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IT HAS OFTEN BEEN SUSPECTED that, along with the abundance of contemporary political themes, Euripides' *Suppliants* may contain contemporary political allusions to the career of the young Alcibiades.[1] It is this possibility that I would like to explore in this paper. It will be necessary, along with some discussion of the history of the 420's, to examine also the possible role of political allusion in a tragic drama and the functions, political or social or aesthetic, that such allusions might have served.

The political themes in *Suppliants* continued a vigorous life in later prose.[2] Colin McLeod pointed out the many overlaps with Thucydides, while dismissing the likelihood of a direct influence from tragic drama to the historian or to later prose writers.[3] But, as I have argued in the case of nebulous fifth-century "atheistic" texts, tragedy in Euripides' day was the best forum for serious intellectual debate.[4] Without ignoring the existence of prose works of the fifth century that may have dealt with political topics, we should not be quick to deny that tragedy too could have been a source for later historians and political theorists. In fact, the ubiquitous presence in the Euripidean play of political and ethical themes that reemerge in fourth-century rhetorical, historical, and philosophical texts contrasts with the relative absence of points of contact between these texts and our one contemporary prose exemplar, the "Old Oligarch's" tract (= Pseudo-Xenophon, *Ath. Pol.*).

As I have shown (1994), along with its examination of the contemporary political ideology of *hêsuchia/apragmosunê, Suppliants* demonstrates and plays out the connections between these contemporary slogans and the elegiac/iambic poetry of Solon and Theognis, which was rich in political and ethical themes. Since this earlier poetry was influential in prose works from the orators through Aristotle and beyond,[5] there is no reason to eliminate *Suppliants* from the sources used by these same authors. In any case, Thucydides' treatment of Alcibiades indicates that the persona and attitudes

1. See Nestle (1901) 15-16; Grégoire (1923) 90; Delebecque (1951) 221-23.
2. See Michelini (1994), esp. 232. Future references to that article and its predecessor (1991) will be cited by date alone without author's attribution.
3. (1983) 145-55.
4. See Michelini (1987) 127.
5. Note Aristotle citing Solon 13W.71 πλούτου δ' οὐδὲν τέρμα κτλ. to support his own view of the danger of privileging economic over political theory (*Pol.* 1256b33).

associated with this political figure drew upon the same images that gather around Theseus in this play. The paired speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades in Book 6 echo *Suppliants* in associating age and youth with conservative and aggressive politics respectively, while the excuse for imperialism given to Alcibiades (6.18.6-7), that it is habitual for Athenians to be active, echoes Theseus' remark when he capitulates to his mother's arguments and agrees to support the Argives against Thebes.[6]

I will not attempt to fix a precise date for the play. But the theme of Athenian-Argive relations would have been ineffective in such a political play, once 418 had passed, and with it hopes for Argos as a bulwark against Sparta. On the other hand, it seems unreasonable to assume that hints of Argive possibilities could only have appeared at certain, narrowly defined political junctures in the years before. We know little about the various crosscurrents of Athenian politics in the mid-420's, nor is there any reason why a political play should refer only to the most current topics.[7] If in fact, as I am arguing, the play alludes persistently to a particular political figure, political concerns of his might be prominent in the play even at a time when, for most Athenians, these concerns were still peripheral. Metrical statistics, which cannot yield precise results, point to the middle 420's or a little after,[8] and that is quite sufficient for my purposes.

The suggestion that Alcibiades is the political figure who in some way stands behind the portrayal of Theseus in *Suppliants* has been rejected on several grounds. Goossens (1962, 443) argued that Alcibiades was too unknown to have received such notice in the middle 420's, and in fact historians have sometimes implied that Alcibiades emerged as an important political figure only at the end of the decade. It is true that the character given Theseus fails to match that traditionally ascribed to Alcibiades[9] and that the treatment of the theme of youthful leadership, the theme which most strongly suggests Alcibiades and his career, may appear too negative to convey any positive message. A further difficulty, probably obvious to many who have ignored the topic, would be to discover any possible role for political allusion in tragedy. Old Comedy was available as an open forum for exposing political notions and political figures; why should tragedy, which dealt with the obscure heroic past, be needed as a second, necessarily more oblique forum?

