

5-2001

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Examination of Their Relationship in Sophocles' Oedipus at
Colonus and Aristophanes' The Acharnians**

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The Hero and the Polis in Greek Tragedy and Comedy:
An Examination of Their Relationship in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and
Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*

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May 2001

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dale Barnes and Christine Cowan for all of their help with putting this thesis together. Your support, encouragement, and direction were very appreciated!

Introduction

Drama is a mimetic form of communication; it imitates, as Aristotle argues in *The Poetics*, an entire experience through action and emotion of the characters, plot, symbolism, and spectacle on a stage to enable the audience to see and contemplate the issues associated with this experience more clearly. In classical Greek tragedy and comedy these mimetic experiences often relate to the polis itself, which was the center of Greek life, and focus on the hero's influence on the polis.

Tragedy traditionally centers on the fall from prosperity to devastation, while comedy presents the putting of a fractured world back together. Because these two different approaches to drama consider the world from opposing viewpoints, a comparison of these two genres can yield a fuller understanding of problems in the polis and of how an individual's actions affect the polis.

Comedies such as Aristophanes' *The Acharnians* present the audience with the image of an ideal polis that is created by a single character, Dikeapolis, in the middle of the existing city of Athens, which is plagued with problems, as his means for establishing a personal peace with Athens' enemies. Aristophanes uses this image of Dikeapolis' private city to show the audience a corresponding intellectual or spiritual method for achieving such a personal peace through their own imagining of the ideal polis. In contrast to this, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* exemplifies the classical approach of tragedy in dealing with problems of the polis by presenting an image of the fallen polis and explaining how the hero contributed to the fall of the city and to his own fall and his attempts then to save the city.

Both of these playwrights wrote their plays in a similar historical context, during the Great Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta that took place from 431 to 404 B.C.E. *The Acharnians* was written in about 425 B.C.E., six years after the beginning of this war and four years before a temporary peace between Athens and Sparta was established. *Oedipus at Colonus*

was written in 406 B.C.E., just two years before the end of the Peloponnesian War. Because these plays were written during wartime, war was the firsthand experience of these dramatists and therefore part of the experience that they convey in their plays. Both of these plays project Athens as either the ideal polis, as seen in Aristophanes' comedy, based on the virtuous goal of peace and on citizens whose primary interests are focused on what is good for the community as a whole, or as the polis that needs to realize its shortcomings, as Sophocles' play presents.

Comedy functions to portray an image of the imaginary ideal polis so that the audience may assimilate the mimetic experience through the dramatization of this fictional city. This helps the audience understand their own connections to the real polis and enables them to internalize the experience of the ideal even though they must live in the reality of the corrupted polis. Many elements of *The Acharnians* relate directly to Athenian society at the time it was written. The hero of this play, Dikeapolis, creates his own ideal city-within-the-city when he sets up his own small agora in the middle of the Athenian agora and begins to trade with Athens' enemies. It is only in comedy that actions such as these, which would be considered blatant treason in reality, can be portrayed. Because the premise of comedy is to depict an imaginary event that is meant to be imitated spiritually or conceptually and not in reality, Dikeapolis' actions are seen as positive in this context even though he does the unthinkable by specifically trading with the Boeotians and the Megarians. Boeotia was a particular enemy of Athens during the Peloponnesian War and the state that contained Thebes, the only part of Central Greece that Athens did not control. Megara was a defected Athenian ally who had previously played a large role in Athens' ability to dominate Greece, but after a rebel army in Euboea revolted, Megara allied itself with Sparta instead. As a declaration of his determination to make peace with Athens' enemies, Dikeapolis says, "And I to all the Peloponnesian folk,/ Megarians and Boeotians, give full leave/ To trade

with me; but not to Lamachus”¹ (32). This speech indicates Aristophanes’ desire for peace and the refusal to allow anyone connected with war, such as Lamachus, an Athenian general, into the peaceful boundaries of his ideal city. Athens and Sparta had earlier signed two “Thirty Years Peace” treaties in 451 and again in 446, obviously unsustained. The desire for such a treaty is also evident in *The Acharnians*, where Dikeapolis tests out several different peace treaties for various lengths of time: five years, ten years, and finally thirty years. The only peace treaty he approves is that of the thirty years’ time, the exact number of years that Athens and Sparta tried to establish in reality before the eruption of the Peloponnesian War. In Aristophanes’ ideal polis, however, this peace does work and enemies become allies. This image of the ideal polis is juxtaposed with Aristophanes’ presentation of the Athenian agora surrounding Dikeapolis’ marketplace; the latter is the world of war and Lamachus. General Lamachus is characterized as a man who, because of his determination to go to war and his desire for glory in war, only ends up wounded, symbolic of what results when political leaders are more concerned with personal gain than they are for what is best for the community.

The failure of democracy that sparks the comedic hero’s attempts to put the fractured polis back together is also a key point in *The Acharnians*. In fact, the opening of the play focuses on a dysfunctional democracy. Dikeapolis is portrayed in the midst of an assembly on the Pnyx, but though he is in the right place for voicing his opinions, no one is listening to him. At this time in history, the democratic structure of Athens was in danger of deterioration because of the threat of war with Sparta and the resistance to Athenian democracy from both the political leaders of Athens and from Athens’ enemies. Those at the assembly in *The Acharnians* were all more intent on hearing their own voices than on listening to what others had to say, thus foregoing the democratic goal of giving a voice to the people. This “failure” of democracy,

coupled with the aforementioned belligerence of Athenian leaders, is reminiscent of the rule of Pericles, who led Athens until his death in 429, only four years before Aristophanes wrote *The Acharnians*. As Thucydides writes about the state of Athens after Pericles' death,

What they did was the very opposite [of virtue], allowing private ambitions and interests, in matters apparently quite foreign to the war, lead them to projects unjust to both themselves and to their allies — projects whose success would only conduce to the honour and advantage of individuals, and whose failure entailed certain disaster on the country in war. ²

So this is the setting for Aristophanes' comedy *The Acharnians*, which focuses on the image of an ideal polis created through the efforts of the lone comedic hero and his dedication to peace during a time in which Athens seemed destined to fall and indeed would.

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* also has a strong connection to the Peloponnesian War. In this play, Sophocles depicts the doomed polis, Thebes, as the city plagued by problems because of self-serving leadership and a corrupted political system. It does not, as in *The Acharnians*, focus on an image of the ideal polis. Instead, in the traditional form of tragedy, this play serves to examine the failing polis and how the tragic hero participates in this failing. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus has finally escaped Thebes, the city that represents a fractured oikos and poor leadership. Written so close to Athens' defeat, the play depicts the failing polis that Athens was becoming at the time. Here, however, Sophocles uses Thebes, not Athens, as the image of the divided and doomed city because it was founded on violence and rejected its own god, Dionysus, when Pentheus, a former Theban king "opposed his revels with the Theban women on Mount Cithaeron and tried to arrest him."³ Oedipus is a member of the House of Cadmus, the mythical founder of Thebes whose family was characterized as "raving, daemon-ridden: mad-doomed — to ruin Thebes."⁴ The myth recounts that this curse on the

House of Cadmus was placed upon the family by Ares, “the god who is dishonored among gods — the god of war” when Cadmus killed his *drakon* (snake or dragon).⁵ Thus, by nature of his ancestry, Oedipus is doomed to cause disorder in Thebes from the curse of the god of war.

However, there is also an element of hope in *Oedipus at Colonus* because it is in this play that Oedipus is finally absolved of the guilt from his sins, becomes suppliant to Athens, and then, through a mystical event, dies a blessed death. This ending is a hopeful one for Athens as the site of Oedipus' death because, according to the prophecy of his birth, the polis which contains his burial site will be blessed.

Because tragedy portrays the fractured world as well as the hero's contribution to that fracture, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* expresses what can go wrong with a polis and how the hero's actions and intentions affect the failure or success of the city. Sophocles uses Thebes as the model for what can result when the building blocks of a community are harmed or defective. He looks directly at the *oikos*, the family structure that is an essential part of a polis: For one to have healthy relationships with fellow citizens or a healthy relationship between a leader and his people, one must first establish the proper bonds within families. As dramatized in the earlier Oedipus plays, Oedipus destroyed his natural familial bonds. The unnatural relationships among the members of his *oikos*, centered in Oedipus himself, curse Thebes on various levels. Apollo's plague on Thebes and its reign of destruction on the citizens represent a physical manifestation of the moral and spiritual plague within Oedipus himself. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' connection to the polis is reversed; now he is put in the role of guardian instead of curse. A large factor in this reversal is that although Oedipus did commit sins on account of the curse on his birth, he did not do so intentionally. It is this notion of intention versus action that Sophocles

examines through the tragic hero in this last play. Not only does Oedipus redeem himself to the polis through his role as suppliant; he also redeems the polis itself. As Christine Cowan notes,

In Oedipus, the tragic hero must face the destruction of a world view he assumed was sacrosanct.

Everything he thought was true was actually false. What the hero has to contemplate is a world without meaning, without justice, without power and even without good. How does one come to terms with that?

Coming to terms with it, though, is *precisely* what saves the polis from annihilation.⁶

Because Oedipus demonstrates his ability to come to terms finally with a world that is quite different from how he perceived it to be, he accepts his role in this world, thus accepting responsibility for his actions. Once he faces the world as what it really is and understands the true nature of humanity and all its failings, he redeems both himself and the polis as he enters into the role of guardian of Athens to save this city from destruction.

