiesced to request of Scamander</td>
<td>21.377</td>
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### APPENDIX B

Patterns in the Occurrence of the Epithetic Phrase

\[ \text{βοῶπος πότνια Χρη} \]

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<td>rebellion</td>
<td>addressed Zeus in anger</td>
<td>1.551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>urged Zeus to accept the destruction of Troy</td>
<td>4.50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>addressed Zeus in anger</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>planned to beguile Zeus</td>
<td>14.159</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>hid away the zone of Aphrodite</td>
<td>14.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asked Sleep to participate in beguilement</td>
<td>14.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>warned Zeus not to intervene on Sarpedon's behalf</td>
<td>16.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>forced sun to set early after death of Patroclus</td>
<td>18.239</td>
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<td>talked back to Zeus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>refused to help Aineias</td>
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<td>punishment</td>
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<td>frightened by Zeus</td>
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<td>scolded by Zeus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accused by Zeus</td>
<td>18.357</td>
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217
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224


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