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“Dream of a Shade”: Refractions of Epic Vision in Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 and Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*

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This essay explores the idea of epic in relative rather than absolute terms, with specific reference to the image of a “dream of a shade” in Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 and Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*.¹ In both form and content, these two poetic creations contain features that may be described as epic in nature. The main argument of this essay is that such features, as refracted separately in the two distinct genres of tragedy and victory ode or “epinician,” are in fact complementary in revealing a unified picture of epic as a genre in its own right.²

The problem is, we cannot even begin to piece together such a picture without a clarification of the idea of epic as a genre. So I offer this premise: that the genre of epic, as well as any other genre, cannot be defined absolutely, as if it belonged to Plato’s world of Forms (in the usage of Plato, the very idea of “Form” is expressed by the same word that means “genre”:

¹ A point of convergence is seen by J. H. Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge MA 1966) 245: “In *Pythian* 8 Amphiaraus watching the young Alcmaeon from the grave feels only the beauty of his heroism though he knows him destined to die. Eteocles’ beauty in the *Septem* is more clouded, and the dry eyes of the Labdacid curse watching beside him declare a human inheritance from which peace is far removed.” I evoke his shining words as I dedicate this essay to his memory.

² On the optic metaphors of *refraction*, with special reference to the poetic image of *refrain* (from Latin *refringere*), see G. Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge 1996) 23-24.

eidos).³ Rather, genre needs to be defined both {97|98} historically - as it existed at a given time - and comparatively in relation to any other coexisting genres at that same given time.⁴

This essay, then, offers preliminaries to a reconstruction of the genre of epic as it existed in the first half of the fifth century BC, roughly the era shared by Aeschylus and Pindar, with specific reference to two other genres, tragedy and epinician, as represented by Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (originally presented in 467 BC) and Pindar's *Pythian* 8 (originally presented in 446 BC). I will begin by considering in the most general terms the relationship of epic to the tragedies of Aeschylus and the epinicians of Pindar. Then I will proceed to examine specific features of the *Seven against Thebes* and *Pythian* 8 that complement each other in refracting an essential feature that typifies epic. That feature is the self-image of epic as a poetic vision.

In the case of Aeschylus, I suggest that we start by adopting a comparative perspective in considering the performances of his tragedies by professional actors (and by nonprofessional choruses) at the Athenian state festival of the City Dionysia - in light of the corresponding performances of the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by professional rhapsodes at the Athenian state festival of the Panathenaia.⁵ Granted, information about the seasonally recurring Panathenaic

³ See especially Plato *Laws* III 700b on the *eidē* 'genres' of *humnoi*, *thrēnoi*, and so on. Cf. Nagy, "Epic as Genre," *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community* (eds. M. Beissinger, J. Tylus, and S. Wofford; Berkeley and Los Angeles 1999) 21-32, especially p. 29n22.

⁴ L. Slatkin, "Genre and Generation in the *Odyssey*," *MHTIC: Revue d'anthropologie du monde grec ancien* 2 (1987) 259-268, especially p. 260.

⁵ See *Poetry as Performance* p. 81 for more on the "functioning institutional complementarity, in Athens, between the performance of drama by actors and chorus at the City Dionysia on the one hand and, on the other, the performance of Homeric epos - and of Homeric hymns that serve as preludes to the epos - by rhapsodes at the Panathenaia." The most important references to the Athenian institution of rhapsodic performances of Homeric poetry at the Panathenaia are "Plato" *Hipparkhos* 228b-c, *Lycurgus Against Leokrates* 102, and *Dieuchidas of Megara* (4th century BC) FGH 485 F 6 via *Diogenes Laertius* 1.57. For a correlation of the information provided by these passages, see *Poetry as Performance* pp. 70-91. As for the references to the *epē* of Homer, as found in all three passages, I offer the working translation 'verses'. More precisely, the *epē* are the poetic 'lines' of Homer (on *epos* as a distinct poetic unit or 'line', see H. Koller, "Epos," *Glotta* 50 [1972] 15-24). For Aristotle, the *epē* of Homer become 'epic' by default, whence the term *epopoia* 'making of epic', as in the beginning of the *Poetics*, 1447a: see "Epic as Genre" p. 27. The implicit preoccupation with 'lines' as the poetic units or building blocks of *epē* has to do with an ongoing question that engaged the ancient transmitters of the Homeric tradition: which 'lines' are genuine

performances of Homeric poetry is sparse, and there are many uncertainties: we cannot even be {98|99} certain about the actual form of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as they would have been performed during the first half of fifth century in Athens, let alone elsewhere.⁶ Still, among the few surviving certainties we do find one that turns out to be vital for understanding the overall history of the Homeric tradition: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* eventually became the only epic poetry to be performed by rhapsodes at the Panathenaia, that most important of all Athenian festivals.⁷ To put it negatively: other {99|100} epic traditions, known under the general heading of the “Cycle,” were eventually excluded from the official rhapsodic

compositions of Homer and which ‘lines’ have been ‘interpolated’ (one word for which is *emballō*, as in Diogenes Laertius 1.57)? For more on this specific concern, see the next note.

⁶ We find essential pieces of information in the ancient commentaries on Pindar *Nemean* 2.1 as preserved in the scholia (ed. A. B. Drachmann, *Scholia Vetera in Pindari Carmina* I-III [Leipzig 1903-1927]). This information, I argue, was mediated by the school of Aristarchus (middle of 2nd century BC), whose thinking affects an important reference to Hippostratus, = FGrH 568 F 5, in the scholia to *Nemean* 2.1c. Hippostratus (ca. 3rd century BC) is being cited here as the source for information concerning Kynaithos of Chios as the first rhapsodic performer of the *epē* of “Homer” in the polis of Syracuse, within the time-frame of the 69th Olympiad (= 504-1 BC). It seems to me misleading to claim that all the information we read in the scholia about the rhapsodic performance of Kynaithos “derives” not from Aristarchus but from Hippostratus, as if we needed to make an exclusive choice between the two sources. R. Janko makes this claim in his review of I. Morris and B. Powell, eds. (*A New Companion to Homer* [Leiden 1997]), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 98 (1998) 5.20 (with specific reference to my chapter “Homeric Scholia,” pp. 101-122, where I discuss the scholia to Pindar *Nemean* 2.1c). The fact that one detail in the scholiastic information about Kynaithos (that is, the dating of his rhapsodic performance at Syracuse) “derives” from Hippostratus cannot be used to rule out the school of Aristarchus as an intermediary source for that information - or even as a direct source for other information about Hippostratus. Besides the reference to Hippostratus in the scholia for Pindar *Nemean* 2, we see four explicit references to Aristarchus in the scholia for the same poem: 9a, 17c (twice), and 19. We may note too the reference to Hippostratus FGrH 568 F 2 in the scholia for Pindar *Pythian* 6.5a, which happens to occur immediately next to an explicit reference to Aristarchus, again at 5a. In all, we find over seventy references to Aristarchus in Drachmann’s edition of the Pindaric scholia (and five to Hippostratus). These references, as casual as they are frequent, lead me to conclude that Aristarchus’ overall critical presence was taken for granted in the Pindaric exegetical tradition that culminated in the scholia. Returning, then, to the scholia for Pindar *Nemean* 2.1c: I maintain that the learned discussion in this section reflects primarily the agenda of Aristarchus, not of Hippostratus (whose work concentrated, after all, on sorting out the genealogies of Sicilian dynasties). Thus I follow the view of F. A. Wolf, *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (Halle 1795) ch. 25, who discerns the agenda of “the Alexandrians” in the claim, reported by the scholia for Pindar *Nemean* 2.1c, that Kynaithos and his followers ‘interpolated many of the *epē* that they had created into the creation [poetry] of Homer’ (οὓς φασὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἐπῶν ποιήσαντας ἐμβαλεῖν εἰς τὴν Ὀμήρου ποίησιν).

