

# Aeschylus, *Persians*

## Introductory Remarks

### 1. Aeschylus' Plays

Aeschylus' *Persians* was first produced in 472 BCE and won first prize in the City Dionysia (the major dramatic festival for tragedies in Athens). What does this prove? It was patriotic. The Athenians loved talking about the Persian Wars. Their art was full of Persia. The play was spectacular in costume and musical composition, and in the action of the destruction on stage of the fabric of (a feared and hated) Empire. Pericles, the future great Athenian statesman was *choregos*, the money man for the show, and makes his first attested appearance, as it were, on the stage of Athenian politics. The *Persians* is the only surviving Greek tragedy on a contemporary theme, the battle of Salamis and retreat of Xerxes and the remnants of his army<sup>1</sup>. Aeschylus was born at Eleusis, a sacred site in Attica, around 525 BCE. He fought in the battles of Marathon (490 BCE) and Salamis (480). He had been writing plays since about 500 BCE. That is, his writing career had already lasted close to thirty years when he produced *Persians*. He had already won his first prize (in 484 BCE). He wrote in all eighty-two to eighty-nine plays of which seven (or six) and scant fragments have survived. We know little about tragedy during this earliest time, from its beginning with the semi-legendary Thespis to this first surviving drama. But by the time of *Persians*, the tetralogy form existed (it is the form Aeschylus used for this competition): three tragedies (a trilogy), followed by a satyr play. Three playwrights competed each year; the work of each constituted a day's entertainment or, as the Athenians might say, education. For the playwright who was also the director, producer, dramaturge, and sometimes an actor, was called the *didaskalos* ("teacher") and was said to "teach" the play (*didaskei*). Sometime during this period, Aeschylus "invented" the second actor, from a time in which there was (according to tradition or legend) only a chorus and one actor.

In *Persians* the chorus and the supporting actors are all Persian men, but the lead is a woman. Aeschylus did not choose which would be the first of his plays to survive two and a half centuries, but the scholars, schoolmasters, copyists who had a hand in the process of making sure six of the eighty to ninety plays that he wrote would survive chose plays with powerful women and goddesses as chorus or characters.

The Extant Plays:

*Persians* [472 BCE]: *Persians* was the second play in the series of 472. It's hard to imagine the *Persians* being stuck between two lost dramas (that to most of us are on rather obscure myths). *Persians* was not part of a connected trilogy on a single saga (a format commonly used by Aeschylus in his later plays though probably not by other playwrights), but still it is not a stand alone piece.

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<sup>1</sup>For other major versions, see Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 8; Plutarch, the *Life of Themistocles*, Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, Book 11; the musician Timotheus of Miletus (circa 446–337) wrote a long lyric called *Persians*, parts of which survive on papyrus. It is published in Denys Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci*.

The first play was *Phineus* (its name is from a blind seer who lived on the Bosphorus and was harassed by the Harpies). Then *Persai*. The last of the tragedies was *Glaukos of Potnia*, a hero eaten by his own horses: nasty stuff, but hardly equal to the downfall of a mighty empire. Finally came the satyr play *Prometheus Pyrkaeus* (the *Firesetter*). That they don't seem to fit together is astonishing (although some scholars have tried, based on setting and supposed content). That they were there at all surrounding the *tour de force* boggles the mind. Such is the power of convention.

*Seven against Thebes* [467]: *Seven* is the final play of a trilogy that began with *Laius* and *Oedipus*, of which a few fragments have survived. The *Sphinx* was its satyr play. Like *Persians*, *Seven* shows the effect of war on the women of the community. Though the protagonist Eteocles tries to demean them, the women's point of view triumphs.

*Suppliant Women*, though long thought to be the earliest surviving Greek tragedy, because of assumptions about its high lyric content, was performed in competition with Sophocles (in 468) and therefore later than *Persians*. In its trilogy of tragedies *Suppliants* is the first play, followed by *Egyptians*, and *Danaids*, all clearly connected by legend, ending appropriately with *Amymone* (the "Blameless", the one daughter of Danaus who did not kill her husband) as satyr play. The chorus of women is the focus of this disturbing play.