6. Ll. 337-41; see Michelini (1994) 232 and n.49. Forde's analysis of Thucydides' treatment of Alcibiades documents other themes shared by Thucydides and Euripidean tragedy, notably the association of war with *erôs* (1989) 30-34; on *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, cf. W. D. Smith (1979).

7. Zuntz (1955) 157-59 argued against the extreme precision with which members of the French historicist school (see Michelini [1987] 28-30) attempted to link plays and events. The battle of Delium was proposed by Grégoire (1923) 93-94, Wilamowitz (1926) 209-11, and Delebecque (1951) 203-04 as the central event behind *Suppliants*, in spite of the fact that Delium was a defeat and that the old story of Theban refusal to return bodies for burial was undoubtedly already a standard of the Funeral Orations. See discussion in Michelini (1994) 221, n.2.

8. See Devine and Stephens (1981) 49; their suggested date (423) coincides with that suggested by Zuntz. Collard (1975) 1, 10-12 suggested 424.

9. Zuntz (1955) 4: the loose reputation of Alcibiades little fits the moral perfections of Theseus.

I will begin with the question about Alcibiades' early career. The question about the fit between Alcibiades and Theseus is a literary one, and I think that it can be sufficiently answered by consideration of the play's thematic structure and comparison with another literary genre, one devoted to overt praise of an individual, the epinician ode. The third question will require some discussion of the generic functions of tragedy and comedy as well as the assistance of a modern parallel.

Alcibiades' pedigree gave him close links through his mother, Deinomache, daughter of Megacles, grand-niece of Cleisthenes, to the most elevated segment of the Alcmaeonid clan; Pericles' maternal descent was in the same line since his mother was a niece of Cleisthenes.[10] On the death of his father Kleinias at the battle of Coroneia in 447-46, Alcibiades, when still a young child, came under the guardianship of Pericles.[11] Pericles was the cousin of Alcibiades' mother, and, if Deinomache was not remarried after Kleinias' death or if she was later widowed again, she too would have come under Pericles' protection. Scholars have recently suggested that the connection between Alcibiades' family and Pericles may go further: inherited family names suggest that Aspasia, the metic concubine of Pericles, may have been a younger sister of a woman with whom Alcibiades the elder, the grandfather, had allied himself during exile in Miletus.[12] Finally, Pericles' first wife, mother of his two legitimate sons and related to him by blood, was also married to the wealthy Hipponicus,[13] father of Callias. Alcibiades, in turn, married Hipponicus' daughter, Hipparete.[14] These close interfamilial connections and parallel marital liaisons, as well as the deaths of Pericles' two legitimate sons and the questionable status of Pericles the Younger,[15] make it not unreasonable at all to see Alcibiades as the only available inheritor of his guardian's political prestige.[16] The earliest story told about Alcibiades' public career is that he fought at Potidaia and that the generals awarded him a prize for valorous conduct.[17] Alcibiades cannot have been

10. On the Alcmaeonid connections see Ellis (1989) 2, 5, 8; on the family of Alcibiades, see also Bicknell (1982), Stanley (1986), and Davies (1971) 9-22.

11. On joint guardianship with Ariphron, his (paternal) uncle, see Plutarch, *Alc.* 1, 3. On the birth date of Alcibiades, see Hatzfeld (1940) 24-27, who places it at 451 and Ellis (1989) 1, who suggests 450 as "a reasonable approximation."

12. The evidence comes from a later grave monument of Alcibiades' family with the names Aspasios and Axiochos; Aspasia's father was Axiochos (Plutarch, *Per.* 24). See Henry (1995) 13-14 who cites Bicknell (1982); see also Stanley (1986). Alcibiades' uncle, Axiochos, was close to his age and was sometimes allied with him in his escapades (Bicknell [1982] 241).

13. For the controversy over whether she married Hipponicus before or after her divorce from Pericles, see Davies (1971) 457. See also Cox (1989) 35 and n.3.