⁷ The wording of Lycurgus *Against Leokrates* 102 makes it clear that only the *epē* of “Homer” are performed at the Panathenaia. Also, in the scholia to Pindar *Nemean* 2.1d ed. Drachmann, it is mentioned *en passant* that the rhapsodes of Homeric poetry have as their repertoire the *two* poems (ἐκατέρας τῆς ποιήσεως εἰσενεχθείσης); the source of information in this context is named: Dionysius of Argos (ca. 4th or 3rd century BC) = FGH 308 F 2. In my view, this reference to Dionysius was mediated by the school of Aristarchus; compare the reference to Hippostratus (ca. 3rd century BC) = FGrH 568 F 5 in the scholia to Pindar *Nemean* 2.1c, as discussed in the note above.

repertoire of the Panathenaia.⁸ Two of the most outstanding examples of such epics were the *Thebaid* (PEG pp. 20-28, EGF pp. 21-26) and the *Epigonoï* (PEG pp. 29-31, EGF pp. 26-27).⁹ The alternative epic poetry of the “Cycle,” as we can see clearly even from the fragmentary evidence concerning performance traditions sanctioned by the Athenian State in the first half of the fifth century BC, was absorbed into the tragic poetry of the City Dionysia, as in the case of the *Seven against Thebes* of Aeschylus, which is evidently a tragic version of the epic *Thebaid*.¹⁰ To that extent, I would say that tragedy became a kind of *neo-epic*, though we should {100|101} keep in mind the obvious differences in the earlier historical backgrounds of epic and tragedy.¹¹

In the case of Pindar, we may continue to take a comparative perspective as we look at the explicit references in his epinicians to epic as a genre, combined with explicit self-references to the praise poetry of the epinician as a realization or “actualization” of a prototypical

⁸ On the concept of the “Cycle” in the fifth and fourth centuries BC as the entirety of epic traditions - with the notable exception of the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, see Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Austin 1996) 38. For editions of the “Cyclic” testimonia and fragments, see PEG = A. Bernabé, ed., *Poetae Epici Graeci I* (Leipzig 1987); EGF = M. Davies, ed., *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen 1988).

⁹ For an appreciation of the epic *Thebaid* as an esthetic rival of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, see especially Pausanias 9.9.5. The wording of Herodotus 5.67 suggests that the epic themes of the *Thebaid* and the *Epigonoï* may have been the basic repertoire for rhapsodes’ performances at the festivals of Argos and Sikyon: see E. Cingano, “Clistene di Sicione, Erodoto e i poemi del Ciclo tebano,” *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 20 (1985) 31-40, with reference to Herodotus 5.67. See also Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore 1990) 22n22.

¹⁰ We learn from the hypothesis of the *Seven* that Aeschylus won first prize in 467 BC with the sequence of these four dramas: *Laïos*, *Oedipus*, *Seven against Thebes*, and *Sphinx*. The close relationship between Aeschylus’ dramatic repertoire and the epic repertoire of the “Cycle” is stressed by J. Herington, *Poetry into Drama: Early Tragedy and the Greek Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1985) 139. I argue further for a complementarity between the “Cyclic” repertoire of the City Dionysia and the “Homeric” repertoire of the Panathenaia. In my view, even the representations of Achilles and Odysseus in early tragedy reflect the generally “Cyclic” repertoire and not the specifically “Homeric” repertoire of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In terms of this argument, the “Homeric” *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are distinct because they became the sole epics of the Panathenaia. As such, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* would have passed through a distinctly Athenian phase of evolution, not shared by the “Cycle.” Elsewhere, I have described the Athenian phase of Homeric poetry as the “Panathenaic bottleneck”: see pp. 271-272 of “Irreversible Mistakes and Homeric Poetry,” in J. N. Kazazis and A. Rengakos, eds., *Euphrosyne: Studies in Ancient Epic and Its Legacy in Honor of Dimitris N. Maronitis* (Stuttgart 1999) 259-274.

¹¹ On epic elements in tragedy, see in general Herington pp. 138-144, the section entitled “Aeschylus Homericus?” I note with special interest his remark at p. 139: “It should not be forgotten that (at least to judge by the *Oresteia*) the running time of a trilogy could be more than a quarter of that of a full-length epic.”

function of epic - to make *kleos* 'fame'.¹² These references imply that the genre of the epinician, as inherited by Pindar, is not only older than the genre of epic: more than that, the praise poetry of the epinician is pictured as the compressed origin of epic, which by contrast is pictured as an expanded derivation of praise poetry.¹³ In Pindar *Nemean* 8.51-52 - to cite the most relevant example - the athletic ordeals of the Seven against Thebes, as virtually celebrated by the genre of the epinician, are privileged as older than their wartime ordeals as actually celebrated by epic (and as attested by the surviving fragments of the epic *Thebaid*). In other words, the victory ode of Pindar claims that its "praise poetry was praising heroes even before the events recorded by epic."¹⁴ Let me stress again: such self-references imply an even more important claim: that the compressed poetry of praise actually generated the expanded poetry of epic. Such claims, built into the epinician tradition, have a historical validity in the sense that the epinician is in some ways older than the epic in form (for example, in its metrical repertoire) while praise poetry is in general older than epic poetry in function (for example, in its conventions of reference to the present as well as the heroic past).¹⁵ For the moment, however, questions of historical derivation are irrelevant: the one point of relevance is simply the functional relationship of epinician and epic, as claimed by epinician. To that extent, I would say that the epinician is a kind of *micro-epic*, though we should keep in mind the obvious differences in the earlier historical backgrounds of epic and epinician.

Proceeding now from the general to the specific, let us explore the {101|102} wording of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, as a "neo-epic," and of Pindar's *Pythian* 8, as a "micro-epic," concerning the overall epic narrative about the *Seven against Thebes* and their sons, the *Epigono*i. In parallel ways, both of these poetic creations picture this narrative as a *vision*.

¹² Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* pp. 202-214, especially with reference to Pindar *Pythian* 4.277-279, *Isthmian* 8.56a-62, and *Pythian* 6.28-51.

¹³ *Pindar's Homer* p. 437 (summary).

¹⁴ *Pindar's Homer* p. 192, with further examples and references.