*Oresteia* [458]: *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroe*, *Eumenides*: this is the only surviving connected trilogy. The satyr play was *Proteus*, who lived on Pharos in Egypt and figures in Menelaus' adventures in the *Odyssey*. Clytemnestra, guardian of the palace doors is protagonist of *Agamemnon*, but is reduced to victim in *Libation Bearers*, but the chorus of men is replaced by a chorus of women in the second play. The third play is dominated by female gods, whose arguments are a match and more for the male gods protecting Orestes.

*Prometheus* [date unknown] first of the Prometheus trilogy, also called *Prometheus Bound*, followed by *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-bearer* (*Pyrphoros*), both lost, thought by many not to be by Aeschylus. The chorus of *Prometheus Bound* is made up of the daughters of Oceanus and the most vivid character is Io, a victim of Zeus' rape.

With *Persians* Aeschylus won his second first. *Persians* is his first surviving play and the first surviving Greek tragedy, but be aware that though considered by many (even most, students, readers, scholars) not to be his best, it is not the work of an amateur. He died in 456 BCE and so his career was beyond the mid-way point.

## 2. *Persians*: Outline

**Parodos** (1–154, entrance of the chorus): The chorus of Persian Elders arrive in procession along the *parodos* (or *eisodos*) that leads from the city/palace area. The other side entrance/exit would lead to the outside world whence the armies departed and are anticipated to return. They imitate, in their stately, though less vigorous, gait the parade of the warriors departing, men representing the vast reaches of the Persian Empire. The chorus' regular stopping place is in the orchestra and there they remain, though they have a fairly large space for movement. What are the themes of this song? How is suspense kept up even though everyone in the outer audience (mostly Athenians watching the play in the *theatron*) knows the outcome? The inner audience, the Persians left in their homes, elders, women, children, are in the dark. The absence of the men is frightening, even if there had been regular dispatches: news changes every minute as waiting family members know—but we are told

there were none. Oppressive time is the theme here. At the beginning the men marched out. Now their homes, their bridal beds are empty. This is the *chronos*, the long time of waiting and wondering. But a dramatic event requires a *kairos*, a time, a crisis, a change, not just more middle; it requires an end as well as a beginning. Aeschylus is able, as is his wont, to mix the buoyant feeling of the beginning of the expedition with a deep sense of foreboding that only grows until the messenger delivers his devastating news. Of course all is not well. How bad it will be for the victims when all comes out is unknown even to the outer audience. There were other battles: how they will be related to form a coherent whole of Xerxes' fall is the genius of Aeschylus. And a further example of his genius is this: the long time of fear, hope, anticipation, and dread is not given from the Greek point of view. What do the Greeks know, except for the universal existential loneliness, of life in Sousa? How can they walk their streets and never hear the voice of their father, son, brother, husband. Playwright Ellen McLaughlin, picking up on Aeschylus' interest in the experience of women, shuts the young wife's breath-taking longing in her husband's closet (continuing Aeschylus' own motif of clothing on bodies) in her poignant adaptation of *Persians* (Playscripts, 2011):

Can't stop opening the closet once again  
To smell his lost body on the clothes he once wore.  
She has come to know him in his absence so much better  
than she could ever have known him in his presence.  
Then she could afford to look away . . . (43–47:8).

Compare *Persians* briefly with another war play set inside the city, *Seven against Thebes*, the last play in its trilogy in which the confinement of a people under siege is strangulating terror. *Persians* is full of dread but still the city is open. Men and women can walk about at will. There is no enemy at the gates or in the hills. The men who went off to war are expected to come pouring back: this is the longing expressed in the opening song as the divisions of men, the empire in its diversity, goes pouring out. Their return is awaited. But in *Seven* the return of the exiled king would spell disaster, rape, pillaging, slaughter. The Persians do not fear rage closing in at the walls, the surrounding land full of danger. They fear the emptiness. Whichever is the setting for people at war, Aeschylus concentrates on women's experiences, which include understanding a wider, more universal context than men's narrowly historical or political view.