14. Cf. Cox (1989) for a fascinating account of the way in which accusations of incest repeatedly marked the dissolution of marital bonds between the family of Hipponicus and that of Alcibiades. This, of course, provided more grist for the comic mills and indicates the spiraling interaction between oratory and comedy in creating the myths of personal "biography."

15. On this individual's treatment by the comic poets, see Henry (1995) 15, 23-24.

16. For a contrary opinion, see Hatzfeld (1940) 32ff.

17. Isocrates' *On the Team* 16.29 is the most detailed ancient source; since it defends the younger Alcibiades, it would tend to put the most glorified construction on the award. For Socratic suggestions that Socrates was the real deserver of the prize, see the account by Plato's Alcibiades in *Symp.* 220d6-e7.

above twenty;[18] and, if there is any truth in the story at all, it indicates a brilliant opening for the young man.

Alcibiades is a target of the comic poets as early as 427, when in his early twenties he was lampooned in the *Daitaleis* of Aristophanes.[19] The passage (K198 = PCG205) is a stichomythy in which the second speaker (B) comments on the abstruse vocabulary of the first (A), speculating on the sources of A's various affected neologisms. B is likely to be an older man while A would represent the "new rhetoricians." The first idiom is ascribed to a well-known politician,[20] and the next one (καταπλιγήσει) is identified as coming "from the *rhêtores*." B traces the third example of affected language (ἀποβήσεται) to Alcibiades, and A indignantly complains that B insults men of practiced nobility (καλοκαγαθίαν ἀσκοῦντες).[21] B, still citing neologisms (A used ὑποτεκμαίρει), cries out, "Oh in the name of Thrasymachus, which *sunêgoros* [an advocate in the popular court] thought up that monstrosity?"[22] Alcibiades here is lodged firmly in a context that identifies him as a "*rhêtor*" (i.e., an active politician), admired by some but attacked by others for his affected diction. B's final comment suggests a source for such language in the formal rhetorical training offered by professionals such as Thrasymachus, and suggests also that Alcibiades belonged to the class of *sunêgoroi*.[23]

For association of this office with clever, talkative young men getting ahead in politics, see *Acharnians* 675-718. In this play, produced two years later, the aged chorus complain that the young *sunêgoroi* mistreat untrained older defendants by flaunting their elaborate vocabulary (στρογγύλοις τοῖς ῥήμασιν) and fluent oratory (σκανδάληθρ' ἱστὰς ἐπῶν —688). It would be better, they conclude, for old men to get an old accuser, and for the young to get "a fast-talking bugger like the son of Kleinias (εὐρύπρωκτος καὶ λάλος χὠ Κλεινίου — 716)." Here Alcibiades' sexual notoriety is linked with his rhetorical slickness, not a rare connection in Aristophanes (see *Clouds* 1085-1104). Clearly, Alcibiades was in a position to begin his political career at an age when most youths were advised to keep a modest distance from active political involvement, as did the youthful Pericles.[24] Alcibiades followed in the footsteps of his guardian by distinguishing him-

18. Plutarch refers to him as a *meirakion (Alc.* 7). While Ellis (1989) 24-27 places too much trust in Platonic dialogues as historical sources, he may be right in placing Alcibiades at Potidaia in September 432; see also Hatzfeld (1940) 62. By Ellis' dating, he would have been 18 at the time.

19. The account of this play's plot in Schmid-Stählin (4.2, 182-83) suggests that it was intended as an attack on current rhetorical education.

20. Lysistratos; see Aristoph., *Ach.* 855-59.

21. The phrase is significant. *Kalokagathia,* the mark of the gentleman, is no longer inherited but has become a *technê* (skill) requiring training, just like athletics.

22. οἴμ' ὦ Θρασύμαχε, τίς τοῦτο τῶν ξυνηγόρων τερατεύεται;

23. For the probability that already in the fifth century a board of ten *synêgoroi* assisted in the *euthynai* of public officials, see Ostwald (1986) 60-61, 211-12, 231-32. O. argues that there is no evidence that Alcibiades acted in this capacity (292-93); but, taken together, the two passages make it clear that he was thought of as a model of the *synêgoros*.