The Acharnians and *Oedipus at Colonus* are two very intriguing plays to consider when examining the differences between the goals of Greek tragedy and comedy. They are both important because, while Sophocles presents the image of the fallen city in his tragedy and Aristophanes creates an ideal polis in his comedy, these plays do not function in solely traditional manners. In *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles not only gives us a view of the fallen polis and the hero's relationship to that fall, but he also uses Oedipus as a means for conveying to his audience what qualities an ideal polis should have. Likewise, in *The Acharnians* Dikeapolis creates his own ideal polis through his private agora, but Aristophanes also shows us the fallen polis that the hero must separate himself from before the ideal can be achieved. Because these plays break from the conventional approaches of tragedy and comedy, they convey the necessity of considering the city as a whole entity, that is with both good and bad characteristics, in order to facilitate change within its sphere. That both of these plays look at the polis from both sides,

fallen and ideal, is evidence of the close connection between tragedy and comedy and the importance of the polis and the hero's relationship to the polis in both genres.

Because Ancient Greek society was so centered on city life, comedies and tragedies, presented in a state-sponsored festival, deal with the state of society both in reality and in theory and with life issues in terms of the polis and political, or community, life. In both genres of Greek plays it is evident that the use of the hero is such that he must first separate himself from society in order to evaluate and offer instruction for the improvement of that society. There is a great emphasis in both of these plays on where the hero is and where he is not in relation to the city. In his comedy, Aristophanes places Dikeapolis in the center of the polis yet sets him apart from city activities when he sets up his individual agora. Dikeapolis is therefore both inside the polis in the physical sense yet he can more effectively criticize and instruct the polis from the stance of an outsider. In Sophocles' tragedy, Oedipus is also separated from the city proper, but his is an actual physical as well as spiritual separation. It is only from outside the city walls that the tragic hero can find the place from which citizens will both hear and listen to him and his ideas about what is beneficial and what is detrimental for the polis. In Ancient Greece, the goal of comic playwrights such as Aristophanes was to present an ideal view of the polis as an image for the audience to internalize to improve their own world. Aristophanes uses the character of a common man, Dikeapolis, who is able single-handedly to create an ideal polis by adhering to the goal of peace and political order. If at least some members of the audience were able to envision the true polis through Aristophanes' dramatic presentation, then the portrayal is a success because it means that a deeper understanding of the sense of community that helps to hold a strong polis together was conveyed and understood. The goal of tragedians such as Sophocles was to portray the relationship between the hero and the city and explore how the hero can

simultaneously bring about the fall of the city and save it. The hero's ultimate effect on the city lies in the difference between his intention and his actions: Oedipus did initiate sinful actions by murdering his father and marrying his mother, yet he did not know the sins he committed and his intentions were always in the best interests of the city. Sophocles' dramatic presentation of the fall of the polis and the noble hero's attempts to save it gives his audience the mimetic experience of Oedipus' desperate love and respect for the city. In so far as Oedipus' sins lead to the failure of Thebes, he deserves suffering and punishment; yet he also faces his punishment with strength and accepts his actions as part of his god-given fate, so he is a figure who is redeemable for the polis and who redeems the polis itself. An examination into the complementary ways that tragedy and comedy present the polis and its problems and the hero's relationship to the polis, particularly in terms of his sense of place, will enable readers of these plays to explore these ideas in greater depth.

Problems of the Polis in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

The view of the polis and its assessment in literature as either sanctified or problematic is evident in the various ways in which comedy and tragedy evaluate the same polis with different determinations. For example, Athens is a polis that both Sophocles and Aristophanes portray, but the pictures they create of this polis are quite divergent. Whereas Aristophanes depicts Athens as a place of mayhem where democracy has failed and it is up to one man to restore the city, Sophocles expresses a high regard for Athens as a sanctuary for the suffering of the sinner and as a protector against Thebes and Creon. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, political problems are estimated in terms of the presence or lack of a fundamental good, the stability of the oikos in the polis, and a respect for the divine. Sophocles wrote this play during a great time of duress for Athens to

explore the qualities a polis should have and to understand conditions or elements within a dysfunctional polis. The play dramatizes both the elements lacking in Athens and the societal components present in reality that led to the downfall of the city and how the actions of the citizens and leader of the polis directly correlate to the success of the polis.

Thebes is Sophocles' example of the truly dysfunctional polis. The problems of Thebes are set out in the first play of the Oedipus Cycle, *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In this play, the Oracle at Delphi decrees Thebes must find Laius' murderer and punish him; Oedipus sets out to do this as the leader of Thebes, only to discover that it is he himself who is the perpetrator of this crime. Though Oedipus attempts to atone for his sins by gouging out his eyes and admitting to guilt, he is still stigmatized as miasma, a harmful entity, to Thebes; thus Creon exiles him from the polis. It is in *Oedipus at Colonus* that Oedipus is fully defined as miasma for the polis when he is rejected from political life by Creon. This places Oedipus, the man who existed with the intentions of protecting and nurturing the polis, altogether without a polis. The irony is heightened because Creon himself embodies the role of the selfish and unjust leader who does not possess the fundamental good and is another outward sign of the failings of Thebes. When Creon comes to return Oedipus to Thebes, he is characterized as a tyrant, a bullying leader attempting to exercise his authority out of his realm of control. This distinctive trait is clearly portrayed by Sophocles as objectionable when Creon justifies his demand that Oedipus be returned to Thebes. Creon says, "I thought Athens was not a home for such exiles./ In that belief I considered him my prize"⁷ (74). Creon has, in every way, the imperialistic attitude which Athens also had at the time Sophocles wrote this play and that Thucydides criticizes: that power constitutes right or good. This drive towards domination characteristic of many Greek poleis was one of the reasons that Athens found itself entangled in the Great Peloponnesian War. Sophocles

sets up Thebes and Creon as a mirror for Athens and its leader in reality so as to warn the citizens against such predilections.

The role that Athens plays in this tragedy is that of an ideal polis, far from its situation in reality, but a standard to which Sophocles hoped it could live up to. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is the key to attaining a blessing for the polis. His burial site will ensure the adjacent polis divine protection against other attacking poleis. The play begins with the image of Antigone and Oedipus coming across the sacred grove in Colonus, setting the tone for Oedipus' new role as savior of the polis. He is with his daughter, one of the fruits of his sin, yet this is also a symbolic image of the oikos restored. To build a strong polis, the foundation — the citizens and the leaders — must have stable familial situations as well the ability to lead an entire population. However, Oedipus will never have such stability in his life because he is cursed; he will never again play the role of a strong political leader. This does not mean, however, that he cannot still serve and bestow blessing upon the polis. For Oedipus to benefit the polis he must play a different role than that of leader: He can take on the role of guardian instead. To enter into this role he must first get his life in order, become a suppliant, and be absolved from sole responsibility for his sins.

There are several actions that Oedipus takes to move into his new role as suppliant and then savior of the polis, actions comparable to those of Creon, the leader of a devastated and fratricidal polis. First, Oedipus has escaped from Thebes where he destroyed his own oikos and where he was the leader of a polis in distress; now, apart from that polis of his sin, he is able to be seen as a father with loyal daughters. Sophocles juxtaposes this view of Oedipus with that of Creon, who represents the locus of a defective polis. A marking of Creon's ineptitude as a leader is portrayed through his ignorance of the rules of political boundaries when he barges into

Oedipus' sanctuary in Colonus, violating its connection to Athens. As the critic Joseph P. Wilson points out,

The polis, as customarily defined, is a city-state, that is, the city and the land that surrounds it. The land however, matters far less than the people; geography must be subordinated to politics. If people and their tombs fall under the control of the state, they are part of the polis. This small but relevant detail demonstrates that Thebes and particularly its representative, Creon, do not comprehend the true nature of the polis.⁸

If the political leader does not comprehend the nature of the polis, then that leader is destined for failure. It is necessary for those in power to understand the workings and rules of a functional polis. When these rules are suspended, political life falls into disarray and confusion. Sophocles presents Creon as a leader who does not follow the rules of the polis, thereby adversely affecting Thebes. Creon is characterized as the antagonistic leader of Thebes who is attempting to force Oedipus to return to Thebes, his place of sin, so the Thebans can secure the blessing of his grave site. He does not realize that this demand is outside his realm of political control, nor would he care if he knew. This portrayal of Creon is juxtaposed with Theseus' role as the leader of the virtuous city of Athens. Theseus sees to it that the laws of his polis are enforced and that Oedipus stays within Attica according to his decree. Theseus represents justice and salvation in the face of Creon's disregard for the very laws that keep a polis in order.

Creon also represents the destroyer of the family when he uses the tactic of stealing away Oedipus' daughters, his traveling oikos, in order to secure the return of Oedipus to Thebes. This action is an indicative characteristic of a problematic polis: Creon takes the oikos, the foundation, the essential element for strength in a polis, and ruthlessly attempts to tear it apart. Pointedly, he attempts this in the name of the polis, saying, "This is not one man's mission, but was ordered/ By the whole Theban people" (61-2). If Creon was truly concerned about the Thebans, then he

would not attempt to break the laws of the polis by using authoritarian powers in Attica. It is these authoritarian powers that lay bare Creon's true motives for personal gain as the reason for his demand for Oedipus' return to Thebes. This self-promotion done in the name of Thebes indicates Creon's corruption as the leader of a city. Theseus, on the other hand, is most interested in what is best for the polis. As G.M. Kirkwood explains, "Theseus is a ruler, and his mind is occupied with practical politics; when Creon abducts the girls, his main reproach is for Creon's lawlessness and his apparent contempt for the power of Athens. He is constantly aware of the city and his place as its ruler."⁹ Athens is the ideal and is led by the ideal ruler, the ruler who focuses on what is good for the community, a point that Sophocles emphasizes in his characterization of Creon and Theseus. The complex figure here is Oedipus, who has both saved a polis when he answered the riddle of the Sphinx yet caused it to fall by committing his prophesied sins. Oedipus is the figure who is difficult to reconcile with the polis because of the destruction he has caused within a political realm, yet Sophocles emphasizes the necessity of Oedipus' return to the political realm through the examination of action and intention in terms of his sins.

