# BEYOND DEATH IN THE *ORESTEIA*

The *Oresteia* is permeated with depictions of the afterlife, which have never been examined together. In this book, Amit Shilo analyzes their intertwined and conflicting implications. He argues for a "poetics of multiplicity" and a "poetics of the beyond" that inform the ongoing debates over justice, fate, ethics, and politics in the trilogy. The book presents novel, textually grounded readings of Cassandra's fate, Clytemnestra's ghost scene, mourning ritual, hero cult, and punishment by Hades. It offers a fresh perspective on the political thought of the trilogy by contrasting the ethical focus of the Erinyes and Hades with Athena's insistence on divine unity and warfare. Shedding new light on the trilogy as a whole, this book is crucial reading for students and scholars of classical literature and religion.

AMIT SHILO is Assistant Professor in the Department of Classics at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is a cofounder of Classics and Social Justice, a group for those using Classics to address inequalities in the world. He has published on Greek tragedy and Plato.

# BEYOND DEATH IN THE *ORESTEIA*

## *Poetics, Ethics, and Politics*

AMIT SHILO
*University of California, Santa Barbara*

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108832748
DOI: 10.1017/9781108963862

© Amit Shilo 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*
NAMES: Shilo, Amit, 1978– author.
TITLE: Beyond death in the Oresteia : poetics, ethics, and politics / Amit Shilo.
DESCRIPTION: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2022004783 (print) | LCCN 2022004784 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108832748 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108963862 (ebook)
SUBJECTS: LCSH: Aeschylus. Oresteia. | Future life in literature. | Greek literature – History and criticism.
CLASSIFICATION: LCC PA3825.A6 S55 2022 (print) | LCC PA3825.A6 (ebook) | DDC 882/.01–dc23/eng/20220420
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022004783
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022004784

ISBN 978-1-108-83274-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

*To my family, partner, and true friends.*

# *Contents*

*Preface* *page* ix
*A Note on Abbreviations and Translations* xi

Introduction 1

1 The Herald of the *Agamemnon*: Accounting the Dead 29

2 The Chorus of the *Agamemnon*: Human Views on the Beyond 51

3 Prophecy on the Banks of the Acheron: Thinking Cassandra Past Her Doom 69

4 Afterlives at the Tomb of Agamemnon 91

5 Heroes in the *Oresteia* 114

6 The Ghost of Clytemnestra 145

7 The Tablet-Writing Mind of Hades: Omniscient Ethical Judgment 176

Conclusions 213

*References* 228
*General Index* 243
*Index Locorum* 246

# *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.

I would especially like to thank each of my world-class UCSB colleagues, with a further debt of *kharis* for those who gave feedback on chapters, namely Francis Dunn, Dorota Dutsch, Brice Erickson, and Emilio Capettini. Other colleagues and friends to whom I am deeply obliged for support, intense intellectual exchanges, and sharing work are Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Helen Morales, Daniel Markovic, Rosa Andújar, Alexander Loney, and Joshua Billings. Simon Goldhill's Sophocles course during a visiting semester at Princeton and his sophisticated writing on tragedy were an additional inspiration for this book. There are too many other teachers, colleagues, and students to thank by name, but I hope I am able to express gratitude in person or to pass their kindness along to others.

The UCSB Regents and the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, run by Susan Derwin, have generously awarded fellowships that enabled me to complete this book. I am greatly indebted to Michael Sharp for help with every aspect of publication and to the anonymous reviewers at Cambridge for their precise and positive feedback. I thank the *American Journal of Philology* and its editor, David H. J. Larmour, for permission to use my 2018 article, "The Ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides*: Ethical Claims Beyond Human Limits" (*AJP* 139 (4): 533–76), a revised version of which is Chapter 6 of this book.

For their support throughout these times of turmoil, my gratitude to my family and friends defies expression. Three of my *philoi* 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.

# *A Note on Abbreviations and Translations*

I use the standard abbreviations for authors and their works as found in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (OCD) digital edition, supplemented with journal abbreviations as listed in *L'Année philologique* online. Unless otherwise stated, the Greek text is from the most recent edition of the Oxford Classical Text (OCT), and translations are my own. I have transliterated terms relevant for the discussion, with names as they appear in the OCD. Capitalization is used to indicate dramatis personae.

| | |
|---|---|
| Beekes | Beekes, R. S. P., and van Beek, L. 2010. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek.* Leiden. |
| Bernabé | Bernabé Pajares, A. (ed.). 1996. *Poetarum Epicorum Graecorum Testimonia et Fragmenta, Pars i*. Leipzig. |
| Chantraine | Chantraine, P. 1968–80. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. Paris. |
| DK | Diels, H. A., and Kranz, W. (eds.). 1966. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker.* Zurich. |
| LIMC | Ackermann, H. R., Gisler, J.-R., and Kahil, L. 1981–2009. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae.* 8 vols. Zurich. |
| LSJ | Liddell, H. G., and Scott, R. 1996. *A Greek–English Lexicon.* Oxford. |
| Maehler | Maehler, H. (ed.). 1989. *Pindarus, Pars ii*: *Fragmenta, Indices.* Leipzig. |
| OCT | Page, D. L. (ed.). 1973. *Aeschyli Septem Quae Supersunt Tragoediae*. Oxford.<br>Monro, D. B., and Allen, T. W. (eds.). 1920a. *Homeri Opera, Tomus i, Iliadis Libros i–xii Continens.* 3rd ed. Oxford.<br>Monro, D. B., and Allen, T. W. (eds.). 1920b. *Homeri Opera, Tomus ii, Iliadis Libros xiii–xxiv Continens*. 3rd ed. Oxford. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Allen, T. W. (ed.). 1917. *Homeri Opera, Tomus iii, Odysseae Libros i–xii Continens.* 2nd ed. Oxford. |
| | Allen, T. W. (ed.). 1919. *Homeri Opera, Tomus iv, Odysseae Libros xiii–xxiv Continens*. 2nd ed. Oxford. |
| Smyth | Smyth, H. W. 1956. *Greek Grammar*. Cambridge, MA. |
| TrGF | Snell, B., Kannicht, R., and Radt, S. L. (eds.). 1971–2004. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta.* Göttingen. |

# *Introduction*

## Afterlives in the *Oresteia*

> Similarly, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He, "make me to know my end," that is, he wished to know to which end he was allotted, and his mind was not at rest 'til the good tidings reached him, "Sit at my right hand" (Ps. 110:1).
>
> (*Zohar Bereshith* 1.63a)[1]

> Dear to the dear ones who nobly died over there,
> being prominent
> as an august lord under the earth
> and an attendant of the greatest
> chthonic rulers there.
> For when you lived you were king
> of those wielding in their hands destined fate
> and the mortal-persuading scepter.
>
> (*Choephoroi* 354–62)

Preoccupation with one's lot after death has been suggested as the starting point of all philosophical thinking and is one of the central concerns of world religions. It is evident in the quotation above from the *Zohar*, as it is in innumerable other religious texts.[2] In Ancient Greece, mystery cults promised a better afterlife – but antiquity's profound silence has segregated them from the mainstream of Greek religion. Unlike the scriptures and commentaries of numerous other religions, the only openly circulating Ancient Greek texts outspoken about the afterlife are philosophical and literary. Among them, the one with perhaps the greatest disparity between its overt concern with what lies beyond death and the lack of scholarly attention to the theme is Aeschylus'

---

[1] Quoted in Segal (2004), 630.

[2] For recent overviews of afterlife conceptions in ancient and world religions see Obayashi (1992); Coward (1997); Bremmer (2002); Segal (2004); and Smith (2009).

*Oresteia*.[3] In scene after scene, and in the work as a whole, afterlife conceptions transform both individual values and the structures within which humanity operates. I am not claiming that focusing on the afterlife radically transforms our understanding of the *Oresteia*. In analyzing this understudied theme, I merely attempt to estrange and thus reevaluate some of the trilogy's most often discussed ethical and political dilemmas.[4]

Plurality and ambiguity enrich the *Oresteia*'s representations of human afterlives. Foremost, these techniques demonstrate a literary field of meaning, in interaction with, but not bound by, religious ideas. One can unpack crucial differences between religious and literary treatments by contrasting the two quotations above. Each passage depicts the figure who personifies the highest kingship in its culture facing an uncertain afterlife. The first exemplifies how definitive religious answers can be. The *Zohar* fills in a gap from the absence of a positive individual afterlife in the Hebrew Bible. It presents David's anxiety about his "end" after a tumultuous earthly reign, yet it mollifies him with assurance from the highest authority, directly quoting the divine through a passage from the Psalms.

By contrast, the *Choephoroi* passage is sung by the Chorus of Slave Women, who have no stated connection to the divine. Moreover, its content is highly incongruous with its setting: Agamemnon's wife has slaughtered him, dismembered him, and interred him without proper funeral rites. Agamemnon's disgraced end is not alleviated by this serene picture of the powerful ruler beloved in the afterlife by "the dear ones who nobly died over there," that is, his friends who died gloriously in combat at Troy. Without a definitive promise, this choral song only increases the tension between Agamemnon's manner of death and his imagined afterlife.

In the *Oresteia*, epistemic uncertainty complicates nearly every mention of the afterlife. The translation of the first sentence of the *Choephoroi* passage above lacks a main verb, reflecting its absence in the Greek. Are the Chorus singing of a factual situation in which Agamemnon is honored in the afterlife ("you *are* dear") despite his ignominious death and dishonored funeral? Or are they *wishing* for the honor that is currently lacking ("you *would be* dear") and thus declaring it may still occur? Such ambiguity is partially a product of the *Oresteia*'s multivalent web of themes and terms couched in dense poetry, whose permutations have been analyzed on a variety of fronts. This study uncovers a further, little-examined set of linguistic, thematic, and philosophical issues that arise specifically from potential afterlives. The trilogy's use of this imagined plurality is part of its poetics of the beyond.

---

[3] There has been little scholarship on the afterlife in tragedy in general and in the *Oresteia* more specifically until recently. North (1992) briefly demonstrates just how freely tragic authors treat traditional understandings of the afterlife. Schlatter (2018), in a lightly revised doctoral dissertation in German, provides a running commentary on chthonic forces in key tragedies, with comparanda and bibliography. Martin (2020) surveys the types of interactions between the dead and living in all of tragedy, emphasizing the harm they may do to each other.

[4] This is in line with other readings of the *Oresteia* and tragedy more generally that have shifted our understanding by shedding light on specific themes. The works of Vernant, Zeitlin, Lebeck, Goldhill, and the collection of essays edited by Silk (1996) are the most relevant for my approaches to the genre of tragedy, its poetics and themes.

Taking the epistemic uncertainty so prevalent in the *Oresteia* one step further, most of the characters who depict the beyond make no religious or prophetic claim to knowledge. Their descriptions are regularly marked as their own projection onto the unknown. The views of human characters are ambiguous when taken alone, contradictory compared with their previous statements, at odds with those of others, or belied entirely by the manifestation of an underworld figure. For instance, several characters at the start of the trilogy express views of death as oblivion, an absolute end to consciousness. In contrast to this are, at first, the hints of continuity in ambiguous statements by these same characters. As the trilogy progresses, numerous scenes feature afterlife continuity prominently. These include a vision of the self in the underworld, a staged attempt at raising from the dead, ghostly returns from the underworld, the transformation of staged characters into afterlife beings, and even references to judgment by Hades. Sometimes an assortment of these possibilities is expressed by or about the same character. In the *Choephoroi* scene of mourning, the Chorus describe several other ways of thinking about Agamemnon, including as an agitated, undead avenger. The afterlife, moreover, is not only left to human surmise. In the *Eumenides*, the Ghost of Clytemnestra speaks of her existence in the underworld and the chthonic Erinyes reveal the ethical punishment of the dead.

Understanding how possible afterlives transmute both individual arcs and political structures in the *Oresteia* leads to new perspectives on key points and affects the reading of the whole. Characters draw radically disparate conclusions from their contemplation of the beyond; affirmation or denial of the afterlife affects how they face the possibility of death, a theme that the Herald, Cassandra, and the *Agamemnon*'s Chorus all address. Other characters ground vengeance, and even political coups, on one or several versions of existence after death. These appeals are conspicuous in the mourning for Agamemnon, in the claims of Clytemnestra's Ghost, and in Orestes' transformation into an undead hero. Many see the finale of the *Oresteia* as akin to religious revelation, promising to resolve all the problems of humanity. Yet, this book will argue, the counterrevelation of ethical punishment in the underworld presents a wide-ranging contrast to the vision of justice and the state at the end of the trilogy.

Several introductory sections follow, as a guide to the book and its key terms. The first provides necessary background on Ancient Greek religious and literary ideas about the afterlife. The second section offers some common methods for analyzing ethics in literature that several of the chapters will challenge. This section also gives a working definition of tragic poetics for contextualizing ethical analysis in a genre of stylized characters and extreme situations. The third section surveys the relevant political background for the structures and themes in the *Oresteia*. The last section introduces the main concerns of each chapter to preview the arc of the whole book.

## Material Background and Literary Precedent

The concept of an "afterlife" is a flexible one in the Greek tradition.[5] Generally, it refers to the continuity of a human being after biological death, with the retention of some group of recognizable features. Yet the mechanisms, forms, and meanings of such a continuity are multifarious. Western religions inherited from the Greco-Roman tradition a specific subset of ideas concerning an ethically determined afterlife, with the promise of reward as well as punishment.[6] These have led to a tendency in earlier scholarship to condemn or disregard the far more prevalent Greek views that had little or nothing to do with the judgment of ethical actions. On the other hand, the vast array of Eastern ideas about the afterlife, many of which bear similarities to Greek ones, were not widely discussed by the Greeks themselves, nor is direct influence from the East easily found.[7] Between these two factors, studies of Greek religion have sometimes had trouble dealing with its flexibility and diversity on its own terms.[8] Within the *Oresteia*, many of the culturally available notions concerning life after death make consequential appearances. Moreover, there are several ideas hardly found in previous Greek texts or mainstream religious practices. What was culturally standard in 458 BCE and what might have stood out? A necessarily oversimplified, brief discussion of contemporary Archaic and Classical Greek cultural and literary treatments of afterlives follows, to help contextualize the occurrences of these ideas in the *Oresteia*. Each chapter will return to and expand on relevant ideas in this overview.

---

[5] Major studies and overviews concerning the Greek afterlife include Rohde (1925); Vermeule (1979); Burkert (1985), 190–215, 276–304; Vernant (1989), (1991), and (2001); Sourvinou-Inwood (1995); Johnston (1999); Bremmer (1983) and (2002); Garland (1985); Jouanna (2015); and Larson (2016), 251–309.

[6] On the wide range of sources, both Greco-Roman and Near Eastern, for the various modern notions of life after death, see Bremmer (2002), 41–102; Segal (2004), 399–732; and Casey (2009).

[7] Bremmer (2002), 24–6.

[8] Attempts to fit Greek afterlife ideas into a narrative that progresses more or less toward the views in later religions occur both in classic and modern studies, such as Rohde (1925), Burkert (1985), and Bremmer (2002). On the opposite extreme, Parker (2011), xii, claims that the Ancient Greeks were relatively indifferent to the afterlife, which is therefore not a part of his study of major issues in Greek religion.

From the earliest times, Ancient Greek care for the dead focused on honorable memorialization and rites with social importance. Rituals could be sophisticated affairs in which lament channeled grief and brought groups together, burial goods symbolized honor, and markers at the grave focused memory.[9] There was clearly political tension in democratic Athens surrounding the lavishness of aristocratic funerals, since they were repeatedly legislated against.[10] Further emphasis on the state's role in burial seems to be influenced by Cleisthenes' democratic reforms. Starting in the early part of the fifth century, the Athenian war dead were buried in the *dēmosion sēma* ("public tomb") outside the city walls of Athens, breaking with general Greek practice of burial on the battle site.[11] The new location – away from previous aristocratic tombs – the broad architecture, and the associations with symbolically significant tombs all signaled the difference of democratic values.[12] The funeral was at state expense, first with a chance for individual offerings and then with processions of caskets by tribe, with one casket for those whose bones were not recovered. Funeral speeches were given to the citizen body. The most famous one, Pericles' funeral oration, as reported in Thucydides, does not focus on the afterlife at all, but on the perspectives of the living citizens on Athens, how their ancestors increased its power, and how the fallen have preserved it (2.35–46).[13] This is a speech in part about subsuming familial memories of the dead to social memory. It emphatically states that the act of facing death bravely and the consummation of dying for the *polis* erases any harms these individuals did in their private lives (2.42).

---

[9] On grave rituals and their surrounding mourning, see Garland (1985), 21–37; Alexiou (2002), esp. 4–7; Oakley (2004); and Mirto (2012), 62–167.

[10] See Shapiro (1991), 629, 643–47; Morris (1992), 129–34, 138–45; Meyer (1993), 106, on Cicero *de Leg.* ii 59–66; and Mirto (2012), 148–51.

[11] Thuc. 2.34. On the *dēmosion sēma*, its excavations and imagery, see Clairmont (1983); Stuppenrich (1994); and Arrington (2010). On the meaning of the split from Greek practice of battlefield burial for the ideology of Athens, focusing on the equality of all Athenians, see Loraux (1986), esp. 18–56. Contrary to Thucydides' claims, we have evidence of burial at battle sites both before and after the Persian Wars, on which see Toher (1999).

[12] Arrington (2010), 525, 532–3.

[13] On the whole genre of Athenian funeral orations and their emphasis on building an imaginary idea of Athenian democracy, see Loraux (1986). On the funeral oration as a specifically Periclean political statement in the context of the first year of the war, see Sicking (1995). For an example of the long debate over the particular relationship of his speech to democracy and its institutions, see Harris (1992).

We also have evidence from Thucydides of cult for the dead of Plataea (3.58.4) and late evidence for a cult for the dead of Marathon, as protectors of Athens.[14] Although they did not end tyranny in Athens, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the aristocrats who attacked the tyrannical family, were referred to as the Tyrannicides; uniquely, they were awarded statues in the Agora and received democratically tinged cultic worship.[15] These are some of the ways the material and ritual commemoration of the Athenian dead reinforced political ideas about the democracy at the time of the *Oresteia*.

The following chapters address analogous aspects of the trilogy, as death and burial rites are loci of discord throughout. I argue that close attention to all aspects of speech regarding the dead, burial, and afterlife return shows that they diverge substantially from internal expectations, which are conditioned by civic and individual practices as well as by literary precedent. The return from the Trojan War involves public discourse over its casualties (Chapters 1 and 2). This includes civic disaffection at their loss and halting, restrictive discourse about their afterlife and share of glory. The *Oresteia*'s corrupted burial rituals and emphasis on the mourning of Agamemnon (the *kommos*) are familiar ground.[16] The contest over the burial of Agamemnon is intertwined with the rivalry for control over the royal house and the attempt to restore rites proper to a father and king (Chapter 4). The question remains open of whether it is not vengeance rather than ritual that restores honor, an issue in the afterlife of Clytemnestra as well (Chapter 6). On the political front, both Agamemnon's and Orestes' afterlives include continuing civic protection (Chapter 5). I will argue that death in war and rhetoric over burial from the start of the trilogy provide a framework for a meaningful rereading of the picture of Athens at its end (Chapter 7).

As is well known, Archaic and Classical Greek culture often distinguished between body and soul: the former decayed, and the latter would go elsewhere.[17] Literature and artistic representations depict some portion of the person continuing after death in the grave, in the realm of Hades, or in both. One of the most influential texts, *Odyssey* 11, contains a different set of elements in tension. The notion that a partly physical body could continue in Hades alternates with something close to an immaterial soul existing there.[18] Although this study will use the term "ghost" in English for consistency, a wide range of terms, each with its own undertones, refers to the soul after death. The most flexible and wide ranging is *psukhē*, from the word for breath. Others, such as *eidōlon* ("image"), *skia* ("shade"), *opsis* ("vision"), and *onar* ("dream"), all refer to the vestige of the person as visual, without their former substance.[19] Archaic literature tends to depict the dead soul less as a full subject than as the remainder of a person, lamenting its lost life, aroused only by contact with the living. Such is the main tendency of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, with references to death and the realm of Hades as dark, gloomy, shadowy, and invisible.[20] The presumed etymology of Hades (Ἅιδης) in many Greek texts is from ἀ-ἰδεῖν, *a-idein*, "not to see."[21] This notion of life as light and death as darkness is structurally embedded in Greek culture and recurs with variations throughout the *Oresteia*, as do many of the Archaic afterlife terms and ideas.