¹⁵ *Pindar's Homer* pp. 414-437.

In the *Seven* of Aeschylus, each of the seven heroes arrayed against the polis of Thebes is visualized directly, by way of direct speech as delivered by the messenger (to Eteocles as the chief defender of the polis); further, the identity of each hero is visualized indirectly, by way of a blazon on his shield, the word for which is *sēma* ‘sign, signal’ (lines 387, 404, 432, 491, 518, 591, 643); even further, the *sēma* of each hero is interpreted directly by way of the same direct speech delivered by the messenger.¹⁶

Similarly in Pindar’s *Pythian* 8, the hero Alcmaeon is visualized directly by way of direct speech as delivered by his father Amphiaraus from the realm of the dead and as “quoted” by the epinician (lines 44-55); further, the hero is visualized indirectly by way of the blazon on his shield, the image of a *drakōn* ‘snake’ (line 46); even further, this blazon is interpreted directly by way of the same direct speech delivered by the hero’s dead father (lines 44-45). This parallelism of Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 with Aeschylus’ *Seven* is particularly remarkable in view of the epic identity of the hero Amphiaraus: he is one of the original *Seven against Thebes* and his son Alcmaeon is one of the *Epigonoι*. The parallel visualizations of Pindar and Aeschylus are conjuring parallel visions emanating from the epic tradition of the *Thebaid* and the *Epigonoι*.

In both form and content, Pindar’s poetic words “quoting” a dead hero’s vision of a living hero are the words of a *mantis* ‘seer’, as we can see clearly from the wording of the hero Amphiaraus, who is imagined {102|103} as speaking from the dead when he envisions the blazon on the shield of his son, the hero Alcmaeon:

¹⁶ On the semiotics and poetics of visualization as signaled by the word *sēma* (σημα; cf. also *thauma*/θαῦμα), see Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca 1990) ch. 8, = a rewritten version of “*Sēma* and *Noēsis*: Some Illustrations,” *Arethusa* 16 (1983) 35-55. On the semiotics of visualization as deployed specifically in theater, with reference to the blazons or *sēmata* on the shields of the Seven, see F. Zeitlin, *Under the Sign of the Shield: Semiotics and Aeschylus’ Seven Against Thebes* (Rome 1982), including bibliography on earlier work, especially H. H. Bacon, “The Shield of Eteocles,” *Arion* 3 (1964) 27-38, and P. Vidal-Naquet, “Les boucliers des héros,” *Annali del seminario di studi del mondo classico: Archeologia e storia antica* 1 (1979) 95-118; = “The Shields of Heroes,” *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece* (eds. J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet; translated by J. Lloyd; Sussex and Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1981) 120-149.

θαέομαι σαφές | δράκοντα ποικίλον αἰθᾶς Ἀλκμᾶν' ἐπ' ἀσπίδος | νωμῶντα
πρῶτον ἐν Κάδμου πύλαις.

I see [*thaeomai*] clearly [*saphes*] Alcmaeon, wielding the patterned [*poikilos*] snake
[*drakōn*] on his blazing shield, in the forefront of the gates of Kadmos.

Pindar *Pythian* 8.45-47

Immediately preceding the “quotation” of the actual vision, the interpretation of the dead father’s mantic vision is likewise “quoted” by Pindar’s song:

φυᾶ τὸ γενναῖον ἐπιπρέπει | ἐκ πατέρων παισὶ λῆμα

By inherited nature, the noble purpose [*lēma*] shines forth from fathers [*pateres*] to
sons.¹⁷

Pindar *Pythian* 8.44-45

It is relevant that Pindar’s song claims to have received as a gift the *manteumata* ‘mantic crafts’ (8.60) of the seer Amphiaraus, who had appeared to the poet in an epiphany (8.56-60).¹⁸ Thus becoming mantic in its own right, Pindar’s song describes itself as a *humnos* (8.57) that can now duly reciprocate the mantic gift of Amphiaraus by celebrating Alcmaeon (again, 8.56-60).¹⁹

¹⁷ I have simplified my earlier translation, as printed in *Pindar’s Homer* p. 195.

¹⁸ The voice of the poet says that he “met” the mantic hero on the way to Delphi (Pindar *Pythian* 8.56-60): that is, the poet himself experienced the vision of a heroic epiphany, which is now the inspiration, as it were, of Pindar’s words. The theme of epiphany is connected to the mantic interpretation: ‘By inherited nature, the noble purpose [*lēma*] shines forth from fathers [*pateres*] to sons’ (43-44). It is also connected to what the voice of the poet announce later on, at lines 95-97, which we will consider further below. See also T. K. Hubbard, “The Theban Amphiaraon and Pindar’s Vision on the Road to Delphi,” *Museum Helveticum* 50 (1993) 193-203.

¹⁹ This Pindaric association of *humnos* with the mantic arts of Amphiaraus at *Pythian* 8.57 may be connected to an epic theme concerning the heroic seer. According to the Herodotean *Life of Homer* 9 (PEG T 7 = EGF F 9) Amphiaraus himself had once upon a time composed *humnoi* to the gods which “Homer” later performed (ἐπεδείκνυτο) when he visited Neon Teikhos; another performance by “Homer” while he was there, besides his own poetry, was the *exelasia* of Amphiaraus to Thebes. What particularly interests me about this whole narrative is the idea that epic can appropriate the poetry of the seer.

Earlier, when the words of Pindar introduce the words of Amphiaraus by quoting them directly, the seer is said to speak in *ainigmata* ‘riddles’ (*ainissomai* 8.40: αἰνίξατο).²⁰ {103|104}

For the moment, let us focus our attention on the collocation of *theaomai* (Doric *thaeomai*) with *saphes* ‘clearly’ in Pindar *Pythian* 8.45, where the sense of the word *saphēs* ‘clear’ conveys the visual clarity of mantic clairvoyance. The same clairvoyant sense is conveyed in the three occurrences of the same word *saphēs* in Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*:

Line 40, near the beginning (second verse) of the messenger’s initial speech: ἤκω σαφῆ τάκεῖθεν ἐκ στρατοῦ φέρων ‘I have come bringing things that are clear from the army back there’; the messenger describes himself as a ‘viewer’, *katoptēs*, of the things happening there (line 41).

Line 67, at the second-to-last verse of that same speech: the messenger refers to the visions that he brings to Eteocles as σαφηνεῖα λόγου ‘clarification [dative] of speech’.

