

## Alcibiades and the Irrational

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It can be no secret that for the past few years I have been putting forward the view that Attic tragedy and comedy were originally intended to serve as a commentary — often a close commentary — on current events. The fickle, fluid, not to say irrational, personality of Alcibiades figures large in the picture that emerges. And not simply Alcibiades, but his extended family: his brother Cleinias, their foster-father Pericles, and the woman who played the role of a mother in the Periclean household, Aspasia. On this view, dramatic productions played the same role as political cartoons today: tragedy was akin to the more sombre and serious kind, comedy the more flippant. Greek dramas were intended to deal with specific historical situations before some of them became great literature written for all time. But just as the political cartoon is evanescent, with very few receiving canonical status, so too, of the hundreds of tragedies and comedies to have been written, fewer than four dozen have survived, and often for the most bizarre reasons. It was, for example, Antigone's 'Christian love' that allowed enthusiastic teaching of the play in Byzantine schools and contributed to the preservation of the Sophoclean corpus.<sup>1</sup>

I have drawn inspiration from Aristotle, for whom drama explored what a certain individual, given his/her propensities, might inevitably say or do: this in contrast to the role of the historian, whose task was to discuss what Alcibiades actually did (*Po.* 1451b 9-11). One consequence of this is the possibility that the dramatic poet explored what Alcibiades, given his propensities, would inevitably say or do, and this has been the working hypothesis of my work in the area of ancient drama. I have also taken note of Libanius' rhetorical questions, consistently overlooked in modern scholarship: 'What play did not include [Alcibiades] among the cast of characters? Did not Eupolis and Aristophanes show him on the stage? It is to him that comedy owed its success' (Fr. 50.2.21). One might add: not just comedy but tragedy too.

Greatly encouraged by Martin Ostwald, I have presented the case in books and articles. *Pericles on Stage*, which dealt with Aristophanes' earlier plays, appeared in 1997, and my *Sophocles and Alcibiades* was published in 2008. *Aristophanes and Alcibiades*, which deals with all of Aristophanes' complete plays, as well as relevant plays of Euripides, such as *Helen*, *Ion*, and *Hippolytus*, is currently in active preparation. It is fair to say that my views have had a mixed reception, whether in print or in the attempt to get them into print. The reaction of reviewers and referees is polarised: my work is either praised to the skies or damned to perdition. Martin was kind enough to write a helpful puff for *Pericles on Stage* ('Perhaps the most significant and innovative contribution to Aristophanic studies in this century. The arguments are highly and brilliantly original, and well supported. They may well set Aristophanic scholarship on a

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<sup>1</sup> Calder 2010.

new footing’) but others, professional Aristophanists for the most part, have been rather less appreciative. Of *Sophocles and Alcibiades* it has been said on the one hand ‘I strongly urge all those who teach Greek tragedy in its historical context to read this thoroughly admirable tome with care’,<sup>2</sup> and on the other ‘No serious student of the Classics should waste two minutes on this ridiculous book’.<sup>3</sup> You win some, you lose some.

Most recently, *Sophocles and Alcibiades* has been reviewed in *JHS* in a manner whose attitude is more robust than the argument,<sup>4</sup> but lest this should become the last word on the subject, I propose in this paper to respond to some of the charges made. Most relate to *Antigone*, a play that is noteworthy in anyone’s book for a degree of irrationality on the part, not perhaps of the protagonist who is Creon,<sup>5</sup> but of the young girl whom I take to be closely based on the public image of the youthful Alcibiades in 438 BC. I follow R.G. Lewis in dating the play to that year,<sup>6</sup> and consider it to be a reaction on Sophocles’ part to his fellow general Pericles’ excesses following his triumphant victory over the rebellious Samians in the previous year. According to a Samian source, their leaders were tied to planks in the Agora at Miletus on Pericles’ orders, and were left in the open for ten days before being beaten to death with wooden clubs, and their bodies cast away unburied (Plut. *Per.* 28.2). Unburied bodies are, significantly perhaps, prominent both in this tale and in Sophocles’ play. Sophocles was still being implicated in the harrowing events on Samos centuries later (Strab. 14.1.18), but he seems to have made his feelings felt in representing Pericles as the austere, unbending Creon, who (unlike Antigone) is on stage for most of the play.