---

[14] On the heroic aspect of these burials, see Kearns (1989), 55; and Currie (2005), 89–119, who adds evidence concerning the dead of Thermopylae, Salamis, and the Megarian dead of the Persian Wars, as well as from other *poleis*.

[15] Hdt. 5.55–6, 6.123; Thuc. 1.20.2, 6.53–9; *Ath. Pol.* 18.2–6. Shear (2012) identifies the rituals as occurring during the Panathenaia and thus posits a mutual reinforcement between the democratic aspects of the festival and the actions of the Tyrannicides. Cf. Kearns (1989), 55, 150; and Azoulay (2017), 15–23.

[16] For the corrupted rituals in the *Oresteia* and their poetic function, see the classic articles of Zeitlin (1965) and (1966). On the poetics of ritual in tragedy, focusing on Sophocles, see Brook (2018), 3–19.

Even in the Homeric shadow realm, however, the theme of continuation beyond death invites poetic transformations of value. Instead of souls unable to interact with each other or with the living, both Homeric epics return dead souls into the narrative to reverse some of the positions they held in life. Thus, when comparing antecedents in literature, this study refers to the scenes of Patroclus' return as a ghost (*Il.* 23.62–107), Odysseus' stories of visiting the realm of Hades (*Od.* 11), and the (likely written somewhat later) scene of souls interacting with each other in the afterlife (*Od.* 24.1–204). Aeschylus' Ghost of Darius from the *Persians* and the numerous references to Hades in his *Suppliants* provide the other major comparanda.[22]

---

[17] Rohde (1925); Vermeule (1979); Mirto (2012), 10–28; and Jouanna (2015), 55–62.

[18] Tsagarakis (2000), 105–23; and Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 10–107.

[19] Vernant (1991), 186–8, defines three kinds of supernatural apparition denoted in Homer by the term εἴδωλον, all of which are actual doubles of a human being, rather than products of the imagination: the phantom, *phasma*, created by a god in the semblance of a living person; the dream, *oneiros*, considered to be a sleep apparition sent by the gods as an image of a real being; and the souls of the dead, *eidōla kamontōn*, phantoms or images of the dead, which exist in the afterlife and are also called *psukhai*. Cf. Rohde (1925), 3–26, 156–235; Vermeule (1979), 8; and Burkert (1985), 190–8.

[20] Gazis (2018), 36–40; and Vermeule (1979), 23–34, with comparanda from other cultures.

[21] On the disputed etymology of Hades, see Chantraine, s.v., who is unwilling to commit; and Beekes (1998), s.v. For further notes on etymology and alternate names, see Burkert (1985), 195–6; Albinus (2000), 32; and Gazis (2018), 36. Cf. Homer's puns in *Il.* 5.844–5 and 6.284–5; and Aeschylus *Sept.* 856–60.

Absent any scene in tragedy that takes place in the underworld, scholars routinely understand phrases that refer to acting in Hades as simply metaphors for being dead.[23] Yet meaningful actions and interactions in the realm of the dead are mentioned by several characters in the *Oresteia*, from allusions by Cassandra (Chapter 3) and the Slave Women (Chapter 4) to the risen Ghost of Clytemnestra's claim that those she killed are shaming her (Chapter 6). Even the shorter references and allusions, the following chapters will show, are deeply imbricated with the trilogy's themes and should be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. Each underworld reference echoes some aspects of the Homeric underworld but often differs in pivotal details.

When the dead were thought to be agitated by a lack of care, such as remaining unburied, they were said to reappear, demanding in a dream or through an intermediary some ritual or action to return them to rest.[24] In Athens, for which we have the best evidence in the Classical era, several annual civic festivals were concerned with honoring the dead, explicitly as prophylaxis against the anger of spirits who could affect life.[25] In Homer, too, there are numerous threats from the dead and dying. Not one of the Homeric undead, however, actually manifests any power over the living.[26]

In tragedy generally, and Aeschylus more particularly, undead figures can be pivotal to the dramatic action.[27] Aeschylus himself may have been the first to bring spirits on stage.[28] Certainly the summoning and appearance of the Ghost of Darius is the central dramatic action of the *Persians*. Although our evidence is limited, the extant sources are most likely not the only literary undead to which Athenian audiences had ever been exposed by 458 BCE.[29] For example, Aeschylus' fragmentary *Psychagogoi* ("Ghost-Raisers"), of uncertain date, is connected with Odysseus' journey to the underworld.[30] In the *Oresteia*, the unsettled spirits of the dead play a number of roles: the Herald denies the desire of the Trojan War casualties to rise (Chapter 1), Cassandra sees the ghostly forms of the Children of Thyestes (Chapter 3), the mourners of Agamemnon call on him to rise bodily (Chapter 4), and Clytemnestra's Ghost actually arrives on stage and activates destructive forces in the world (Chapter 6).

---

[22] Other types of afterlife are beyond the scope of the argument but are still fruitful areas for research. These include the Hesiodic spirits of the gold race and his "Watchers"; and Herodotus' story of Melissa at the Oracle of the Dead (5.92). Plays with central undead figures in extant tragedies after the *Oresteia* include Polydorus' Ghost in Euripides' *Hecuba*, Achilles' Ghost mentioned within his speech, and the revenant title figure in *Alcestis*.

[23] Short references to acting in Hades without follow-up are plentiful in Sophocles and Euripides, e.g.: Soph. *Aj.* 865; Eur. *El.* 1144–5; *Ion* 953; and *Tro.* 445. The *Antigone* as a whole, however, presents a counterexample to such a dismissive attitude. Antigone's speeches conjoin references to Hades that can be taken as merely synonymous with death with appeals to the "laws of Hades" (519, cf. 451–2) as a religious matter and repeated references to being there with her family as motivation for her act (72–6, 542, cf. 912). Cf. Rehm (1994), 59–71; and Foley (1996). On the *Alcestis*, a play deeply concerned with the afterlife, see Dova (2012), 170–87; and Schlatter (2018), 191–235.

[24] Johnston (1999), 9–10, 38–81; and Jouanna (2015), 62–3.

[25] See Johnston (1999) on the fear of ghosts rising, 22, 29; on the needs of the dead, 27–8; on funerary law, 40–1; on the Genesia as a civic "festival of the dead" for one's "begetters," 43–5; on the Nemesia as a "festival of the dead" to avoid Nemesis, "wrath," even from dead parents, 46; and on the Anthesteria, which was partly comprised of sacrifices to Hermes Chthonios for leading the dead back to the underworld after three days above, and included roles for Dionysus, Orestes, and the Erinyes, 55, 63–6. Cf. Burkert (1985), 190–203.

[26] Hence the ubiquitous dishonoring of enemy corpses and seeming unconcern for the cremation of common soldiers, on which see Garland (1984).

[27] Johnston (1999), 7–32, lays out the evidence for the increasing influence of the dead in literature from Homer's relatively weak souls to the active undead in tragedy.

In Greek religion, attributions of divine power to the dead sometimes blurred the line between humans and gods. Heroes were conceived of as the powerful spirits of dead individuals. They were local semidivinities with shrines where they received ritual cult, unlike the gods, who were worshipped at multiple sites all over the Greek world.[31] Historically, both Agamemnon and Orestes received cult as heroes. In the *Choephoroi*, the mourners of Agamemnon attempt to harness his supernatural power for vengeance (Chapter 4), and in the *Eumenides*, Orestes speaks of his own powers after death in the manner of a hero (Chapter 5). However, I will argue that the afterlife of each bears a counterintuitive relation to their living characters and their cultic worship in Greece.

The Ghost of Clytemnestra, for her part, neither haunts Orestes directly nor gains heroic powers but mobilizes the Erinyes on her behalf. These chthonic deities, known from Mycenaean times, had only a minor cultic presence in Greek religion.[32] The Erinyes are widespread, however, in the visual arts and Archaic literature. In the former, they are depicted as snakes, symbolizing divine vengeance.[33] In the latter, the Erinyes have their own genealogy and functions: myths before Aeschylus present them as older than the Olympians, the daughters of Gaia.[34] This locates them in a wide constellation of dark, chthonic, bloody, and deadly forces.[35]

---

[28] As Bardel (2005), 92, argues, from later evidence.

[29] There were clearly tragedies with scenes set in Hades, which Aristotle, in *Poetics* 1456a3, specifically mentions under the category of "spectacle." Yet none survive. Aristophanes' *Frogs*, set mostly in the underworld, was staged over fifty years after the *Oresteia*. The Basel Krater (Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig BS 415), dated to 480 BCE, gives a visual representation of a possible tragic raising of the dead preceding the *Oresteia*. See Wellenbach (2015).

[30] Henrichs (1991), 187–92; Moreno (2004), 7–29; Cousin (2005), 137–52; Bardel (2005), 85–92; Sommerstein (2008b), 269–73, and (2010a), 249–50; and Martin (2020), 76–80. Other Aeschylean dramas with potential underworld or soul motifs exist only in tiny fragments: *Sisyphus the Stone-Roller*, which might have been a satyr play, and *The Weighing of Souls*, in which the characters are still living.

[31] Rohde (1925), 115–38; Burkert (1985), 203–8; Kearns (1989); Antonaccio (1994) and (1998); Currie (2005); Bremmer (2006), 15–20; and Parker (2011), 103–23.

[32] Burkert (1985), 44; and Sewell-Rutter (2007), 81–2.

[33] LIMC, s.v. "Erinyes."

There is always an undertone of terror to the Erinyes, yet previous references to their functions fall into two connected categories – balancing the universe and carrying out curses among humans – the first of which is seemingly benign. In Heraclitus, they prevent occurrences contrary to nature, keeping the very sun in its course, as ministers of Justice.[36] This also covers one of their most prevalent duties in Homer, namely to guard against actions and events contrary to the universal order, even when divinities themselves would transgress it.[37] This is the only function of the Erinyes within the *Prometheus Bound* (whether or not it was written by Aeschylus). Along with the *Moirai* (Fates), they are explicitly the pilots of divine necessity, whom not even Zeus can contravene (*Prom.* 515–18). In curbing the excesses of the gods, the Erinyes function as noncontingent enforcers of the current structure of the universe.

For mortals, however, the balancing power of the Erinyes is far more sinister. Their most neutral function is as the guarantors of oaths, in which, however, self-cursing is also involved.[38] More destructively, they are the divine forces of vengeance, deeply identified with family curses.[39] In many of these examples, they come from under the earth.[40] Both literary and material sources group the Erinyes with other avenging or killing divine forces, such as the *Kēres* (goddesses of death, often associated with sickness), the *Alastor* (Avenger), and the *Arai* (Curses).[41] In the *Seven Against Thebes*, the curse of Oedipus on his sons accounts for all eleven uses of "Erinys," which are again paired with a variety of other divinities such as the Curses, Hades, and *Moira* (Fate).[42] Numerous studies have examined the *Oresteia*'s staged Erinyes as representatives of the old *lex talionis* who transform into beneficent spirits.[43] Few, however, have examined in any depth their connections to the larger structure of afterlife punishment. Hints of it wind through the choral passages of the trilogy and will be examined in Chapters 2, 4, and 7.

---

[34] On the genealogy of the Erinyes in Homer and Hesiod, their functions before Aeschylus, and their distinction from the spirits of death, the *Kēres*, see Sommerstein (1989), 6–9; and Sewell-Rutter (2007), 78–91, who also distinguishes them from the Fates, the *Moirai*, 143–4.

[35] On the meaning of "chthonic," a poetic term for supernatural forces connected to the earth and underworld, see e.g. Scullion (1994); Burkert (1985), 190–215; and Henrichs (1991), who emphasizes its dual aspect as both fertile and deadly.

[36] Fr. 94 DK. Sewell-Rutter (2007), 79, collects instances of the Erinyes' corrective nature from Homer, citing the scholia on *Il.* 19.417 that "they are the overseers (ἐπίσκοποι) of things contrary to nature." Cf. Sommerstein (1989), 6–12.

[37] In the *Iliad*, Poseidon is admonished by the threat of the Erinyes, who support the claims of the elder, in this case Zeus (15.204). Hera uses them to silence a horse endowed with speech (19.400–18). Cf. Johnston (1992); and Sewell-Rutter (2007), 88 n. 40.

[38] See Burkert (1985), 197–8, 200, 252–3. Oath formulas in the *Iliad* invoke the Erinyes (19.259–60, cf. 21.412). In *WD* 803, the Erinyes assemble at the birth of Oath, son of Strife (Ἔρις). On oaths in ancient Greece, see Sommerstein and Torrance (2014).

[39] For example, Phoenix's father curses him with the Erinyes (*Il.* 9.454–6) and Meleager's mother curses him similarly (*Il.* 9.566–72). Athena tells Ares that the Erinyes of his mother are taking vengeance on him for abandoning the Achaeans (*Il.* 21.412–14). In the *Odyssey*, it is the mother's Erinyes that afflict Oedipus (*Od.* 11.280). This literary identification with curses has a material corollary, for in curse tablets from even before the *Oresteia*, they are part of a constellation of threatening, chthonic (and often female) deities: Hecate, Hermes of the underworld, and Persephone; see Johnston (1999), 71–9, 91–4.

[40] As in Agamemnon's speech in *Il.* 19.259–60: "the Erinyes, who beneath the earth punish dead men, whoever has sworn a false oath." Cf. *Il.* 3.276–9; and see Schlatter (2018), 125 n. 4, for further citations of their connection with the underworld.

In the most significant of the choral references, the Erinyes reveal to Orestes and the audience the universal judgment and punishment by Hades for ethical transgressions (*Eum.* 264–72). This passage has little precedent in Greek religion, art, or literature. Although he is a brother of Zeus, in neither Homer nor Hesiod does Hades have a personality or much interaction with the world of the living. Of the "Homeric Hymns," he appears only in the *Hymn to Demeter*. Due to the inability of the dead to return from his realm, his inexorability is proverbial already in Homer.[44] For this, he and his realm are hated by its heroes.[45]

Hades, in his aspect as a god of death, was seldom worshipped in mainland Greece because of his nature as unseen, removed, and implacable.[46] The known temples associated with the underworld are regularly related to Demeter or Persephone and only use a pseudonym if they refer to Hades, for they are concerned with a different aspect of chthonic power, fertility.[47] Similarly, Hades alone was never connected with the possibility of an improved afterlife. Nonstate salvation cults from this period pick up on the return of other figures from the realm of the dead, including Orpheus and Dionysus, who offer secret knowledge and rituals meant to improve an individual's afterlife.[48] As is well known, Aeschylus was born in Eleusis, the cult site at which there were year-round festivals, the most famous of which were the Eleusinian Mysteries.[49] These were run by Athens and were connected with the story of Demeter and Kore, but they did not, as far as we know, entail any worship of Hades.[50] Following roughly along the lines of these religious demarcations, there is no discernible reference in the *Oresteia* to salvation of the soul through initiation.[51]

---

[41] See Sewell-Rutter (2007), 86–7.

[42] Connected with Curses: *Sept.* 70, 574, 699–700, 709, 723, 725. Connected with strife: ἔρις, 723–6, 791. Connected with Hades: ὕμνον Ἐρινύος . . . Ἀίδα τ᾽ ἐχθρὸν παιᾶν᾽, 868–70, 886. Connected with Fate: Μοῖρα . . . τ᾽ Οἰδίπου σκιά . . . μέλαιν᾽ Ἐρινύς, 975–7 = 986–9. Connected with the *Kēres*: 1055.

[43] E.g. Brown (1983); and Sewell-Rutter (2007), 79–109.

[44] See *Il.* 9.158–9 and its scholia, in which the claim is made that no cities have altars to Hades, since he cannot be propitiated, quoting Aeschylus, *Niobe* fr. 161: "Alone of the gods, Death (Θάνατος) desires no gifts; one can gain nothing by making sacrifice or pouring libation to him, nor has he any altar, nor is he addressed in songs of praise; from him, alone among divinities, Persuasion (Πειθώ) stands aloof." Cf. Sommerstein (2008c), 168–9.

[45] *Il.* 9.312–13; *Od.* 14.156–7.

[46] Pausanias, 6.25.2, claims that Elis contains the only temple to Hades.

[47] The aetiological story of the *Hymn to Demeter* illustrates the basis of these cults: Hades' snatching of Persephone is the mythical link between the crops rising from the earth and the underworld. See Scullion (1994), 93. On temples and religious use of pseudonyms for Hades, including "Chthonic Zeus," see Rohde (1925), 183–4; and Burkert (1985), 196–6, 200–1. On the agricultural aspects of the festivals at Eleusis, see Parker (2005b), 328–32.

The *Oresteia*'s Hades passage is one of the earliest descriptions of ethical punishment for all humans in the Western tradition. Surprisingly, it has received no attention to speak of in a wide range of relevant studies.[52] The idea is extremely unusual in its culture, for Hades is not seen as a judge of the dead in early Greek cult, nor is such judgment a theme in almost any Greek literature until Plato.[53] The notion that *every* human is subject to punishment in the afterlife based on their action in life is unknown in Homeric epic. The *Iliad* does not differentiate the dead except for the unburied, whereas the *Odyssey* describes penalties and rewards only for great transgressors and those connected with the gods.[54] Hesiod differentiates afterlives by mythical era rather than individual deeds. He does grant positive outcomes for the gold and silver races, with increasingly worse ones as humans degenerate, not even mentioning it for people of his time (*WD* 109–201).[55] The first afterlife reward for ordinary people's actions in life is the *Hymn to Demeter* and its associated Eleusinian Mysteries, but these were specifically reliant upon ritual cleanliness and knowledge through initiation, not ethical action.[56]

---

[48] On these Orphic, Dionysian, and Pythagorean cults see Linforth (1973); West (1983); Burkert (1985), 276–301; Graf (1993) and Graf and Johnston (2007); Edmonds (2004) and (2011); Parker (2005b), 327–68; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008); and Bremmer (2014), 55–80.

[49] It is likely significant to his writing about the afterlife that Aeschylus comes from Eleusis and had a strong connection to Sicily, where he died. On Aeschylus as most likely an initiate of the Mysteries, against the ancient biographical story to the contrary, see Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 248–50.

[50] See Mylonas (1961); Graf (1974); Burkert (1985), 285–9; Cavanaugh (1996); Bremmer (2014), 1–20; and Jouanna (2015), 151–82.

[51] There are several allusions to mystery-cult phrasing, referred to in the chapters as they arise, and there is certainly concern for the state of the soul after death, on which see esp. Chapter 4. On the Eleusinian Mysteries and tragedy, including the *Oresteia* specifically, see Thomson (1935), 22–34; Tierney (1937), 11–21; Solmsen (1947), more generally on religion in Aeschylus; Zeitlin (1978), 160–74; Bowie (1993), 24–6; and Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 167, 248–50.

[52] It is either absent or glossed over in studies of Aeschylus and religion, theology, or cosmology, and even of Greek ideas of the afterlife more generally: for example, Rohde (1925); Rose (1946); Solmsen (1947); Burkert (1985); Zak (1995); Johnston (1999); Seaford (2012); Sourvinou-Inwood (2003); Bees (2009); Parker (2009); Jouanna (2015); and Larson (2016).

[53] Rohde (1925), 238–9; North (1992); and Johnston (1999), 11–2, 31–2, 98–9. For death and immortality in Classical Greek philosophy and selected Archaic Greek literature, see Long (2019).

[54] Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood (1986); and Johnston (1999), 11–12. The only exceptions in the *Iliad* are two instances in which Agamemnon calls on a host of powers above and below as witnesses of his oaths. He invokes Zeus, Helios, rivers, Earth, and the underworld powers, who punish oath-breakers, 3.278–9; and again invokes Zeus, Earth, and Helios, and the Erinyes, who beneath the earth punish oath-breakers, 19.259–60. On the general restriction of the afterlife in the *Iliad*, see Schein (1984), 67–84; and Currie (2005), 41–6.