24. Cf. Plutarch's account of Pericles' early period, *Per.* 7.

self in battle; but he also used a new avenue, the office of *sunêgoros*, to become well-known, even notorious, in the political arena. He was a byword not only for his rhetorical skills but also for his elaborate and intellectualizing diction.

Thucydides' account of the mid-420's indicates that Alcibiades already had strong political pretensions in that period. The historian states (5.43) that Alcibiades resented the role of Nicias and Laches in the peace negotiation with Sparta, since he felt that his own inherited proxeny relationship should have been recognized and used by the negotiators.[25] He had, Thucydides further remarks, been currying Spartan favor by offering help to the prisoners captured in Sphakteria (425). While still in his twenties, then, Alcibiades had the pride, or the arrogance, to attempt to compete with established and older politicians. If we put any credence at all in Thucydides' suggestion that Alcibiades' resentment at this rebuff led directly to his Argive machinations (6.89.1-3), then his Argive policy would have its roots in a period several years before the actual treaty was concluded.

In sum, the apparent date of *Suppliants* in the middle or later 420's coincides with a period when Alcibiades was increasingly active in Athenian politics and during which he displayed political ambitions considerably out of proportion to his age. The production of a highly political play, full of themes taken from the elegiac poets as well as contemporary sloganeering, and featuring an extremely youthful and highly intellectual leader, orphaned by his father,[26] who creates a formal alliance between Argos and Athens, does indeed seem to point directly at Alcibiades. Further, the political position of Theseus, leader of a democracy in which he nonetheless holds a uniquely powerful position, obviously parallels what Thucydides and others have told us about the prestige of Pericles.[27] But Pericles was in his sixties when he died in the early years of the decade: the identity of a new, extremely youthful Pericles should be obvious.[28]

I now turn to the second question: why, given the prominence of a highly admirable youthful political leader in *Suppliants*, is the treatment of youth and its potential in this play so ambiguous, containing many dark elements? How could such a play have served to advance Alcibiades politically? But the question may be somewhat misdirected. Artistic works, especially those of a fictional, dramatic nature, are very blunt instruments with which to pro-

25. See the further development of this motif in Alcibiades' Spartan speech, 6.89.1-2: the *atimia* he suffered at the rejection of his proxeny led him to seek the Argive alliance. See Bloedow (1991), Ellis (1989) 17.

26. Alcibiades' mother may still have been alive at this date since Theseus' relation to his mother is so strongly emphasized in the play. Grégoire pointed out (1923) 86 how irregular it is for Aethra to appear as the legitimate Athenian widow of Aegeus. See also Calame (1990) 195: Theseus is usually depicted as having separated from his mother at the very beginning of his career. The emphasis on Aethra in this play might reflect the importance of Deinomache in Alcibiades' family tree.

27. See Michelini (1994) 233 and n.52. See also the extensive work of Goossens (1932) and (1962) 447ff. on the parallels between Pericles and Theseus in this play. Goossens, however, concludes that the political parallels suggest not Alcibiades but Nicias, although the latter was "well into his forties" when first elected general in 427 (Lewis; *CAH* 5, 406)!

28. For emphasis on the extreme youth of Theseus, see Michelini (1994) 220-21, 239-40.

mote particular political policies; but that does not mean that they lack political significance altogether.[29] We would do better to compare the epinician odes of Pindar, which celebrated the athletic achievement of a young man or boy by glorifying his family, civic, and cult associations.[30] Kevin Crotty (1982, 5-7) has shown that, while the victory song may be seen as a kind of opposite to the tragic pathos of the hero, it too may emphasize the passive, god-determined element in human success. The close affinity of *Suppliants* with the Funeral Orations and their patriotic praise of Athens has long been noted; but the complex manner in which the patriotic myth in *Suppliants* is treated has more in common with the victory ode than it does with the tone of the Funeral Oration, where, as N. Loraux (1981) has shown, negatives of any sort tend to be firmly repressed.[31]