Creon’s idiosyncrasies of speech, for example, are not unlike those of Thucydides’ Pericles, not least the way in which Creon’s first speech (162–210) with its obtrusive references to himself and his personal opinions (with nine occurrences of ἐγώ, ἐμός and the like), is paralleled by Pericles’ second Thucydidean speech (where ἐγώ, ἐμόν and ἐμοί occur twelve times between them [Thuc. 2.60.2–64.2]). Creon’s vocabulary also resonates with Periclean associations: words such as φρονεῖν (to be resolute), νοῦς (mind), δίκη (justice) and their cognates. Another frequent word in *Antigone* is μηχανή and cognates and compounds (79, 90, 92, 175, 349, 363, 364): allusions, I would suggest, to Pericles’ novel skill with siege-engines (μηχαναί) that enabled him to defeat his Samian opponents (Plut. *Per.* 27.3).

Creon and Pericles have a propensity to silence in common, and there, will be long periods when Creon is silent. Silence in public was apparently a typical feature of Pericles’ behaviour: he quietly endured criticism (πράως καὶ σιωπῆ: Plut. *Per.* 34.1) and obloquy (σιωπῆ: *ibid.* 5.2). If Creon is on the stage for most of the play, as has been suggested. He is thus a ‘silent, menacing presence’ at 582–625,<sup>7</sup> and it is likely that he remains silent on stage during the Chorus’ hymn to Eros and Aphrodite. Creon actually states, ‘I would not be silent (σιωπήσαιμι) if I saw ruin rather than safety (σωτηρία)

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<sup>2</sup> Calder 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Buttrey 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Irwin 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Frey 1878; Calder 1968, 390.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis 1988; cf. Tyrrell and Bennet 1998, 3–4.

<sup>7</sup> Brown 1987.

coming to the citizens' (185-6). Σωτηρία, of course, well reflects a Periclean policy that attracted criticism in public debate as well as satire on the comic stage (Plut. *Per.* 33.7-8).

What had been described as Creon's 'coldness'<sup>8</sup> might moreover be compared with what Gomme termed the 'bleakness' with which Thucydides' Pericles consoled the relatives of the dead in the Funeral Speech.<sup>9</sup> Pericles was in fact something of a cold fish: witness Ion of Chios, who knew Pericles and was less than impressed with his lack of social graces: 'Pericles was overbearing and insolent in conversation, and his pride had in it a great deal of contempt for others' (Plut. *Per.* 5.3), a characterization that closely corresponds to that of the Creon of *Antigone*.

There are many more ways in which the two figures run in parallel, and I have discussed most of them in *Sophocles and Alcibiades*. Pericles' meanness and incorruptibility is matched by Creon's mean-mindedness and suspicion that others might be interested only in monetary gain. Pericles' well-attested philosophical interests are alluded to by the 'pseudo-sophistic analysis of the senses'<sup>10</sup> in Creon's interview with the Guard, who also stands as a representative of the kind of people who formed Pericles' constituency. Creon makes invidious allusions that can only be taken as references to Pericles' reputation as 'King of the Satyrs' (Hermipp. *PCG* 47.1 ap. Plut. *Per.* 33.8), much given to love-making (Clearch. *FHG* 2.314 ap. Ath. 13.589d). Creon appears to share Pericles' cruelty, and his tendency to brevity and repetition. The latter is best exemplified in φεῦ φεῦ, ἰὼ πόνοι βροτῶν δύσπονοι (woe, woe for the toilsome toils of men; 1276). Πόνος (toil [= blood, sweat and tears]), was apparently such a prominent feature of Pericles' oratory that Thucydides artfully packs his last speech with five references to πόνος (Thuc. 2.62.1, 2.62.3, 2.63.1, 2.64.3, 2.64.6).<sup>11</sup> It might almost appear that Creon served as a Thucydidean model, rather as Thucydides regularly looked to Aristophanes as an *aide mémoire*.<sup>12</sup>

All this, and more, was in *Sophocles and Alcibiades*, but I have subsequently been able to add another argument in support of the case for a Periclean Creon. In an article that appeared recently in *Scripta Classica Israelica* I suggested that Sophocles subtly implies by means of allusions to the ephebic oath and to Aeschylus' *Persae* (of which Pericles was the *choregus*) that Pericles' behaviour at Samos, when he cruelly executed the Athenians' Ionian kith and kin, was like that of Xerxes at Salamis when he in effect 'left his dead comrades unburied'.<sup>13</sup>

Given the nature of the households to which Antigone and Alcibiades belonged, I thought it was reasonable to draw parallels between Antigone's position and that of Alcibiades, and the *JHS* reviewer was kind enough to quote some of them, as follows:

Antigone is an orphan, comes from a badly disturbed family and is in the care of a guardian who is not much good at helping her over her past experiences, and totally unsympathetic towards her expressions of family pride. Alcibiades, too, was an insecure

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>9</sup> Gomme et al., 2.143.

