

## Preface

The writing of this book started during a time of global financial crisis and continued through wars and deepening partisanship. The book was finalized during protests against both particular violence and systemic racism, taking place in the midst of a harrowing plague on a global scale, whose gruesome toll is still unknown. While writing about ethical action and political themes in Greek tragedy, I have kept foremost in my mind these modern conflicts and pervasive, historically rooted issues of social justice. The *Oresteia* has provided a way to think through a number of these themes in mythic and historical time, since it dramatizes the consequences of war, oppression, and interpersonal violence with prodigious complexity.

One cannot comprehensively interpret a tragic work, nor do I attempt to here; instead, I analyze how human continuation beyond death transforms a number of the *Oresteia*'s most widely discussed themes. One goal of this book is to draw new attention to individual ethical claims, especially of those who are oppressed. Another is to demonstrate that the *Oresteia* undercuts its own justifications of warfare through its polytheistic conflicts and plural ideas about the afterlife. I therefore hope that the analysis of the "poetics of the beyond" and the "poetics of multiplicity" herein can be more broadly understood as a contribution toward responsible ethical and political thought.

In the dozen years since beginning this project, I have racked up more intellectual and emotional debts than it is possible to acknowledge. The book, as it stands, has evolved significantly from its origins in my dissertation at the New York University Department of Classics. For his perspicacity and support, I deeply thank, first of all, my advisor Phillip Mitsis. He and David Konstan continued to help improve drafts well after my time as a graduate student ended. Special thanks as well go to Joy Connolly, Peter Meineck, and Raffaella Cribiore. They have each not only served as scholarly paradigms with their wide-ranging interests but have also given me sage advice over many years. The idea for the project came in part from

my immersive experience as a graduate student on a fellowship at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, which I recommend to all my students.

This book developed in many ways during my postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard's Mahindra Humanities Center. The time to write was invaluable, as was the freedom to attend workshops, reading groups, and talks in numerous Harvard departments, which helped expand my theoretical and philosophical range. I am immensely grateful for the generosity of John Hamilton, Gordon Teskey, and Jamey Graham, whose friendship I cherish. The Harvard Department of the Classics in general, and Gregory Nagy and David Elmer in particular, provided a superb resource throughout.

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For their support throughout these times of turmoil, my gratitude to my family and friends defies expression. Three of my *philoí* deserve final recognition, having improved dozens of drafts over many years: my partner, Maren Lange, for joy, grace, immense patience, perspective, nimble conversation, and unstinting support; my aunt, Nancy Felson, for inspiring me to take up Classics, *homophrosynē*, and boundless intellectual generosity; and finally, my father, Steve Felson, whose motto, "let's rethink this," encapsulates a lifetime's worth of incisive critique.