Line 82, in the initial part of the chorus’ initial song: ἄναυδος σαφῆς ἔτυμος ἄγγελος ‘the clear and genuine messenger’ (with reference to the chorus’ actual vision of the dust rising toward the aether, as a sign of the oncoming doom).²¹

Moreover, the messenger’s mantic visions had been preceded, as the words of Eteocles make clear at *Seven* 24-29, by the words of a professional seer, a *mantis* (24: νῦν δ’ ὥς ὁ μάντις φησίν; 27: μαντευμάτων), who had already interpreted for Eteocles the omens of birds that prophesied the coming of the *Seven against Thebes* (24: οἰωνῶν βοτήρ; 26: χρηστηρίου ὄρνιθας).²²

²⁰ Cf. Sophocles *Epigonoι* F 771 Radt, now supplemented by col.i of *Pap.Oxy.* inv. 87/110(a), to be published by Christoph Mülke, Corpus Christi College; also by H. Lloyd-Jones. The relevant verses: καὶ τὸν θεῖον τοιοῦτον ἐξεπίσταμαι | σοφοῖς μὲν αἰνικτῆρα θεσφάτων ἀεὶ | σκαίοις δὲ φαῦλον κὰν βραχεὶ διδάσκαλον.

²¹ I am grateful to Timothy O’Sullivan for alerting me to these three contexts.

²² Cf. G. O. Hutchinson, ed., *Aeschylus: Septem contra Thebas* (Oxford 1985) 46: “We hear of the attack first from the foreknowledge of the absent prophet, then from an eye-witness’s report, and finally from the chorus’s direct perception.”

The poetics of mantic visualization mark not only Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* in particular but also the genre of tragedy in general, the vehicle of which is *theatron* (θέατρον) 'theater': this noun is derived from the verb *theaomai*, meaning 'see, visualize', with a suffix -tron {104|105} that actually designates the vehicle for the action of that verb.²³ The mantic aspect of *theatron* is recapitulated in the compressed wording of Pindar *Pythian* 8.45, θαέομαι σαφές 'I see clearly', featuring the same verb *theaomai* (Doric *thaeomai*), where the subject is the hero Amphiaraus, speaking from the dead as he visualizes the image of the snake on the shield of his son, the hero Alcmaeon.

Not only is the word for 'theater' mantic. There is a word for the professional 'actor' of theater that is mantic as well: it is *hupokritēs*, derived from *hupokrinomai* 'respond' in the specific mantic sense of *respond to a vision*, where the vision is an omen that occurs in "real life" or in a dream.²⁴ Of particular interest are idioms referring to the mantic practice of dream-interpretation or *Traumdeutung*, such as *opsis krinō* 'interpret a vision' (Herodotus 1.20.1) and *en-hupnion krinō* 'interpret a dream' (ibid.: the *opsis* 'vision' here is equated with the *en-hupnion* 'dream'; cf. 7.19.1).²⁵

To sum up what we have seen so far: both the tragedy of Aeschylus and the epinician of Pindar define themselves as mantic. The explicit theatricality of Aeschylean "neo-epic" and

²³ On the mantic connotations of the related forms *thea* (θέα not θεά) and *theōros* (θεωρός), see *Pindar's Homer* p. 164. On *theatron*, see also Herington, *Poetry into Drama* p. 224: "It is sometimes forgotten that the word and concept *theatron* was by no means associated only with the drama; quite possibly, indeed, it antedated the drama." He cites the use of the word in Herodotus 6.67.3 with reference to the Spartan festival of the *Gymnopaideiai*. On Plato's idea of *theatrokratia* (θεατροκρατία) 'theatrocracy' as a new cultural force that erodes the differentiations of the old *eidē* 'genres' of songmaking and poetry (*Laws* III 701a), see *Pindar's Homer* pp. 108-109. A question not addressed by Plato's discussion is this: how does the "theatrocracy" of tragedy as the prime genre of the City Dionysia affect epic as the prime genre of the Panathenaia?

²⁴ The relevant contexts of *hupokritēs* and *hupokrinomai* are collected and analyzed by H. Koller, "Hypokrisis und Hypokrites," *Museum Helveticum* 14 (1957) 100-107. To be added to his bibliography: G. Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study of the Social Origins of Drama* (2nd ed. London 1946) 181-182; cf. also J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (2nd ed. of original 1988 French version, translated by J. Lloyd; Ithaca 1993) 171-173. More on *hupokritēs* in *Pindar's Homer* pp. 162-163, 168n95, 376, 379. In a forthcoming work, I analyze a variety of idioms involving *hupokrinomai* in both mantic and theatrical contexts.

²⁵ Koller p. 101.

the implicit theatricality of Pindaric “micro-epic” - as compressed in the expression θαέομαι σαφές ‘I see clearly’ - can be explained in terms of this inherent mantic quality.

Now we turn to the epic of Homeric poetry. We are about to see that {105|106} epic narrative is not only pervaded by mantic visions: it is actually driven by them. Further, the poetics of mantic visualization can help clarify the theatricality of epic in its own right.

Let us begin with a Homeric example of *hupokrinomai*, which is a key to understanding the mantic - and theatrical - potential of epic. It will be clear from this example that any given mantic vision has to be *performed as a question* - either by a character in the narration or simply by the narration itself - so that the interpretation of its “real” meaning may be *performed as a response*.²⁶ The passage in question is *Iliad* II 228, where *hupokrinomai* refers to a hypothetical situation: the verb, meaning ‘he would respond’ (ὕποκρίναιτο), has as its subject *theopropos* ‘seer’. The speaker in this context describes the generic *theopropos* as one who knows *sapha* ‘clearly’ the omens [*teras* plural] (XII 228-229: θεοπρόπος δς σάφα θυμῷ | εἰδείη τεράων).

The speaker who is being “quoted” here by the Homeric narrative happens to be the hero Polydamas, a comrade of Hector. Polydamas has just interpreted a *teras* ‘omen’ in his own right (XII 209): it is the vision of a *drakōn* ‘snake’ (XII 202, 220), who stings an eagle carrying it, in midflight; once stung, the bird drops the snake amidst the ranks of the Trojans and flies off (XII 200-209). This omen is quoted directly by the words of Homeric narrative (again, XII 200-209). Then the meaning of these poetic words is interpreted by the likewise poetic words of the hero Polydamas, which are also quoted directly (XII 210-229). It is clear, according to Polydamas, that the Trojans in general and Hector in particular could *potentially* equate themselves with the snake - and thereby equate the Achaeans with the eagle - if only Hector

²⁶ In the same forthcoming work as mentioned in note 24, I analyze all attested Homeric examples of *hupokrinomai*.

would heed the omen (again, XII 210-229).²⁷ The hero Polydamas is “quoted” as saying, at the conclusion of his words, that these same words of interpretation would be matched by the words of interpretation spoken by a hypothetical seer: the seer ‘would respond’, as expressed by the verb *hupokrinomai* in the optative (ὕποκρίναιτο), the same way as Polydamas has in fact just responded (XII 228-229).

In other words, what the hero here performs in epic corresponds to what a *theopropos* ‘seer’ could *potentially* perform if he responded to the same vision as narrated by epic. Thus epic poetry is declaring its {106|107} control of mantic poetry.²⁸ The question remains, though, whether the visions of mantic poetry can control epic.