In this tragedy, Sophocles absolves Oedipus of a great amount of responsibility for his sins, and through a new role Oedipus is able to begin assimilating himself back into a political realm. As the critic Charles Segal notes, "Oedipus' reacceptance into the polis, however, is not a given. The opening scenes, in fact, pose one of the central problems of tragedy itself: how can the ordered structures of society confront and incorporate their negation? Oedipus contains in himself something irreconcilable with the city."¹⁰ Because of his past actions, he is the antithesis of a good leader and of what is good for the polis. He has destroyed all the familial bonds which create a strong oikos and, in turn, a strong polis. Oedipus transgressed the father-son bond when he unknowingly murdered his own father at the crossroads. He then took on his father's role as

the king of Thebes and married his mother, thus destroying the mother-son bond. When he fathered children, he also broke the father-daughter and father-son bonds because he himself was their father-brother. Because the relationships were skewed and corrupted in the face of Oedipus' actions, Oedipus himself is a person who is unable to be defined. He is not simply a father to his children nor a husband to his wife. Oedipus is *everything*: He is implicated in all the bonds of his oikos. Thus the rules of the family do not hold as they should. None of his relationships stand sacred; all are defied. Thebes itself is affected by these relationships because its leader perpetuated the destruction of these bonds. Oedipus goes against all of the connections that unite one person to another, so the relationships between family members are demolished. He is the reason his family's bonds become confused and dysfunctional. These bonds are also meant to give a person his or her own autonomy as a separate element within a whole, yet because these bonds are confused, they serve to make connections that are not natural. Paradoxically, that is why he is such an interesting and effective focal point for Sophocles in his exploration of what is propitious for the polis. Athens is viewed as a polis of protection, a quality that will later ensure the blessing of Oedipus' grave site. Because the Athenians choose to care for Oedipus whereas the Thebans exiled him twice, Athens proves to be the more virtuous of the two poleis and therefore the better polis.

Sophocles portrays this difference between virtuous and nonvirtuous poleis to show the disjunction within Athens itself. In this play, Thebes is set up as a mirror of the real Athens of the time, while Theseus' Athens is portrayed as the ideal polis. This play focuses on the problematic state of Athens: it is an ideal polis on the stage, but its reality intrudes in the juxtaposition of its representative, Thebes, the fallen polis. As Christine Cowan points out, "This same juxtaposition occurs in Thucydides with the *Melian dialogue* (Athens at its worst) and Pericles' funeral oration

(Athens at its best).”¹¹ Critic Thomas Van Nortwick explains, “Now the standoff is between Athens, home of democracy and protector of suppliants, and Thebes, the city that, in the plays and in Greek tragedy in general, symbolizes violence and political discord.”¹² Violence and political discord are two elements that were a large problem in Athenian society at the time this play was written. Their transference to the traditional symbol of the destructive polis and then juxtaposition to an ideal Athens of care and protection vividly warns the audience of the disastrous effects of poor leadership.

Oedipus’ exchange with his son Polynices when he comes to ask for assistance in war is another example of the manifestation of political problems in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Previously Polynices had abandoned Oedipus to promote his own quest for power and to distance himself from the stigma of his father’s cursed life. In doing so, Polynices himself violated the oikos of his family, as did his younger brother when they allowed Oedipus to be exiled from Thebes. Polynices must reap what he has sown because now his brother has dethroned him and he must fight back to save face with his followers, though he knows he has the weaker of the two armies. But Oedipus, recalling his betrayal by his sons, foretells the defeat of them both on the battlefield. He says to Polynices: “Go with the malediction/ I here pronounce for you: that you shall never/ Master your native land by force of arms,/ Nor ever see your home again in Argos,/ The land below the hills; but you shall die/ By your own brother’s hand, and you shall kill/ The brother who banished you. For this I pray” (107). Oedipus curses his sons with the faults not only of killing each other but also of laying waste their own homeland. This is a recipe for utter disaster for Thebes, which further serves as Sophocles’ warning against the dangers of pride and self-promotion without regard to the harmful effects on your own polis and people.

By the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Thebes is established as the utterly dysfunctional city. Thebes has wrongly focused on self-love as all the Theban characters who come to Oedipus indicate. Creon wanted Oedipus to return to Thebes so that he (Creon) would be hailed as the king who saved the city. Initially Creon does not even consider the limitations of his power when he tries forcibly to return Oedipus to Thebes. He does not care about Theseus' power or the power of Athens. His only objective is to get what he wants: personal glory as the savior of Thebes. Creon acts under the guise of working for the wishes of the Thebans, but it is evident that he will only harm his citizens more if his actions establish a discordant relationship with Athens. Oedipus' other visitor from Thebes, Polynices, also exhibits this self-love. Oedipus reminds him of his first act of self-love, banishing his own father from Thebes, by saying: "When it was you who held/ Throne and authority — as your brother now/ Holds them in Thebes — you drove me into exile:/ Me, your own father: made me a homeless man,/ Insuring me these rags you blubber over" (106). Polynices was not at all concerned for his father and was only thinking of himself and his political power when he forced Oedipus into exile. He further exhibits his self-love in his lack of consideration for his soldiers. Although Polynices knows that without Oedipus' help against his brother he will not win, even after Oedipus' curse on him he is still determined to have his men fight a doomed battle. He explains his reasons for this to Antigone, saying, "I'll not report this trifle. A good commander/Tells what is encouraging, not what is not" (109). Wanting to be seen as a 'good commander,' he is not one, for he neglects his responsibilities as the safeguard of his men. His personal and political appearance is of the utmost importance to him, above his duties as a just leader and a dutiful son.

While the qualities of the fallen polis are carefully scrutinized in *Oedipus at Colonus* to suggest which steps must be taken to improve political life, so too are the elements of an ideal

polis. It is essential to recognize how important Sophocles' linking of the divine is with the image of an ideal polis. Respect for the divine is a fundamental characteristic of such a polis; Oedipus' mystical death, symbolic of the complete acceptance of Oedipus into Athens, also comments on the ideal polis. Sophocles uses this mysticism, set in the grove of the Dread Goddesses, also known as the Eumenides, or "Kindly Ones," to reinforce the idea that religion is at the heart of a strong polis and its citizens should respect and remember that. This location is essential: just as Oedipus is alien to Athens and wanders into the polis to find protection, so too were the Eumenides. Henry J. Walker notes that Aeschylus' *Eumenides* "tells of the permanent reception of an unusual band of suppliants, the Furies, who became resident aliens in Athens at the end of the play."¹³ It makes perfect sense for Oedipus to find safety with the Eumenides because he has found with them a realm in which he can be understood and in which he can understand his role in the world. As the critic John Gould notes, one of the functions of the rite of supplication is "to bring an aberrant human being within the norms of the social order and to mitigate or resolve the crises which result when the community or its representative agent is confronted with what is outside."¹⁴ It is also notable that in the *Oresteia* the Eumenides say of themselves, "We hold we are straight and just. If a man/can spread his hands and show they are clean,/no wrath of ours shall lurk for him."¹⁵ That Oedipus can enter into their grove with no repercussions from the Eumenides themselves is statement of his absolution from guilt.

Because Athens and the Athenians respect the divine elements in Oedipus' life and death, they will also benefit from their just treatment of him. It is important that Sophocles emphasizes the necessity of Oedipus' ultimate reinstatement back into the polis. Oedipus was a political figure whose place was in the polis. Christine Cowan notes that "His connection to the divine reinstates him into the polis in a different role, as guardian, and reexamines his original sin, this

time with a new perspective. All that was important before was that he sinned. Now his sin is acknowledged but his intentions become paramount.”¹⁶ In *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles makes a clear distinction between intentional and unintentional sin. It is apparent that Creon and Polynices both committed intentional sins in their self-love and the actions that surrounded this love. Creon exhibited defiance for the laws of the polis in his attempt forcibly to return Oedipus to Thebes so Creon could be known as the savior of Thebes. Polynices committed intentional sins when he exiled his father from Thebes in the name of personal glory. Oedipus, however, did not commit his sins willingly. In fact, he made every effort possible to avoid fulfilling the prophecy of his birth. He did commit sins but unknowingly, and he also paid for these sins through his own suffering. His foremost concern was always for others: either his family or the Thebans, never primarily for himself. Thus Oedipus is deserving of a blessed death because the polis in all its forms, foundation (oikos) and constituency, were what he put first — never his personal ambitions.