Suppliants is a true tragedy in Crotty's terms in that it presents "the insufficiency of moral resources in a world designed without regard for men's will or well-being" (1982, 5); but it also resembles Solon's great "Hymn to the Muses" (13W) in which, as Crotty shows (33ff.), there is a deliberate movement between two poles, from morality to tragedy, from maxims on how to succeed in life to a recognition of the basic unfairness, instability, and perversity of human experience. So too in *Suppliants*, the movement from the youthful Theseus' intellectualized optimism and stern moralism to a tragic sense of repeated error and failure, as the generations cycle from youth to age,[32] presents us with a broad, humanized prospect. In this prospect the wondrous boy-king, with his persistent good fortune and his faith in justice, stands out against an Argive background of error, suffering, and transcendence. Like Pindar, Euripides can praise the glorious achievements of untried youth while placing them in a frame that shows how arbitrary and exceptional they really are. The play thus develops as an *enkômion Athênôn* (praise of Athens) that nevertheless raises important political questions and suggests the pitfalls that lie before the pursuit of extreme distinction. If the play does praise Alcibiades, it does so in a manner consonant with the highest values of praise poetry rather than praise oratory. A patron and an audience familiar with the epinician mode would not have failed to see the appropriateness of Euripides' treatment.

The third and most difficult question is to ask how political allusion works in tragedy and what its connection might be to the historical figure of Alcibiades. We know that Alcibiades was notorious in his youth as only

29. Political allusions in literary works acquire enormous force in totalitarian regimes, but this is the result of repression. Prudish societies like our own react similarly to any hint of sexual double-entendre. The mere fact that the allusion is made is of thunderous importance; but this does not mean that the message is a precise one. Athens in the fifth century, of course, suffered little repression in either cultural area.

30. See Kurke (1991) 1-12. The location of the play, at Eleusis, may also reflect the involvement of Alcibiades' and Pericles' *kêdestai* in the cult. See Cox (1989) 38-39. Euripides did, apparently, compose a fairly conventional *epinikion* for Alcibiades' chariot victory in 416, which certainly suggests a sympathetic connection with this figure at that period; on the poem see Bowra (1960).

31. See discussion of this contrast in (1994) 248-50.

32. (1994) 246, 249; for Theseus' optimistic philosophy, see (1991) 20-21, 23-24. For the importance of Theseus as a figure of adolescence and maturation, see the analysis of his legend in Calame (1990) 186-92.

Greek youths could be, combining masculine achievements with a degree of sexual popularity and glamor that would make a 1950's Debutante of the Year pale in comparison.[33] We know that he was early orphaned and the stories—as well as the general picture of Alcibiades' youth— suggest that Pericles did not control him much. His association with Socrates was very likely embellished by the fantasies of the Socratics;[34] but the comic texts make it clear that Alcibiades was learned and sophisticated, at least as a *rhêtôr*. Pericles' own patronage and association with certain intellectuals was so well-known as to become an eventual source of political controversy for him and for them; it would hardly be surprising if Alcibiades intended to acquire similar associations for himself.

What *Suppliants* does for Alcibiades is to overlay his public persona with one that resembles him at key points but differs signally elsewhere. Like Theseus, Alcibiades is an orphaned youth with great inherited prestige. Like Theseus, he is intellectual and argumentative (1991, 19). Like Theseus, he has a unique position in a democracy—or would like to lay claim to such a position. Like Theseus, he enters the political arena in a time of extreme youth. Like Theseus, he supports aggressive foreign policies (1994, 239-40).

There are, however, aspects of Alcibiades' public persona that are either absent from the play or carefully negated. Alcibiades' reputation was that of the naughty young man who scoffs at traditional morality and revels in sexual notoriety, succumbing to many lovers while a boy and seducing other men's wives once he is mature.[35] By contrast, Theseus' obedient relationship to his mother suggests an opposite character, what the more rebellious young men would call a *blitomammas*, a "good boy."[36] Any hint of the dangerous, sexual aspects of Alcibiades, as well as the daring quality of his personality which matches those exploits, are wiped out by Theseus' stubborn caution, his deference to his mother,[37] and his stern denunciations of ambitious youths who seek glory by making war (232-37). We might compare *The American President*, a recent movie clearly designed to support and defend the Democratic incumbent. On the screen, the least pleasant and most caricaturable aspects of President Clinton are absent: his gushing Southern style, his rather excessive affability, his overindulgence in food and sexuality, his strong wife (herself controversial), and his tendency to reverse himself under pressure. Instead, we are given a sanitized president, a former history professor from a northern state, who courageously resists the temptation to com-