The all-pervasiveness of mantic visualization in Homeric poetry is evident in the foundational *teras* ‘omen’ of the *Iliad* as epic, which takes the form of a primal vision interpreted by the seer Calchas. The *Iliad* “quotes” the seer himself as saying at II 324: ἡμῖν μὲν τόδ’ ἔφηνε τέρας μέγα μητίετα Ζεύς ‘Zeus the Planner *made as a vision* for me this great *teras*’. The *teras* ‘omen’, which is framed by the narrative of Odysseus (II 284-332) - which in turn is framed by the overall Homeric narrative - is the vision of a *drakōn* ‘snake’ (II 308) that first devours eight young birds and then the mother bird (II 303-320). The vision happened in the first year of the Trojan War, during a sacrifice on the occasion of the assembling of Achaean forces at Aulis (II 303). Next, we hear that Zeus, ‘the god who *made the vision*’, θεὸς ὅς περ ἔφηνε (II 318), proceeded to render this vision permanent and unchanging - by turning the snake into stone (II 319). In the words of Odysseus, the whole vision of the *drakōn* ‘snake’ (II 308) is a *sēma* (II 308), which we may interpret not only as a mental ‘sign’ but also as a concretized visualization. The petrified vision of the snake becomes a concrete work of the visual arts, a

²⁷ For an alternative situation, where Hector is compared to an eagle, see *Iliad* XV 690, to be discussed further below.

²⁸ For a detailed study of representations, in and by the genre of epic, of other poetic genres, see R. P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad*. (Ithaca 1989)

three-dimensional frozen motion picture. It is thereby a permanent monument, a landmark, of the original omen.

Just as this concretized vision of the story of Ilion - and of the *Iliad* itself - is imagined as unchanging and permanent, so too is the *kleos* or poetic ‘fame’ of epic that radiates from the words of the seer Calchas as directly “quoted” by Odysseus in *Iliad* II 323-332. In the words of the seer himself, as we already saw at II 324, ἡμῖν μὲν τόδ’ ἔφηνε τέρας μέγα μητίετα Ζεὺς ‘Zeus the Planner *made as a vision* for me this great omen [*teras*]’. Then Calchas goes on to prophesy that the *kleos* of this omen [*teras*] will never perish:

ὄψιμον ὀψιτέλεστον, ὅου κλέος οὔποτ’ ὀλεῖται

[... this *teras*], late in coming, late in coming to fulfillment [*telos*], and its *kleos* will
never perish

Iliad II 325

That was then, at Aulis, in the first year of the Trojan War (*Iliad* II {107|108} 303). Now, as Odysseus is “quoting” back those same words of the seer, it is the ninth year at Troy (II 295). Calchas was saying, back then, in the words that are now being “quoted” by Odysseus (II 323-332), that the nine birds are the nine years that the Achaeans will spend at Troy, and that the citadel will now be captured finally in the tenth year. After Odysseus “quotes” these words of the seer, he adds: τὰ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται ‘and they are now reaching their fulfillment [*telos*]’ (II 330).

Here the snake is a positive sign for the Achaeans. By contrast, in the earlier example of an omen calling for an act of interpretation as expressed by the mantic word *hupokrinomai*, we have seen another *drakōn* ‘snake’ becoming a negative sign for the Achaeans, insofar as it becomes a potentially positive sign for the Trojans (*Iliad* XII 202, 220).

Similarly, the *drakōn* ‘snake’ in Pindar *Pythian* 8.46 is a positive sign for the anti-Theban heroes who are sons of the original Seven against Thebes. In Aeschylus *Seven* 486-525, by contrast, the complex image of snakes and dragons on the shield of the anti-Theban hero Hippomedon is a decidedly negative sign for the pro-Theban heroes defending the seven gates of Thebes against the same original Seven. I will return to this image at a later point; for now, I simply draw attention to a relevant detail at *Seven* 503: the anti-Theban hero Hippomedon himself is compared to a *drakōn* ‘snake’ who menaces defenseless young birds. We may also compare the choral reference at *Seven* 291 to the seven anti-Theban heroes as predatory *drakontes* who prey on defenseless young birds. Moreover, at *Seven* 381, the anti-Theban hero Tydeus is said to ‘roar’ (βοᾶ) like a *drakōn*. In such contexts, the translation ‘dragon’ is even more appropriate than ‘snake’.²⁹

On the basis of the comparisons that we have considered so far, I offer this summary: the mantic visions of omens, deeply embedded as they are within the narrative agenda of Homeric poetry, make it clear that the genre of epic itself shares its poetics of visualization with the “neo-epic” of Aeschylus and the “micro-epic” of Pindar. But the argument can be taken further: I would even go so far as to say that the visual worlds of Aeschylus and Pindar can ultimately be described as epic in nature, and that the blazons visualized on the heroic shields of {108|109} their “neo-epic” and “micro-epic” creations are in fact a shining example of epic pure and simple. After all, the most complex and spectacular of all blazons is a creation of epic: it is the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* XVIII. The mantic vision of this ultimate Shield is a microcosm that interprets - and is interpreted by - the macrocosm of the epic that frames it.³⁰

²⁹ On homologies of snake / dragon in various myths of Indo-European provenience, see C. Watkins, *How to kill a dragon: Aspects of Indo-European poetics* (New York 1995), especially pp. 448-459 with reference to Typhon. At a later point in this essay, I have more things to say about this “dragon,” Typhon.

³⁰ Nagy, “The Shield of Achilles: Ends of the *Iliad* and Beginnings of the Polis,” *New Light on a Dark Age: Exploring the Culture of Geometric Greece* (ed. S. Langdon; Columbia, Mo. 1997) 194-207.

The argument can be taken still further: the Shield of Achilles, as an example of an epic sub-genre, is related to the epic sub-genre of the Homeric simile.³¹ Like the Shield, the Homeric simile can function as a “recasting” of mantic visions.³² Like the Homeric micro-narratives about the responses of *theopropoi* ‘seers’ to omens, Homeric similes become micro-narratives in their own right, deeply embedded within the macro-narratives of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The mechanism of likening in the simile - that is, of saying that something from the outer frame of the narrative is “like” the inner content of the simile - is an act of interpretation. As such, the Homeric simile can be just as mantic as the response given by a seer to a given vision. What gets interpreted, moreover, is not only the vision of the simile, by way of its connectedness to the outer frame of the macro-narrative, but also the macro-narrative itself, which is deepened and thus enhanced by the embedded mantic vision of the simile’s micro-narrative.³³ By extension, then, we may even say that epic itself is pervasively mantic by virtue of interpreting - and being interpreted by - similes embedded within its narrative frame.

In this mantic light, let us take one last look at the vision of the shield of Alcmaeon in the “micro-epic” of Pindar’s *Pythian* 8. The visualization of the *drakōn*, which I have already quoted earlier, is seen as a positive sign in the words of interpretation emanating from the dead seer, which I have also already quoted. This time, however, I will quote simultaneously the vision and the interpretation that immediately precedes it: {109|110}

φῦ᾽ τὸ γενναῖον ἐπιπρέπει | ἐκ πατέρων παισὶ λῆμα. θαέομαι σαφές | δράκοντα
 ποικίλον αἰθᾶς Ἀλκμᾶν' ἐπ' ἀσπίδος | νωμῶντα πρῶτον ἐν Κάδμου πύλαις

³¹ L. Muellner, “The simile of the Cranes and Pygmies,” HSCP 93 (1990) 59-101, especially p. 91n59, with reference to the explicit likening of the dancing-place on the Shield to the one that Daedalus contrived for Ariadne in Crete (*Iliad* XVIII 590-592).