In this play, Sophocles examines variant ideas of what is detrimental and helpful to the polis; into this play he incorporates many elements as beneficial to the polis that in the previous Oedipus plays proved harmful. Sophocles uses the progeny of Oedipus’ sinful relationship with his mother Jocasta, Antigone and Ismene, as essential to his well-being, not as visible signs of miasma. Oedipus himself is now presented as a blessing for Athens, embodying the fundamental good, whereas to Thebes he was a curse. In this play, Sophocles presents the difference between action and intention; because Oedipus’ intentions were good and virtuous, he is at the end recognized as a fundamentally good person who has endured very difficult trials in his life: Oedipus has done his best to preserve what remains of his oikos, his two daughters, and he has also maintained respect for divinity and refers to it at his death. Thebes, on the other hand,

represents the flawed polis because it has leaders who are focused more on individual achievement rather than community, it disregards the sanctity of the oikos, and its appeals to the divine are too little, too late. *Oedipus at Colonus* warns the Athenians through the foil example of Thebes what happens to a city whose leaders and people neither do the good nor intend it.

Problems of the Polis in Aristophanes *The Acharnians*

It is sometimes necessary to strive for perfection by studying examples of what is ideal and then attempting to achieve that same level of perfection. In Aristophanes' comedy *The Acharnians*, this example of perfection as a reference point for what is possible in this world is the basis for the events in this play, which centers on the image of the polis and the elements that function to make a polis operate smoothly. Aristophanes presents the audience with the image of an ideal Athens that the protagonist, Dikeapolis, creates in his efforts to establish peace between the Athenians and their enemies. For Aristophanes, the ideal city is the city that strives for peace and a smoothly functioning political system; thus, the Athens in *The Acharnians* serves as an image of the ideal polis versus its actual state of disorder in reality.

The problems in Athens during Aristophanes' era that set the stage for *The Acharnians* were created earlier through both the citizens and their leader, Pericles. Because both Pericles and the Athenians wanted Athens to dominate the Aegean with military force and political expansion, this created much discord with Sparta. Pericles was a ruler who wanted for his city "simply the Peisistratean formula on a bigger and better scale than ever before — more splendid public buildings, a sounder economy geared to imperial tribute, and a determination to justify Athens' leading role in Aegean affairs through moral superiority as well as an unbeatable fleet."¹⁷ This ambitious ruler and the ambitions of the Athenians are exactly what Aristophanes

criticizes in *The Acharnians* through characters such as Lamachus, an Athenian general whose attitude is summed up in the following lines: “But I with all the Peloponnesian folk/ Will always fight, and vex them everyway,/ By land, by sea, with all my might and main” (32). This is exactly the pattern of thinking Aristophanes shows as conducive to bringing about the fall of Athens. This unwillingness to work for peace and the overconfidence in Athens’ abilities to fight Sparta are in part what led Athens into the Great Peloponnesian War.

The plea for peace in *The Acharnians* comes through the character of Dikeapolis, whose name means “divinely just city.” It is this character, the comic hero, who holds the key to creating an ideal city, which he accomplishes by establishing his own market within the boundaries of the Athenian agora. Dikeapolis as the comic hero functions to see what exactly are the problems of the imperfect polis and use this knowledge to create an ideal polis. He observes and protests the injustices in the polis where democracy is failing. He sees that the order of the polis is usurped by the self-love of the citizens and of a leader all of whom are supposed to be striving for the good of the community. As the critic Xavier Riu notes, “Dikaeopolis confronts the city in two ways: on the one hand he acts of his own accord, forgetting the laws, and makes a private treaty with the Lacedaemonians — something not only impossible but even extremely dangerous in the real Athens,” and “His second way to confront the city is making a defense of her enemies.”¹⁸ By using these two strategies as methods for Dikeapolis to form an ideal city, Aristophanes points out exactly what is wrong with Athens and why. These actions are not Dikaeopolis’ first choice but become necessary as a means for making himself heard after he is completely ignored when he tried to voice his opinions about war in the Assembly. This breakdown of democracy is key to the plight of Athens and Dikeapolis; “Reduced to his individual anonymity, Dikaeopolis is confronted by an apparent yes-or-no situation: either he

may accept his insignificance in the body politic and let himself remain the anonymous individual, or he may keep trying to make his voice heard....”¹⁹ This is where Dikaeopolis’ role as a comic hero becomes essential in Aristophanes’ criticism of Athens; through the actions of Dikeapolis, Aristophanes addresses and helps to mend the faults in Athenian society.

In Dikaeopolis’ first confrontation with the city he refuses to abide by the laws of society and creates his own polis within Athens. This reflects the contemporary meltdown of politics and society which Athens faced during Aristophanes’ time. The laws are suspended in Aristophanes’ portrayal of the polis. In traditional Athenian society, “almost all Greeks held the view that wisdom and rationality grow in a man with the advance of age,”²⁰ yet Dikeapolis, who is an aged man himself, is virtually ignored by the Assembly. He cries out to them, “O will you let them, Prytanes, use me thus,/ Barbarians too, in this my fatherland” (19) when Theorus calls him a rascal for accusing the Thracians of stealing his garlic. So this rational person has no place in the polis during the irrational time of war. He is not given the respect which he should be accorded as an elder member of society. At the same time, Lamachus is characterized as a young man, a man who, because of his age, is quite enthusiastic about war. However, in this portrayal of the polis, Lamachus is the more authoritative figure instead of Dikeapolis, which indicates a polis turned upside down and a polis against which Dikeapolis must revolt.

Dikaeopolis’ second level of revolt is to draw Athens’ enemies into his individual political realm. Dikeapolis does this by setting up his own agora within the midst of the Athenian agora. This is in direct opposition to the actual actions taken earlier by Pericles: “If we carefully assess Athenian policy 433-31, it may appear that Pericles deliberately brought matters to a head; for he banned Megarian traders from Aegean markets, aided the Corinthian colony of Corcyra in its controversy with Corinth, and forbade the subject state of Potidaea to draw its annual

magistrate from Corinth, as had been the custom.”²¹ Aristophanes expresses the idea of unification as the method that can form and sustain an ideal city, whereas in reality Athens was attempting to gain power for itself by individuation. Dikeapolis even eventually gains the support of the Acharnians (hence the title), which is essential to the message of the play. Historically, “the reaction of the Acharnians, who lived among the foothills of Mt. Parnes on the northern edge of the central plain of Attica, was an eagerness to sally forth and engage the enemy rather than sit tight and watch while their properties were being overrun.”²² *The Acharnians* therefore reflects great displeasure with Pericles and his successors early in the Peloponnesian War through the characters in the play who are all connected to Athens and are also disenchanted with the powers that be. The very fact that Aristophanes chose to lampoon the Athenian general Lamachus draws an even greater correlation between this play and ancient Athenian society. Lamachus was a general under Pericles during the Pontic expedition around 437, a time of great unrest for the Athenians. This expedition served as “a retaliation against Persia and a warning against a repetition of the Persian indiscretion at Samos, which occurred in 440 and where Pisuthnes assisted the Samians by giving them troops with which to attack the Athenians, thereby breaking Persia’s peace with Athens.”²³ Aristophanes realized the tendency of Athenian leaders to display their military power and knew that this could be detrimental to the goal of a peaceful polis, something he addresses in *The Acharnians*.

The perfected polis that Dikeapolis creates is one that centers on the primary goal of peace. Aristophanes sets up this city within the city in the very center of Athens, the agora. In this center of commerce and the heart of city life, Dikeapolis is able to operate a smoothly run political system. It is also an interesting point that Dikeapolis is merely an average citizen. He is not a highly-ranked official or a person of any evident great political power. Instead, he is an

intelligent and crafty individual who manages to save the city when those in power cannot. This empowerment of the common man is what the purpose of democracy is, and the very fact that Dikeapolis can attain the great achievement of peace is one way that this play serves to portray the ideal city. An ideal city with a fully functioning democracy should be run by its citizens, and those citizens, who should be striving for the common good, should also desire a peaceful community rather than being concerned solely with their own well-being. The very word *demokratia* (democracy) was coined by the Greeks from the words *demos*, meaning “the people” and *kratos*, meaning “power or rule.” It is evident that in the fallen polis in *The Acharnians*, the goal of democracy has failed. This failed political system is exactly what Dikeapolis revolts against when he establishes his own marketplace within the Athenian agora. In his personal sphere he creates a monarchy where he is the one in charge and the one setting and enforcing the rules. However, because he is initially the only citizen, Dikeapolis’ monarchy is also a blend of democracy because he is the only citizen so far, so the citizens have the power to rule.

Dikeapolis’ setting-up of his city within the city is also an interesting event. The first thing he does when establishing his ideal city is to indicate the boundaries of the marketplace, thus definitively separating it from the less-than-perfect city. He then announces that “here may all the Peloponnesian folk,/ Megarians and Boeotians, freely trade/ Selling to me, but Lamachus may not.” So everyone is included except the leader of the dysfunctional polis, the leader who is more concerned about his personal gain and one who neglects the workings of democracy. Dikeapolis then states that the market clerks will be decided upon by a vote, “elected by the lot” thus further emphasizing his focus on democracy. He also declares that “Within these bounds may not informer come,/ Or any other syco-Phasian man,” and later tells his Market clerks, “Why don’t you keep these sycophants away?” (39) to let it be known that self-serving men are not

welcome in his marketplace. Such types of people are the very ones who lead to the downfall of the polis because of their concern for themselves over the community. His final preparation for his polis is to place the peace treaty in “some conspicuous place” (36). Thus all the elements necessary for an ideal polis are in place; the marketplace is based upon the rules of democracy and the common good is the central focus of those involved in the workings of this political system.