**Episode 1**(155–531): First Atossa scene. Atossa arrives in pomp, in a chariot and doubtless in her majestic royal attire, accompanied by stately attendants. The chorus would have entered also suitably wardrobed, presenting a majestic spectacle. The fabric of the empire is intact. "Rich in gold" is repeated four times (at lines 5, 9, 43, 54). The haberdashery of sorrow (a phrase I gratefully acknowledge as borrowed from my student of the last century, Carol McKubbin) is a unifying theme beginning even in the Parodos. Once the dread sets in, the chorus' mind is clothed in black (115–6) they suggest the women, alone in their chambers, might tear their fine linen robes in mourning (125) realizing the emptiness of the city. Atossa's part has more to add. But it does not add news: only more premonitions of doom. The chorus calls assembly to debate on no news; Atossa consults them on her dream. And what could they add? She is their queen and they are in awe of her. The queen-mother tells her vivid, frightening dream (181, 11) of the two women, sisters, one in fine Persian garb, the other in Greek. The siblings fight. The Greek refuses the bit. She breaks free of Xerxes' yoke, throwing him from the car as Darius looks on in pity. Xerxes tears his clothing (199).

And then Atossa's sacrifice is aborted by an omen of an Olympian eagle attacked by a thuggish hawk. We are granted a pause before the disaster is announced while Atossa asks about Athens and we learn what Aeschylus want us to believe the Persians thought of their city-state. It is Atossa who makes most clear what the battle is about: the clash of cultures, submission or rebellion, which may have flattered the audience politically, but may have been socially somewhat disquieting.

Premonition meets swift fulfillment in the arrival at last of a Persian courier. Then comes the blow. It is finished. Not a breath is wasted in his declaration that all is lost. The catalogue of warriors is undone, but with different warriors. The *kairos*, like the *daimon*, the avenger, the "gods' is swift and relentless. This is good tragedy. The battle of Salamis was not the only battle, but it was *the* one for Aeschylus and his fellow citizens. The bodies of the men who marched out are lying dead and battered, afloat in their clothing. And so comes the un-catalogue as each man's death is described. At the loss, Xerxes who has the best view, sitting on a high hill, rends his clothing. This is the Aeschylean method (later to be seen in the *Oresteia*) of premonition followed by swift and horrifying fulfillment (155-531). And of the metaphor, here the clothing, becoming more and more visual, almost taking over the action. First the men's deaths are listed. But that is not all. The gods play their part: an evil (or just) avenger. The universal gives—if not meaning—then a context for the individual youths missing from the world. And all of this is against the background of the natural setting, where gods still dance on the lands inhabited by men and women. Where gods still destroy those bent on their own annihilation:

My report is true, though in telling it I have left untold

many of the evils *a god* has hurled upon the Persians. (513–14).

Even though the *Persians* is a historical drama, or perhaps better, an Athenian drama based on a recent event, Aeschylus treats his theme in much the same way as he treats his mythological stories: the gods are integrated into the unfolding story (especially Zeus and the unknown or unnamed *daimon*); the very land helps the Greeks and the weather cooperates against their foes. We watch for such concepts as *hubris*, impiety, retribution, over-extension. Cooperation of man and god is a constant in Aeschylus.

Atossa leaves to bring offerings to Darius' tomb, having nothing else to do, with her son bent on ruin..

***Stasimon 1:*** the chorus laments the horrible losses (532–597), even entering in imagination Persian homes and witnessing the intimate suffering of widows. And they blame Xerxes. Their suggestion of a liberated Persia with free speech, falling of tribute, and ending of king-worship seems to go too far. Balance has not yet been reached.

[***Episode 2a***] Atossa returns with offerings (598– 622). She has come on foot, dressed in black as a suppliant. Pomp does not become the circumstances. The offerings are simple produce of the earth, again showing the connection of women to the world of nature, the continuance of life. Many readers see this whole movement from Atossa's entrance to her exit as a single episode (that is, including the Darius scene).

[***Stasimon 2a***] The chorus conjures the ghost of Darius (623–680). Darius is looked upon as a perfect ruler in contrast to his son. One of the few Persian words in the play, *ballēn* (657, "king"), is used in summoning him. Consideration must be taken of the cleansing of Darius' deeds and character which hardly differed from Xerxes', except that Darius, though he lost at Marathon, was

not devastated. Darius had been as ambitious and violent as his son. He suppressed the Ionian revolt and led the punitive expedition into mainland Greece that ended with the battle of Marathon in 490 and a sacking of Athens. Aesthetic, dramaturgical choices are crucial: Xerxes is set up, not just by the gods, but by the playwright, by his parents, by his rash friends, by the very land and nature of his enterprise. A line of good kings who died successful and happy (despite a tricky interregnum; see 709–10) throws Xerxes' fall into higher relief. His choice to go too far, to risk losing too much is tragic. It had to end, but *when* was up in the air as we find out now from Darius.