Pindar's *Olympian* 2.56–80 is the only explicit passage of ethical judgment in Archaic literature. Judgment is performed by "someone" below (δικάζει τις, 59) and afflicts with terrible punishment those who are wicked in life (56–60, 67). The singular occurrence of this theme in extant Pindar, its brevity, allusiveness, and description of this punishment as a truth not ordinarily known, all mark how unfamiliar it is.[57] The passage, moreover, also includes a set of rewards for good people (61–6), which are seen to be the counterpoint to punishment. The statement that humans "remain three times on either side" (68–9) is the first mention of reincarnation in extant Greek literature. The poem's promise of the Islands of the Blessed to those who keep their soul pure in these multiple journeys (68–80) also has no literary or cultic precedent in mainland Greece. The many novel aspects of this structured conception of a universal afterlife in *Olympian* 2 are deeply obscure and appear to be related to Southern Italian and Sicilian religious ideas.[58]

The above survey should make it clear that in Aeschylus' time there was no single, shared picture of life after death, despite a desire by some scholars to reconstruct one.[59] Nor was Aeschylus himself a religious innovator, as has sometimes been claimed.[60] Rather, in the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus uses the available bounty of religious and literary ideas concerning the afterlife in ways that differ radically from his culture, other authors, and even his other extant plays.[61] The following chapters address in detail the conflicts he creates through a poetics of multiple afterlife ideas. These conflicts are specific to the context of the trilogy. They are therefore relevant to subsets of ethical and political thought evident within the *Oresteia*. Since "poetics," "ethics," and "politics" are heavily contested terms and refer to broad fields of study, the remaining portion of the Introduction preliminarily defines and narrows how each will be used.

---

[55] On the races, see, e.g., Solmsen (1995), 83–94, and on Hesiod's unconcern with the divinity Hades, 72; and Clay (2003), 81–95.

[56] On ritual cleanliness, see Parker (2005b), 343–7, with the formulas quoted in n. 86. On initiation, see the *Hymn to Demeter* 480–2: "Happy is he among men upon earth who has seen (ὄπωπεν) these mysteries; but he who is uninitiate and who has no part in them, never has lot of like good things once he is dead, down in the darkness and gloom" (tr. Evelyn-White). Burkert (1985), 198–9, attributes the first structured concern with one's place in the afterlife to mystery cults – which only demanded rites – and ethical concerns to the sophists, with Plato synthesizing the two. Cf. Albinus (2000).

[57] The other Pindaric afterlife passages all differ from this one, namely *Threnoi* frr. 129, 130, and 133, on which see Willcock (1995), 170–4.

[58] See Willcock (1995), 135–40; Solmsen (1982); Lloyd-Jones (1984); and Nisetich (1988).

[59] On the plural, vague, and contradictory nature of Greek burial customs and beliefs about the dead, see, e.g. Vermeule (1979), 1–2; Burkert (1985), 190–1; and Garland (1985), 102–3.

[60] Lloyd-Jones (1956); and Parker (2009), esp. 127–8, address this flawed modern idea.

[61] Further introductory material relevant to the afterlife in Greek tragedy more generally may be found in Martin (2020), 11–32; with the idea that contradictory views are commonly found alongside each other in this genre, 34–7; and a scale of awareness, from witless to manifest, 37–62.

## Ethics and Tragic Poetics

Throughout the *Oresteia*, characters make conflicting claims about acceptable and unacceptable behavior, take actions that fall under the categories they themselves discuss, and find themselves subject to proliferating repercussions. Central to every statement about transgression and justice, every deliberation about consequences, and every plot action is the implicit understanding of relationships between beings as ethically bounded.[62] It is crucial, however, to delimit the scope of the term "ethics" – a fraught notion throughout the history of philosophy – in order to give it analytical utility.[63] Doing so clarifies how tragedy in general and the *Oresteia* more specifically fall outside the domain of most modern philosophical discussions of ethics.

This book will use the terms "ethics" and "ethical" for the evaluations of individual behavior toward others, of more general norms of individual behavior, and of the transgression of such norms.[64] Everything concerning benefit and harm to others fits within this definition: evaluating actions, individual relationships, and criteria of judgment. Often, scenes contain spoken or unspoken indications of communal norms concerning individual actions; at other times, characters make overt declarations about "justice" as it relates to the individual. Such discourse demonstrates individual and communal values, standards, and behavior and will fall under the category of ethics for the purpose of our analysis. Yet there are still distinctions to make. Ethics, for one, is here analyzed at the level of individuals, as distinguished from the structures of civic entities and interactions of larger groups; these are covered by "politics," as defined in the next section. The separation is by no means absolute (they often overlap within the *Oresteia*) but is necessary for clarity. The ethical analysis in this book focuses on the way representations of the afterlife transform interpersonal behavior, norms applied to such behavior, and the understanding of transgressions against both.

---

[62] Alongside the many works on justice in the *Oresteia*, debates over ethical or moral choice, variously defined, can be found in Lloyd-Jones (1962); Hammond (1965); Lesky (1966); Dover (1973); Edwards (1977); Helm (2004); Sewell-Rutter (2007); and Lawrence (2013).

[63] Rachels (2009), 413–22, offers a brief introduction to twentieth-century ethical theory. See Narveson (2010) for a recent, representative example.

[64] "Ethical" is here preferred to "moral," since the latter term evokes more socially contingent prescriptions of what agents must or ought to do, Harpham (1992), 3. Annas (1992) summarizes the differences between ancient ways of writing about ethics and modern ways of thinking about morals, as well as the lack of general agreement as to what differentiates these terms.

Ethical issues in literature are interpretable on a range of scales and from a variety of positions. The analysis may take on a whole genre (such as "tragedy"), an author or work (e.g. the ethical thought of Aeschylus or that expressed in the *Oresteia*), one act (e.g. Agamemnon's decision at Aulis), or a combination of these. During and after the play, spectators and interpreters might discuss subsections of this range as well as compare them with their own communal mores and experiences.[65] The relentless interconnections of the *Oresteia* compel a continual cycling between these levels of interpretation. Yet each modern interpreter is at many removes from the original performance and its culture. At times, it is inevitable to consider (surely a variety of) audience responses. This is a necessarily speculative exercise, and I do not claim any special insight into the minds of Athenian audience members.[66] Instead, I have tried to foreground the internal logic of the play and then add what can be deduced from the strongest available evidence outside of it. The analysis thus includes relevant cultural, linguistic, and dramatic elements whenever they may buttress particular points.

For this reason, also, ethics and poetics are herein jointly analyzed. The manifestation of themes in language and dramatic representation is what the term "poetics" refers to throughout this book.[67] This includes both metaphorical connections across thematic categories and, at one point, even metatheatrical features (in Chapter 6). The analysis in several chapters will identify specific features of a "poetics of the beyond." This phrase refers to the warping effects of perspectives on the afterlife, from recasting the referents of particular words to affecting the interpretation of the trilogy as a whole.[68] Also connected to the afterlife is a related "poetics of multiplicity." This refers to the creation of contrasting and sometimes totally opposite perspectives on the afterlife in one scene or across the trilogy, and to the effects specific to such plural perspectives.

---

[65] Altieri (1998), 31–3, categorizes ethics in literature through the perspectives of different audiences: how individuals evaluate motives and actions in texts, how readers imagine or converse about their assessments, and how readers and critics interact with philosophical discourse about morality.

[66] On Greek tragic audiences, both as collectives and individuals, responding to ethical issues in tragedy, see Segal (1996); and Easterling (1996).

[67] For tragic poetics and Aristotle's ideas, see, for example, Heath (1987). For Aeschylean poetics, see Rosenmeyer (1982).

[68] For the "poetics of the afterlife" in Homer, see Gazis (2018); and for the "poetics of *katabasis*," see Dova (2012).

Positing these two types of poetics and deriving ethical points from them requires responses to three methodological objections.[69] The first is that there is no inconsistency between multiple views of the afterlife in the *Oresteia* because Greek society and religion itself contained these very contradictions, which were discussed in the previous section. The second is that references to death and dying, punishment in the afterlife, and ethical rules are all merely expressions of popular morality.[70] Commentators routinely mark such statements as "commonplaces," list references to similar statements, and thus imply that there is no further meaning worth investigating. On a more specific, linguistic level, there are interpreters who claim that certain Greek words have a singular meaning, based on their understanding of Greek culture or tragedy as a genre, oftentimes picking comparanda from later examples. They then use this idiosyncratic, specific, or later meaning to deny the multiplicity of possible meanings in a particular passage in the *Oresteia*.

These three positions miss something fundamental to tragedy. Part of what makes the genre so enduringly important is precisely that it focuses on cultural incongruities and linguistic ambiguities. It thus challenges the audience by taking contrasting meanings to extremes, soliciting ethical responses.[71] Of course, what we can tell of ideas circulating at the time serves as useful background for phrasing and themes in the trilogy. However, this does not determine or fix the meaning of a particular word, idea, or passage.[72] Every chapter of this study will draw attention to the peculiarities of specific phrasings in context and to antithetical views pitted against each other, either in close proximity or across the trilogy. In linguistic discussions, I have been careful to cite the Aeschylean corpus along with relevant earlier sources, if necessary, rather than later tragedies. I put forward the reasons for each claim of problematic meaning or linguistic ambiguity, taking into account other uses, a wide range of commentaries, and specialized studies. As a whole, the book attempts to demonstrate just how much there is to be gained from closely analyzing the language of the afterlife.

---

[69] These objections are contained in the scholarship on particular passages that will be cited as the discussion progresses.

[70] The classic work on popular morality is still Dover (1974). On tragedy, see 14–17; and on the afterlife, 261–7.

[71] These tragic techniques are discussed at length in theoretical works cited throughout, for example Goldhill (1986).

[72] Dover (1974) rightly insists on the unsystematic nature of moral discourse and behavior in any society, xii–xiii; as well as on the dependence of meaning on the source, its genre, and the particular usage, 1–45.

The approaches one takes to dramatic character are especially consequential in interpreting ethical ideas within tragedy. Dramatic characters most often – although not always – speak as agents with their own perspectives.[73] The chapters thus generally focus first on individuals embedded in their context, then build connections to the larger ethical issues in the trilogy. This practice addresses ethical issues as characters experience them, since prolepsis in interpreting ethics should be avoided.[74] Following the course of the trilogy also more strongly emphasizes the specificity of particular ethical actions and choices. These are often reconceived in later scenes, and the Summations/Connections at the end of each chapter draw out these links, whereas the Conclusions chapter addresses the interplay between the local level and the trilogy as a whole.

Tragic characters are also always constructed through conventional language and action, against which their individuality emerges.[75] From this generic axiom come more subtle distinctions: "character" (etymologically from a distinctively engraved mark) includes all of a wide range of both individual features and positions in society. One can thus consider the structuring elements of character in terms of ethos (e.g. whether characteristics are inherited or actions are affected by a divinity) or the roles a figure plays in particular circumstances (e.g. what is expected of a "king" versus a "father" in Agamemnon's dilemma at Aulis). Understanding the issues that arise when dramatic characters are placed under stress requires scrutinizing their continuity from one scene to the next. Has anything changed when they reappear?

---

[73] See Gill (1990) on tragic character and (1996), esp. 176, on regarding the thinking agent as involved with and reacting to a communal nexus of beliefs and practices.

[74] See Lebeck (1971), 1–2, on prolepsis as a main structural feature of the *Oresteia*, which she claims necessarily entails teleological reading. It is crucial, however, to heed the double warning of Porter (1990), 35, against considering enigmas in the text as clarified by later events and, conversely, against treating any particular passage in isolation. Bernstein (1994) gives an ethical critique of prolepsis as a literary and historical technique of writing about catastrophe and stipulates that the focus should be on the perspective of individuals.

[75] See the survey of scholarship in Judet de La Combe (2001), 1.39–46. Character as a generic construct is also connected to the standardized masks and costumes of Greek tragedy, on which see Halliwell (1993); Wyles (2011); and Meineck (2011). Cf. Lawrence (2013), esp. 15–18.

This is an especially germane issue when examining the shift from a living figure to a representation of the same figure after death.[76] A number of the following chapters will demonstrate that instances of ghostly returns, spiritual continuation in the underworld, and supernatural power in the living world significantly transform previously staged characters.

The analysis in this book is also intended as a delimited argument for reconsidering the use of Greek tragedy in ethical philosophy. Some thinkers attempt to draw universal ethical insights from tragedy.[77] The dilemmas discussed and enacted within each play and the reconciliations that sometimes occur pull in this direction. Yet there are major quandaries for ethical generalizations from tragedy. Formally speaking, such readings begin from (often unstated) socially normative assumptions. Among these are the requirements for agents to act within relatively stable societal structures and to work to preserve such structures.[78] Greek tragedies, however, unceasingly undercut the gender, kinship, political, and even divine structures they depict.[79] Tragic scenes of ethical action or deliberation consistently occur at moments of crisis and follow societally toxic transgressions. Political turmoil and kin murder are particularly prevalent. Tragedy often follows flawed central characters who commit such acts, yet still critique the oppressive norms of their societies.[80] Moreover, the solutions offered at the end of tragedies are oftentimes unexpected, including divine intervention and rituals that – despite serving as a form of reconciliation – often fail to address the provocations to the structure of society raised in the course of the action.[81] Thus, the tragic genre as a whole presents insuperable challenges precisely to the foundational premises of normative ethics. The afterlives of Agamemnon, Orestes, and especially Clytemnestra will provide illustrations of such challenges to normative ethics as echoes of these characters' transgressive living actions.[82]

---

[76] Further issues of continuity include what characters know in each scene and whether characters are considered psychologically coherent or merely vehicles for the action. See Easterling (1990), 83–92, on disagreements concerning the nature of dramatic characters and on the different levels of interpretive codes audiences use to understand performances. Goldhill (1984a), 69–79, 167–9 and (1990a), separates dramatic "figures" from "real people" with psychological histories. He maintains that the former emerge only through the tragic narrative's language, in which they are fully embedded, arguing against scholars who refer to external notions of consistency.

[77] Nussbaum (1986), while recognizing the reversals of fortune and irreconcilably conflicting imperatives in Greek tragedy, is nevertheless a prime modern example of generalizing from it to normative ethical claims.

[78] This can be seen from the categories of normative ethical theory, which focus on determining what is best for society (consequentialism), the obligations of duty (deontology), or understanding how a virtuous actor would approach a dilemma (virtue ethics).

[79] The recognition of the exceptional character of tragedy and the tragic hero goes back to Aristotle in the ancient world and Schelling at the beginning of modern philosophical approaches to tragedy. For useful surveys of philosophical theories of tragedy, many of which emphasize its undermining functions, see Schmidt (2001); Szondi (2002); and Young (2013). Cf. Goldhill (2012), esp. 137–65.

[80] Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 25–48, emphasize the tensions that tragic characters face within their society and in their collision with larger divine forces. Gill (1996), 94–174, analyzes the "problematic hero" (especially Achilles and Medea) as a critic of societal norms.

Tragedy also contains far stronger and more diverse divine influences than accounted for in modern ethical thought. Supernatural forces repeatedly pressure human agents in ways that affect ethical claims. Examples in the *Oresteia* are the real or interpreted alterations of mental states, signs construed as supernatural demands, and more or less direct divine commands.[83] The *Oresteia*'s polytheistic framework and the competing claims of divine justice within it are part of its poetics of multiplicity, as will be discussed in Chapter 7. Whereas divinities may be responsible for framing these situations, characters routinely construe action as (at least partially) the agent's responsibility.[84] This can be seen in the Elders' often-discussed formulation concerning Agamemnon's fulfilling the divinely demanded sacrifice of Iphigeneia: "He put on the yoke of necessity."[85] The divine pressures on characters warp the *Oresteia*'s ethical dilemmas beyond normative frameworks. They thus bedevil any abstraction into ethical rules for conventional situations.

Continuity after death further strains the stable societal structure implied in most philosophical analyses of ethics.[86] Claims on behalf of the deceased also entail the uncertainty inherent in the multiple Greek pictures of the potential afterlife. As we will see, appeals for justice on behalf of dead family members recur in scene after scene in the *Oresteia* without any suggestion of sure knowledge of the beyond. Instead, the many ideas about potential continuity raise new questions concerning actions taken by an individual or their kin in life or after their death: What might affect their status in any society of the dead? How might postmortem existence, or even divine punishment, force rethinking of living actions and values?[87]

---

[81] Segal (1996); Easterling (1996); and Dunn (1997).

[82] There have also been numerous powerful critiques of normative ethics, notably in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, for example (1969) and (1987). Levinas often frames ethics as an infinite obligation to the always separate, unknowable Other. His work may be seen as foundational (and much reacted against) for taking the individual seriously regardless of socially normative frameworks. Although not following Levinas's philosophical framework, an ethical emphasis on individuals will be part of the argument of several of the following chapters. For the difficult conjunction of Levinas's ethical and political philosophy, see Bernard-Donals (2005).

[83] Discussions of decision-making in the trilogy have always focused on the restrictions governing human freedom, citing such forces as necessity, the divine, and the family curse or guilt of the Atreidae, for example, Greene (1943); Gantz (1982); and Sewell-Rutter (2007).

[84] Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 79; *contra* Rosenmeyer (1982), 284–307, who denies the notion of "choice" anywhere in Aeschylus.

[85] ἀνάγκας ἔδυ λέπαδνον, *Ag.* 218. The bibliography on Agamemnon's decision is immense, for example Greene (1943); Lloyd-Jones (1962); Lesky (1966); Peradotto (1969); Dover (1973); Edwards (1977); Nussbaum (1986), 25–50; Griffith (1991); and Lawrence (2013), 71–83.

[86] For modern philosophical approaches to death and the afterlife that address potential transformations of values, see Moore (1981); Paterson (1995); and Kagan (2012).

Just as in religion and philosophy, in literature transformations of the self and of how one is valued may occur after death. In general, it is only literature, however, that presents the perspectives of the deceased, sometimes startlingly unpredictable ones. To give a famous example from Homer (heavily oversimplified by necessity), Achilles in the *Iliad* must choose between two foretold paths: glorious early death or long, inglorious life (*Il.* 9.412–16; 18.97–126). For reasons less to do with glory than with vengeance and guilt, he eventually embraces death in battle.[88] In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, the soul of Achilles in the underworld declares that he *only* values life, even without property or freedom. He thus abnegates any honor accrued in battle and denies that glory gives him power in the afterlife (*Od.* 11.488–91). That is, he finds no joy in the state that his choice hastened.[89] It soon becomes clear, however, that the soul of Achilles is anxious about the status of his son (*Od.* 11.492–3), who is unmentioned in the *Iliad*. Achilles seemingly returns full circle to valuing glory by rejoicing at Neoptolemus' earthly deeds, despite renouncing any continuing benefit from his own.[90] Odysseus' encounter with the soul of his comrade entails a number of reversals of Achilles' stated concerns. It ends with an underworld happiness grounded in continuity through living children.

Crucially, the story itself also demonstrates the reflexive use of the afterlife to reevaluate life on the level of poetics and metanarrative.[91] Since Odysseus narrates the tale simultaneously to an internal audience and to the external audiences of the epic, both sets are invited to rethink the terms of Achilles' choice: glory relative to longevity and the individualistic mentality of the hero versus a legacy through family, among other themes. This example, with its continual turns, fits in especially well with the following discussions of the transformations of Cassandra, Agamemnon, Orestes, and Clytemnestra after death. A major indication of this theme's importance in the trilogy is that each of its three choruses sings of the afterlife as a place for the reversal of fortune.

---

[87] On the major ethical problems raised by different perspectives on the afterlife in Greek tragedy and how Plato reworks each for his philosophical questioning of values, see Shilo (2013). Cf. Annas (1982); and North (1992).

[88] Schein (1984), 128–63.

[89] Gazis (2018), 184–95, with bibliography.

[90] *Od.* 538–40. The common misconception about the pessimism of Achilles in Hades does not take into account the joy he demonstrates as he departs, Schmiel (1987), 35–7.

[91] de Jong (2001), 271–95.

Conscientious analysis of ethical issues in the trilogy ought to elicit their complexity, to temper unconditional conclusions, and to reconsider any tempting generalizations. Despite the multivalenced language of tragedy and the repeated reversals of many themes, ambiguity cannot be an endpoint for interpretation. Therefore, this book concatenates afterlife themes as the trilogy progresses, with the later ones also qualifying the earlier ones. Each chapter draws out the consequences of major and less obvious aspects of possible human afterlives. The book as a whole thus builds a layered argument about the trilogy's challenges to ethical thought based upon plural perspectives on human afterlives.