<sup>10</sup> Goldhill 2006, 90.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Boegehold 1982, 154-5.

<sup>12</sup> Vickers 1997, *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Vickers 2011a.

orphan in the care of an excessively severe guardian. Antigone's essential irrationality has been generally overlooked, as has Alcibiades' psychological make-up. His problems will have begun in the first year of his life. He was an insecure baby who very early discovered self-coping mechanisms. His wild oscillations in behaviour suggest that he had a disturbed history of attachment, and had problems holding the world together, problems that will have been the more acute when he was a teenager.

I would stand by every word, not least because it represents the fruits of research carried out together with Daphne Nash Briggs, a practising child psycho-therapist.<sup>14</sup> But it was perhaps unkind of the *JHS* reviewer to leave the reader with the impression that this is all there was to the equation. If this were the case, criticism would indeed be perfectly in order. But these observations were merely supporting arguments in a case whose principal planks lie elsewhere. In particular, I had taken note of the tradition that the youthful Alcibiades 'dressed in women's clothes ... attended symposia undetected,' and boasted about his exploits afterwards (Lib. *Fr.* 50.2.13). Also relevant was what has been called — on other grounds — Alcibiades' 'ambiguous sexuality' that Tim Duff detected in a close reading of Plutarch's *Life*.<sup>15</sup> It was also a characteristic picked up by Euripides in *Helen*, and Aristophanes in *Lysistrata* (probably performed at the same dramatic festival in 411 BC).<sup>16</sup>

Duff also noted how influential Alcibiades was even as a schoolboy, when he objected to playing the *aulos*, in that it disfigured the face and inhibited conversation. He gave up the instrument himself, and 'induced his friends to do so, and all the youth of Athens soon heard and approved of Alcibiades' derision of the *aulos* and those who learned it. In consequence of this the *aulos* went entirely out of fashion, and was regarded with contempt' (Plut. *Alc.* 2.5-7). Duff noted 'The extraordinary effect which Alcibiades' rejection of the *aulos* has on the other boys and on public opinion generally prefigures his later popularity and influence, and demonstrates the effectiveness of his speech and his charisma'.<sup>17</sup>

'Let the children of the Thebans', Alcibiades used to say, 'play the *aulos*, for they know not how to speak' (Plut. *Alc.* 2.7). I thought it was neat of Sophocles to put Alcibiades on stage as Antigone, a 'child of Thebes' *par excellence*; Alcibiades, moreover, famously 'knew not how to speak', for he preserved a childish speech defect throughout his life (*ibid.* 1.6-8; Dr Barrie Fleet kindly reminds me that the use of the middle voice τραυλίζεται indicates habitual action).

The important point overlooked by the *JHS* reviewer relates to Alcibiades' *aulos* teacher. Nothing but the best for Alcibiades; as the richest boy in town, he was able to employ Pronomus, the foremost master of the aulic art. We learn this from a curious, but surely significant source, namely Duris of Samos' book entitled *Sophocles and Euripides* (Ath. 4. 184d; cf. Paus. 9.12.5). Not only did Duris claim to be physically descended from Alcibiades (Duris *FGrH* 76 F 76 ap. Plut. *Alc.* 32.2), but we also owe our knowledge of Pericles' Samian excesses to him (Duris *FGrH* 76 F 67 ap. Plut. *Per.* 28.2). But the real point is that it would be difficult to account for a reference to

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<sup>14</sup> Vickers and Briggs 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Duff 2003, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Vickers in preparation.

<sup>17</sup> Duff 2003, 104.

Alcibiades' *aulos* teacher in a book on *Sophocles and Euripides* unless Alcibiades had played some sort of role in the works of these writers.

It is against this background that I made the comparison between the domestic situations of Antigone and Alcibiades. Given this and other evidence, *Sophocles and Alcibiades* would have been open to criticism if I had not done so. The other evidence bears on Antigone's essential irrationality. In fact, I took as my starting point the controversial passage in the play where Antigone makes the puzzling statement concerning her dead brother (904-20). Goethe put the matter succinctly: 'She says that, if she had been a mother, she would not have done, either for her dead children or for her dead husband, what she has done for her brother. 'For,' says she, 'if my husband died I could have had another, and if my children died I could have had others by my new husband. But with my brother the case is different. I cannot have another brother; for since my mother and father are dead, there is no one to beget one'.<sup>18</sup> Goethe expressed the wish for 'a philologist to show us that the passage is spurious'. Some have duly expunged the passage from the text,<sup>19</sup> but paradoxically they tend to be those who want to make Antigone the protagonist; paradoxically, because to cut out the offending passage leaves Antigone, who has relatively few lines in any case, with even fewer. It is Creon who is the protagonist, as befits Sophocles' Periclean foil.