**Episode 2b or 3:** Darius scene (681–851): Darius rises from the tomb, but his impatience situates him in the world below, a border he cannot cross at will. But the chorus is in too much awe of their dead king to speak to him. Is it the specter, its otherworldly appearance, otherworldly still though Darius is attired in his monarchical architectural tiara and robes, as they saw him in life? They paid obeisance to his godhead and ignored his humanity, and perhaps never looked him in the face and so remain in awe. Talking comfortably with his wife, his only apparent equal, Darius surprises us with oracles and a history of the rapid rise of the Persian Empire.

Who did it?

*Impetuous Xerxes. He emptied the whole continent of men. (718) Was this his sin, his hubris? And he destroyed the youth of the allies (733).*

*It never before fell upon the city of Sousa to leave it empty (760–1). But the word hubris has not yet been uttered. For all its significance in Greek tragedy, in *Persians*, an example of hubristic behavior, the word hubris is used only twice (808, 821).*

*What is left for them there is to suffer the utmost ills  
as atonement for hubris and godless thoughts:  
for in going to the land of Hellas they did not restrain from  
despoiling the gods' images nor burning their temples.  
But altars are in ruins and the statues of the gods  
have been torn from their bases and thrown into utter chaos.  
They have done evil and suffer no less  
and there is more evil to come . . . . (807–14).*

Was it the desecration of sacred places? Or another more abstract definition, the existential threat to all mortals if they want to achieve more than their share? Are humans unable to know the limit?

*Being mortal one must not aspire too high,  
for hubris blossoms and produces a crop of ruin  
from which it reaps a harvest full of tears (820–22).*

Darius offers kind words and solace to his son to be carried out by Atossa. But another side of Darius is evident, a side perhaps seen only by his wife and intimates. Who would have expected the magnificent King Darius to advise his trusted ones:

*And you, elders, farewell, though the times are evil,  
give joy to your spirits day by day  
since among the dead wealth does us no good (840–2)?*

I was impressed by Ellen McLaughlin's rendering of these lines in her brilliant adaptation of *Persians*:

*Grasp the joy of things while you can, my friends.  
The end will come soon enough.*

*Death is long and without music.* (756–8, p. 29)

And so, finally, it was no one's fault. Humans strive. They succeed for a while, but ultimately they fail.

Atossa goes to bring raiment from the palace, a step toward rebuilding the shredded society. She will not return except as the actor playing Xerxes.

***Stasimon 2b or 3:*** the chorus sings of the grandeur of Darius's realm, but especially they are aware of the peacefulness (despite the wars and conquests) of their long lives and of the civil authority that brought stability to the Empire. The Trusted Ones are still standing in the clothes and dignity they came in with (852–907).

***Exodos:*** Xerxes returns alone and in tatters, the ragged end of the Empire. The play has been closely confined in time and space. How does Aeschylus extend both? Notice how the description of the movement of the army extends the space covered to the cities of the Persian empire and to the isles and cities of Greece. By giving a catalogue of the men who marched out and two more catalogues of those who did not come back, Aeschylus shows us the beginning and end of the expedition. One day (the *kairos*) is set against the whole time of the war and the generations of good kings of Persia (the *chronos*).

The whole last scene is a *kommos*, lamentation between chorus and character (908–1077). This last scene is a song, the traditional lament, with a generous abundance of words for “woe” or, rather, untranslatable sounds of sorrow. These cries of grief (translated lamely as “alas” or “woe, woe”) I decided to put into transliterated Greek, giving readers a choice whether to use the English terms or the strange Greek sounds or a combination of both. Such sounds, balanced as they often are in strophe/antistrophe, add to the operatic feeling of the play and especially its end.<sup>2</sup> The *kommos* is punctuated by violence, the violence of shredding the cloth that held it together, the violence of beating the head and wounding the body and tearing the hair. Is this weeping and wailing so excessive that it is ludicrous, as some scholars have believed? Or is it the universal suffering of those who have lost far more than expected? The great and mythical victory of the Greeks has been turned into the defeat and tragedy of the Persians. And how different would the Greeks have acted? They were known for violent and passionate funerals. For now we have the Persian point of view: Xerxes in rags; the Elders ripping themselves into rags. The golden man, born of gold, returns home in squalor. There is no solace, no mother to take his hand and guide him home. His zombie-like character has consumed her normalcy, which has little place at tragedy's end.