## Politics and the *Oresteia*

"Politics," too, is a term in need of wider, provisional definitions and narrower redefinitions in individual chapters. It is easily seen that structures of government, actions with effects on rulers, and discourse about societal values all play a role in understanding the political aspects of particular scenes, whole tragedies, and tragedy as a genre. Tragedy, having evolved in Athens, has long been understood as enmeshed with the city and its ideas, especially those opposed to the heroic values of epic.[92] More specifically, in studies of Athenian democracy and scholarship on tragedy's connection with political theory there is a widespread tendency to refer to the *Oresteia* as an essentially democratic text.[93] Consequently, the analysis of political themes in this book will touch on references relevant to contemporary Athenian concerns, writ large, and analogies to democratic governance, both of which included high-stakes conflicts throughout Aeschylus' lifetime.[94] Yet there is much more to politics in the *Oresteia* than its relationship to democratic Athens. This becomes evident in the following brief survey of the political context of tragic performance, the events surrounding the *Oresteia*'s staging in 458 BCE, and the scope of political themes affected by the afterlife within the trilogy.

---

[92] Thomson (1946) is an early example, while a more recent flood of works stems more or less from Vernant's structuralist interpretations. For example, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 23–9, sketch out "the opposition between legal and political thought on the one hand and mythical and heroic traditions," and "the problems of human responsibility that arise as a hesitant progress is made toward the establishment of law," 27. Cf. Goldhill (1986); and Longo (1990), 12–19.

[93] Studies of Aeschylus in relation to democracy tend to emphasize the final reconciliation and divine order at the end of the *Oresteia*, for example, Thomson (1946), 199–219, 245–97; Euben (1982); and Zak (1995), 29–88. Meier (1990), 82–139, connects the *Oresteia* to the contemporary Athenian political transformations most emphatically; for example, "there is good reason to believe that the transition to democracy in Attica was never perceived as clearly as it was by Aeschylus," 137; cf. (1993), 102–65.

Over the last several decades, a great deal of attention has focused on tragedy's relation to the festival of Dionysus, within which it was staged, and to the related civic discourse of contemporary Athens. Many features of the festival structure can be labeled as demonstrating "democratic ideology." Although our evidence is tenuous for Aeschylus' time, some democratic features of the dramatic festival and performances include: theater seating by tribe and political status; ticket distribution by deme; the audience as the most numerous annual congregation of citizens, who overlapped with voters and jurors; the judges, chosen by lot, voting on the victors; the presentation of crowns for benefactors of the city; the institution of *khoregia*; and the control over funding by the assemblies and the Council of 500, which made decisions about the festival and audited it thereafter.[95]

A number of other features of the festival and performance are ambiguously democratic. The chorus – which was a widespread feature of festivals around the Greek world – also has elements that scholars have connected specifically with democracy. As a collective, they model plurality and sometimes socially conventional reactions.[96] Other aspects of the festival are possibly democratic, but definitely militaristic in nature: the generals led ceremonies and sometimes judged (at least once in 468 BCE); the war-orphan *ephebes*, raised at the expense of the city, paraded in full armor; and the choral dance training might have had some correlation to training for hoplite warfare (a link which is disputed).[97] Even the introduction of the City Dionysia has been tagged as a political-theological ploy for the unity of a formerly decentralized Athens, but this element was, again, not necessarily democratic. It has been plausibly argued that the ritual procession for Dionysus was part of a wide-ranging attempt at bolstering Athenian imperialistic policy through integrating cult practices from elsewhere.[98] It is possible that this nexus of religion and politics was initiated by Peisistratus, whose scheme to regain the tyranny of Athens through mocking up a human avatar of Athena in procession drew Herodotus' scorn, yet seems to have worked.[99] Emotions elicited by tragedy, such as pity and fear, have a central place in political statements within the *Oresteia*. They have strong analogues in Athenian political discourse, but the use of pity for suppliants and fear as a means of social control may be widely shared across forms of government, and not a fundamental feature of democracy.[100]

---

[94] It is worth noting, with Denniston and Page (1957), ix–x, that Aeschylus was born under tyranny, and his early years were marked by political assassination, the expulsion of the tyrant, the defeat of the Spartan king who had entered Athens, and the development of the structures of democracy.

[95] Goldhill (1987), (1990b), and (2000); Sommerstein (1987); Wilson (1997); Longo (1990); Griffin (1998); Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 67–140, 231–51; Slater (2007); and Roselli (2011). *Contra* Griffith (1995) and (1998); and Carter (2007), 35–43.

[96] See Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981) 1.xxix–xxxiv; Gould (1996); Goldhill (1996) and (2012), 166–200; and Foley (2003). Note that in the *Oresteia* none of the three Choruses are comprised of democratic citizens: the Elders of Argos in the *Agamemnon* are the closest, the Slave Women of the *Choephoroi* do not show democratic features, and the Erinyes in the *Eumenides* are least of all concerned with democracy, despite being incorporated into Athens (Chapter 7).

[97] The evidence is again not conclusive for these other features in Aeschylus' time: on the generals, see *Cim.* 8.7–9; and cf. Goldhill (1987), 60; on the *ephebes* and the choral dances, see Winkler (1990); criticized by Wilson (1997); and Lech (2009).

The conjunction of religion and militarism in the festival under strict *polis* control provides crucial background elements for understanding the *Oresteia*'s political engagements. The focus on positive ceremonies in Athens and the procession that closes the play may be understood as staging the festival within itself. Yet the fictional ceremony also displaces elements of the real one: the Athens of the play is a mythic double of the real city, Athena is made the founder of both festival and Athenian law, and the divinities whom the festival honors are not Dionysus but chthonic demons.[101] Since the *Oresteia* links the Erinyes to the *Semnai Theai*, divinities with their own procession, the Dionysian tragic festival that contains democratic features is no longer a precise referent, but only a general parallel to the trilogy's closing rituals.[102] Thus, from the start, it is worth examining political and political-religious ideas in the *Oresteia* from a perspective broader than the study of Athenian politics or democratic ideology.[103]

---

[98] See esp. Kurke (2013), with bibliography. Cf. Goldhill (1987), 59; and Sourvinou-Inwood (2000), 18–19.

[99] On Peisistratus and Athena, Hdt. 1.60 and *Ath. Pol.* 14.4. On the introduction of festivals by Peisistratus, see Griffith (1995), 116; and Kurke (2013), 148–9.

[100] Rosenbloom (2012) discusses political passages from drama that demonstrate pity and fear, with analogous Athenian political language drawn mostly from the orators. He never, however, proves the assertion that these are specifically *democratic* emotions. Cf. MacLeod (1982), 144.

[101] On the varied relationships of Athens to Athena, in myth, art, and political discourse, see Loraux (1993) and Kennedy (2009).

[102] On the links between the Erinyes and the *Semnai Theai*, associated with the Areopagus, see Brown (1984), esp. 262–3. For further challenges to understanding the religious and political effects of tragedies on the city, see Parker (1997); and Sourvinou-Inwood (2003).

[103] Especially important is the debate between Griffith (1995) and Goldhill (1986), (1990b), and (2000), 34–56. Goldhill challenges any single notion of ideology, especially stemming from the festival context and the notion of tragedy itself. He concludes by drawing attention not only to the ambiguities of the *Oresteia*'s political content in context, but to the very issue of critical investment in judgments about ambiguity and closure. Further, wide-ranging critiques that draw attention to issues of ideology, such as Zeitlin (1978), are valuable for understanding the *Oresteia*'s place in

The *Oresteia* certainly alludes to contemporary events, yet their place in its political message, if any, is disputed. The trilogy contains transparent references to Athens fighting in Egypt and in what historians retrospectively refer to as the First Peloponnesian War.[104] Contemporary inter*polis* relations, too, are the obvious reason for the move of Agamemnon and Orestes to Argos (Chapter 5). Scholarship has analyzed references in the *Oresteia* as a reaction to recent, contentious democratic reforms against aristocratic privilege, which led to civil strife. Within the *Oresteia*'s mythical-historical narrative, however, the Athenian government is contrasted with Argos, a monarchy. That is, the warnings against civic infighting, *stasis*, are clear, yet Aeschylus' references to internal Athenian politics are ambiguous.[105]

The reform of the Areopagus, hinted at in the *Eumenides*, serves as a prime example. Several aspects of the trilogy's ending seem to be a reaction to the recent turmoil. Historically, Solon transformed the Areopagus from a homicide court to a council of ex-archons.[106] He claimed that it would be "a second anchor" for the state.[107] It is thought that part of the function of these officials was to keep the current archons in line during their year of office.[108] Over time, the Areopagus became a seat of aristocratic influence with wide-ranging powers, through its mandate to "preserve the *nomoi.*" Ephialtes in 461/2 (only a few years before the staging of the *Oresteia*) contentiously reduced its power back to judging homicide cases and prosecuted its members, leading to further turmoil and possibly to his assassination.[109] In the *Eumenides*, by contrast, the institution is divinely mandated. Athena establishes the Areopagus under the rubric of a new "law for all time" and declares that it ought to inspire fear (*Eum.* 690–708). It is represented as the place for men "without fault" chosen, in the first instance, by Athena (482a[475]–84); it is not selected from the ex-archons, nor by vote of the *demos*, nor by lot. Aeschylus thus leaves room for the Areopagus to be identified with an aristocratic (or at least nondemocratic) bulwark for the current laws and against any change whatsoever, but,

---

political thought. Extending Vernant's theories, Zeitlin argues that myth is the unrecognized, unacknowledged legitimizing force for social and political ideology, beyond the psychic forces that compel its creation, which are in dynamic tension with collective ideology, 119.

[104] Sommerstein (2010a), 283–5.

[105] See Meier (1993), 87–9; and Sommerstein (2010a), 285–9.

[106] For a reconstruction of the functions of the Areopagus over time, see Zelnik-Abramovitz (2011).

[107] Along with the Council of 400 that took up matters before the assembly deliberated, Plutarch *Sol.* 19.2.

[108] Wallace (2007), 66–7.

[109] Ephialtes was killed (as we understand it) for attempting to improve the relative status of the *demos* and reform systems that the aristocracy was seen to control, on which see Cartledge (2016), 85–6.

again, this is only hinted at.[110] It is impossible to reconstruct his affiliation or a partisan message from the *Oresteia*.[111]

The Areopagus example illustrates that instead of taking a specific stance in contemporary affairs, tragedy addresses them indirectly. The distance in mythical time and the lack of direct references to contemporary politics and public figures that are prevalent in comedy appears to be (with some exceptions) a tragic convention. Tragedy might be said to appeal only to general political principles, such as civic unity. Yet since tragic language, themes, and action also pose challenges to such general principles (including, as we will see in Chapter 7, civic unity), one must continually refer first of all to internal context. By necessity, therefore, this book greatly restricts its treatment of the historical aspects of the allusions in the *Oresteia*. Similarly, the democratic "ideology" of the tragic festival, itself always ambivalent, will be understood as the background for a set of themes in the play and the closing procession. Politics in this study thus refers to the themes related to the Trojan War, the *poleis* Argos and Athens in mythical time, and allusions to contemporary democratic institutions. Additionally, it refers to explicit statements about governing from rulers in the trilogy, general injunctions to humanity from the Erinyes, and Athena's foundation of a new law.

It is precisely these political aspects that afterlife references can both enrich and challenge. The destiny of *poleis* is at stake in a number of depictions of the beyond: postmortem punishment for those who instigate war, the honor or dishonor of rulers in the underworld, monarchical succession related to the status of the dead, and the political influence of ghosts and heroes.[112] The Choruses of the trilogy declare that war, *coups d'état*, and blood-spilling in general are judged by chthonic powers. Afterlife ideas, expressed or enacted, give new perspectives on the political choices of individuals, rulers, cities, warfare, divine justice, and the Athenocentric ending.[113] The postmortem existence of Orestes and

---

[110] The identification of the Erinyes with older forces parallels an argument that the reform of the Areopagus was in fact a restoration of its original function, see Meier (1993), 110.

[111] Scholars have taken both sides concerning Aeschylus' support of Ephialtes' reforms, with no consensus. On these debates and the *Oresteia* as a general reaction to civil strife, see further Sommerstein (2010a), 284–9, and (2010c).

[112] Although there are no examples of political martyrdom *per se* in the *Oresteia*, several characters rhetorically express desire for death in conjunction with political attacks, on which see Chapter 5. On the intersection of ethics, politics, religion, and the afterlife in martyrdom, see, for example, van Henten and Avemarie (2002); Castelli (2004); Devji (2005); and Middleton (2011).

[113] Athena's insistence on a new law in the ending of the trilogy has led to numerous discussions of theodicy in the *Oresteia*, see Kitto (1961), 90–5; Gagarin (1976), 66–73; Rosenmeyer (1982), 259–368;

Clytemnestra, as well as the ethical punishment by Hades, add layers to the heavy emphasis on the individual's action in tragedy as intrinsically opposed to the state, which is the topic of much philosophizing about tragedy.[114] In analyzing each, this book strives to maintain the tensions between the power of tragedy's normative pull as elevated public discourse and its subversion of widely accepted political notions.

## Order of Chapters

The ever-increasing prominence of afterlife themes in the *Oresteia* allows this book to address them in a natural order. The first two chapters thus analyze death as closure, along with the first, barest allusions to possible continuation after death. Chapter 1 addresses the Herald's remarkable focus on his own death at home and the ethos it implies. The chapter then turns to his repeated attempts to suppress speech and thought about the dead of the Trojan War, which lead to twists of language and untenable political positions. The chapter also includes the first reference to Hades, but in an entirely restricted sense.

Chapter 2 analyzes the Chorus of the *Agamemnon*, who treat death as an absolute end to suffering even more explicitly than the Herald does. Throughout their songs, however, they speculate on a variety of continuations of the self, including brief allusions to a resurrection of the dead and to punishment in the afterlife. Together, these two chapters provide the background for the rest of the trilogy by focusing on characters who lack access to the beyond, but who demonstrate multiple attitudes to death and the afterlife. What are only hints in their scenes continually grow in importance as the trilogy progresses.

The next two chapters concern characters who more actively consider the afterlife, with powerful implications for themselves. Chapter 3 provides a new perspective on Cassandra, the oft-discussed prophetess facing a foretold doom. Cassandra briefly and ambiguously refers to herself singing prophecies in Hades. Attention to this passage leads to questions that have never been asked: How would her continuity in the underworld transform consideration of her predicted death? Does it circumvent Apollo's curse or reinforce it? The notion of fate, built up by Aeschylus throughout the scene, is at stake if Cassandra continues to exist beyond her foretold demise.

---

Goldhill (1986), 35–9; Solmsen (1995), 178–224; Bees (2009), 157–259; Parker (2009); and Sommerstein (2010a), 193–203.

[114] Schmidt (2001), 101–2, 112.

Chapter 4 focuses on the multiple relationships to the dead Agamemnon that his mourners create in the *Choephoroi*. The laments of the Chorus of Slave Women, Electra, and Orestes intertwine diverse possibilities for Agamemnon's afterlife, including appeals to his spirit and even attempts to raise him from the dead. As discussed briefly in this Introduction, the Chorus also depict Agamemnon in Hades, with the implication that his current dishonor might be reversed by ethical and political action. Specifically, they call for vengeance on his behalf, which eventually constitutes a second *coup d'état*. Together these chapters begin to expose a pattern in the *Oresteia* that has garnered little attention: over the course of the trilogy what seemed to only be a personal consideration, the individual afterlife, becomes ever more politically significant.

The next two chapters pick up on this pattern with characters who straddle life and death. Chapter 5 analyzes heroes as afterlife figures of worship in the *Oresteia*, which has not been the subject of sustained study. The only example of the word "hero" in the Aeschylean corpus occurs in the *Agamemnon*. Yet both Agamemnon and Orestes transform into afterlife figures to whom supernatural powers are attributed. Both of these mythical figures received geographically specific rituals in contemporary Greek religion. Within the *Oresteia*, however, their roles shift significantly between life and death, demonstrating the unexpected political-theological use of the afterlife as staged before Athenian spectators.

Chapter 6 examines the dynamics of Clytemnestra's Ghost, who emphasizes her own dishonor in Hades in order to call for the Erinyes to take vengeance on her living son. This afterlife figure is thus a direct instigator of dramatic action, for the Erinyes' pursuit of Orestes structures the plot of the *Eumenides*. I will argue that Clytemnestra's Ghost challenges normative ethical thought through themes unique to her postmortem reappearance and continuation in the underworld.

Chapter 7 analyzes the universal judgment of the dead by Hades. Whereas other Choruses only hint at it and characters on the whole ignore it, the Erinyes present it as a divine revelation. I will argue that afterlife punishment for living deeds forces reconsideration of the ethical calculations of characters and thus gives a new perspective on the ethical points made by the trilogy as a whole. Hades' punishment also has unexplored political consequences, since it continues the Erinyes' check on transgressive deeds even after these divinities subordinate themselves to Athens. A contrast with Athena's law and collective vision for Athens closes the chapter. I argue that Hades' continuing, alternative justice deeply complicates her rewriting of human politics and values.

Finally, the Conclusions chapter links insights from each earlier chapter to demonstrate the layered and unique poetics of the beyond in the *Oresteia*. It draws out the sophisticated revaluations that occur when human life is extended past its normally understood ending. These possibilities beyond death present new perspectives and challenges for some of the trilogy's most widely debated ethical dilemmas and its political resolution.

CHAPTER I

# *The Herald of the* Agamemnon

## *Accounting the Dead*

### Introduction

The arrival of the Herald marks a transition from the world of war to the anxious anticipation at the palace. He breaks the impasse between Clytemnestra's descriptions of the fall of Troy and the Elders' doubt. Before the Herald speaks, the Elders set up a simple dichotomy of positive and negative news, corresponding to the truth or falsehood of Clytemnestra's statements. Either they or Clytemnestra (editors are divided) emphasize that his human testimony can be interrogated, in opposition to the speechless signal fires from which the queen claims her knowledge.[1] This prelude primes the audience to expect a clear-cut report of the war's conclusion from him, accompanied by the appropriate emotional response.[2] As has sometimes been noticed, the Herald, while repeatedly claiming that he is attempting to fit his message of victory into a positive framework, is aware that many of the events he has experienced fall into the category of evils.[3] These he would rather mute. However, cracks appear during his narrations of the expedition's victory, return, and glory earned; the horrors of war and shipwreck seep into his speech. The Herald's attempts to annul negative forces (which nevertheless arise) are especially evident in his problematic references to his own death and those of his fallen companions.

---

[1] *Ag.* 498–9, which the codices and the OCT attribute to Clytemnestra, but many other editors to the Chorus. Cf. Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc. On the epistemological issues in this passage, see Goldhill (1986), 17–18.

[2] As Judet de La Combe (2001), 1.169, points out, the Herald's speeches never address the dispute over knowledge, only raising further issues with his tale of the shipwreck, on which see below, pp. 47–8.

[3] See his later rhetorical question: "How am I to mix good things with the bad ones?" πῶς κεδνὰ τοῖς κακοῖσι συμμείξω, 648. Yoon (2012), 48–51, claims that the Herald has an unconscious relationship to his bad news. While it is certain his words exceed his intended meaning, he also makes statements, including this one, that explicitly refer to the negative aspects of the expedition.

The Herald, this chapter will demonstrate, creates a set of unexpected relationships to these personal and public deaths. Since he is an anonymous character, only appearing in one scene, at times his individual perspective has been ignored.[4] At other times, he has been understood as an everyman.[5] This has led to normalizing his oftentimes unusual statements and reducing their potential impact. Yet we will see that the Herald is far more personalized than other messenger characters in Aeschylus, especially in his language concerning death at war, at sea, and at home.[6] Moreover, the implications of his references to his own demise and burial resonate with the Herald's treatment of the war dead later in his scene in ways that have not been explored.

This chapter will first examine how his ethos emerges in relation to the types of death he has avoided and to the one to which he looks forward.[7] The next two sections turn to his attempts to remove the Trojan War dead from any consideration by the living. Lastly, we will see how his language represents the working of unseen forces in life and how these are connected to divinities of the afterlife. These themes in the Herald's scene form a human, nonheroic background for the supernatural afterlives that develop so strongly in the remainder of the trilogy.

## Return to a Tomb

The Herald's arrival speeches are marked by several surprising turns toward his own death, the import of which has been minimized in most readings. There has been a tendency to view him at first as a straightforwardly positive character, whose language is altered by the responses of the Chorus to become ever darker and more portentous.[8] It is true that the Chorus react to his statements with unspecific hints of the baneful situation in Argos and sometimes twist his meaning (542–50). Upon examination, however, it becomes evident that the Herald creates a thoroughly individual relationship to death that precedes their promptings.