It has been said that 'the logic' of speeches in tragedy 'can be far-fetched, but it ... cannot ... be absent altogether';<sup>20</sup> but this does not allow for the possibility that Sophocles was making Antigone speak like an impassioned teenager. What the Chorus call her, 'folly in speech and frenzy at the heart' (λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν ἐρινύς; 603), has been taken as a sign of one who might be mentally unbalanced,<sup>21</sup> but it could equally well be understood as a brilliant evocation of normal, impassioned adolescent reasoning. Either way, we are dealing with the irrational, and any perceived mental imbalance can be put down to Alcibiades' character, which was described by Plutarch (who had access to far more sources than we do) as full of 'many strange inconsistencies and contradictions' (ἀνομοιότητος πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ μεταβολάς; *Alc.* 2.1; cf. 16.9 τὴν τῆς φύσεως ἀνωμαλίαν: 'the unevenness of his nature'). Alcibiades was prone to a kind of off-centre logic that verged on the irrational and it is this that Sophocles so cleverly captures. Alcibiades was not the principal target in *Antigone*, but was brought in as yet another rod with which to beat his Periclean target. The results of Pericles' indifferent guardianship of Alcibiades are thus laid at his door; when the six-year-old orphan first came into Pericles' house, he was entrusted to a Thracian slave who was 'useless on account of his old age' (Pl. *Alc.* 1.122b; cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 15).

Later Sophoclean plays, including *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, have Alcibiades as the centre-piece. But here, I should like to dwell for a moment on *Ajax*, where again the *JHS* reviewer has gone for only a partial description of the case that was made in *Sophocles and Alcibiades*, to the disadvantage of the argument. 'Alcibiades' treatment of the dog's tail and his lavish sacrifice are apparently "parallels" for the butchery of the opening scene, their weakness as such acknowledged

<sup>18</sup> Otto and Wersig 1982, 28 March 1827, trans. Oxenford 1874.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Muller 1967.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, 1987, 200.

<sup>21</sup> Collinge 1962, 61.

and dismissed by the parenthetical “it is not necessary to taste all the sea to know that it is salty”. Again, our reviewer has omitted to mention the principal planks in the argument. I had noted that it is a remarkable fact that the only examples in myth or history for an award of arms — an *aristeion* — after a campaign to have been made (or demanded) on hereditary grounds are when Alcibiades won such a prize at Potidaea, and when Ajax made his importunate demands in Sophocles’ play.<sup>22</sup> The fact that Alcibiades was reckoned to be physically descended from Ajax (Plut. *Alc.* 1.1), was also, I thought, a card worth playing.

I found a likely context in 410 for the performance of the play (usually dated to the 440s, but with no more support than scholarly wishful thinking). Two years earlier, troops under Alcibiades’ command had brought about the deaths of 300 Argives at Miletus (Thuc. 8.25.3). Four years before that, the slaughter of the Melians had been carried out as part of Alcibiadean policy (Thuc. 5.116.4, cf. Plut. *Alc.* 16.5-6).<sup>23</sup> It is these events that lie behind the butchery in the opening scene; animal cruelty and Alcibiades’ love of sacrificing (attested from his youth; e.g. Schol. Luc. 20.16) were merely extensions of this picture, but it would have been remiss to have overlooked them. The story of the dog’s tail not only bespeaks a certain callousness, but provides another example of off-centre logic verging on the irrational: ‘Alcibiades once bought a very fine hound for a very large sum, and proceeded to cut its tail off, to universal disapproval. When his friends told him how sorry everyone was for the dog, Alcibiades replied “Then what I want has come about. I want the Athenians to talk about this, rather than that they should say something worse about me” (Plut. *Alc.* 9).