Not only is it important to focus on the elements within Dikeapolis’ ideal polis, but it is also necessary to consider those elements that are not present within this realm. One of the primary elements that is excluded from this ideal polis is the presence of war. This idea is brought to the audience’s attention near the end of the play when Lamachus tries to establish a trading relationship with Dikeapolis’ agora and is met with disdain from those participating in the functioning of the ideal polis. A messenger says to Dikeapolis, “Lamachus bids you, toward the Pitcher feast,/ Give him some thrushes for this drachma here,/ And for three drachmas one Copaic eel.” Dikeapolis responds to this request with, “An eel for *him*? Not though his shield he gave me!/ Let him go shake his plumes at his salt fish” (43) indicating Dikeapolis’ unwillingness to work with someone who is concerned with war and with self-love and his irreverent attitude toward such a person. This response also shows the important role of the citizens in a functioning democracy. If Dikeapolis were to allow Lamachus to trade in his new agora, then this would mean that one of the participants in that democracy was not primarily concerned with communal good, thereby undermining the purpose of democracy. Thus Dikeapolis, by not allowing Lamachus to trade, proves his loyalty to the cause of democracy. As critic Thomas K. Hubbard explains, “The separation of war from the simple joys of domestic life is dramatized by Lamachus’ exclusion from the marketplace and even more vividly by the following

confrontations between the general and Dikeapolis.”²⁴ Dikeapolis pointedly proclaims that Lamachus may have no part in his new polis; and, from that point on, Aristophanes juxtaposes the activities of these two men to show the workings of the ideal and the real polis.

The subtext of Aristophanes’ comparisons of the two political leaders is one of politics disguised in the language of other events. The first comparison between the leaders of the two poleis occurs when a crier is sent to tell Lamachus that he is needed in battle immediately: “The generals bid you take your crests and cohorts,/And hurry off this instant; to keep watch” (47). At the same time another messenger brings Dikeapolis an invitation to dinner, saying, “Come at once to supper,/And bring your pitcher, and your supper chest” (47). While Lamachus is gathering his armor, Dikeapolis is gathering his feasting supplies. Aristophanes cleverly sets up each man’s preparation for his respective engagement as a witty commentary on the ills of war and the virtues of peace. Each time Lamachus asks for some war-related item, Dikeapolis asks for a similar item for his feast. For example, as Lamachus says to his assistant, “Bring me a casque, to arm the outer man,” Dikeapolis says to his man, “Bring me a cask to warm the inner man” (48). The subtext of these two lines is symbolic of the difference between an ideal polis and a fallen polis. Lamachus must arm his body while Dikeapolis is warming his own. Only in a fallen world is there war and suffering, while in the ideal world one can relax in contentment. The second comparison between the two men is when Lamachus returns wounded from war, suffering in pain, while Dikeapolis is rejoicing in happiness. Lamachus says, “O lack-a-day! O lack-a-day!/ I’m hacked, I’m killed, by hostile lances!” as Dikeapolis exclaims, “O lucky day! O lucky day!/ What mortal can ever be richer...” (50). Once again the benefits of peace are presented in the face of the hardships of war. The message is clear: war works to wound a community while peace brings pleasure and contentment.

Another important comparison is dramatized when the two men exit the stage. Lamachus must be helped off the stage because of his wounds, while Dikeapolis merrily exits the stage singing a song for Victory. Lamachus leaves the stage essentially alone; he has no citizens to follow him. This is symbolic of the fallen polis where democracy loses its place. Who would be left to follow him after he is wounded in war? Certainly not the citizens who are only concerned with themselves, and a leader who is concerned with himself would have no one to care for him as he showed no concern for others. In contrast to the lonely image of Lamachus is that of Dikeapolis whom the Chorus follows, thereby indicating their allegiance to him and the ideal polis. The Chorus's choice of Dikeapolis at the end of this play signifies his creation of the ideal polis in full. The Chorus, who had earlier supported the war, now sides with Dikeapolis. The ideal polis must be composed of citizens whose principal concern is what is good for the community. By choosing the side of peace, the Chorus demonstrates that it has chosen to support the communal good of peace. Dikeapolis' message of peace has been heard and understood by the community, and they, too, support his goal of peace. He has brought all the elements for success together: the political form of democracy, the result of peace, and the agents that effect both, citizens who work for the common good.

In following the tradition of classical comedy, Aristophanes uses the comedic hero Dikeapolis to examine both the fallen polis and the ideal polis. With the example of the actual city and the image of the ideal polis, Aristophanes sets out a spiritual and intellectual method for achieving the ideal city of peace. Louise Cowan suggests that this method means that even if Athens as a whole does not listen, for each man who does, as Aristophanes demonstrates in *The Acharnians*, 'that ideal city lives in his heart and makes him a true and happy and peace-full citizen.'²⁵ This personal peace is exactly what Aristophanes depicts through Dikeapolis'

establishment of a personal peace with Athenian enemies within the heart of Athens. The city that Aristophanes seeks to build in his comedy is one that lives in the spiritual, or intellectual, dimension. It is the idea of having the ideal polis within the hearts and minds of the citizens that Aristophanes suggests in his portrayal of the polis. This gives the audience a deeper experience than merely watching a play; it allows them to form their own ideal cities to help them come to terms with city life in reality and to have a place of refuge from everyday problems.

Placement of the Hero in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

The treatment of the polis by ancient Greek playwrights, such as Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus*, allows for essential insight into understanding the close relationship between life and literature in ancient Greek society and the great importance placed on the polis during that time. Sophocles provides commentary on the polis through an examination of Oedipus' actions and how these actions affect political life depending on where he is located relative to the polis. Oedipus is a figure who by divine connection has the abilities to both save and defile a city, and these qualities are what facilitate his movement from the realm of one polis to another. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is connected with both his birthplace of Thebes, Athens his refuge, and Colonus, the religious site just outside of Athens. In this play, Sophocles associates Oedipus with blessing on the polis instead of curse, as in the previous plays of the Theban cycle. This picture of a blessed Oedipus is also juxtaposed with the previous idea of a cursed Oedipus who, because of his sin, plagued Thebes. Sophocles' continued portrayal of Oedipus as both savior and destroyer of cities in *Oedipus at Colonus* enables dialogue about Thebes and Athens to provide a contextual commentary on the state of each polis in Greece at the end of the Great Peloponnesian

War, and Oedipus' final resting place in Colonus to bring full circle the interdependence of tragic hero and polis.

The relationship between the gods and the defiled is a key theme in this tragedy. According to the history set forth in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as a child Oedipus was abandoned on Mount Cithaeron, a holy site associated with the god Pan. He was left there to die under the direction of his parents, with his ankles bound by an iron pin, so he could not fulfill the prophecy of his birth to murder his father and marry his mother. He was named for his wounded feet, his name meaning 'swollen foot.' However, a wandering herdsman rescued him and he did indeed fulfill this prophecy which led to the defilement of Thebes. The importance of Oedipus' placement in relation to the polis is echoed in *Oedipus at Colonus* when he finds his final resting place in the grove of the Eumenides (the Dread Goddesses; also called "The Kindly Ones" or "Gracious Ones") in Colonus. This area is similar to Mount Cithaeron because both are holy realms within a greater political realm, yet apart from the actual city-proper. They both represent areas where the lines are blurred between political and apolitical. Oedipus is found on Mount Cithaeron because his parents knew of his destiny to destroy their oikos and the polis of Thebes: He was essentially rejected from that political realm. This relates to Oedipus' refusal in *Oedipus at Colonus* to enter into the city walls of Athens because this would make Athens as defiled as Thebes is.

The grove of the Eumenides is an interesting setting for Oedipus' sanctuary because it facilitates the transition from defiled to holy. The critic Thomas Van Nortwick explains that "we begin to see that Oedipus may be neither as alien nor as impotent as he first appeared. This place has some destined role in his life, and he in turn can offer something of value to its people."²⁶ Oedipus then informs the audience that this grove was part of the prophecy that also foretold of

his cursed life. He says, "For when his [Apollo's] riddler prophesied my ruin,/ He also spoke of this: A resting place,/ After long years, in the last country, where/I should find home among the powers of justice:/ That there I might round out my bitter life,/ Conferring benefit on those who received me,/ A curse on those who had driven me away" (8). So this holy site is exactly where the sinful Oedipus was directed by the gods to find peace. Thus Oedipus has found a realm that he does fit into, and this is decreed by divine order. His acceptance into the polis is therefore on both a political level because Theseus decrees that he may remain, and on a religious level because Oedipus has found his predestined resting place. Oedipus' religious connection to Athens is key because it establishes the importance the ancient Greeks placed on the relationship between the polis and the divine.

The level of the divine within these holy realms is also an interesting point of comparison. One is a mountain, Mount Cithaeron, where Oedipus' life is saved, but the curse of his birth is secured in the fact that he was rescued. Mount Cithaeron was where both Amphion and Zethus were born, according to Jean Richer, these two figures are significant because they are "The Theban twins...the sons of Antiope-Moon and Epopeus-Helios."²⁷ The other divine place where Oedipus encounters a major life experience is in the grove of the Dread Goddesses, on level ground with other humans. However, the actual site of his death, and his grave, is secluded from the observations of common men. Only other royalty, Theseus, the king of Athens and (in some myths) the son of Poseidon, can attempt to look upon this sacred area. As Zak notes, this burial site is a place "beyond the reach and range of mortal vision. Even Theseus, the one man Oedipus presumed would learn of his destiny, ultimately had to hold 'his hand before his face to screen his eyes.'"²⁸ To reach his final destination, Oedipus must go down into the earth, into a cave which is where he will be taken into the afterlife. This area is even more holy

than the grove itself, thus only certain people can enter into it. This is interesting because Oedipus, who is a miasma by nature of his birth, is set in this holy place, and through the virtue of his blessed death becomes a “*heros*, the divine guardian of Athens.”²⁹ Though Oedipus does not want to risk defiling Athens by entering into her city walls, he has no qualms about entering into a holy site. Not only this, but he is fully embraced within this holy realm of the Dread Goddesses and experiences the death of highly esteemed royalty.