---

[4] Literature about herald and messenger speeches in tragedy has tended to discuss their authority and conventionality, as well as, more recently, emphasizing the undercutting role of language. See Heiden (1989), esp. 48–64; and Barrett (2002), which only briefly mentions the Herald of the *Agamemnon*. Scodel (2006), 115–21, is an exception, focusing on the use of the memory of the Trojan War in political speech and analyzing the Herald's control over the war narrative.

[5] On the Herald as a "plain man," who would have spoken directly to the experience of nonelite audience members, see Fraenkel (1950), II.293–4; cf. Denniston and Page (1957), xxx.

[6] Although the Herald is unnamed in the *Oresteia*, the hypothesis to the *Agamemnon* names him Talthybius, after Agamemnon's herald in the *Iliad*. This is possibly influenced by that character's appearance in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, which are set in Troy. See Garvie (1986), xxii–xxiii, for the contemporary visual representations of Talthybius and his possible role in Stesichorus' lost *Oresteia*.

[7] On the ethos of a character as one way of interpreting ethics in tragedy, see the Introduction.

[8] Indeed, interpreters have often taken the Herald – who does announce victory – to display "unqualified optimism," Fraenkel (1950), II.293; or a "futile cheerfulness," Denniston and Page

Immediately upon his entrance, the Herald uses several positively valenced words, hailing his paternal country. This language sufficiently indicates his gratefulness to be home and seems to mark him as a character who will lighten the ominous tone.[9] Yet even before he prays to the gods, as is conventional upon return from war, the Herald subjoins the issue of his own demise (506–7):[10]

> οὐ γάρ ποτ᾽ ηὔχουν τῇδ᾽ ἐν Ἀργείᾳ χθονὶ
> θανὼν μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος.
>
> For I would have never said that, having died in this Argive land,
> I would gain a share of a most dear grave.[11]

The Herald's immediate mention of death and the addition of a desire for a "most dear grave" signal more than relief at homecoming. This is evident from a contrast to the Messenger of the *Persians*. That less defined character merely declares that he has survived to see the day of his return, beyond even his hopes (ἀέλπτως, *Pers.* 261). The specific focus on burial is thus an added element in the later *Agamemnon*, which individualizes the speaking character.[12]

Moreover, the Herald soon makes an even more abrupt pivot to his own death. He responds to the Elders' greeting (χαῖρε, *khaire*, *Ag.* 538) cheerfully enough, but with a striking addendum (539):

> χαίρω· τὸ τεθνάναι δ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽ ἀντερῶ θεοῖς.
>
> I *am* happy (*khairō*)! As to dying, I will no longer oppose the gods.[13]

---

(1957), xxx. Conacher (1987), 25, claims it is "the Chorus who gradually infect the cheerful Herald with their own mood of gloom."

[9] E.g. Fraenkel (1950), II.293, "He thoroughly enjoys being alive and safely back after so many toils and perils." Cf. Medda (2017), ad loc.

[10] For conventional prayers upon return to the homeland, see Fraenkel (1950), ad 503.

[11] See Medda (2017), ad loc., on the use of αὐχέω, often translated "boast," in negative phrases meaning only an unmarked "said." *Contra* Fraenkel (1950), ad 1497, who has it as a verb of thinking, not speaking, in Aeschylus, especially with an infinitive.

[12] In fact, the Herald of the *Agamemnon* later contrasts himself as a bearer of good news to a herald announcing disaster to a city (638–47). It is as though Aeschylus were alluding to the Messenger of the *Persians* (249–514), although there may well have been others in the lost plays.

[13] Translation as per Headlam and Thomson (1966), who prefer, however, the emendation τεθναίην δ᾽. κτλ. Against this emendation, see Fraenkel (1950), ad loc., who daggers the line – agreeing with

At first glance, his words seem to merely indicate the level of his joy, as rhetorical exaggeration: "Now I could die happy!"[14] The phrase would then simply indicate the great relief the Herald feels at no longer having to struggle to survive. Yet the reception of the internal audience demonstrates the significance of his word choice. After ten lines of stichomythia, the Argive Elders move from their joy at welcoming the army to a pointed return to the Herald's mention of dying (550):

> ὡς νῦν, τὸ σὸν δή, καὶ θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις.
>
> As you said just now, even to die is a great boon (*kharis*).

The fact that they are responding to the Herald's second reference to his own death renders incomplete those interpretations that posit a simple dichotomy between a lighthearted Herald and morbidly anxious Elders.

Deliberately echoing the Herald, the Elders even magnify dying itself into a positive (*kharis*).[15] The implication, built up throughout the earlier scenes of the *Agamemnon* and pervading the Elders' speech, is that the political situation in Argos is so repugnant that they would gladly escape it through the repose offered by death.[16] The recurrent dynamic of the Elders twisting the Herald's comments to their own meanings, of which this is only one example, ought not to blind us to the ways each of these statements characterizes the speakers' attitudes to death. The Elders' rhetoric of dying as an evasion of living evils might be inconspicuous, considering their repeated references to their senescence and death.[17] The Herald, however, is marked as a character of army age.[18] Civilian death ought not to be his immediate concern; his rhetoric makes it so. The unanticipated pattern of the Herald harping on his own demise upon arrival home requires, and rewards, examination.

We may clarify the Herald's words through contrasting the two other instances in the trilogy where someone announces a willingness to die after an extreme undertaking. Each is the exclamation of a character central to

---

Verrall (1904) concerning its hopelessness – but accepts the sense. For the latest on the textual debate, see Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc.; and Medda (2017), ad loc.

[14] For earlier examples of the theme, see *Od.* 7.224–5; *Hy. Aphro.* 153 ff.; cf. Garvie (1986), ad *Cho.* 438, with examples from later literature. For the objection to interpreting in their specificity lines that touch on commonplaces in Greek literature, see the Introduction.

[15] Note the similarity between χαίρω· τὸ τεθνάναι, 539, and θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις, 550.

[16] On death as oblivion in tragedy, see Martin (2020), 34, 37–45.

[17] For the numerous relationships to death in the Elders' speeches and songs, see Chapter 2.

[18] Both in his words and, presumably, costume. On the construction of character through costume, see Wyles (2011), esp. 53, 117–18, 133–4.

the trilogy's plot. First, Aegisthus declares at the end of his gloating introductory speech (*Ag.* 1610–11):

> οὕτω καλὸν δὴ καὶ τὸ κατθανεῖν ἐμοί,
> ἰδόντα τοῦτον τῆς Δίκης ἐν ἕρκεσιν.
>
> Even dying is therefore noble for me,
> having seen this man in the nets of Justice.

Similarly, Orestes, before he undertakes to murder his mother, announces (*Cho.* 438):

> ἔπειτ᾽ ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμαν.[19]
>
> When I have removed [her from life], let me perish!

One could assimilate these two passages to the Herald's earlier example and label all three as merely rhetorical amplifications of the greatness of a particular event, which overwhelms one's life to the point that one wishes for a quiet death. This is certainly part of the meaning of each. However, there is a vast asymmetry between these two characters and the Herald. Aegisthus and Orestes are each concerned with a grim vengeance that consumes their lives. They each plot and murder, and the death of each is meaningful on a narrative level. Aegisthus' reference to dying ironically foreshadows his own murder. Orestes' is followed by having to fight for his life. The result in Orestes' case, moreover, is not restful oblivion, but an afterlife existence as a hero. These factors add layers of complexity and significance to those characters' rhetorical wishes for death (Chapter 5). The Herald's statements about dying, by contrast, come from a character who neither acts within the trilogy nor is heard from again.

One must therefore examine the Herald's language further to understand how its nuances demonstrate his values. Having just returned from a ten-year war and avoided shipwreck, he closely links his homecoming and his tomb. Interpretations for μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος (literally "to have a share of a most dear grave," 507) include joining with "all those who die in the home country," Fraenkel (1950), and partaking of a "beloved family tomb," Sommerstein (2008b). In either case, the verb μετέχω (*metekhō*, which often means to "partake of something in common"), the partitive idea in τάφου μέρος, "share of a grave," and the φίλος (*philos*) root of φιλτάτου all indicate that the Herald looks forward to reentering the familial and social realms he left behind.[20] Thus his words might resonate with the same pathos as the exclamation of shipwrecked Odysseus (*Od.* 7.222–5): "having seen my home . . . let life leave me!" By contrast, the Herald is not lost at sea, pledging his life for the barest return home; he has already arrived safely. His reintegration is thus more analogous to Odysseus' burial of an oar far inland, a symbol of the alternate deaths he has eluded.[21] The Herald's language is less metaphorical; it is not the oar that will be buried. He thus represents his reintegration only through his tomb, not a living reunion with family, the extensive theme at the end of the *Odyssey*. In fact, nothing in the Herald's language about himself pertains to the benefits of life that other characters who complete a *nostos* from the Trojan War (such as Odysseus, Agamemnon, or Orestes) strive to regain: control of a house, companionship of family, and children for continuity of the line (cf. *Cho.* 757–8; Chapter 5). He depicts family and community only through their loss.[22]

---

[19] The text follows Garvie (1986). The OCT's addition of Page's <σ'> would not affect the interpretation.

It is thus significant that the Herald characterizes himself as having actively denied death in the past. The negative and double negative ("not ever," οὐ . . . ποτ᾽, 506; "no longer will I deny," οὐκέτ᾽ ἀντερῶ, 539) in these phrases intimate his previous fear of death abroad. His language hints at the hurdles a soldier in an extended overseas war must overcome to achieve even the least and last rite of civilian life, interment at home. By contrast to Aegisthus and Orestes, in the Herald's mouth the rhetorical wish for death indicates his lack of agency within the momentous events into which he was drawn. In countermanding (ἀντερῶ, literally, "I will speak against") the gods, the Herald characterizes as a speech-act his previous endeavor to ward off death. Yet upon his return, he abrogates the same denial of his end. In a poetic juxtaposition, this second speech-act, that of surrender, evokes externally determined fate while simultaneously emphasizing a decision. Having evaded violent annihilation, invoking peaceful death is the Herald's rhetorical assertion of control over his life.

The Herald's language of return contains further negations that can more precisely locate his values. He mentions the land five times within his first seven lines, with special emphasis on it being paternal and

---

[20] Although τάφος may mean funeral rites (LSJ A), in Aeschylus it seems to always refer to the grave or tomb itself: *Pers.* 684, 686; *Ag.* 1311; *Cho.* 108, 168, 336, 352, 488, 501, 540, 894; *Eum.* 598, 767; *Sept.* 914 (1037 and 1046 may refer to the funeral rites, in the portion many scholars suspect to be a later addition, following the *Antigone*'s concern with those rites).

[21] *Od.* 11.121–36, 23.263–87. On the whole range of devices in the *Odyssey* for reintegrating Odysseus, see e.g. Segal (1962) and (1967).

[22] Similarly, later in his speech the Herald declares that if Menelaus is alive, it means Zeus "does not yet wish to eradicate his stock" (Διὸς οὔπω θέλοντος ἐξαναλῶσαι γένος, *Ag.* 677–8).

Argive.[23] By implication, he thus links his homeland burial to the two alternatives he has avoided, namely the loss of the body at sea and the grave on the foreign battlefield. His ascription of both the storm and the war to divine forces allows for an inclusive ambiguity in his reference to denying death to the gods. Since these two types of death abroad diverge in their personal and ritual meanings, it is worthwhile to examine each in turn.

Taking the most recently avoided alternate death first, the Herald alludes to shipwreck in his opening lines with the metaphorical "although so many hopes of mine have been broken" (πολλῶν ῥαγεισῶν ἐλπίδων, 505).[24] He describes with great pathos the storm that shattered the other returning ships (648–73), including the sickening image of the sea "blossoming with corpses" (659). The shipwreck narrative contains the first instance of the name Hades in the trilogy: The Herald relates that those on his ship were spared with the phrase "having fled a watery Hades" (Ἅιδην πόντιον πεφευγότες, 667).[25] This mention of the underworld god has an outsized importance in teasing out the meaning of death at sea for the Herald. Commentators have generally considered it merely a synonym for death. Yet the Herald's earlier emphasis on the land and tomb at home raises the question of whether he is hinting that drowning would entail a different "Hades," that the loss of the corpse at sea would be a hurdle to entering the underworld proper.

Death at sea was dreaded throughout Greek literature. It is terrifying for the individual not only for the immediate horror of drowning but also for the imagined devouring of the corpse by underwater creatures.[26] Odysseus himself vividly fears drowning (e.g. *Od.* 5.400–50), yet his sorrow at the perdition of his shipwrecked companions is mentioned only in passing (12.417–19). It receives far less emphasis than, for instance, the threefold lament for those killed by the Ciconians in battle (9.62–6). For kin, the loss of the body at sea might lead to the uncertainty over death that Telemachus in the *Odyssey* suffers concerning his father, and it is the main thread of the Herald's lengthy response as to the fate of Menelaus (*Ag.* 617–79).

---

[23] ἰὼ πατρῷον οὖδας Ἀργείας χθονός, 503; Ἀργείᾳ χθονί, 506; νῦν χαῖρε μὲν χθών, 508; χώρας, 509. Verrall (1904) followed by Fraenkel (1950), ad 503, imagines the Herald throwing himself on the ground as the physical correlative of his words.

[24] Either alluding to the breaking of the ships themselves, as Sommerstein (2008b) translates, or to the snapping of mooring or anchoring cables, as Fraenkel (1950) interprets. On hopes as anchors or cables, see Headlam and Thomson (1966), ad loc.

[25] It is one of seven uses of the name Hades in the *Oresteia*. The other five in the *Agamemnon* also principally refer to death rather than the divinity or a place in the afterlife (1115, 1235, 1291, 1387, 1528). However, on the double valence of Cassandra's uses of it, see Chapter 3. The exception is the single, crucial mention of Hades in *Eum.* 273, on which see Chapter 7.

[26] A fate similar to the constant Homeric threat of dogs and birds eating the unburied battlefield corpses, Vermeule (1979), 12. Cf. *Supp.* 800–1.

The missing corpse meant that a cenotaph was needed to facilitate a burial ritual, with at times a substitute body and a *sēma* (grave marker) for memory.[27] Together, they were intended to strengthen the chances of the dead soul successfully arriving at rest in the underworld despite the loss of the corpse. The burial *ritual* was the differentiating factor, both in practice and in literature. The *Odyssey* contains a number of references to a cenotaph, including one for Odysseus.[28] Yet the *Odyssey* never refers to an inability to gain entrance into the realm of Hades proper for those who are lost at sea. In fact, it pointedly does not differentiate drowning from other types of death in its version of the underworld: Odysseus asks the dead Agamemnon whether he drowned with the ships or died in combat (11.397–403). Neither in the literary-mythical world nor elsewhere is there clear evidence that those who were shipwrecked would suffer a different fate in Hades.[29] Thus the Herald is not clearly referring to a forfeiture of underworld entry through the phrase "a watery Hades." In this instance, it really is a synonym for death. We will see below that this limited reference to Hades is part of a wider pattern in the Herald's speech.

The other death that the Herald has avoided is in the war itself. In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a battlefield death that earns glory is praised rather than feared.[30] The theme occurs within the *Oresteia* when Agamemnon's children wish that he could have died at Troy by the spear.[31] The Herald's emphasis on glory for Agamemnon and the leaders of the war later in his speech (*Ag.* 574–81) demonstrates this set of values. Yet the Herald's language about himself betrays ideas antipodal to most of the warrior elite. His avidness for sharing a tomb with kin is a subtle repudiation of glorious death in combat (in which, as a herald, he presumably would not have engaged).

---

[27] See Vermeule (1979), 45, on the substitute body and *sēma* as memorial, and 187–8, on the cenotaph; cf. Garland (1985), 102, 165; Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 121, 128; and Johnston (1999), 122.

[28] Athena tells Telemachus he might have to erect a cenotaph for Odysseus, referred to as a *sēma* (φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν σῆμα, *Od.* 1.290–2, cf. 220–3). Menelaus erects one to Agamemnon, referred to as a tomb or mound (τύμβον, ἵν᾽ ἄσβεστον κλέος εἴη, 4.583–4).

[29] The notion, for example, that the Athenian *stratēgoi* of Arginusae were executed in 406 BCE because the bodies left at sea would prevent the dead sailors from entering into the underworld is supported by neither Xen. *Hell.* 1.7 nor Diod. Sic. 13.97–101. Loraux (1986), 18, attributes the Athenian anger to the casualties losing the honor of public burial; cf. Plato, *Menex.* 243c6–8.

[30] For the Homeric theme, see e.g. *Il.* 12.310–28 and *Od.* 1.230–43, in which Telemachus wishes that Odysseus had died in this way rather than having disappeared. Cf. Schein (1984), 67–84, 186–8; and Vernant (1991), esp. 55–7.

[31] For the theme of death at war for Agamemnon's glory, see *Cho.* 345–74 and Chapters 4 and 5.

Again, the issues of burial and the underworld in his speech can be fruitfully contrasted with their representation in epic. The Herald's nonheroic register is in some ways akin to Elpenor's story in the *Odyssey*. The young man, whose drunken death is entirely overlooked by his companions, cannot enter Hades proper until he is buried. Elpenor's shade, the first soul to appear to Odysseus, is concerned with burial, however, precisely because his corpse lacks it.[32] Even Elpenor desires a miniature *kleos*; beyond the call for Odysseus to remember him long enough to bury him (*Od.* 11.71–2; cf. *Il.* 23.69), Elpenor desires to be objectified through a *sēma*, his oar, by which those in the future may know of him (11.75–9). By contrast, the Herald's concern with his homeland grave is a living one. His family burial would naturally encompass rites to send him to Hades, a grave marker, continued memory, and regular ritual visits. In expressing his desire for burial at home so emphatically, the Herald inserts an implicit challenge to the logic behind a glorious war death, a challenge that will be amplified when he speaks of the casualties themselves.

The Herald, therefore, should not be considered merely a freely speaking, joyful messenger or a character who does not know the meaning of his own words in the context of the situation in Argos. Although his message is of victory and his scene contains strong elements of irony, his concern with personal death distinguishes him from other herald and messenger characters in the extant plays of Aeschylus. His phrasing hints at a need for closure that individuates him as a soldier returning from traumatic war and connects him to the *nostos* of Odysseus. It also foreshadows the vengeance that more central characters take. His words, in contrast to theirs, sketch out the attitude of a powerless individual swept up in prodigious events he cannot affect. The Herald's focus on a homeland grave has a specificity of its own, in that it differentiates his fate from the drowning and battlefield deaths that his companions suffered. Whereas a grave at home is far preferable to a lost body at sea, the Herald never makes reference to afterlife differentiation, reinforcing his rhetorical focus on closure at death in the personal part of his scene. Moreover, the relief at not having a glorious death abroad inserts a nonelite perspective into the discourse concerning the Trojan War. Crucially, the Herald's attitude toward his own death affects in unexpected ways the interpretation of his public announcements concerning the war, to which we now turn.

---

[32] *Od.* 11.71–8. On Homeric grave monuments and memorialization, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 108–39.

## Silence about the Dead?

The Herald's official announcement of the end of the Trojan War aims to condition the responses to it.[33] The transition from personal concerns to the official speech about the war has puzzled commentators, for it occurs in direct reply to the Elders' declaration that "even to die would be a great boon."[34] The Herald seems to take their meaning as an expansion to the whole city of his personal relief at the end of the war. This is supported by his immediate remarks. He labels the affair well accomplished (*Ag.* 551) and adds gnomic statements to the effect that over time some things may be said to "fall out well" and others not, for only the gods live a life free of pain (551–4). These insipid truisms on their own could support the reading that the Herald offers the first positive contribution to the trilogy.

In fact, the Herald's public speech contains a set of extreme rhetorical moves in the attempt to minimize the negatives of the war. He follows these aphorisms with a token depiction of the army's suffering at Troy (555–66). It has been noted by many that he never even mentions battle, only the unpleasant camp and sailing conditions. What has not received enough attention is the astounding set of nullifications with which he cuts off his own narrative (*Ag.* 567–73):[35]

τί ταῦτα πενθεῖν δεῖ; παροίχεται πόνος·
παροίχεται δέ, τοῖσι μὲν τεθνηκόσιν
τὸ μήποτ᾽ αὖθις μηδ᾽ ἀναστῆναι μέλειν,
ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς λοιποῖσιν Ἀργείων στρατοῦ
νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, πῆμα δ᾽ οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει.
τί τοὺς ἀναλωθέντας ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν,
τὸν ζῶντα δ᾽ ἀλγεῖν χρὴ τύχης παλιγκότου;

Why is it necessary to mourn these things? The suffering has passed.
It has passed, so that the dead
do not even care to ever rise up again.
But for us, those remaining from the Argive army,
profit has prevailed, and pain does not counterbalance it.