33. See Plutarch, *Alc.* 1, 3-5 detailing his triumphs over his would-be lovers whom he treats with flirtatious disdain. The parallel with the "Deb" is not a frivolous one: as Dover has shown (1978) 121-22, the sexual adulation accorded certain youths was attended with a considerable degree of danger if their reputations should be publicly and irreparably damaged (cf. Plutarch, *Alc.* 3). See also Cohen (1991) 171-202.

34. See Ellis (1989) 20-23 for a very credulous account of Alcibiades' relationship to Socrates.

35. There is, of course, no contradiction in these two roles which belong to different life periods but express the same tendency; see the jibe of Pherecrates (*PCG* 164) that Alcibiades has managed, through his rampant sexuality, to confuse the two; though not yet an *anêr* (man), he now acts as the *anêr* (husband) of all the women.

36. I refer, of course, to *Clouds* 1000-02; cf. 1068-1078, the locus classicus for this distinction.

37. Whose foreign policy is much more jingoistic than his own (1994) 230-33!

promise liberal principles, and—most strikingly—a widower whose sexual peccadilloes are exceedingly venial. On the Athenian tragic stage, a benign reference to Alcibiades' sexuality would have been very difficult: Euripides, of course, often uses sexual themes in his plays; but the effect is almost always disturbing and morally ambivalent.[38] *Suppliants* does give strong play to another of Alcibiades' controversial aspects, his intellectualism; but, instead of suggesting amorality, Theseus' argumentative and philosophical style is harnessed to material straight out of Theognis and thus redeemed. Theseus' only major deviation from tradition—he rejects the idea of pollution in association with the dead—merely underlines the piety of his attention to burial ritual.

Finally, we may ask, why should veiled allusions to a particular political figure be introduced to the tragic stage? In comedy, allusions were not even needed because individuals were lampooned directly by name and in the most outrageous terms.[39] Comedy, however, is a genre of blame; it could serve to damage and lower a political reputation but could do little to enhance it—that required another venue. The association of serious poetic genres with praise is patent in Greek literary traditions. Alcibiades' sexual escapades and other eccentricities offered continual food to comic poets; but his aspirations, which always seem to have been of the most unbounded and heroic sort,[40] required quite another approach.

This suffices to provide a motivation for Alcibiades, whose career E. F. Bloedow has characterized as "long on drama, especially in his initial appearance on the political scene."[41] What of Euripides? The embodiment of Periclean ascendancy in all its paradoxicality, Theseus is characterized as a kind of democratic monarch. Thucydides, as Forde points out (1989, 5-11), used the complementary figures of Pericles and Alcibiades to explore the strategic and moral problems facing the Athenian democracy. The Thucydidean text strongly suggests that the Athenian democratic government confronted a challenge beyond its powers when it attempted to assimilate the remarkable leadership potential of Alcibiades. Euripides acted with his usual prescience when he centered his complex political drama on a youthful and intellectual protagonist, the point at which conflicting views of democracy could meet.

38. Calame (1990) 198-206 points out that the youthful Theseus' rejection of Ariadne, a rejection directed in some versions by Athena, indicates the subordination of erotic to political concerns. This orientation of the early or ephebic Theseus would be a useful corrective for the notorious reputation of Alcibiades.

39. This question has been largely neglected in the earlier literature; see, recently, Vickers (1989) who assumes that Aristophanes would make delicate and hidden allusions to Alcibiades' speech defect and thence to his policies. V. also attempts to argue (by emending various rhos to lambdas or the reverse) that the heroine of Euripides' *Helen* must represent Alcibiades himself.

40. See the characterization given him by Thucydides, analysed by Forde as a kind of exaggeration of Athenian national character (1989) 6-7, 183ff. See also Ellis (1989) xv.

41. (1991) 61: B. refers to the Argive matter, Alcibiades' first appearance in Thucydides.