Oedipus’ refusal to return to Thebes, the place where he was king, is significant because his freedom through exile from Thebes facilitates a degree of absolution from guilt for Oedipus. Oedipus’ relationship to Thebes has thus far served as one of utter and debilitating defilement because of his entrapment in the Theban Cycle. It is only after Oedipus leaves the bounds of Thebes that he can gain some clarity about his own humanity and duty on earth as one who can only fulfill the gods’ laws, whether they be favorable or not. The taint on Thebes is further emphasized by Creon’s visit to Oedipus while he is at Colonus. Creon attempts to deceive Oedipus into returning to Thebes so it can secure the blessing of Oedipus’ grave, but Oedipus realizes Creon’s intent and retorts, “How can you think to take me/ Into that snare I should so hate if taken?” (63). This ‘snare’ has the double connotation of both Creon’s deceit and Thebes’ cursed environment for Oedipus. Creon further expresses his corruption as a leader of a corrupted polis by using force to try to return Antigone and Ismene back to Thebes in order to lure Oedipus to return as well. But now Creon is not on his own ground; he is in Oedipus’ sanctuary at Colonus, and he is therefore powerless to control Oedipus’ actions. Theseus, the ruler of Athens, steps in to rescue Antigone and Ismene, which also displays his power as leader of a virtuous polis. It is important to note that Oedipus knows that if he were to go with Creon, he would not be allowed into Thebes at all until he died. He says to Creon, “You come to take me, but not to

take me home;/Rather to settle me outside the city/So that the city may escape my curse,/Escape from punishment by Athens” (64). Thebes is already a cursed polis and the only way it can protect itself from Athens is if Oedipus is buried there. This is also important because whereas Oedipus sees his position just outside of Athens as positive and a choice he makes of his own will, he is angered by the notion that a return to Thebes would mean relegation to the outskirts of the polis until his death.

This loyalty of Oedipus to Athens and Theseus in the face of Creon and Thebes clearly draws upon tragedy’s traditional portrayal of the discord between the two cities. As Van Nortwick notes, “Now the standoff is between Athens, home of democracy and protector of suppliants, and Thebes, the city that, in the Oedipus plays and in Greek tragedy in general, symbolizes violence and political discord.”³⁰ Athens is the city on which Oedipus hopes to bestow the prophesied blessing of his burial site; however, he falls into the dilemma of possibly defiling Athens if he actually sets foot in the city-proper. When Theseus offers Oedipus a resting place at his home in Athens, Oedipus must decline this offer. He cannot leave his grove of protection, and he also cannot risk defiling Athens. Oedipus even takes this so far as to refuse to touch Theseus in thanks for returning Antigone and Ismene to him, saying, “How can a wretch like me/Desire to touch a man who has no stain/Of evil in him? No, no; I will not do it;/And neither shall you touch me” (89). Thus Sophocles defines the only suitable place for Oedipus as one which is human, yet apart from humans; mortal, yet with great connection to the gods.

Because of Oedipus’ ambiguous position between political and apolitical, human and divine, the suburb of Colonus is the perfect place for Oedipus to rest. It is a place which is neither a city unto itself nor apart from a political domain. Colonus a religious site near Athens where the Athenians can come to pray; this attribute gives it a connection to the political realm. Yet

Colonus is not itself a polis; instead it is a place of worship, which distinguishes it from the polis proper and gives it an apolitical essence. “The first two lines of the play, a question addressed to Antigone by Oedipus, pose a disjunction between *khôros* “place” and polis...Antigone’s answer preserves the disjunction: she can see the towers of a polis in the distance, but here is a sacred *khôros*.”³¹ This is a necessary disjunction because of Oedipus’ reputation for defiling land he comes into contact with. For him to become a blessing for Athens, he must actually be not in Athens but in a pristine holy location which would be immune to his defilements. Oedipus has already trodden on virgin ground in seeking refuge at Colonus, and this very fact symbolizes the freedom that he finds there. Colonus represents this freedom for Oedipus, not from sin because he did indeed commit sin, but from the complete responsibility and total guilt for these sins. When Oedipus speaks to the elders at Colonus, he is able to vocalize his realization that it was by nature of his birth that he committed the sins of murdering his father and marrying his mother and not by his own volition. This realization allows Oedipus’ character to evolve from being seen solely as a curse in relation to the polis to being seen as a blessing.

Colonus also represents a convergence between man and god because it is a holy area where both the chorus and the kings can have dialogue. It is in this earthly domain of the gods that Oedipus can more fully appreciate what his specific role in the world as a human destined to sin must be. “Oedipus’ curse...would keep him at the limits or boundaries of Thebes, a place at, but not quite within the frontiers between the civilized and the demonic,” just as Oedipus himself has walked the line between civilized and demonic; “Both aspects of his past, the cleansing and the polluting, are reenacted in his entrance to the grove of the Dread Goddesses.”³² This line between decency and diabolic, cleansed and polluted, is also drawn within the boundaries of Colonus itself: “Although in the initial encounter with the chorus he willingly moved to the

liminal verge of the grove, taking his seat there between sacred ground and the ground common to all men in order to discourse with them for his own benefit, he never fully returns to ‘common ground’ with them, the domain in which all mankind shares equally.”³³ This is the ground on which he seeks his refuge. In order to render this discourse with men, it is necessary for him to be in this specific area that is ambiguously that of the gods and that of man. In his life and trials, Oedipus himself has always walked this line: It was his divine duty as a mortal to both save Thebes yet to cause its downfall in the process. However, Oedipus’ function in this play is as savior; therefore his actions are structured to benefit the polis:

Like the Oedipus of the earlier play, the aged hero of the *Coloneus* still occupies a position at the boundary between order and chaos, civilization and the wild. But unlike his younger counterpart, he enters the city not to call the civilized order into question but rather to deepen and strengthen it.³⁴

Though Oedipus represents the embodiment of forces both positive and negative for the polis, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he acts as protector of Athens and his geographical relation to the polis must be just outside the polis-proper where there is common ground for gods and men without the risk of defilement.

Although Oedipus comes to terms with his role as sinner in the world, he is not able to return to Thebes; this would only qualify as a regression for his character. If Oedipus were to return, he would be back at the site of his crimes, and he would be banned from actually entering the polis itself. However, his children must return to Thebes to continue the family destiny of participation in the Theban cycle. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus has now returned to the outskirts of a city, which is where he began his initial role as savior/destroyer of the polis when he solved the sphinx’s riddle as recounted in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. As a child he was abandoned on nearby Mount Cithaeron and he has come full circle by finding refuge in the grove of the Dread

Goddesses. Oedipus has overcome his ties with Thebes, but his children have not realized the same suffering and experiences as Oedipus has and are therefore fated to return and commit yet more sins. It is an inescapable chain of events set forth by the gods which would prevent any other course of action. In his play *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles depicts Oedipus as a man who, within the framework of the tragic cycle, confers both blessing and tribulation upon the polis and whose location in reference to the polis plays a large role in the effect he will have on it. Because of his double-sided role as protector and destroyer of city life, his final resting place in an area that is neither polis nor apolitical, a place both divine and common, is the only suitable site for his blessed burial because it allows the unity of man and god and provides a necessary separation, yet evident connection between city and man.

The Hero's Place in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*

The use of space and the placement of actors within the course of a play is equal to the importance of dialogue when we consider the predominant themes of plays. An actor's movement from scene to scene and his or her varying interactions with each different environment can convey much of the playwright's intended messages to the audience. Just such an emphasis on placement of the hero is seen in Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*. In *The Acharnians*, Dikeapolis' qualities are those of a common man; his role as a comic hero, however, gives him cunning that facilitates his movement from one realm within the polis to another. In the course of the play, Dikeapolis moves from the realm of the Assembly on the Pnyx in which he has absolutely no power at the opening of the play, to the stage, where he performs a comic rendition of Euripides' *Telephus*, thereby gaining a voice within the polis, then finally to the agora, at the foot of the Acropolis, where he finally finds his power and achieves his goal of

peace between Athens and Sparta. It is evident that Aristophanes uses the movement of Dikeapolis from one realm of the polis to another or from one physical place to another, and Athens' response to him, to provide commentary on the power of placement, and the corresponding role a person plays, within the polis. Concentrating on the realm of the polis the hero speaks from, and the role assumed in that realm, Aristophanes examines the interdependence between the comic hero's societal role and environment through the range of society's responses to the hero as Dikeapolis attempts different efforts to be heard in his quest for peace.