---

[33] On the "official capacity" of the Herald, see Yoon (2012), 48–51. Agamemnon's speech about the war (810–54) follows the Herald's closely, Conacher (1987), 30.

[34] Goldhill (1986), 7, labels it "an extraordinary *non sequitur*" that "seems to stress the uncertainties in the process of communication"; cf. (1984a), 52. Instead, the analysis herein relates the Herald's statement first to his personal relationship to death, discussed above, "Return to a Tomb," and second to his framing of the war dead.

[35] The OCT editors admit uncertainty as to the order of lines and have transposed a number of them in this passage on the basis of "flow of ideas" for the following section. Cf. West (1990), 192–4; and Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 570–2. I have used the OCT text here but have translated verse 569 as though it ends with a period. The order does not affect the argument.

> Why should we reckon those expended in the account,
> and why should the living one grieve over malignant fortune?

At first glance, the Herald's statements fall under the category of prudent speech that he previously articulated. Human affairs contain a mixture of desirable and undesirable outcomes, and one ought not to verbalize evils for fear of provoking pain and pollution.[36] These statements match the introductory characters' emphasis on silence, which creates a foreboding atmosphere in the first part of the *Agamemnon*.[37] This is the central strategy of the passage quoted above. Suffering and death, when described, must be closed off as soon as possible for the reintegration of the living. In his telling, these matters are so painful that they cannot be spoken aloud, so painful that one wishes to lie about them (*Ag.* 620–3). When he speaks, he expresses concern to keep descriptions short (*Ag.* 629). Yet even before this passage, the Herald has begun to speak of adverse outcomes, and eventually, under questioning, the dam bursts. With the lengthy narrative of shipwreck (*Ag.* 648–70), he depicts the corpses floating on the sea. By the end, silence in the service of apotropaic vigilance is discarded.

The pressure not to speak of the worst parts of the war instead deforms into an entirely unexpected stance that the Herald takes throughout, that of excluding the dead from any further consideration. The rhetorical questions in the passage above seem to presuppose that the war dead contribute nothing except anguish. The Herald denies the impetus to "mourn these things" (ταῦτα πενθεῖν, 567). "These things" properly refers to his previous descriptions of mere hardships in the war, pain which has now gone (παροίχεται πόνος, 567). Yet the anadiplosis of παροίχεται (*paroikhetai*, 567, 568) reapplies the notion of closure to the casualties of war. The Herald thus closely links two ideas, the latter of which does not follow from the former: There is no use in lamenting suffering in the past, therefore those who have passed do not concern themselves with the living world. They do not care to return from the dead, as they might in the case of uneasy spirits.[38] The Herald immediately pushes this idea to a further extreme in the last two verses of this passage: Since the end of the war resulted in victory, there is no need for the living to grieve for the dead.[39] He does not replace grieving with remembrance or praise, as epitaphs for the war dead and funeral orations traditionally do.[40] He thus denies them a heroic afterlife in the manner of the war dead of Athens and other states.[41] The Herald goes so far as to claim that the living should not even *account* for the dead. Such a sinister economics deserves further scrutiny.

---

[36] Cf. 551–5, 572 [570], 574, and, more explicitly, 636: "it is not proper to pollute an auspicious day (literally 'a speaking-well day') with evil-announcing tongue," εὔφημον ἦμαρ οὐ πρέπει κακαγγέλῳ γλώσσῃ μιαίνειν. Montiglio (2000), 210–12, addresses the Herald's insistence on ritual silence for fear of pollution, seeing each failure of silence as announcing future misfortune.

[37] The Watchman and Chorus have already promoted a silence of political caution, e.g. *Ag.* 36–9; 498–9, 548; cf. Thalmann (1985b), 228–9; Schenker (1991), 69–71; McClure (1999), 96; Scodel (2006), 123–4; and Nooter (2017), 127–34.

[38] Sommerstein (2008b) gives an alternate translation of 568–9: "for the dead, it is so thoroughly past that they don't even have to worry about reveille any more." Whereas "reveille" as a translation for

## The Expended Dead and the Glory of the Living

At first glance, the Herald's auditing seems dispassionate, for he closely conjoins words of balance (ἀντιρρέπει, 571), expenditure (ἀναλωθέντας, 572), and financial calculation (ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν, 572). Specifically, the Herald strikes from the loss column all emotional suffering (πενθεῖν, 567; πόνος, 567; πῆμα, 571; ἀλγεῖν, 573). Instead, he insists that for the survivors, "profit" (τὸ κέρδος, *kerdos*, 571) preponderates over pain (πῆμα δ' οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει, 571).[42] Therefore the war would be entirely positive if only one should forget all its casualties and focus on its benefits.[43]

Audiences must again be on guard, as always with positive language in tragedy: "Profit" (*kerdos*) – in the context of war, especially – is seldom an innocent term.[44] Scholars, in the debates concerning the authenticity of the Herald's description of the destruction of Trojan temples (527, on which more below, p. 46–7) sometimes link it to Clytemnestra's

---

ἀναστῆναι can work in a military context (for ἀνίστημι as "waking up," see e.g. *Il.* 10.32), it does not seem to be the primary meaning in this passage. Casualties never need concern themselves with further military duty, whether the war is won or lost. The Herald is specifically referring to victory dampening their concern with the living world. Nevertheless, we should leave room for the ambiguity on the local level, as discussed in the Introduction.

[39] See Medda (2017), ad 568–74; and Judet de La Combe (2001), 1.209–10.

[40] E.g. Simonides 531.3, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνᾶστις, ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος. Cf. Currie (2005), 91–2. On the theme of suppressing lament, especially in favor of praise, see Loraux (1986), 44–50; and Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 192–3.

[41] Loraux (1987), 1–2, emphasizes that in instances of the Athenian funeral oration, the city itself gains glory *through* the praise of the dead, precisely the opposite of the dynamic here; on the public burial and heroization of the war dead, see further the Introduction and Chapter 5.

[42] Scodel (2006), 119–21, suggests a general connection between the accounting language of this passage and an attempt to exclude the very suffering the Herald describes from the memory (or "master narrative") of the Trojan War.

[43] On this passage one may again quote Fraenkel (1950) for a contrast: "Hitherto there has been heard no utterance of assured confidence . . . only the Herald can utter words of joyful satisfaction." Kitto (1961), 73, is more distrustful of the positive valence and closure offered in this speech: "The Herald, like the Watchman, is profoundly glad to be rid of it all. They all suffered; many are dead. But victory has come! – Victory being another of the false lights that illuminate the whole trilogy."

[44] See Seaford (1998) and (2012), 196–205.

premonitory language concerning this same event (338–40).[45] *Kerdos* provides a second, foreboding linguistic resonance between the two speakers. For the issue of profit from war is at the heart of Clytemnestra's suggestion that disaster might enmesh the victorious Greeks (*Ag*. 341–2):

> ἔρως δὲ μή τις πρότερον ἐμπίπτῃ στρατῷ
> πορθεῖν ἃ μὴ χρή, κέρδεσιν νικωμένους·
>
> Only let no desire (*erōs*) first fall on the army
> to plunder what they should not, conquered by profit (*kerdos*).

Clytemnestra predicts a scenario, later found to be true, in which the living bring destruction down on their own heads, ambushed by their own *erōs* and defeated by profit (κέρδεσιν νικωμένους, *kerdesin nikōmenous*).[46] Clytemnestra's words reveal the tension between the unmarked use of *kerdos* to mean "beneficial gain" and the charged signification of her use of it as "*desire* for gain."[47] The Herald uses the same combination of verb and noun (νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, *nika to kerdos*, *Ag.* 571) to make profit the justification for the war and the reason for revoking any consideration of the dead.

There is a further, crucial resonance in Clytemnestra's earlier passage, as she invokes the possibility of the dead being a cause of harm to the living. Her warning that if the army should return without offense, "the pain (πῆμα) of the dead might be awakened" (346) is a double entendre. Within the immediate context of the expedition, these are the war dead.[48] The reference then is to the Trojans, whose city and gods would be dishonored in this scenario, or the Greek dead, whose suffering, angry families at Argos will soon be invoked. However, with Clytemnestra's language, the dead Iphigeneia is never far away. It is in fact the dead daughter who is the immediate cause of Agamemnon's death. Since Clytemnestra has already uttered her warnings, the Herald's vocabulary of profit at the expense of the dead should not be understood without this set of sinister undertones.[49]

---

[45] E.g. Goldhill (1986), 6–8, contrasts the Herald's "optimism in the end of toil and in his role as simple message conveyor" and ironic unawareness of the links and ramification of his own words with Clytemnestra's "web of dissimulation and deceit, manipulating language as an opportunity for furthering her plot."

[46] Echoes of Clytemnestra's use of *erōs* can also be found in the exchange between the Chorus and Herald: *Ag.* 540, 544. On the erotics of Clytemnestra's speeches, see Goldhill (1984a), esp. 91–5; Wohl (1998), 101, 106–7; Foley (2001), 207–34; and Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012), 198–232.

[47] On these meanings of *kerdos*, see Cozzo (1988), 41–82; and Seaford (2012), 168. Wohl (1998), 59–117, uncovers the network of links in the *Agamemnon* between commodification of women (and men), the Trojan War, sexuality, profit, and the problematic violence that results. Cf. Cairns (2013), xxi–xl, on the interplay of *kerdos* and *atē* in the *Antigone*. The same tension continues throughout the *Oresteia*, where the other uses of *kerdos* alternate, on their face, between these two meanings, but where even the ostensibly positive uses should also evoke the problematic issues of one's own gain being at another's expense: *Cho.* 825–6; *Eum.* 539–41, 704, 990–1. There seems to be a strong link in the rest of Aeschylus between *kerdos* and death: e.g. *Sept.* 683–4, 697; *PV* 747.

[48] On the difficulties of this passage, see Fraenkel (1950), ad 345–7, but his assumption that this phrase must somehow be comforting is not shared by other commentators. Cf. Denniston and Page (1957), ad 345–7.

Rather than financial gain, which is a primary denotation of *kerdos*, the "profit" that the Herald specifies is the ability to boast.[50] Taking up the value system of the *Iliad*, to glory the Herald turns. Yet his depiction of the victors' boasts and desired plaudits from the city are peculiar in a number of important ways (*Ag.* 574–81):

καὶ πολλὰ χαίρειν συμφοραῖς καταξιῶ,
ὡς κομπάσαι τῷδ᾽ εἰκὸς ἡλίου φάει
ὑπὲρ θαλάσσης καὶ χθονὸς ποτωμένοις
"Τροίην ἑλόντες δή ποτ᾽ Ἀργείων στόλος
θεοῖς λάφυρα ταῦτα τοῖς καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδα
δόμοις ἐπασσάλευσαν ἀρχαῖον γάνος."
τοιαῦτα χρὴ κλύοντας εὐλογεῖν πόλιν
καὶ τοὺς στρατηγούς·

I think it worthy even to rejoice much at these events,
as it is proper for us, flying over sea and earth,
to boast to this light of the sun:
"The expedition of Argives having taken Troy once upon a time,
nailed up in temples for the gods across Greece
these spoils, an ancient splendor."
Having heard such things, it is necessary to praise the city
and the generals.

The Herald pictures the victors boasting (κομπάσαι, 575) in the form of dedications at temples accompanying the spoils of war.[51] For this, the Herald uses the language of Homeric epic (including the form Τροίην, 577).[52] He also speaks of the victory in words that appear more suited to the distant past: δή ποτ᾽ ("once upon a time," 577) and ἀρχαῖον ("ancient," 579).

---

[49] For Athena's attempts to reverse the negative implications of *kerdos* in her blessings, see Chapter 7.

[50] On the connections of *kerdos* and money in tragedy, see Seaford (2003).

[51] For the various renderings of the thought behind the metaphorical ὑπὲρ θαλάσσης καὶ χθονὸς ποτωμένοις, see Fraenkel (1950); and Medda (2017), ad loc. The idea likely being conveyed is that, as the returning Argives sped home from Troy, they dedicated spoils at each temple they visited, with the additional layer of meaning that their fame thus spread widely.

[52] The OCT prints Τροίαν from T, but I retain Τροίην from F, following Medda (2017), ad 577–9; cf. Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc. The same commentators also note that Ἀργείων στόλος (577) has a Homeric resonance.

Scholars have felt these two temporal markers to be deeply problematic; some choose to supply a double lacuna.[53] Others tie them closely to dedicatory inscriptions, with the idea that the Herald's phrasing already addresses the readers of the far future.[54] However, this passage does not conform with the actual use of ποτέ in archaic and classical epigrams and epitaphs (in the latter of which it is quite rare, and δή ποτε nonexistent).[55] Still others suggest that δή ποτε (the only instance in the corpus of Aeschylus) means here "at last, after a long time" and that ἀρχαῖον merely attests to the long-standing tradition of dedication, rather than to the proleptic antiquity of the spoils themselves.[56]

The debate about the phrasing of this imaginary dedication will likely continue, but its poetically ambiguous terms hint at the problems of when and to whom glory is ascribed, magnifying an issue already present in the Herald's speech. The temporal markers draw attention to glory as something enduring, which will be seen in the future. As with any dedication, this imaginary one contains the past timeframe of the action, the present time of its composition, and the future time of reading. However, the events of the Trojan War as well as the *Oresteia* as a whole happen in *mythical* time. They are all "at some time" and "long ago" regarded from the vantage point of the audience.[57] This mythical time is hinted at by the epic language and phrasing. Yet whereas the Homeric epics and real dedications of spoils counterbalance the ephemerality of human life by ensuring posthumous fame, the Herald only demands the ascription of fame now to those still alive (χρή . . . εὐλογεῖν . . . τοὺς στρατηγούς, 580–1).[58] Conspicuously missing are the dead, whose tombs go unmentioned, whose praise goes unsung.

As we saw above (pp. 38–40), the Herald himself has just contrasted the dead and "us" (568–71) and then insisted that the living should not take the dead into account at all (572–3). In counterbalancing their deaths with profit, the Herald severs the casualties from their rightful mourning and glory. By the time the Herald speaks these words, the call for living eulogies is more problematic than it seems. Lament for the casualties of the Trojan War has already materialized as a political problem in Argos before the Herald takes the stage. In the first stasimon, the Elders describe the "mourning" (πένθεια, *pentheia*, *Ag.* 429–30) by those who lost sons in the war using a term with a root identical to that with which the Herald later denies mourning (πενθεῖν, *penthein*, 567).[59] Concerning specifically the share of praise owed to the casualties, the Elders had previously described the families praising their dead with the same vocabulary (εὖ λέγοντες, 445) as the Herald ascribes only to the living.[60] Moreover, in the remainder of the play, further issues and ironies emerge from this speech, to which the Summations/Connections section will point.

---

[53] Sommerstein (2008b), 68–9 n. 122; and West (1990), 192–4.

[54] E.g. Weil, quoted in Fraenkel (1950), ad loc.: "de rebus praesentibus quasi de praeteritis loquitur"; and Verrall (1904), ad loc.: "the praise is worded as it will be spoken a long time hereafter," followed by Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.

[55] Wade-Gery (1933), 71–82, in a study on the use of ποτέ in epigrams and epitaphs, denies that its use there parallels this passage or mythical poetry in general (77 n. 28). He insists that ποτέ marks a specific past time relative to the moment of inscription and never the indefinite past from the point of view of the reader.

[56] Medda (2017), ad 557–9, following Klausen; and Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc.

[57] Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc., distinguishes ἀρχαῖον from παλαιόν in this context as giving a mythic gleam (γάνος) to the spoils. On temporal issues in the *Oresteia* as a whole, see Chiasson (1999); and Widzisz (2012).

[58] Scodel (2006), 115–17, elucidates the paradox: "Yet the boast, whose content demands that it be spoken in the future, belongs emphatically to this day."

## Heroes, Hades, and the Unseen

Before concluding, it is important to examine the Herald's references to the divine world for further insight into his overarching stance on the afterlife. The Herald's attempts to control his own death and the reception of the war are often in direct response to the divinities who affect these events. He regularly names supernatural forces that oversee war, disease, and storms, as well as any possible escape.[61] A number of his references to such forces are the first, the only explicit, or otherwise distinct from those of other characters. Each returns later in the trilogy with strong chthonic and afterlife associations. Do these same associations emerge when the Herald first refers to them?

The Herald's claim that the war dead are uninterested in rising and his attempts to remove them from consideration ought to be understood in the context of the powerful role the dead play in the trilogy. Importantly, his speech contains the only use of the term ἥρως (*hērōs*, "hero," *Ag.* 516) in Aeschylus. The Herald's prayer to the heroes as the local divinities who sent off and now receive back the expedition is traditional. Yet this recognition of their powers also undercuts his insistence that the dead are not concerned with life, and that one ought not to be concerned with them. The category of hero specifically applies to dead humans who are supernaturally effective in the living world. Later in the *Oresteia*, the ideas and terminology of hero cult surround both the dead Agamemnon in the *Choephoroi* and the still-living Orestes in the *Eumenides* (Chapter 5).

---

[59] πένθεια is either an otherwise-unattested, poetic form of πένθος, "sorrow, grief, mourning," or a reference to a "mourning woman," Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981), ad 429–31.

[60] As Judet de La Combe (2001), 1.221–2, puts it, the Herald's eulogizing presents the vision of a universal situation that has no temporal boundary, refers to panhellenic glory, and transcends all dissent.

[61] He and the Elders both tend to refer to specific divinities, whereas the named characters of the *Agamemnon* almost invariably refer to the gods in vague language, Zeitlin (1965), 503–4.

Restrictions of references to the afterlife are the rule in the Herald's speech. This is the case with his one possible allusion to the Mysteries, in the phrase characterizing the return of Agamemnon as "bearing light in darkness for you" (ὑμῖν φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων, 522).[62] No part of the Herald's speech amplifies it to be any more than an echo of salvational ritual; instead, as we will see below (pp. 46–8), he connects both light and sight to life on the one hand and (nonmystical) knowledge on the other. Analogously, the Herald's statement that the dead "do not care to ever rise up again" (569) is belied throughout the *Oresteia*. Risen humans as ghosts play a significant role in the trilogy: the murdered Children of Thyestes are visible to Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon's spirit is called to rise in the *Choephoroi*, and the Ghost of Clytemnestra manifests to the audience in the *Eumenides*. The Herald's rhetoric of excluding the dead is in every way anomalous within Greek culture and the trilogy.

The Herald's references to divinities are similarly free of the significant afterlife associations they have in the rest of the *Oresteia*. The Herald's one mention of Hades (667) is as a synonym for death. As we saw above (pp. 35–6), it does not indicate a different afterlife fate for those lost at sea. Worth comparing are the Herald's unmarked mentions of other divinities who have explicit chthonic associations in the following two plays. The Herald's early invocation of his own tutelary deity, Hermes (515), ignores the god's well-known psychopomp aspects, to which other characters refer in both the *Choephoroi* (1, 622) and *Eumenides* (89–92).[63] Likewise, the Herald's paradoxical "victory song to the Erinyes" (παιᾶνα . . . Ἐρινύων, *Ag.* 645) is part of his counterfactual depiction of a messenger of defeat arriving in the city. The Erinyes, the chthonic divinities who have already been part of the first stasimon about the afterlife (461–8) and who will themselves appear and sing of the judgment of Hades (*Eum.* 267–75), are mentioned in passing, without any afterlife connotations. In the Herald's mouth, they stand for forces of destruction in the living world.

---

[62] Cf. *Cho.* 459 and Chapter 4. Headlam and Thomson (1966), ad loc., draw attention to the similarities in phrasing with Xen. *Symp.* 1.9, where it is grouped with other allusions to mystery religions. Nevertheless, the claim that these phrases refer specifically to the Eleusinian Mysteries was challenged as early as Tierney (1937), 11–15. See further below, pp. 46–8, on the use of light in the Herald's speech.