What does it all Mean? The play is set in Persia in the capital city of Sousa. Aeschylus, the eye-witness to the battle makes light of this advantage, by presenting the story from the Persians' point of view. A Persian must describe the battle and Persians must respond to it. They (and we, the outer audience with them) are experiencing the whole: from the deployment, through the waiting, the news and the grief. This cannot have been the Greek experience. The great Greek victory that

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<sup>2</sup>On the music, see William C. Scott, *Musical Design in Aeschylean Theater*, University Press of New England, 1984: 152–8. On the metrics, consult the commentaries: for example, A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus Persae*, Oxford, 2009: 372–377; H. D. Broadhead, *The Persae of Aeschylus*, Cambridge, 1960: 283–301.

changed the world is shown as a defeat of monumental proportions. Not that they were so monumental: Persia was not destroyed. It remained a vast empire. Greece, however, was safe from further incursion. What did the original audience think? Did it cause them to reflect on what it means to be human? Did it arouse their patriotic spirit? Did it make them think of companions or kin who were lost in the wars? Aeschylus lost his own brother. Or make them rejoice that Athens was still free? There must have been differences of opinion. I still hear people talk about the Kent State Riot rather than the Kent State Massacre.

### 3. Why *Persians*?

The *Persians* is different. If you have read other Greek tragedies—and you probably have—you notice immediately the *Persians* is in many ways unlike anything else in its genre. It is rare to begin a study of Greek tragedy with *Persians* even though it is in fact the earliest of the Greek plays to survive more or less intact.

Having said that, I must admit that when I taught my regular undergraduate course, “Greek Tragedy in Context,” I did usually begin with Aeschylus’ *Persai*. First, because it is first in time, not that it is the first Greek tragedy, but only the first to survive. We cannot even say that it is the first on the subject: that honor goes to Aeschylus’ contemporary playwright, Phrynichus, who wrote a *Phoenissae* (*Phoenician Women*) that seems, from its meager fragments, to be on the subject of the battle of Salamis and to take place at Sousa. Another reason is that it does not fit into any of the regular groupings, the Theban saga, the Trojan War and its Aftermath, individual heroes (like Medea, Heracles, Hippolytus). *Persians* stands alone as a drama about a recent historical event: the battle of Salamis took place in 480 BCE; the play was produced in 472. What are some of the other unique or unusual features ascribed to this earliest play?

There is little or no plot, not that all Greek tragedies are long on plot. This one, like *Trojan Women* is rather a pageant of pathos, but with a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end.

There is no “hero”: there are other tragedies where a single focus is hard to apprehend, but in this play we wait and wait for the defeated man. When he comes, his whole part is to sing a lament for himself, his dead companions, his lost empire. He utters not a line of dialogue. There may be no “hero” but a powerful and admired woman is the protagonist (the main actor), Atossa, the dowager queen well known to us from Herodotus. She is the focus of the male characters’ attention until the exodus: the chorus prostates itself to her; the messenger tells his tale in answer to her; she alone can address Darius’ ghost; and Darius believes that only she can comfort Xerxes. The same actor most likely plays Xerxes in the final scene. The absence of Atossa’s civilizing influence is felt at the end. If Aeschylus acted in this tragedy he would have played Atossa.

There is no prologue. The play begins with the parodos (or entrance song of the chorus) which, though unusual, is not unique. The chorus here recalls with both pride and foreboding the departure of the troops and illogically decides—without any information except the length of time the troops have been gone—to debate the issue of the fate of the expedition. Since the expedition itself is the background, there is no need for a prologue to set the scene. This parodos combines the functions of both. Some more details are filled in through Queen

Atossa's questions in the first episode, not that the outer audience in the theatre was unaware of where Athens was and what was its source of wealth. But this is Athens where it's easy to praise Athenians.