When I wrote ‘it is not necessary to taste all the sea to know that it is salty’ I did so from a position of strength rather than weakness. There was so much Alcibiadean material falling into place in *Ajax* that it seemed unnecessary to list it all in detail. The expression occurs at a point when I said

In *Ajax*, many aspects of the plot resonate with what we know Alcibiades’ experiences to have been, whether his ancestral ἀριστεῖον, his enmity with the Spartan Agis, his responsibility for the deaths of 300 Argives, his sacrificing hundreds of animals at Olympia, his involvement in the massacre of the menfolk of Melos or his having taken a prisoner of war as his mistress and having a child by her. There is not of course a one-to-one relationship between recent history and Sophocles’ plotting, but there is a sufficient overlap to justify seeing the playwright as a shrewd commentator on current affairs, and a perceptive judge of the characters of prominent contemporaries ... Let us look for further support for the case made so far: that it is Alcibiades who lies behind Ajax. The examples that follow are of uneven merit, it is true, and they are only a sample (it is not necessary to taste all the sea to know that it is salty), but they cumulatively turn on its head the position that in his plays Sophocles stood aloof from the world of politics. They also remove many of the problems with which current criticism of the play is beset ... Ajax’s madness and mutability alone, for example, raise many questions, but the answers fall easily into place when viewed against the background of an Alcibiades whose character was full of ‘many strange inconsistencies and contradictions’ (Plut. *Alc.* 2.1), and any apparent flaws in the tragic hero would have been intentional.<sup>24</sup> Sophocles is indeed ‘reaching after effects of

<sup>22</sup> Vickers 2008, 49-50; cf. Gregoire and Orgels 1953; Gregoire 1955.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Vickers 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Vandvik 1942.

irony which can only be described as bizarre,<sup>25</sup> for such was the nature of his principal model. The nature of Ajax's regard for the truth, or the lack of it,<sup>26</sup> is related to his madness, but again, when we reflect that the likely model was one who had once fooled Spartan envoys by means of 'deceit and oaths' (Plut. *Nic.* 10.4), who had betrayed his city, and who was epitomized by Plutarch as 'a tricky politician and deceitful' (Plut. *Alc.* 41.1), problems recede, and there is thus no incompatibility between any apparent deceit and the supposed character of Ajax. Nor will there be any need to explain away any impieties on Ajax's part, for they will all have been part of Sophocles' skilful character building, and Alcibiades' impiety needs no gloss; ditto, Alcibiades' hubris<sup>27</sup> and his μεγαλοπραγμοσύνη (grandiose schemes; Plut. *Alc.* 6.4), which also seem to have informed the picture that Sophocles creates.<sup>28</sup>

This was supported by items such as (1) Themistius' very short list of famous μεγαλοφύχοι, that consists of 'Alcibiades, Ajax and Achilles' (*APo.* 5.1.56,); (2) a resolution of the 'unsettled problem'<sup>29</sup> of Ajax's claim to 'have been made female' (651) (Alcibiades' 'ambiguous sexuality' is relevant here, and the fact that he had probably been represented on the stage as Helen and Lysistrata in the year before *Ajax* may also be pertinent); (3) an explanation of the apparent Themistoclean references in *Ajax* (Okell 2002) (Alcibiades' residence in 412 in Themistocles' place of exile, and his awareness of the reputation of his predecessor<sup>30</sup> come into play); and (4) an explanation for the title of the play in Greek, *Αἴας μαστιγοφόρος* or *Ajax the Whip-carrier*, in the stories that Alcibiades had once been horse-whipped at Olympia (Hermog. *Inv.* 2.4.37).

This is what I meant when I was referring to the saltiness of the sea; I did not think it necessary to spell out quite how much Alcibiades had been guilty of impiety or deceit, subjects that are not in dispute. And if Alcibiades does indeed come forward as Ajax, the major problems recede at a stroke. There has been a general reluctance to see Ajax as mad, despite the evidence to the contrary. There has been little on the subject since E. Vandvik's article 'Ajax the Insane' written as long ago as 1942; likewise, N.E. Collinge, writing in 1962, was a rare observer of Antigone's essential irrationality. Sophocles, however, was on to Alcibiades' case and did not hesitate to use the weapons of allusive commentary in order to resist what he regarded as a baleful influence within the Athenian state.

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Any modern student of Greek drama has to deal with the malign legacy of E.R. Dodds, who effectively put a brake on rational discussion of tragedy with his dictum that 'it is an essential critical principle that *what is not mentioned in the play does not exist*' (italics original).<sup>31</sup> Thus shackled, it is small wonder that scholars have tended to ignore the historical context within which plays were composed. Dodds' edition of Euripides *Bacchae*, for example, misses the point of the play, which is to serve as a riposte to

<sup>25</sup> Moore 1997, 55.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Welcker 1829; Bowra 1944, 29-41; Reinhardt 1947, 31; Sicherl 1977; Crane 1990.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Garvie 1998, 12-16 on Ajax's *hubris*.