[63] Cf. Garvie (1986), 48, and (1970). Hermes acts as psychopomp in *Od.* 24.1–5, cf. 11.626; *Il.* 24.331ff.; *Hy. Dem.* 377. In Aeschylus, at *Pers.* 629–30, he is invoked as part of the summoning of Darius. Chthonic Hermes was also part of the Dionysian Anthesteria festival, on which see Burkert (1985), 156–9, 217; and Johnston (1999), 55, 63–6.

One might also include two divinities whose interaction with the Erinyes is pivotal in the trilogy. First is Apollo, to whom the Herald prays to change from harmer to healer.[64] Orestes reports that Apollo's oracle threatens him with a father's Erinyes and other chthonic punishments in the *Choephoroi* (269–97, 925), and then the god himself fights against a mother's Erinyes on stage in the *Eumenides*. The second divinity is actually omitted by the Herald, for Athena is the goddess traditionally responsible for the storm the Herald reports.[65] She is never mentioned in the first two plays of the *Oresteia* but later harnesses the power of the Erinyes and the underworld. Thus, in line with the Herald's refusal to account for the dead, all his mentions of divinities are limited to their operation within the world of the living.

To complete the analysis of the Herald's reference to Hades, it is necessary to trace out its connection in Greek to "the unseen" (Ἅιδης, *Hadēs*, was generally thought to come from ἀ-ἰδεῖν, *a-idein*, "not to see," as discussed in the Introduction). The *Oresteia*, like Homeric epic, repeatedly connects seeing with being, light with life.[66] Sight terms for life and death run throughout the Herald's descriptions of the war and return home. The Herald metaphorically connects eradication with becoming invisible in his much-discussed reference to the army's obliteration of even the sacred places of Troy: βωμοὶ δ' ἄιστοι (*bōmoi d' aistoi*, "and the altars have disappeared," *Ag.* 527).[67] The Scholia gloss ἄιστος (*aistos*, "unseen, invisible," which is also from ἀ-ἰδεῖν, *a-idein*) with ἀφανής (*aphanēs*, "unseen, especially of the netherworld").[68] The Elders have already used this latter word in a similar context with the same sense of utter destruction as the Herald does, proleptically connecting it with desecrating an altar: "for one who has kicked the great altar (*bōmon*) of Justice into invisibility (*aphaneian*)," (λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν, 383–4). Further, the conjunction between being seen and being alive occurs again in verses 630–4, when the Chorus ask whether other sailors speak of Menelaus as living or dead. The Herald replies that only the sun knows. In the course of elaborating, the Herald returns to these same heavily visual terms, answering that there is some hope of his homecoming (*Ag.* 676–7):

---

[64] *Ag.* 509–13; cf. Yoon (2012), 49.

[65] Sommerstein (2008b), 77 n. 136.

[66] Barrett (2002), 12–13. On this theme in Homer, see Gazis (2018), 25–6.

[67] Some editors prefer to delete this verse, but the reasons given are unconvincing. The shocking nature of its sacrilege is exactly the point: it is consonant with the Herald's other declarations and the Chorus's earlier mention of kicking the altar of justice into invisibility, using the same vocabulary (*Ag.* 383–4). There is no definitive argument to be made from the nearly identical verse in the *Persians* (βωμοὶ δ' ἄιστοι, δαιμόνων θ' ἱδρύματα, *Pers.* 811), which could just as well indicate its authenticity. Nor does its interruption of the flow of the previous metaphor mean it was "probably added by a producer or actor for a revival in the late fifth century," as claimed by Sommerstein (2008b), 61 n. 112. See Fraenkel (1950), ad loc., for earlier arguments that rely on notions such as the Herald being too "religious" to say such a thing or Aeschylus thinking the destruction of temples by Greeks too atrocious to write down; cf. Headlam and Thomson (1966). For recent coverage of the arguments, see Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc.; and Medda (2017), ad loc.

[68] *Ag.*, hypothesis-scholion 527a1, in Smith (1976).

> εἰ δ᾽ οὖν τις ἀκτὶς ἡλίου νιν ἱστορεῖ
> καὶ ζῶντα καὶ βλέποντα
>
> If some ray of the sun observes him
> both living and seeing

For Menelaus, no longer being seen or seeing means no longer being present, no longer living. In this passage, and ones like it, sight and being seen take on special significance when their absence is emphasized.[69]

The Herald's hesitation to declare Menelaus dead, however, parallels his difficulties with discussing the casualties. He uses ἄφαντος (*aphantos*) in a weaker sense at 624 to say that Menelaus "has disappeared," as he does at 657, describing the other ships lost in the storm as ἄφαντοι (*aphantoi*, "disappeared"). In both instances, he deliberately clarifies that all those who are thus unseen may still be alive, only unbeknownst to those who have returned.[70] This carefully maintained ambiguity reverses both the first mention of ἄιστοι (*aistoi*) and the Elders' employment of ἀφάνειαν (*aphaneian*) as synonyms for "destroyed." The application of "unseen" to Menelaus and the ships demonstrates that what is invisible may still exist even for the Herald. Within the context of the Herald's scene, this is not a truism but another telling convolution of language. It reveals the strain between this character's attempts to close off thinking about what is

---

[69] Compare the Messenger of the *Persians*, who indicates his gratefulness to be returning alive after the destruction of the army: "and I myself see the unhoped-for light of return" (νόστιμον βλέπω φάος, 261).

[70] *Ag.* 671–3. Cf. *Od.* 1.235–6, where Telemachus complains of Odysseus that "the gods have made him unseen (ἄϊστον) beyond all other men," and 1.242–3, where he continues that Odysseus "is gone unseen, unheard" (οἴχετ᾽ ἄϊστος, ἄπυστος). This invisibility, and thus uncertainty, obscures Odysseus' glory. Even disregarding the audience's probable knowledge of Menelaus' return, the Herald's language contains an equivocation as to whether this disappearance is real destruction. Both his role in the *Odyssey* and the fact the satyr play, *Proteus*, which followed the *Oresteia*, was about Menelaus seem to guarantee survival. See Peradotto (1969), 261–3. On attestations for the tetralogy, see Gantz (2007), 40, 43–4.

"gone," such as the casualties of war, and the continuations of the dead so important in other contexts. Thus, there is a tension between the unseen and even chthonic forces that are active in his speech and his stance – unique in the trilogy – that barricades off consideration of any sort of afterlife.

## Summations/Connections

The poetics of the beyond in the *Oresteia* begins to manifest in the Herald's perspective on his own death and the casualties of war. Little attention has been paid to the Herald's repeated focus on closing off his own life and to his consistent shuttering of afterlife possibilities for others. These have therefore not been read as giving insight into his particular ethos, providing background for the afterlives of other characters, or affecting the understanding of war in the trilogy.

In terms of ethos, the Herald frames his values in the negative, through his relationship to death. As a survivor of mass violence, his need for some control over life expresses itself rhetorically through the repeated supersession of his death and burial at home over any positively phrased desiderata. In this way, he presents a more personal perspective on war, return, and reintegration than any other messenger in Aeschylus. A quiet death as an escape from hardship is a subtle theme in the Herald's speech, yet it is only the first instance of death as oblivion in the *Oresteia*. The rest of the trilogy represents characters in extreme situations expressing similar thoughts. The Elders more clearly and repeatedly articulate such a notion, first in response to his words and again later in the *Agamemnon* (Chapter 2). Aegisthus and Orestes each enunciate a version of it, with quite different meanings for their ethos (Chapter 5). Taking the Herald's words seriously provides context for these other rhetorical wishes for death.

As the only representative of the nonheroic survivors who return home, the Herald gives a unique viewpoint on the war. His focus on a homeland tomb implies that he does not accept for himself the equation of glory for battlefield death. By contrast, Herald's focus on closure and his vocabulary of calculation relegates his companions to oblivion. In convoluted statements, the Herald's language strives to seal off relationships to the casualties. He negates further action or motivation on the part of the fallen; gone is their desire to participate in life. Concurrently, the Herald claims the living should not concern themselves with the dead. He explicitly denies mourning, never mentioning rituals such as funerals for the dead. Thus he cuts off the traditional manner of cultivating the memory and even immortality of the dead in return for their deeds.

The Herald's restriction of focus to the positives transforms the war into a zero-sum proposition. Silencing its casualties is the currency with which profit, the joy of victory, and the glorification of the survivors is bought. The Herald, having just eliminated consideration of the dead, is hard-pressed to declare that Agamemnon and his army will only gain fame posthumously. His tortuous language of dedication thus gives long-ago glory to the living. The bookkeeping of the Herald presages the significant theme throughout the *Oresteia* of tallying up value, especially the value of death in individual and political contexts. The Herald's phrase "to reckon in the account" (ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν, *en psēphō legein*, *Ag.* 572) uses the vocabulary of calculating with a pebble (*psēphos*), the same pebble as the one used for voting, a political theme that repeats in the trilogy.[71] When Agamemnon arrives on stage, he continues the Herald's boasting about victory by declaring that the gods voted unanimously for the destruction of Troy (ψήφους ἔθεντο, *psēphous ethento*, *Ag.* 816). The Herald's problematic accounting thus draws attention to Agamemnon's own tendentious characterization of the war. The Herald's reckoning of the dead involves vocabulary heavily associated throughout the trilogy with decision-making, the erotics of profit (*kerdos*), the unaccounted-for carnage of war, the tyrannical need for total violence, and even Athena's new law (Chapter 7). These links demonstrate the limitations and perils of the Herald's valuation of the dead as merely ciphers in the debit column.

The omission of funerals and consideration of the dead resonates with another set of themes surrounding the Trojan War and Agamemnon himself. First, Agamemnon, upon receiving ostentatious glorification from Clytemnestra, insists that a life only be valued after a good death.[72] Thus the Herald's claim that glory is not for the dead soldiers but for the living leaders is actually rebuffed by its main recipient. Secondly, in terms of the casualties, Agamemnon's speech fails to praise or even mention the Argive dead. His public position, analogous to the Herald's speech, contrasts with the stated fury of the bereaved families at the Argive leadership.[73] Thirdly, explaining away all temporal issues with the dedication and the living ascription of glory would lose the irony of its implications: Clytemnestra's murderous actions soon correct the anachronism of living eulogies for Agamemnon. Thereafter, the Elders concern themselves with Agamemnon's lack of a proper public funeral, specifically mentioning his "great deeds" and the expected praise over his tomb (ἐπιτύμβιον αἶνον, 1543–50). Agamemnon's own children later wish that he had died at war (*Cho.* 345–53). Attention to the Herald's convolutions – grammatical and ideational – thus uncovers the quandaries inherent in his attempts to close off consideration of the dead. Especially so since the *Oresteia* itself repeatedly returns to the issue of untimely death, glory, and afterlife transformations of reputation. Further, each of the stances the Herald takes to the war dead clearly contrasts with the values of ancient Greek cities, particularly the Athenian state, which heavily memorialized the war dead at this time, even granting the exceptional dead special cult, treating them as heroes.[74]

---

[71] At the end of the trilogy, this vocabulary of voting recurs often, in a seemingly positive context, when the Athenian jurors deliberate concerning the life or death of Orestes (e.g. *Eum.* 597, 630, 675, 680, 709, 735, 748, 751).

[72] *Ag.* 928–9. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of this passage in context of Agamemnon's own afterlife. The gnomic statement by the Chorus in verse 485, that *kleos* proclaimed by a woman vanishes quickly, demonstrates that concern about the transitory nature of glory is already present immediately before the Herald's entrance.

Lastly, the Herald's language consistently restrains the afterlife associations of the divinities he names. There are numerous possible human continuations after death and chthonic forces that lurk beneath the Herald's speech. His prayers to the heroes, Apollo, and Hermes, and his references to Hades and the Erinyes, all operate within a restricted semantic range that excludes the afterlife. His language puts the "unseen" outside of knowledge and beyond calculation, a traditional human epistemic position echoed throughout the *Oresteia*. These restrictions set the stage for the very forces he mentions to demonstrate their effectiveness in life all the more strikingly as the play progresses.

---

[73] *Ag.* 427–60, on which see further Chapter 2.

[74] See Currie (2005), 89–119.

## CHAPTER 2

# *The Chorus of the* Agamemnon

## *Human Views on the Beyond*

### Introduction

What was implicit in the Herald's speeches about death becomes more explicit in the words of the Elders throughout the *Agamemnon*. Specifically, the Herald's relation to his own death, his faltering attempts to close off the continuity of the war dead, and his subsequent difficulties navigating the issue of glory after death all have their analogues in the Elders' speeches. As impotent old men facing the recurrent violence of the house of Atreus, they repeatedly raise the prospect of their own deaths but also fail to intervene. They intersperse the dramatic action with odes that comment on it from more universal perspectives and contain the first whispers concerning the afterlife.[1] They offer collective wisdom about life, speculate about the divine, contrast citizen perspectives to those of heroes, and concern themselves with the propriety of ritual.[2] The Elders' plural perspectives on the afterlife provide insights into their dramatic character and contrast with later divine knowledge. This chapter examines how these sometimes-contradictory attitudes affect the representation of ethical and political values, whether they influence character action, and how they connect with the rest of the trilogy.

### Wishing the End

Infirm and aged, the Elders of the *Agamemnon* cannot uphold their stated ideology of civic loyalty (e.g. *Ag*. 805–9) against precipitate violence.

---

[1] See Parry (1978), 73–107, on how tragic choral poetry in general, and Aeschylean in particular, exploits the tension between the Chorus's role as character and the more "cosmic" viewpoint natural to the choral genre. Fletcher (1999) engages the issue of the authorial voice. Rosenmeyer (1982), 145–87, esp. 186, treats their maxims as tapping into "the near anonymous life preserving spirit which sustains civic life while heroes come and go."

[2] See the debate over each of these particular aspects of tragic choruses in Gould (1996) and the response of Goldhill (1996) and (2012), 166–200; cf. Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981) 1.xxv–xlii; Foley (2003); and Dhuga (2011). On the Chorus focalizing the Athenian citizens but also differing from them, see Griffith (1995), 103 n. 129.

They affect neither a tyrant's decision for war, with which they originally disagreed (*Ag.* 799–804), nor his bloody overthrow (*Ag.* 1344–71, 1612–71). In response to murderous political events, on multiple occasions they express a desire for life's end. In this, they invert some of the themes from the Herald's rhetorical emphasis on his own death. For the Herald, the focus on the tomb heightened his gratefulness to have escaped from evils and returned home. As we saw in Chapter 1, even this rhetoric is problematic on many levels, culminating in his attempt to entirely close off thinking about the dead. The emphasis on death is even more problematic for the Chorus. For one, these Elders' responses to the action are partially paradigmatic for the audience, so their wishing for death factors into the ominous tone throughout the *Agamemnon*. Further, in their role as characters, they are more directly involved in the action, and their statements frame their values and confrontations with the main figures.[3]

The first instance of the motif of wishing for the end in the Elders' dialogue contains, as we saw in Chapter 1, a direct reference to the Herald's submission to death. They take his claim that he will no longer resist dying (τὸ τεθνάναι δ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽ ἀντερῶ θεοῖς, *Ag.* 539) one step further when they unexpectedly return to his statement several lines later (*Ag.* 550):

> ὡς νῦν, τὸ σὸν δή, καὶ θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις.
>
> As you said just now, even to die is a great boon.

The Elders' words corroborate that the desirability of death is evident in the Herald's original statement. Of course, as the speakers change, so too change the associations. Unlike the Herald, whose words only ironically connect to the situation in Argos, of which he is unaware, the Elders find themselves enmeshed within specific political and familial conflicts, hinted at darkly from the *Agamemnon*'s earliest lines. In circumstances still opaque at that dramatic moment, death for the Elders is, paradoxically (as expressed by καί, "even"), a πολλὴ χάρις (*pollē kharis*, "a great favor/boon"), if not actually an aspiration. Verbally, at least, they manifest the severity of the problems of life through a transvaluation of its end into a reward. A peaceful death represents the escape from the violence of war for the Herald; for the Elders, death represents an escape from overwhelming political tension.

---

[3] On the character and peculiar position of the Chorus of Elders compared to other Aeschylean choruses, see Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981), 1.xxii–xxviii.

At that early point in the narrative, the wish for death as closure seems purely rhetorical and greatly overstated – it has been dismissed as merely a commonplace.[4] In the aftermath of Clytemnestra's coup, however, violent death manifests itself viscerally on stage as the corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra are wheeled in.[5] These characters had just been interacting with the Elders, one having returned as a blessed victor, one (as a slave) having been spared her civilization's demise. The Elders' worst fears have been consummated. In response to Clytemnestra standing over the body of their king, the Elders formulate their anguish in part by enunciating even more fully a wish for their own death (*Ag.* 1448–51):

φεῦ, τίς ἂν ἐν τάχει μὴ περιώδυνος
μηδὲ δεμνιοτήρης
μόλοι τὸν αἰεὶ φέρουσ᾽ ἐν ἡμῖν
μοῖρ᾽ ἀτέλευτον ὕπνον

Alas, would that some not excruciating
nor lingering fate come swiftly,
forever, carrying to us
eternal sleep

Slumber ends the nightmare of life. The Elders are concerned with the avoidance of both the anguish of continued existence and possible torment in the process of dying.[6] This wish does not pass unremarked upon. Clytemnestra responds specifically to their rhetoric (1462–3):

Κλ. μηδὲν θανάτου μοῖραν ἐπεύχου
τοῖσδε βαρυνθείς

Clyt. Do not pray for the fate of death,
weighed down by these events

Clytemnestra acknowledges that their wish for oblivion is part of their emotional response to her murders and political subversion. She attempts to argue them out of it, yet fewer than eighty lines later they return to the theme in a second passage (1538–40):

---

[4] Compare Aegisthus, who at *Ag.* 1610–11 calls dying (τὸ κατθανεῖν) noble (καλόν) for himself after he has accomplished his vengeance. See Chapter 1, with citations on "now I could die happy." For an analysis of this passage in comparison with Orestes' stated wish to die once he kills Clytemnestra at *Cho.* 438, see Chapter 5. Concerning the general objection that a particular line is a commonplace and therefore lacks any meaningful specificity, see the Introduction.

[5] On the staging, with the possibility of the *ekkyklema*, see Denniston and Page (1957) 196–7; and Taplin (1977), 325–7.

[6] Denniston and Page (1957), 204, condemn this passage as containing "a remarkable quantity of irrelevant detail." The analysis here demonstrates precisely the relevance of evasion of pain to the Chorus's rhetoric of death as closure, as well as the consequences of such rhetoric.

> ἰὼ γᾶ γᾶ, εἴθε μ’ ἐδέξω
> πρὶν τόνδ’ ἐπιδεῖν ἀργυροτοίχου
> δροίτας κατέχοντα χάμευναν.
>
> Oh earth, earth, if only you had received me
> before I looked upon this man occupying
> the makeshift bed of a silver-sided bathtub.

The logic of this second passage is ostrich-like: If the Elders had not lived to see the event, they would not be suffering from it. The network of visual language examined in Chapter 1 continues in this statement's equation of death with the privation of sight ("before I looked upon," πρὶν τόνδ’ ἐπιδεῖν, 1539), and therefore with the abolishment of knowledge.[7] It is evident that in both passages the Elders use highly potential, even counterfactual language.[8] Both passages treat death as anesthesia.[9] In a malevolent reality they seem powerless to change, this yearning to renounce what they have actually seen instantiates one conception of death: Its nothingness should be a refuge from earthly adversity.

## Glory and Noble Death

The Elders articulate a second conception of death, which diverges from oblivion: Glory allows for a type of continuity of self. After the Herald's problematic silencing of the war dead and glorification of the living, the Elders, too, engage glory in a dubious manner. Against Cassandra's protestations, the Elders define her decision to face a known death as brave (*Ag.* 1300–4):

> Χο. ὁ δ’ ὕστατός γε τοῦ χρόνου πρεσβεύεται.
> Κα. ἥκει τόδ’ ἦμαρ. σμικρὰ κερδανῶ φυγῇ.
> Χο. ἀλλ’ ἴσθι τλήμων οὖσ’ ἀπ’ εὐτόλμου φρενός.
> Κα. οὐδεὶς ἀκούει ταῦτα τῶν εὐδαιμόνων.
> Χο. ἀλλ’ εὐκλεῶς τοι κατθανεῖν χάρις βροτῷ.
>
> Chor. Nevertheless, the last moment is most honored.
> Cass. The day has come. I will profit little by fleeing.

---

[7] Cf. Schenker (1991), 69.