³² I borrow the term from Muellner pp. 98-99.

³³ See especially Muellner p. 68.

By inherited nature, the noble purpose [*lēma*] shines forth from fathers [*pateres*] to sons. I see [*thaeomai*] clearly [*saphes*] Alcmaeon, wielding the patterned [*poikilos*] snake [*drakōn*] on his blazing shield, in the forefront of the gates of Kadmos.

Pindar *Pythian* 8.44-47

As we can see clearly from the original Greek as printed above, the switch from the interpretation of the vision to the vision itself happens within a single colon and is marked by asyndeton: |... λῆμα. θαέομαι σαφές | ... ‘... purpose [*lēma*]. I see clearly ...’. The postponement of the word that marks the subject of the clause, *lēma* ‘purpose’, all the way to the end of the clause accentuates the juxtaposition of this key word with the two words that signal the vision itself, *thaeomai saphes* ‘I see clearly’. The juxtaposition is further accentuated by the asyndeton.

Just as the sign on the shield gives a positive meaning to the *drakōn* ‘snake’ in Pindar’s *Pythian* 8, so also the interpretation by the seer gives a positive meaning to the *lēma* ‘purpose’ of the fathers.³⁴ This positive meaning resurfaces dramatically near the conclusion of the Pindaric ode, as the voice of the poet declares:

ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις τί δ’ οὔ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ | ἄνθρωπος. ἀλλ’ ὅταν αἴγλα διόσδοτος
ἔλθῃ, | λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μείλιχος αἰών

Creatures of a day. What is a someone, what is a no one? Man is the dream of a shade. But when the radiance [*aiglē*] given by Zeus comes, there is at hand the shining light of men, and the life-force [*aiōn*] gives sweet pleasure.

Pindar *Pythian* 8.95-97

³⁴ We may compare the positive meaning of *lēma* ‘purpose’ in Aeschylus *Seven* 616, with reference to Amphiarus.

Here is what I have already written elsewhere about this passage: {110|111}

I interpret *skias onar* ‘dream of a shade’ as a recapitulation of the earlier words of the dead Amphiaraus about his living son. In Homeric usage the word *skia* can designate a dead person. I suggest that the shade of the dead person is literally dreaming - that is, realizing through its dreams - the living person. In other words, the occasion of victory in a mortal’s day-to-day lifetime is that singular moment when the dark insubstantiality of an ancestor’s shade is translated, through its dreams, into the shining life-force of the victor in full possession of victory, radiant with the brightness of Zeus. It is as if we the living were the realization of the dreams dreamt by our dead ancestors.³⁵

The benign vision here of the *aiglē* ‘radiance’ of Zeus seems to me metonymically connected to (and mantically synchronized with) the radiant vision announced by the seer Amphiaraus when he says clairvoyantly *thaeomai saphes* ‘I see clearly’ as he looks out from the shades of the dead and sees the image of the snake on the blazing shield of Alcmaeon. By metonymy, the image of the snake now shines with the radiance of Zeus. To understand the full power of this positive image in *Pythian* 8, we must now contrast it with the negative image of the snake at *Seven* 503 and elsewhere (291, 381).

As I have noted earlier, *drakōn* ‘snake’ is applied at *Seven* 503 as a simile to describe the anti-Theban hero Hippomedon, who menaces the Thebans just as a snake menaces young birds; moreover, as I have also noted earlier in passing, the blazon on the shield of Hippomedon is itself replete with negative images of snakes and dragons (*Seven* 486-525). But now we come to a further important detail: the snake on the shield of Hippomedon spews

³⁵ Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer* pp. 195-196. This interpretation is not necessarily at odds with other interpretations that stress the presence of another theme in this passage: that human life is sadly ephemeral (for references, see further at pp. 195 notes 211, 212).

‘black smoke’ in the *Seven* (λινγὺν μέλαιναν 494): this monster, in fact, is none other than the fire-breathing *Typhōn* (*Seven* 493 and 511; cf. 517). Typhon’s very name derives from the root *tuph-*, meaning ‘smoke’ (τυφ-).³⁶ The legacy of this root *tuph-* tells its own story: historians of the Greek language have remarked on how far and wide its basic meaning of ‘smoke’ has spread, generating a spectacular variety of “words relating to obscurity, blindness, or else to the darkening of one’s wits, stupidity, or even to becoming {111|112} blind to one’s own self, pretension, boasting, vanity.”³⁷ Such an etymological inventory of Greek words derived from the root *tuph-* can also serve as a poetic inventory of the negative characteristics of the *Seven against Thebes* in Aeschylus’ drama by that name.

In Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 as well, the image of the Typhon fits these same negative characteristics (lines 15-18), though here the identity of the monster is kept separate from the positive characteristics of the snake featured on the blazing shield of Alcmaeon (lines 45-48). In the Pindaric ode, Typhon is named as the premier example of the kind of personality marked by excessive *bia* ‘violence’, matched by correspondingly excessive speech: such a person is *megalaukhos* ‘one who boasts grand things’ (line 15). We may compare this word with *megal’ epeukhetai* ‘he boasts grand things’ at *Seven* 452;³⁸ such a person deserves to be smitten, says the chorus at 453, by the divine thunderbolt.³⁹

In Pindar’s *Pythian* 8, the negative image of *Typhōn* is an effective foil for the positive image of the *drakōn* ‘snake’ pictured on the blazing shield. The non-vision of the dark Typhon is needed to achieve the vision of the radiant snake. Similarly, the *skias onar* ‘dream of a shade’ is

³⁶ P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris 1968-1980).

³⁷ Ibid.: “d’où les termes relatifs à l’obscurité, la cécité, d’autre part ceux qui expriment l’obscurcissement de l’esprit, la stupidité, enfin ceux qui signifient l’aveuglement sur soi-même, la vantardise, la vanité.”

³⁸ On Hector’s hybristic speech-acts involving *eukhomai* in the *Iliad*, as at XIII 54, see L. Muellner, *The Meaning of Homeric EYXOMAI through its Formulas* (Innsbruck 1976) 51. Note too the expression μακρὸν ἄνσε ‘he let out a far-reaching shout’ at *Iliad* V 101, picked up by the participle of *eukhomai* at V 106 (I owe this reference to Philippe Rousseau).

³⁹ See also the negative context of *eukhomai* ‘boast’ at *Seven* 633, where it is used synonymously with *araomai* ‘curse’.

a foil for the ultimate *aiglē* ‘radiance’ of Zeus himself. But there is more to it: the seer sees the radiance *from* the shades, and in fact he *is* the shade. In my interpretation, the ‘dream of a shade’ is the actual medium of vision, of visualization, for the victorious athlete in the present to be seen by his ancestors from the past.