The Acharnians opens with Dikeapolis at an empty assembly meeting near the Pnyx waiting for everyone to arrive. As he prepares for the meeting to begin, he says, "So here I'm waiting, thoroughly prepared/To riot, wrangle, interrupt the speakers/Whenever they speak of anything but peace" (16). These sorts of actions would never have been tolerated in an actual ancient Athenian Assembly, but as the members begin arriving it becomes obvious there are no real rules followed at the meeting. In the Assembly, Dikeapolis is within the boundaries of the gathering on the Pnyx, but the rules of order are so disregarded that he cannot find a civilized place within the meeting. This symbolizes the disjunction between physical place in the polis and place, or role, within the society of Athens. Though Dikeapolis is in the proper place for voicing his opinions, the breakdown of democracy is expressed through the fact that he is unable to make his voice heard. In the role of citizen of Athens, Dikeapolis has the societal place to be heard, yet he cannot: thus signifying the disintegration of order in Athens.

The corruption in the polis is explicitly exemplified by the discussion among the assembly members in which the rules of the meeting are suspended and mayhem ensues. This madness reflects the madness of a society that would choose war over peace. "He [Dikeapolis] is,

as his name reminds us, a just man and a citizen; but he is allowed to play no part in the democratic gathering which should exhibit justice and citizenship.”³⁵ Dikeapolis is determined both to support those assemblants who request peace and also to demand peace personally. Despite his efforts, however, none will listen to him: “His helpless isolation is dramatized throughout, from the moment when he first appears, sitting all alone in the place of public assembly, counting his four joys and numberless woes.”³⁶ The very fact that he is so isolated from the community also serves as commentary on the state of the community itself at this point. The citizens are also isolating themselves from the larger community in their selfish attempts to promote their own interests and not the interests of Athenian society as a whole.

However, while the citizens’ isolation is intentional, Dikeapolis’ is unintentional and he wants more than anything to break out of his isolation and achieve dialogue with the community. Therefore, he decides that as an individual within a community that is not working properly and is ignoring his wishes as a citizen, he will take on the struggle for peace by himself. Thus the line between community and individual is drawn as Dikeapolis moves from the realm of community and its wishes against peace to his decision to make an individual peace with Sparta. He says to an ambassador, “Here be eight drachmas; take them; and with all/The Lacedaemonians make a private peace/For me, my wife and children: none besides” (18). The Assembly, the place where democracy occurs, is supposed to be the ideal place because this is where democracy happens, where the voice of the people is heard in a civilized manner. However, peace cannot be achieved here because the assembly’s function is dependent upon the virtue of its individual members. Because these members only care about individual gain and not the greater good of the community, Dikeapolis must move beyond this realm to the theatre because this is the place where the public good can be recognized and where he can be heard by society. Aristophanes

opens the play with this scene on the Pnyx to represent what should be ideal, but because of the corruption of the participants, it is actually an image of the fallen polis. Aristophanes' placement of Dikeapolis here is very deliberate, and in the traditional comedic form, the audience sees the hero's fruitless attempts to function effectively within the failing polis. Because within the realm of the assembly Dikeapolis is powerless to change anything within the polis, he must transcend these bounds and look elsewhere for true power.

Once the community realizes he is forming his own alliance with the enemy, Dikeapolis is forced to enter another realm of the polis for his own protection — a mere dividing line between himself and the community is insufficient for him to achieve his goal of peace. He turns to the poet Euripides for help, begging him to “Lend me some rags from that old play of yours;/For to the Chorus I today must speak/A lengthy speech; and if I fail, ‘tis *death*” (27). It is notable that Euripides is specifically the poet of choice for Dikeapolis to use to address the Athenians. The critic Louise Cowan points out, “Citizens are vain and gullible; prominent men are notorious homosexuals and cowards; even poetry is debased, with Euripides much preferred to Sophocles or Aeschylus.”³⁷ Aristophanes' choice of Euripides is interesting because, unlike Sophocles or Aeschylus, he was primarily concerned with human problems and humanity in general. Thus the connection between Euripides and comedy can be portrayed. However, whereas comedy seeks to build up a fallen city, Euripides' tragedies expressed “a strong sense of scepticism...and one becomes aware of the increasing doubt which pervade the plays.”³⁸ So, to lampoon Euripides in comedy functioned both to offer relief from the Euripidean view of the world, as well as to address political problems through the well-established venue of his tragedies.

Aristophanes' deliberate reenactment of the play *Telephus* is also important because of this play's connections with the events in the *Acharnians*. As the critic A.M. Bowie notes,

As a device for generating sympathy, Telephus is well chosen. A king reduced to pain and beggary for defending his homeland, he is further threatened by his willingness to give a balanced view of the situation, despite being of great potential benefit to his opponents. he is thus emblematic of other such people throughout the play. Amphitheus tried to make peace for the city but was ejected; Dikeapolis tried to do the same, but despite his eloquent defence, he too was not listened to....³⁹

Euripides gives Dikeapolis the garb of Telephus, this Mysian king who wretchedly fell into begging. These clothes represent crossing another boundary line for Dikeapolis where he moves from realm of the spectator-individual to that of the actor-individual. He now enters the realm of the theatre, where what seems real is not real, where life is imitated, and above all, where Dikeapolis as Telephus can make an argument for peace even more emphatically than he can as Dikeapolis the farmer. Hubbard notes that "It may be only through placing Tragedy, symbolized here by the Telephus figure, within the context of Comedy that a poet can safely address the contemporary political scene."⁴⁰ In this theatrical realm, Dikeapolis can, in no uncertain terms, speak out against precisely what is wrong with Athens and reinforce the idea of the greater good. This is where art reflects life, and Aristophanes can express through his comedic play how much easier it is to both compliment and criticize an audience through the conventions of a play. Dikeapolis even utters this very sentiment, "Bear me no grudge spectators, if, a beggar,/I dare to speak before the Athenian people/About the city in a comic play./For what is true even comedy can tell/And I shall utter startling things but true" (28). Indeed in the play, Dikeapolis (as Telephus) is able to win the support of the chorus in his mission of peace. The chorus even stands up to Lamachus on behalf of Dikeapolis, and this support allows him to take the next step into another realm — the agora, which will lead him closer to his goal of peace. This step,

however, is in the form of monologue, not dialogue. Dikeapolis as an actor can identify the problems of the polis, but he cannot actively alleviate them in the theatrical realm. The theatre, therefore, is the means for Dikeapolis to move from the dysfunctional political realm into the ideal political realm.

Once Dikeapolis utilizes the theatre as his conduit for moving into the space of the agora, he is finally in a position to begin taking action in his quest for peace. Thanks to the support of the chorus, Dikeapolis is now able to set up his own market place. As Whitman notes, “He conceives an idea which transcends the Assembly with its corruptions, and at the same time startlingly liberates and exalts his own individual self. The private treaty with Sparta puts Dikeapolis on a level with the whole polis, and even above it for the city had refused to consider his ideas.”⁴¹ The boundaries that divide the agora of Athens from Dikeapolis' private market (and figuratively himself from the community) are indicated by him immediately: “These are the boundaries of my market place,/And here may all the Peloponnesian folk,/Megarians and Boeotians, freely trade/Selling to me, but Lamachus may not” (36). As Bowie notes, “These actions give graphic expression to the separation that now exists between himself and the rest of the polis.”⁴² Dikeapolis is now situated in the agora under the holy Acropolis as an individual coordinating activities which are quite outside the consideration of the community around him.

Once again Dikeapolis transcends even the boundaries of law (setting up his own marketplace to trade with the enemy), which, in reality, would have been a high crime, but in this context of social criticism these actions express the idea that sometimes one must take action on behalf of the greater good for the community when the established laws cease to function. Thus the peace is achieved, but only for Dikeapolis himself and definitely not the Athenians as a whole, especially not Lamachus, who represents the realm of war in this play. In his refusal to

accept the notion of peace with Sparta, he is tainted and therefore must not taint the peace that Dikeapolis achieves; as Xavier Riu notes, “the meaning of trading only with enemies is...the rejection of the city as it is, civilized and opposed to those who confront her.”⁴³ Dikeapolis' position in his private market allows him to set the example of the good that can come from peace with enemies; he trades with the Megarians and the Boeotians and the Peloponnesians in general for those goods that Athens lacks. He uses economics, an aspect of society which the citizens of Athens can understand and relate to, in order to show the citizens how to achieve the greater good for the polis. It is through economics that Dikeapolis can reach the citizens who focus on the individual good about the greater good and how when a community thrives, so too can the individual. The Athenians are concerned with their personal gain in the event of war whereas Dikeapolis realizes that the community as a whole would not benefit from war. Only a select few would benefit from war because their business interests lie in selling products that are necessary in war time, or they would reap benefit from war in another way, but the remainder of the community would be devastated by the effects of the war and Dikeapolis knows this. He must be the example for the Athenians to follow to reach the goal of peace. The agora is where the picture of the ideal polis now becomes clear; it is only here, in the place where individuals working for the common good and striving for peace that the greater good of the polis as a whole can be realized. Here is where meaningful dialogue can now be exchanged between citizens, and the political system can function properly once more.

The movement of the protagonist Dikeapolis is key to understanding the development of the idea of peace in Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*. In order for Dikeapolis to convey his message about the importance of peace to the Athenians, he must set himself apart as an individual who can be looked to for guidance, so separation from the community is necessary in

order to achieve the greater good for the community. He is able to travel from one realm to another within the city of Athens, and at the end of the play, Aristophanes structures Dikeapolis' marketplace so as to bring the community into his sphere rather than vice versa. First the protagonist travels throughout the sphere of the polis and then uses these experiences to create a more ideal community which sets the example for the larger community. Dikeapolis' marketplace is also where the most meaningful dialogue can occur between the common man (himself) and authority (Lamachus). This is because only here can Dikeapolis get his message across to Athens about the benefits of peace. This is also where the drawbacks to war are evident in the wounded state that Lamachus returns to Athens in only to be faced with the image of Dikeapolis and his women and wine. This communication with Lamachus at the end of the play clearly portrays the results of peace and the downside of war. Aristophanes uses Dikeapolis' transcendence of different roles and even of the laws of society to achieve his goal. He instructs the audience to look beyond the corrupted city and strive for the greater good. This is the route that Dikeapolis must take in Aristophanes' play *The Acharnians* — transcendence of the community boundaries through crossing several of these boundaries to break out of the sphere and create his own.