[8] An interrogative with optative in the first (cf. Fraenkel (1950) ad 622) and a past "wish incapable of fulfillment" in the second.

[9] Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 394–5, lists Greek sources for the themes of "death as a deliverer from toil, trouble, pain and distress" and "the dead are not touched by pain and suffering." However, both her lists are missing all the passages from the *Oresteia* discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 5.

Chor. But know that you are courageous from a daring spirit.
Cass. None of the fortunate hears these things said of them.
Chor. But I say to you it is a boon for a mortal to die gloriously.

In 1304, the Elders echo their response to the Herald, only now the χάρις (*kharis*, "boon") is not simply escaping life, but having a good reputation (*eukleōs*, εὐκλεῶς) at its close.[10] This reasoning touches on the theme of glory in the Herald's first long speech.[11] The Elders characterize Cassandra's facing her fate as worthy of glory, unlinking it from its epic roots in warfare. They only retain the notion that glory is a goal that prompts and repays courageous action. The Elders specify that rewards are due to her because she knowingly forgoes the final instants of life to confront annihilation on her own terms.[12] They thus reveal an ethical attitude to death: Dying bravely, even though not in battle, can provide some continuity through reputation. In Cassandra's case, such reputation would be solely bestowed from the outside, for she herself does not seek it but even actively denies its benefit (1303; and Chapter 3). It thus does not fall into the category of afterlife continuity affecting decisions in life.

Closer ligatures to action are found in the Elders' own declarations about fighting tyranny to the death. First, in deliberation over what to do once they hear Agamemnon's dying cries, two of their voices take the position that it is better to die than to live under despots (*Ag.* 1362–5):

–ἦ καὶ βίον τείνοντες ὧδ᾽ ὑπείξομεν
δόμων καταισχυντῆρσι τοῖσδ᾽ ἡγουμένοις;
–ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἀνεκτόν, ἀλλὰ κατθανεῖν κρατεῖ·
πεπαιτέρα γὰρ μοῖρα τῆς τυραννίδος.

–Will we really extend our lives this way and yield
to these rulers, defilers of the house?
–But it is unbearable! But it is better to die!
For that is a milder fate than tyranny!

Secondly, at the end of the *Agamemnon*, they themselves choose to stare down the usurpers of the state and declare that they will fight to the death (*Ag.* 1652):

---

[10] There are strong grammatical and sonic parallels between *Ag.* 550 and 1304: χάρις occurs with an elided verb in both, and κατθανεῖν is in the same metrical position as καὶ θανεῖν. See further Chapter 3.

[11] *Ag.* 577–83. Note the similarity of κλύοντας εὐλογεῖν in 580 to εὐκλεῶς.

[12] E.g. 1290[1289], 1296–8, 1302, 1305, 1321. Cassandra's bravery and the possibility of her glory for facing death are covered in the next chapter.

> ἀλλὰ κἀγὼ μὴν †πρόκωπος† οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν.[13]
>
> But I too then [with my sword drawn] do not refuse to die.

Both times, the Elders, or a portion of them, inflame their spirit for action. They utter lines suited to extreme defenders of liberty – prepared to fight tyranny to the crimson end. Both times, however, such bravado only emphasizes the inadequacy of their old age.[14] No fight ensues.

How does their anticlimactic inaction connect with their ideas about the end of life? When they declare themselves ready to fight, they fail to ever mention glory. Instead, their own characterization of death as escape from life is prominent. In the first passage, they rhetorically ask whether they will extend life (βίον τείνοντες, 1362) and create an opposition between death and continuing to live under tyranny (1364–5). In the second passage, the double negatives and use of the verb θνῄσκω ("I . . . do not refuse to die," οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν, *Ag.* 1652) even echo the acquiescence to death in the double-negative formulation of the Herald ("I will no longer deny dying," τὸ τεθνάναι δ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽ ἀντερῶ, *Ag.* 539). Their language in the moment of action paradoxically returns to escapism and passivity. The rhetorical difference between their mentions of glory and their emphasis on a quiet death helps to characterize the Elders. Their references to death as closure in the moment of action verbally reinforce the sense of their futility in the face of political violence.

## Intimations of the Afterlife

The characterization of the Elders in the previous two sections allows us to fruitfully contrast their perspectives on the afterlife. Four critical examples, sung and spoken, demonstrate the range of possibilities of continuity after death. The Elders offer what are essentially the first extended references to different types of afterlife in the *Oresteia*, although they are sometimes hardly more substantial than those of the Herald. Each rewards careful scrutiny, since their motifs continue to unfurl with ever greater import later in the trilogy. Examining them in their context demonstrates how different versions of the afterlife work on multiple levels dramatically, extend thinking about human and divine roles, and embolden political critique.

---

[13] The OCT obelizes πρόκωπος, since few believe the Elders could have had swords on stage throughout the whole play or appeared with them suddenly without comment. There are, moreover, possible textual problems, for which see Denniston and Page (1957), ad 1650–3; and Medda (2017), ad 1651.

[14] On dramatizing this moment and the evasion that characterizes the Chorus, see Greenhalgh (1969), 253–8; Taplin (1977), 323–4; and Winnington-Ingram (1983), 208–16. On choral inaction in general and this passage in particular, see Dhuga (2011), 75–97.

The subtle opening mention of the continuity of the dead involves the Greek soldiers in the Trojan War. It occurs in the first stasimon, before the Herald has even arrived on stage to mention his dead companions. Since it is sung, offers the perspective of the citizens about the distant war, and is quite brief, the theme of continuation beyond death is easy to miss but is nevertheless significant (*Ag.* 452–5):

> οἱ δ᾽ αὐτοῦ περὶ τεῖχος
> θήκας Ἰλιάδος γᾶς
> εὔμορφοι κατέχουσιν, ἐχ-
> θρὰ δ᾽ ἔχοντας ἔκρυψεν.
>
> And there, around the fortification,
> the handsome men occupy graves
> in the land of Ilium,
> and the hostile (land) covers its possessors.

The Elders build up pathos for the casualties via the echoing sounds and image of mutual grasping: The hostile land (ἐχθρά) holds (κατέχουσιν) and hides (ἔκρυψεν) the Greek dead who hold (ἔχοντας) it.[15] Crucially, the one aspect the men retain after death is their bodily image; the substantive "handsome" (*eumorphoi*, εὔμορφοι, 454) provides their sole description.[16] The emphasis on the beauty of their form multiplies the referents to their continuity. Its immediate denotation is their bodies, which are also involved in holding and being held by the land. Yet these corpses would soon lose whatever of their beauty remained through physical corruption.

The term *eumorphoi*, then, has another set of implications. First, it can refer to the underworld shades that retain the image of the living. The emphasis on form thus evokes funerary monuments and vases, where the dead are represented as bodies and sometimes as winged souls leaving the body.[17] Secondly, the (partly visual) memory of these men is nurtured by their loved ones, about whose grief and anger the Elders are singing (433–60). Last is the unstated possibility of thinking of the war dead as heroes, in the technical sense, as the dead of past generations worshipped by a community or, more specifically for an Athenian audience, the Athenian war dead.[18] The implications of continuity are manifold in the Elders' brief mention of the beautiful form of the distant, buried casualties.

---

[15] On the "unusually strong alliterative overlay" of this passage, see Nooter (2017), 166. Note the even denser soundscape created by the repetition and play of aspirated and unaspirated taus and kappas when τεῖχος and θήκας are included, creating, in less than four full lines, the series τεῖχ-θήκ-κατέχ-ἐχθ-ἔχ-τ-ἔκ.

[16] Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc., take εὔμορφοι as "dead in the prime of their beauty." Cf. the similar phrasing of *Sept.* 587–8, in which a prophet is covered by the enemy land, enriching it.

[17] For the Greek emphasis on precisely the image of the dead at their graves, either as a *psukhē* ("soul, ghost"), *eidōlon* ("image"), or *phantasma* ("image, phantom"), see Vermeule (1979), 23–32. Cf. *Cho.* 490.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the Herald attempts to remove these same war dead from consideration through insisting on the profit of victory (*Ag.* 567–73). Yet the Elders give the opposite perspective: These very dead continue to influence the living, for they are the only motive mentioned for political dissent against the war. The Elders, in the part of the first stasimon from which this quotation comes (429–74), explicitly bind the memory and mourning of the dead to the mounting citizen rancor against the authority of the Atreidae. The dead make it back only in urns (441–3), giving a second example of physical continuity, but a far less idealized one. For the war dead no longer have the human body's beauty; they have been changed into "heavy dust" (βαρὺ ψῆγμα, 441–2) and "ashes instead of men" (ἀντήνορος σποδοῦ, 442–3). Whereas the "handsome dead in their graves" stresses the former beauty – whose loss is moving in a Homeric way – references to the cremated bodies focus attention on the dead denatured into objects.[19] Even worse, the Elders' reference to the men as "dust" transformed by Ares as the "gold-changer of bodies" (ὁ χρυσαμοιβός … σωμάτων, 438) implies a conversion of men into money.[20] Undermining the Herald's assessment, *ashes* are the profit from the war.

The Elders even more precisely contradict the Herald's attempt to silence grief. They connect the families' lament (πένθεια, *pentheia*, 429–30; στένουσι, 445) with specific praise (*eu legontes*, εὖ λέγοντες, "speaking well, eulogizing," 445) for the men fallen in battle, emphasizing their expertise in war (μάχης ἴδρις, 446) and their noble death (τὸν δ᾽ ἐν φοναῖς καλῶς πεσόντ᾽, 447).[21] This memorialization leads to the anger against and critique of the rulers, all the way to curses and revenge threatened by the people (457–60).[22] The contrast between the Herald's and Elders' rhetoric about the same soldiers demonstrates the political implications of the struggle over the continuity of the war dead in body and memory. There is far more at stake than a positive versus a negative attitude to war, or even than an official versus a private perspective on these casualties. Not profit, nor victory, nor glory for the living are enough to justify the massive loss of life. Rather, the memory and material remains of the dead shake the fealty of the people to their rulers.[23]

---

[18] Sommerstein (2008b), ad loc., gives an expansive set of referents: "as shades in the underworld, as heroes receiving cult, and in the memory of their loved ones, they will forever remain young and handsome." Wohl (1998), 97–8, ties the image to both Homeric glory and the *epitaphios logos*. Cf. Fraenkel (1950), ad loc.; and Albinus (2000), 31–2. On heroes in the *Oresteia*, see Chapter 5.

[19] Note the contrast between inhumation and cremation for two groups of soldiers, otherwise undistinguished. On the contrast, see Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981), ad 452–5. For the variety of Greek burial types, rituals, and their implications, see the Introduction.

[20] Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981), ad 441; Wohl (1998), 95–7; and Seaford (2012), 200.

[21] See Scodel (2006), 128–30, who also briefly contrasts the public memory here with the Athenian institution of public burial and speechmaking to commemorate the dead. Cf. Grethlein (2013), 90–1.

[22] Nooter (2017), 166–7, follows Fraenkel (1950), ad 455, in connecting the murmuring dissent of the Argives with the silence of the dead swallowed by the foreign country.

A second passage within the first stasimon is still more radical, for it contains the first allusion to afterlife punishment in the trilogy. The Elders' lyrical worldview promises that transgressive actions have consequences in life and beyond death (*Ag.* 461–8):

> τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ
> ἄσκοποι θεοί, κελαι-
> ναὶ δ᾽ Ἐρινύες χρόνῳ
> τυχηρὸν ὄντ᾽ ἄνευ δίκας
> παλιντυχεῖ τριβᾷ βίου
> τιθεῖσ᾽ ἀμαυρόν, ἐν δ᾽ ἀί-
> στοις τελέθοντος οὔτις ἀλ-
> κά·
>
> For the gods are not
> heedless of men who kill many,
> and dark Erinyes, in time, make faded
> the man who prospers without justice
> by a reversal of fortune, by a wearing down of life,
> and there is no defense for him
> being among the unseen.

The Elders had just described the citizen anger against the sons of Atreus (448–60). In this loaded context, they sing concerning retribution for "killers of many" (461) and a "man . . . without justice" (464). That is, the generalities are nevertheless quite specific to Agamemnon, a radical political inversion of the glory of the Trojan War for which he is soon praised. To punish these acts of violence, the Elders double the "publicly ratified curse" (δημοκράντου . . . ἀρᾶς, *dēmokrantou . . . aras*, 458) of the angry citizens with the divine forces of the Erinyes.[24] The passage goes beyond simply a second, divine reason that the Atreides may be headed for a fall in life; it hints at further punishment after death.

---

[23] Wohl (1998), 98. Note that the Chorus of the *Persians* in verses 576–98 also strongly link the dead soldiers both to the families at home and to disastrous political effects, namely the dissolution of the empire.

[24] The Erinyes proclaim that below the earth they are named "Curses" (Ἀραί, *Eum.* 417).

Their references to light and vision on the one hand, and dimness and invisibility on the other, express three themes: epistemological uncertainty, the loss inherent in death, and the dark nature of punishment. The term ἀμαυρόν (466) ranges in connotation from "dark and weak" to "faint and dim."[25] It thus connects the Erinyes' "making a man hard to see" to invisibility as loss of presence and thus to destruction.[26] The "dark" (κελαιναί, 462–3) Erinyes are intimates of Night and Death in their genealogy and in the light–dark thematics of the trilogy.[27] But, for humans, this term also gives the sense of "difficult to discern." The Elders repeatedly utilize the vocabulary of the invisible to imply a divine or demonic agent about whom they are uncertain.[28] This is the case when they assign the reason for Helen's name being so close to the Greek word for destruction to "some being we cannot see" (τις ὅντιν' οὐχ ὁρῶμεν, *Ag.* 683), and when they unexpectedly substitute an Erinys for Helen (738–49).[29] More explicitly, in a later choral ode they use imperceptibility in an ethical sense to describe a wealthy man's fate when he does not take precautions: "It hits an unseen reef" (ἔπαισεν ἄφαντον ἕρμα, *Ag.* 1007).[30] The divine is all the more ominous for fulfilling signs while remaining invisible.

Yet the vocabulary of invisibility in this passage goes further, for it refers specifically to punishment in the afterlife. In the verses ἐν δ' ἀίστοις τελέθοντος οὔτις ἀλκά ("there is no defense for him being among the unseen/in the unseen places," *Ag.* 466–8), the metaphorical meaning of invisibility (ἀίστοις, *aistois*) transcends the euphemism for nonexistence. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, Hades is etymologically "the unseen" (ἀ-ἰδεῖν, *a-idein*). The "unseen places" or being "among the unseen" thus here distinctly refers to the underworld.

---

[25] Fraenkel (1950), ad loc.

[26] Analyzed in Chapter 1. It is worth noting that – unlike Denniston and Page (1957) – Fraenkel (1950), Sommerstein (2008b), and Medda (2017) retain the codices' ὅσσοις in verses 469–70, which continues the visual motif.

[27] In Aeschylus, they are children of Night (*Eum.* 321–2, 416, 1034), and they dispense punishment "to the blind and the seeing" (*Eum.* 322–3, 387–8). See the Introduction for the previous genealogy and functions of the Erinyes.

[28] Both in conversation (e.g. assuming that the storm comes from wrath of unspecified divinities: δαιμόνων κότῳ, *Ag.* 635) and in lyric (the Hymn to Zeus, *Ag.* 160–83), the gods are the drivers of events for the Chorus. More specifically, they refer to Zeus as the source and will of all events, which nevertheless remain mysterious to men. Lebeck (1971), 35–6, claims that the Chorus's understanding of Zeus's plan is corroborated by the action and ending of the trilogy. However, Goldhill (1984a), 29–33, insists on the genuine difficulty – which the *Oresteia* itself seems to emphasize – of applying choral *gnomai* to the action due to meaningful linguistic gaps and their deliberate vagueness.

[29] See Nooter (2017), 167–73; and Barrett (2002), 11–2. This theme is evident in the Herald's statement that "some god" (θεός τις, *Ag.* 663) navigated the Greeks out of the storm. Cf. Orestes recounting Apollo's threats to him with this same vocabulary: "a father's unseen wrath" (οὐχ ὁρωμένην, *Cho.* 293–4).

[30] Similarly, the Chorus describe the Achaean expedition against Troy as "hunters on the invisible (ἄφαντον) track of oars" (694–5). The LSJ's translation of this term as "disappearing," in its progressive aspect, loses the disjunction between undetectability and existence that the stronger meaning, "invisible," suggests. The Chorus create a poetic paradox in which the track is unseen yet can still be traced. This vocabulary of tracing is used in supernatural contexts elsewhere in the *Oresteia*: The Elders declare that the punishment on Troy is easy "to trace" to Zeus (ἐξιχνεῦσαι, *Ag.* 368); Cassandra prophetically finds the track of evils long ago (ἴχνος κακῶν, *Ag.* 1184); and the Erinyes follow Orestes' invisible trail like supernatural hounds (*Eum.* 244–53).

This is consonant in vocabulary and themes with the other two references in the trilogy to the punishment of a transgressor in life and after death. The second is sung by the Chorus of Slave Women, with light and dark motifs in the context of taking vengeance on Clytemnestra (*Cho.* 59–65). In the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* passages, the notion of ethical wrong punished in the underworld is contained in circumlocutions (especially "there is no defense" *Ag.* 467–8; cf. *Cho.* 65). However, the third is sung by the chthonic avengers themselves and is much more explicit. The Erinyes list three transgressions and name Hades as the judge and punisher of these wrongs (*Eum.* 267–75).[31] Each choral passage is directed against a particular character: Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes respectively. Significantly, the *Agamemnon* passage is in the specific context of the citizens' curse against Agamemnon, for which the Erinyes and affliction among the dead serve as a divine analogue. It is thus the first use of afterlife punishment to explicitly critique political action, certainly in the trilogy, and arguably in extant Greek literature.[32]

The Elders never return to this theme in their other references to possible continuity after death. A third choral passage focuses both on death as final and, paradoxically, on overturning its finality. While appearing to sing of the absoluteness of death, the Elders invoke a mythical story of resurrection (*Ag.* 1019–24):

τὸ δ' ἐπὶ γᾶν πεσὸν ἅπαξ θανάσιμον
πρόπαρ ἀνδρὸς μέλαν αἷμα τίς ἂν
πάλιν ἀγκαλέσαιτ' ἐπαείδων;
οὐδὲ τὸν ὀρθοδαῆ
τῶν φθιμένων ἀνάγειν
Ζεὺς ἀπέπαυσεν ἐπ' ἀβλαβείᾳ.

Once the deadly dark blood
has fallen in front of a man onto the earth,

---

[31] For further analysis of the connections between these three passages and the visibility–invisibility dynamic, see Chapter 7.

[32] See the Introduction for how limited conceptions of afterlife punishment are in previous Greek literature and religion.

who could call it up by chanting?
Not even the one who knew how to correctly
lead up the dead
did Zeus stop harmlessly.

The first part of this passage (1019–21) focuses on the irreversibility of death, one of the several that use blood to justify vengeance in the trilogy.[33] Calling blood dark (μέλαν, 1020) carries some of the same multilayered connotations as the previous reference to the Erinyes (462–3). To the image of liquid flowing out of a human onto the ground, the adjective "dark" adds the mournful emotional aspect of losing life, as well as the privation of light in death. The question appears to be rhetorical; even magical chanting to call up (ἀγκαλέσαιτ' ἐπαείδων, *ankalesait' epaeidōn,* 1021) cannot reverse the one-directional (downward) flow of mortality.[34] Yet the next two verses are a clear allusion to the myth of Asclepius rescuing Hippolytus from Hades. The topographical term ἀνάγειν (*anagein*, "leading up," 1023) is regularly used for leading up spirits and for the reversal of *katabasis*.[35] It assumes an underworld from which people may return as themselves.

The fact that the Chorus treat resurrection as a deed that has already been accomplished, at least once, neatly reverses the meaning of the rhetorical question. Even though Zeus punished the one human who did this in the past, the very reference opens up the continuing possibility of it recurring. Resurrection is one of the potential outcomes attempted by the mourners in the *kommos* scene of the *Choephoroi*, who use the same topographical language to call on Agamemnon (e.g. *Cho.* 489, 496; Chapter 4). Return – if not resurrection – is also thematically related to the ghosts in the rest of the *Oresteia*, for Cassandra declares to the Elders that she sees the dead Children of Thyestes only some seventy lines later (*Ag.* 1095–7, 1217–22), and the Ghost of Clytemnestra affects life in the *Eumenides*. