

The *kommos* is the least studied part of Aeschylus' *Persians*; interpretation of it tends to be impressionistic. Many find it an alienating barbarian performance. Adams thought it alien to tragedy, a kind of satyr-play ending (*Studies Gilbert Norwood*, 52-53); Georges terms it "satyr play Grand Guignol" (*Barbarian Asia*, 87). Hall interprets it as a display of Persian effeminacy and emotionalism (*Persians*, 168-69). Gagarin, by contrast, considers it "rehabilitation" and "support and comfort" (*Aeschylean Drama*, 41-42; cf. Schenker, *Phoenix* 1994, 292-93). Satyr play and rehabilitation are inadequate interpretations. While barbarian emotionalism is an enabling condition of the *kommos*, it does not exhaust its meaning. In this paper, I argue that the *kommos* achieves multiple effects, concentrating on three in particular: it lures the audience into the lament; it realizes the drama's narrative as symbolic action on stage; it dramatizes the power of *hybris* to renew itself.

The ritual model for the *kommos* is the lament of a "Mariandynian mourner" (939; cf. 1054). Such laments mourn the death of a royal youth in the hunt at the height of summer, often while trying to protect the harvest (cf. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*², 55-60). They bewail the death of a royal youth and a lost harvest. Pollux classifies them as farmers' laments (*Onomasticon* 4.54-55). The *Persians* lament the loss of their "native youth" (*hêbê*), figured as the "flower (*anthos*) of the land" (e.g. 926). This type of lament enables the audience to mourn the Persian destruction of Athens and the loss of its literal "flower of the land" (Hdt. 8.65, 142.3; T. 2.16.1). Literal and figural, Persian and Athenian *pathos* intersect in the lament of a "Mariandynian mourner" and its theme of the lost harvest. The ritual basis for the *kommos* interlocks with Darius' gnomic formulation of the tragedy, "*hybris*, coming to full flower, bears the fruit of *atê*, from which it reaps a harvest of tears" (821-22). The *kommos* stages this harvest of tears. It exhibits the *telos* of *hybris* as an insatiable lament that realizes the insatiable desire for *ploutos* and *olbos* at the heart of imperialism.

Balancing the gnomic and ritual dimension of the *kommos* is its particular focus on the narrated tragedy, which it presents as symbolic action on stage. Xerxes and the chorus register the "blow" of naval defeat (1008-15, 1029-37; cf. 251-52); the chorus beats its head and chest in a rowing motion (1046-53). Stage properties emblemize the drama's themes. Xerxes displays his nearly empty quiver (1016-1024), symbol of *atê*, the delusion that numerical superiority is power. I argue that Xerxes' *harmamaxa* is present on stage, a visual sign of absence and longing (955-1001) for the 22,000 soldiers who escorted it (Hdt. 7.41). The *kommos* relives and enacts the tragedy's focal image, the tearing of clothing in sorrow and shame (1026-37, 1060; cf. 127, 199, 468, 537-38); Xerxes recreates the dying moments of his men (974-77) and the *sparagmos* of his yoke, fleet, and men (1056-65; cf. 194-96, 408-28, 459-64, 576-78). At the same time, the *kommos* fails to enact Xerxes' rehabilitation (829-31) and investiture with a *kosmos* (832-51). There is no *kosmos* for Xerxes in any sense of the word: no "world-order" to subvert and dominate, no "battle order" to enslave Hellenes, no "noble order" to serve as escorts and signs of power, no "glory," no "empire," no "robe." I read this failure against Theseus' emergence from the sea with a robe in Bacchylides' *Dithyramb* 17 (cf. Simon. *Plataea* fr. 11.23; Tim. *Pers.* fr. 788 PMG). The play arouses but leaves unfulfilled the expectation that it will realize the *topos* of honoring and incorporating individuals into the community by rite of investiture (cf. A. *Eu.*; Ar. *Eq.*; *V.*).

The *kommos* stages Xerxes' *nostos*, his arrival full circle. It also dramatizes a recurring cycle: the *telos* of *hybris* segues into a renewal of *hybris*. In the exodos, Xerxes enslaves the chorus in a yoke of words, ruling his empire of tears; self-mutilating lament is tribute to the king. The messenger "unfolded the entire *pathos*" (254, 294) as if written on a papyrus roll. At the end, Xerxes orders the elders to inscribe the *pathos* as performed in the *kommos* on their bodies.