Conclusion

By examining the different ways in which Ancient Greek tragedy and comedy portray the polis and those elements that can either benefit or harm the polis, it is possible to gain a view of actual political life in that era and the values that society deemed most important. Ultimately, though, both Aristophanes' comedy *The Acharnians* and Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus at Colonus* are about achieving a society in which the powers for good are distributed among the citizens and respected by their leader. In these plays the hero's relationship to the polis is of the utmost

importance because he must find the place from which he can successfully address and transform society into realizing the city's strengths and weaknesses. Comedy and tragedy present different aspects of the polis in order to examine precisely these strengths and weaknesses. As seen in *The Acharnians*, comedy presents the audience with a fantastical image of the ideal polis and an individual peace with political enemies in order to convey the benefits of a focus on peace and an uncorrupted political system. Another view of the polis is seen in *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which images of both the cursed and the good polis are presented to serve as a warning for the audience about what is possible when leadership fails and in which the tragic hero finds redemption through his virtuous intentions and divine connection to the gods. By considering these different viewpoints of comedy and tragedy, the audience can achieve a deeper understanding of the connection between hero and polis and the methods presented for ameliorating problems within the polis.

The hero's relationship to the polis in Aristophanes' comedy is dramatized as a personal revolution against a failing democracy in Athens. It is this personal experience of the polis that Aristophanes seeks to achieve for his audience through his dramatic portrayal of the ideal polis. Dikeapolis' dual levels of revolt against Athens (first his creation of a private city and then his alliance with Athenian enemies) exhibit two levels of the requirements for founding and maintaining peace. Firstly, an individual must come to terms with peace himself and put it at the center of his own life, just as Dikeapolis does when he sets up his own city founded on peace. Secondly, an individual must take this inward allegiance to peace and practice it outwardly with his community, which is what Dikeapolis does by trading with Athenian enemies. Because this play also portrays Dikeapolis' revolt against a city in which democracy fails to work, to establish his own peace with Athenian enemies he sets up a different political system, a monarchy, in his

own private realm and begins to draw people into his sphere based on the ideal of peace. This use of a monarchical system serves to further emphasize Dikeapolis' role as an individual and the effect that he alone can have on the greater political realm of Athens. He adamantly adheres to the goal of peace and keeps the best interests of his community as first priority in the activities of his marketplace. However, Dikeapolis also dictates the good to everyone else, not unlike Pericles, who functions as a kind of city boss, a benevolent dictator, or tyrant. Of course, the audience also knows that creating an ideal polis in the center of the Athenian agora in reality would be impossible, but that is not the goal of comedy. Aristophanes does not intend for this ideal polis to be considered a goal that could be achievable in reality but instead, as Louise Cowan has shown in her analysis of *Peace* and *The Frogs*, a means for experiencing the ideal polis and realizing a personal peace in a spiritual manner, with one's intellect and soul.⁴⁴

The tragic hero's relationship to the polis is very complex in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* because Oedipus is both counter to the spirit of the polis and a guardian of the polis. He opposes the spirit of the polis through the transgression of his familial relationships. However, it is not his decision to commit such crimes; he is the unknowing victim of the curse of Cadmus who "began the sequence of the Theban crimes, but divinity egged him on."⁴⁵ It is the gods who cause Oedipus to continue his ancestral curse of sins against the city of Thebes and his own family. But it is also the gods who provide refuge and protection for Oedipus at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*. This relationship between the defiled and the divine is of great importance in understanding Oedipus' impact on the polis. It is by divine law that Oedipus is defiled; he has no choice but to act according to his curse. But, despite his actions, Oedipus' good intentions are never corrupted. Throughout the course of the Theban plays, Oedipus' concern is exclusively for his citizens and his family, not himself. Thebes itself is the symbol of the polis wrongly focused

on self-love. It is through his avoidance of such self-love and his value of communal good that Oedipus becomes capable of being redeemed in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Not only is he redeemed to the polis when, according to prophecy, he becomes guardian of Athens, but he also experiences a divine redemption in the sacred Grove of the Eumenides when he is honored with a mystical death. As Christine Cowan points out, “Oedipus becomes like the Eumenides, a guardian spirit — both a curse on those who defile the polis and a blessing on those who work for its good.”⁴⁶ Thus, Oedipus is a unique tragic hero because he undergoes the tragic fall and suffering, but he comes full circle from curse on the polis to blessing and establishes a positive connection to the polis, enforcing the importance of striving for what is good for the community as a whole.

In both *The Acharnians* and *Oedipus at Colonus* a key point in the treatment of the hero is that he must be separated from general society in order to achieve his unique political purpose in the play. In *The Acharnians*, Aristophanes distances Dikeapolis from general society in a series of steps which can also be related to the depth of understanding the audience can experience at each step. Initially Dikeapolis thinks that the ideal place for achieving peace is at the assembly. However, he finds this impossible, for the members of the assembly are all too focused on selfish motives to concern themselves with the issue of peace. This scene portrays the activities of a dysfunctional governing body, and it lays the groundwork for Dikeapolis’ future retaliation against corrupted politics and his creation of a private peace. Dikeapolis then moves into the realm of the theatre where he acts out a play-within-the-play. Through the dramatic presentation of Euripides’ *Telephus*, the king who fell into beggary, Dikeapolis portrays the results of a failing government for both his audience in the play and the audience of *The Acharnians*. This creates a self-referential reminder that the audience is watching a play; the events are imaginary, yet they also bring to light important issues within the polis. This tragic

play within the comedic play also serves to highlight the different issues that these genres of drama can effectively present to their audiences. Because *The Acharnians* is about community, comedy can use tragedy to make points about what society is lacking. Tragedy is much weightier than comedy, so it is through this conduit that Dikeapolis outlines the very problems that he will seek to avoid in his ideal polis. Dikeapolis then moves into the realm of the agora, which is the site for his private city-within-the-city, where the audience can see the mimesis of the experience of the ideal polis. This is the most important step for comedy because it is the presentation of the imaginary ideal, which is not a reality meant to be lived up to but is important for conveying the sense, or experience, of the ideal polis to the audience. Just as Dikeapolis establishes his own private peace, comedy's audience is invited to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the ideal polis that can exist within the imagination or spirit of an individual person.

Tragedy, likewise, relies on a separation of the hero from general society. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is separate from society at several levels. First of all he is characterized as miasma for the polis; thus he refuses to enter into the city walls of Athens for fear of defiling it. Where he is comfortable is in the divine Grove of the Eumenides, a liminal space. Though this sacred grove is within the realm of Athens' political power, it is not within the boundaries of the city-proper, and therefore it is a suitable place for Oedipus in that respect. More than suitable, this grove is truly the place where Oedipus can establish his place in society. The Eumenides, like Oedipus, have also undergone a transformation in their nature from inflicting pain upon others to protecting people. Mythically the Eumenides were said to have stopped driving people to madness and became "Kindly Ones, who keep harmful passion away from Athenian citizens."⁴⁷ Because Oedipus' crimes are all crimes of passion and violations of the family, he possesses the very qualities that the Eumenides must protect Athens from. Also, not only is he

accepted here; but this grove becomes the site of his transformation into a guardian figure like them. It is also important that Oedipus find refuge in this sacred grove because his relationship to the gods is an undeniable part of his heritage and began even before his own birth when the gods cursed him, through his family name. His presence in this grove as guardian to Athens (upon his burial there) is in direct contrast to his life as cursed leader of Thebes. It is in this liminal space of the grove of the Eumenides that is both human and divine where Oedipus can make the transition from suppliant to member of the guardian gods. This in-between area is instrumental in facilitating Oedipus' change in his relationship to the polis. Tragedy focuses on the hero's connection to the fall of the city and his own fall; but in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus finds a method for saving himself and the polis through his connection to the divine.

Both Aristophanes and Sophocles are greatly interested in giving their audiences a mimesis, a deeper experience of the polis, by showing the Athenians different views of the polis through dramatic presentation. Considering these two plays together also gives a unique experience of the polis and the hero's relationship to that polis as a result of the manner in which the polis is presented to the audience. Because these plays extend themselves beyond the traditional roles of tragedy and comedy, it is possible to gain a more complete view of the polis through a juxtaposition of these plays to see how tragedy and comedy can intersect with each other to create an undivided image. Aristophanes' comedy allows the imagination to be stretched to the greatest limits by portraying a polis in which the comedic hero can get away with transgressing all the rules of order to create his own personal polis. Christine Cowan points out that "Sophocles' tragedy portrays a hero that transgresses all bounds of order to the destruction of himself, his family, and his city. But he saves his city, by suffering and dogged insistence on his innocence. This, too stretches the imagination of the audience."⁴⁸ We see in both genres of

drama a polis so important that political leaders and citizens alike must keep its best interests as their primary concern. Tragedy and comedy work together to examine how to save that polis; they explore both what to fear and how to create something good from that fear.

Notes

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