In order to validate this interpretation of the Pindaric expression *skias onar* ‘dream of a shade’, I still need to find some kind of formal parallel in the traditional poetic repertoire of epic themes. Such a parallel exists, I propose, in Aeschylus’ *Seven*. In this case, however, the context is decidedly malign, not benign. In response to the mutual killings of Eteocles and Polyneices, the choral song of the Theban {112|113} women speaks of ‘the Lady, the shade [*skia*] of Oedipus, the black Erinys’ (976-977 = 987-988: πότνια τ’ Οἰδίπου σκιά, μέλαιν’ Ἐρινύς).⁴⁰ The *skia* ‘shade’ of the dead Oedipus is pictured here as the living Fury that *becomes* the death of the hero’s two accursed sons.

The question remains: where, then, is the dream of this negative shade? At an earlier moment in the *Seven*, Eteocles speaks of the *ara* ‘curse’ of his father Oedipus (695), and the chorus speaks of this curse as an Erinys (700) that needs to be exorcised with the help of the gods (699-701); then there is talk of an unnamed force to which the chorus refers simply as *daimōn* ‘daemon’ (705), an entity that needs to be averted from acting on his *lēma* ‘purpose’ (706). The daemon needs to be averted because it is still ‘boiling’ (708: ζεῖ), says the chorus. Eteocles responds:

⁴⁰ I follow most editors by printing μέλαιν’ at *Seven* 977, reflecting Porson’s emendation of the manuscript reading μέλαινά τ’. Note the comment of Hutchinson, ed., *Aeschylus: Septem* p. 205: “πότνια ... σκιά: the combination has an air of paradox. σκιά normally suggests weakness and insignificance, even when used of the dead. It is not absolutely necessary to identify the ghost [of Oedipus] with the Erinys by placing a weak stop, not a strong, after σκιά. However the identification is favoured by πότνια and by the significant echo of 70 Ἄρά τ’ Ἐρινύς πατρός ἢ μεγασθενής. Cf. [Apollonius of Rhodes] 3.704.” Albert Henrichs reminds me that, in Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1299, Polyneices refers to the anger of Oedipus as τὴν σὴν Ἐρινύν ‘your [= of Oedipus] Erinys’ (see also 1434). For a striking parallel to *Seven* 976-977 = 987-988, see also Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 417-419; I owe this reference to Charles Segal.

ἔξέξεσεν γὰρ Οἰδίπου κατεύγματα

ἄγαν δ' ἀληθεῖς ἐνυπνίων φαντασμάτων

ὄψεις, πατρώων χρημάτων δατήριοι

Yes, it [the *daimōn*] boiled over in wrath with the curses [*kateugmata*, from

eukhomai]⁴¹ of Oedipus!

All too true are the visions [*opsis* plural] of apparitions-in-dreams [*en-hupnia*],⁴²

- visions of dividing the father's property.

Aeschylus *Seven* 709-711

We may note too the choral description of the same Erinys at *Seven* 720-726: here the Fury, as the realization of the *katarai* 'curses' (725) {113|114} of Oedipus, is described as 'a malign *mantis* who is absolutely true, the father's prayed-for [*euktaia*, from *eukhomai*] Erinys' (722-723: *παναλαθῇ κακόμαντιν | πατρὸς εὐκταίαν Ἑρινύν*).⁴³ The malign *mantis* may be contrasted with the benign *mantis* of *Pythian* 8. Likewise, the malign *lēma* of the malign daemon at *Seven* 706 may be contrasted with the benign *lēma* of the benign ancestors in *Pythian* 8.45.⁴⁴ The Fury of Oedipus is all-black (977 = 988: *μέλαιν' Ἑρινύς*).⁴⁵ In her absolute darkness, this Fury signals the total eclipse of radiance, which may be contrasted with the shining image of the radiant snake envisioned by Amphiaraus on the blazing shield of Alcmaeon in *Pythian* 8 (46).

⁴¹ For other examples of negative *eukhomai* see note 39.

⁴² The adjectival *en-hupnia* 'in-dreams' describes the *phantasmata* 'apparitions'.

⁴³ In the *Seven*, the malign prophetic contexts of *araomai* 'curse' are generally parallel to the benign (or neutral) contexts of *eukhomai* 'pray'; see note 39 above. With specific reference to the curse of Oedipus, the diction of the *Seven* corresponds closely to the diction that we find in the fragments of the epic *Thebaid*: PEG F 1 [=EGF F2].7-8, on Oedipus' curse on his sons: *ἐπαρὰς | ἀργαλέας ἡρᾶτο· θοὴν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἑρινύν*. In the epic *Thebaid*, the curse of Oedipus is also expressed by way of *eukhomai*: PEG [and EGF] F 3.3 *εὕκτο*. With further reference to *Seven* 722-713, Charles Segal has shown me a striking point of comparison in Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus*: the chorus asserts that the discourse of Teiresias is *alēthes* 'true' at 299, and the seer himself reaffirms the assertion at 461; what follows at 463-511 is an ode about the mantic voice emanating from the god.

⁴⁴ The climactically negative *humnos* of the *Erinus* at *Seven* 867 may be contrasted with the positive *humnos* in *Pythian* 8.57, as discussed at note 19.

⁴⁵ Likewise, the *ara* 'curse' of Oedipus is all-black: *Seven* 695, 832.

The system of complementarity in the deployment of negative and positive images for snakes in Pindar's *Pythian* 8 and Aeschylus' *Seven* brings us back, one last time, to the corresponding epic system of complementarity in Homeric poetry. As we have seen, the vision of the snake that menaced and then devoured the defenseless birds in *Iliad* II was ultimately positive for the Achaeans - that is, after Calchas the seer interpreted it for them. As for the vision of the snake that stung the eagle in *Iliad* XII, it was positive for the Trojans - that is, it was *potentially* positive, after Polydamas interpreted it for Hector. But the point is, this same image of snake and bird could ultimately become negative for the Trojans if they failed to heed its mantic interpretation. From the macro-narrative of the *Iliad*, we do in fact know that Hector fails to heed that interpretation: he consistently refuses to stay on the defensive, unlike the snake that stung the eagle. Instead, Hector consistently goes {114|115} on the offensive, despite the repeated warnings of the clairvoyant Polydamas.

At *Iliad* XV 690, a climactic moment in the course of Hector's playing the part of attacker instead of defender, he is actually given a simile that likens him to an eagle instead of a snake, and the epithet of this eagle is *aithōn* 'blazing'.⁴⁶ We may compare the epithet of the shield that pictures the snake in Pindar *Pythian* 8.46: *aithā* 'blazing'. I see at work here a metonymy: the blazing of the shield is linked with the blazing of the snake. We may compare also the expression *aithōn ... lēma* 'blazing in purpose' in Aeschylus *Seven* 448, describing the Theban hero Polyphontes when he faces his Argive opponent, the hero Kapaneus; as the words of Eteocles prophesy, the fire-bearing thunderbolt of the gods awaits Kapaneus (*Seven* 444-445). Again I see a metonymy: the blazing purpose of Polyphontes is linked with the blazing force of the divine thunderbolt, which will smite Kapaneus. Clearly, the epithet *aithōn ... lēma* 'blazing in purpose' works for Polyphontes.