*Persians* is not part of a connected trilogy, with the three plays of the playwright on a single myth/story, which was or became Aeschylus' preferred way of getting everything in (as in his Theban trilogy, *Suppliants* and its sequels, *Oresteia*, *Prometheus*, whether or not the last is by Aeschylus). *Persians* stands alone, though some scholars have posited a "thematic" trilogy, asserting that the three plays were connected by a theme. But this is really a late idea invented by classicists to fit a time when the connected trilogy had died out as a genre. We are aware of it only from Aeschylus' practice. Others have suggested that *Persians* is a trilogy on its own with three movements, each a play in itself, and even including a satyr play in the form of the tragic lament of the *exodos*.

The usual structure of Prologue, Parodos, several Episodes, with Stasima (choral odes) reflecting and extending them, and Exodos is irregular in *Persians*. The division is by no means clear-cut.

The play uses two actors only, the most Aeschylus had at his disposal before the *Oresteia* (produced after Sophocles had "invented" the third actor). The chorus and two actors voice the various parts. Xerxes could be played by either actor, but it seems most efficient and ethical (that is, showing or fitting the characters' *ethos*) for Queen Atossa and Xerxes to be played by the same actor (the protagonist) and the Messenger and Darius by the other (the deuteragonist). This technically explains the failure of Atossa to return to meet her son. The two are so close: the mother feeling the son's loss; the father sensing that Xerxes will only be able to communicate with his mother make her absence another devastating loss. The other two characters are the reporters: of the present disaster and of the past and future, in both their glory and defeat. The official messenger (likely a Persian courier) fills in the epic details of the slaughter. Darius' ghost takes the longer view.

The play is often said to have (or to have needed) no *skēnē* (or stage building). This could cause some problems in the staging of the ghost scene. We are told in the *Hypothesis* (a blurb that accompanies the manuscript), that the *Persians* takes place near the tomb of Darius. The chorus at the end of the parodos suggests "let us take our seats here under the ancient roof" (140–1). Clearly this is not the main palace of Sousa. The Queen makes two trips from the palace and returns each time in the same direction. Our expectations are deceived twice: she expects Xerxes to arrive while she is away the first time and she expects to meet him with fine robes to cover his shameful appearance, but she does not return. For the tomb to be housed in or near the sacred council chamber would not seem so unusual to the audience. The tomb is, then, at the outskirts of town, near the road on which Xerxes will wend his way home. The other parodos leads to the palace compound. Exactly whether the tomb is in the stage-building or a stand-alone monument in the orchestra is undetermined. It must have been grand enough to hide Darius in his tiara.

*Persians* is historical—it concerns something that happened in the remembered past, in this case, the very recent past—but it is not historiographical. It does not stick to the known facts and details of chronology and actual historical figures. Though it presents the well-known royals, Xerxes, Darius, the Queen (Atossa) and a handful of names of actual Persians, the many catalogs of the Persian



warriors, alive and then dead, for the most part are not names of men known to have existed. The events are not factual, but dramatic, aesthetic, spectacular, ethical, religious, and pathetic. Even the stories of the mythical past (some seven hundred years earlier), the usual material for tragedy, were considered historical, though their great variety tells us that the stories were not fixed and that exaggeration and individualization were expected. We see in *Persians* Aeschylus turning an event in which he participated into a legend as grand as the myths from “that ancient time.” Aeschylus fought in the battle of Salamis, but unlike Xerxes, who was seated on a hill overseeing the battle, Aeschylus, like any soldier would have witnessed the small part of the melee that he took part in, and that in the heat of battle and fog of war. But using sources, other soldiers’ accounts, perhaps the readings of chroniclers, and the general gossip, but especially his own imagination and organization, Aeschylus presents a more coherent account of the battle than his contemporary, the historian Herodotus (A. J. Podlecki, *The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy*, Ann Arbor, 1966:131). He gives the battle a completeness; he arranges events for the most dramatic effect, not necessarily as they happened but for the best panorama; he puts the butchery in a natural setting; he gives the historical context over the generations and looks to the future; and he brings in the gods. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle makes the claim that Poetry is more serious than History because history deals with particulars and poetry with universals. To put it another way, history tells the story; poetry tells the story to us. Did Aristotle get this right? Herodotus is as much a poet and designer as Aeschylus. Comments of some of my students over the years make it clear that they believe if something is not fact then it is a lie. That is a modern tragedy.