<sup>28</sup> Vickers 2008, 53-4.

<sup>29</sup> Taplin 1979, 128; cf. Seaford 1994, 282.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Podlecki 1975, 139, n. 9; Schneider 1999, 23, n. 40.

<sup>31</sup> Dodds 1966, 40.

Sophocles' apparent favouring of Critias in *Oedipus at Colonus*.<sup>32</sup> Dodds accurately epitomises the two main characters in *Bacchae*: 'Dionysus is the dispenser of natural joys, Pentheus the joy-hating Puritan',<sup>33</sup> but because of his self-imposed limitation he fails to follow through. In real life outside the theatre, a struggle was taking place between an Alcibiades who was very prone to pleasure (πρὸς ἡδονὰς ἀγώγιμος; Plut. *Alc.* 6.1-2), and a Critias who was possessed of 'a strong puritanical streak'.<sup>34</sup> Euripides had been a fervent supporter of Alcibiades ever since his services were bought to write an epinician in praise of a superficially impressive Olympic victory in the chariot race in 416 BC. 'Superficially impressive' because Euripides obsequiously has Alcibiades winning third, second and third places (Ath. 1.3*e*; Plut. *Alc.* 11.2-3; cf. Isocr. 16.34), whereas Thucydides slyly corrects the record by having Alcibiades publicly state that his horses came in first second and fourth (Thuc. 6.16.2; cf. Plut. *Alc.* 11.2). Euripides' *Helen* and *Ion* advocate Alcibiades' forgiveness and return,<sup>35</sup> and *Bacchae*, written after Euripides had left Athens for the Macedonian court, reflects the situation in Athens after Alcibiades had come back in considerable style. Euripides does all this allusively; Quintilian called him *sententiis densus* ('the master of oblique reference, of allusive resonance' *Inst.* 10.1.68) for good reason.

Inside the play, Dionysus arrives in Greece from an Asia that is described in extravagant terms (13-22). Outside the play, we know that Alcibiades had been in exile in Asia Minor and returned in triumph receiving 'not only all human, but divine honours' (Just. *Epit.* 5.4). All of Dionysus' characteristics — his vinosity, beauty, long hair, smooth cheeks, effeminacy, womanising, luxuriousness — can be matched by those of Alcibiades.<sup>36</sup> Given his client relationship with respect to Alcibiades, we might well read Euripides' exaggeratedly enthusiastic image of the Asia from which Alcibiades had just come as a programmatic imperial shopping list, akin to Alcibiades' earlier, but thwarted, ambitions in the west: 'Carthage and Libya; and after these were gained, [Alcibiades] meditated the conquest of Italy and the Peloponnese' (Plut. *Alc.* 17.1-4). Apart from the fine cities occupied by both Greeks and barbarians, Euripides makes reference to the golden plains of the Lydians and Phrygians, the sun-blasted plateau of the Persians, to Bactrian fortresses and the harsh land of the Medes, as well as to Arabia Felix and 'the whole of Asia'.

Even if Alcibiades failed to achieve the imperial objectives outlined by Euripides, there was another who did. Euripides, whose last years were spent as poet laureate to the Macedonian court, was, or so it has been argued, the favourite tragic poet of Alexander the Great.<sup>37</sup> I have elsewhere suggested that an Alexander tutored by Aristotle will have known that Alcibiades lay behind Dionysian imperialism and that Euripides' vision of Alcibiadean ambition, his imperial shopping list, coloured Alexander's youthful

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<sup>32</sup> Vickers 2008, 95-103.

<sup>33</sup> Dodds 1960, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Ostwald 1986, 465.

<sup>35</sup> Vickers in preparation.

<sup>36</sup> Vickers 2008, 108-110.

<sup>37</sup> T.S. Brown 1967, 359-68. The absence of any reference to Macedon in the context of Euripides in *Frogs* (cf. Scullion 2003) is not a problem; see Vickers 2011b, 14.



imagination, not to mention his later conduct.<sup>38</sup> There is no end to the possibilities once we look ‘outside the play’. I would encourage my *JHS* reviewer (and others) to cast off their Doddsian blinkers, and to take on board the possibility that Greek tragedians personalized their plots and that irrational elements might sometimes have their roots in the psychoses of individuals.

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