UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

School of English

Sophister Examinations
English Studies &
Two Subject Moderatorship

Trinity Term 2006

Tragic Patterns in Ancient Drama

Wednesday 24th May  Arts Building, Room 3074  09.30-12.30

Dr Andrew Power

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Answer three questions.
Be careful not substantially to repeat material.
Your answers must deal substantially with three of the four dramatists on the course.
1. ‘There are two main tragic situations in Supplices.’ Discuss.

2. ‘Alas, wretched am I that I have encountered this cruel doom that gave no faintest sign it could befall! In what savage mood hath Fortune trampled upon the Persian race?’ (Persai, 909-12) Is Fortune as fickle in Aeschylean tragedy as Xerxes suggests?

3. ‘[S]hould success be ours, we owe it to Heaven; but if, on the other hand – which God forfend! – disaster should befall, Eteocles would be the one name on many a citizen’s tongue, bruited up and down the town in mutterings and our laments.’ (Septem Contra Thebas, 4-8) To what extent is the fate of the city bound to that of Eteocles?

4. ‘Aeschylus leaves until nearly the end of his play those events which come earliest in time: Thyestes committed adultery with his brother’s wife (1193f.), Atreus avenged himself on Thyestes, and finally Thyestes’ son on Atreus’ son – by adultery and murder.’ (Kitto) To what extent is Agamemnon the tragedy of a house rather than the tragedy of a single man?

5. “‘For word of hate let word of hate be said,” crieth Justice aloud as she exacteth the debt, “and for murderous stroke let murderous stroke be paid.” “To him that doeth, it shall be done by,” so saith a
precept thrice-aged.’ *(Choephoroi, 309-13)* Discuss the themes of justice and balance in *Choephoroi*.

6. ‘[T]he trial resulted fairly in ballots equally divided without disgrace to thee; but from Zeus was offered testimony clear, and he that himself uttered the oracle himself bare witness that Orestes should not suffer harm for this deed.’ *(Athena, 795-9)* Discuss the ‘fairness’ of the trial that resolves the conflict in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*.

7. Discuss the importance of the Erinyes throughout Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*.

8. ‘The scene is not familiarly laid in the conventional forecourt of a temple or a house, but is fantastically placed at the edge of the world, in land no man has ever seen or trodden. The protagonist is discovered propped against a cliff, silent and bound.’ *(Havelock)* How does the unusual setting of Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound* affect the tragedy?

9. ‘Oh child, may you be happier than your father, but in all other respects alike. And then you would not be bad.’ *(Ajax, 559)* To what extent is Ajax the author of his own unhappiness?

10. In what way can *Antigone* be described as a diptych?
11. ‘[Euripides’s] desire was to portray, in Deianeira’s character, the gentleness and patient devotion of womanhood’. (Haigh) Discuss in relation to *Trachiniae*.

12. ‘In more than one way *Oedipus Tyrannos* is a play about self-discovery.’ Discuss.

13. Discuss the importance of family history in Sophocles’s *Electra*.

14. ‘Much of Sophoclean theatricality resides in his use of significant objects and significant actions, especially exits and entrances’ (Gould). Discuss.

15. ‘Tragedy is a glorious kind of poetry in every way. For one thing, the stories are familiar to the audience before anyone’s opened their mouth, so all the poet has to do is remind them.’ (Antiphanes) To what extent does Euripides rely on pre-existing myth in *Heracles*?

16. ‘[Beneath Medea’s] various personae lies a coherent, credible and effective character, a woman with a strong sense of justice whose suffering and humiliation drive her to revenge.’ (Allan) Discuss in relation to Euripides’s *Medea*.
17. How serious is Euripides’s treatment of the familiar myth of *Orestes*; is this really still tragedy or is it something else?

18. ‘The basic unit is neither the polis, nor the individual, but the family.’ (Lightfoot) Discuss identity and society in Euripides’s *Ion*.

19. ‘Dionysus is not avenging himself on Pentheus only but on all those – Cadmus and his dupes – who have rejected him.’ (Kitto) Discuss the nature of divinity as Euripides’s *Bacchae* presents it to us.

20. ‘[Senecan drama] makes a virtue of excess’. (Fitch) Discuss the excesses of Seneca’s *Medea*.

21. Discuss self-image in Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*.

22. Compare the use of the same mythological material by any two tragedians on the course.

23. Discuss the themes of exile and homecoming in Greek tragedy.