⁴⁶ For more on the narrative tension created by the anomalous context of this simile, see Muellner, "The Simile of the Cranes and Pygmies" pp. 69-72.

Will the simile of the eagle envisioned as *aithōn* ‘blazing’ at *Iliad* XV 690 similarly work for Hector? The simile is applied at a climactic point of the narrative: Hector is on the attack, moving toward the Achaeans as they stand guard over their ships on the shores of the Hellespont, and at this very moment the hero of the Trojans is compared to an eagle swooping down on flocks of defenseless geese, cranes, and swans as they feed on vegetation growing on the banks of a river (XV 690-691). The problem is, the Achaeans cannot be visualized as defenseless birds except in such a moment of testing, glimpsed by the micro-narrative, and that fleeting moment will ultimately be overwhelmed by the macro-narrative.⁴⁷ The other problem is that the image of an attacking eagle suits Hector’s epic identity not nearly as well as a defending snake. Ultimately, Hector would have been better off if he had imagined himself as a snake caught in the claws of an eagle: the omen of the bird stung by the snake had made that clear. Even if the epithet *aithōn* works for the eagle, the image of the eagle in this simile fails to work for Hector. This image is intended to fail in the macro-narrative of epic.

I conclude this essay by asking a similar question about the images on the shields pictured in the “micro-epic” of Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 and in {115|116} the “neo-epic” of Aeschylus’ *Seven*: do they work for the heroes they signify? In other words, is epic signification intentional?

In the case of Pindar, the response is simple: yes. As I contemplate the blazon on the shield of Alcmaeon in *Pythian* 8, I see no contradiction of the art of epic imagery as idealized in that ultimate blazon, the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* XVIII. Pindar’s poetics are intentionally true to the Homeric ideal writ large, and I think it cannot be an accident that the last word of his *Pythian* 8 is “Achilles.” The “micro-epic” *lēma* ‘purpose’ (or ‘will’) of the ancestors in Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 seems to me linked with the “macro-epic” *boulē* ‘will’ of Zeus in *Iliad* I 5. In the case of Aeschylus, by contrast, the response has to be far more complex: here we have to reckon with

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the “theatrocracy” of tragedy as a genre, which keeps testing the limits of epic as a genre.⁴⁸

The poetics of Aeschylus’ “neo-epic” verge on becoming the “non-epic” or even the “anti-epic.”

To bring up the topic of non-epic imagery in the *Seven* goes far beyond the limits of this essay - especially at this point, nearing the very end. Still, I need examples to show that the “neo-epic” of tragedy as genre is in fact open-ended. Here, then, are three such examples, confined to the smallest possible space for contemplating them.

First, there is the shield of the anti-Theban hero Eteoclus, bearing the image of an unnamed man attacking an unnamed city (*Seven* 456-471).⁴⁹ Eteoclus will fight the Theban hero Megareus, a descendant of the Spartoi (474).⁵⁰ If Megareus wins, says Eteocles, then he will have captured two men and a city (477-479). This vision is a mirror image of what would happen if Megareus and Thebes were captured: instead, Megareus will capture the named man and, in addition, the unnamed man and the unnamed city in the picture, since the picture is on the captured shield. To be sure, anonymity can be used in epic too for the shifting of signifiers, as we can see from the two unnamed cities on the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* XVIII. But the difference is, we do {116|117} not expect epic to split the signifier from its signified, as we see in the doubling of the captured men imagined by Eteocles.

Second, there is the shield of Polyneices, with its climactic *diploun sēma* ‘double sign’ (*Seven* 643). Here we see the image of an anonymous *gunē* ‘woman’ (646) who leads by the hand an anonymous man toward a citadel. Polyneices interprets the *gunē* as the goddess of justice, *Dikē*: she will install him, he boasts, as the rightful ruler of the polis (646-648). In the *Seven*, the word

⁴⁸ See note 23 for more on the “theatrocracy” of drama over other genres in general.

⁴⁹ As a name, *Eteoklos* (Eteoclus) is a morphological variant of *Eteoklēēs* (Eteocles). As a character, the anti-Theban Eteoclus is a thematic variant of the Theban Eteocles by virtue of being substituted for the epic Adrastus: see Zeitlin, *Under the Sign of the Shield* p. 78.

⁵⁰ The *Spartoi*, descendants of the Dragon’s teeth, are also the ancestors of the Theban hero Melanippos (412). Thus two of the seven Theban defenders are connected to “snakes.”

gunē applies generically to everyday ‘woman’, as at 197, 200, 256, 645, 712. In the last of these verses, the chorus of women tries to dissuade Eteocles from fighting the mutually fatal fight with Polyneices: they say *peithou gunaixi* ‘obey the women’. We may contrast 225, where Eteocles speaks of the goddess Peitharkhia, who is the very idea of ‘obeying authority’, as the wife of the *Sōtēr* ‘savior’. Finally, there is Antigone as generic *gunē* at 1038. The question is, then: whom to obey, the authority of the state or the women?⁵¹ If the chorus of women is right and Eteocles (along with Polyneices) is wrong in not ‘obeying the women’, then perhaps the anonymous woman pictured on the shield of Polyneices may remain simply that, a generic woman. Or at least she may become Antigone in her role as generic woman. As for the anonymous man whom she leads by the hand, he too may remain simply that, a generic man. Or at least he may become the citizen of a new polis that transcends the old citadel. Such doubling of what is human, by keeping the generic separate from the heroic, seems antithetical to epic.

Third, there is the shield of the seer Amphiaraus. It has no *sēma* on it (591), since he wants to *be* the best, not just to *seem* the best (592). Such splitting between hero and heroic image seems antithetical to epic. The mantic words of Amphiaraus, “quoted” at 580-589, can now take the place of an epic vision that cannot be there because it cannot be real. The new dramatic imagination is seeking to differentiate itself from an older epic vision. We see another kind of differentiation in the more old-fashioned “quotation” of Amphiaraus’ mantic words in Pindar {117|118} *Pythian* 8.44-55, picturing the shield of Alcmaeon. The image on this shield, that radiant snake, is seen as real not only because it had been heard in the epic of heroes. More

⁵¹ In the *Seven*, ‘obeying’ a woman is imagined differently from ‘obeying’ a man in authority. For men in this drama, the basis of persuasion is the threat of violence; for women, it is the fear and pity caused by the violence, especially as experienced by women captured in war (cf. 253, 326-327, 338ff, 764-765). Further, the emotions of fear and pity are equated with expressions of women’s songs, especially laments. We may contrast the command of Eteocles to the women of Thebes at 232, 242-243: do not lament! (See also the contexts of *philostonōs* at 279 and of *merimnai* at 289, 843, 849.)

than that, this image is seen as real because it had once been seen personally by the hero of epic himself, and thus the vision of its reality may keep shining through from far away, far off in the realms of the insubstantial shade that dreamed it.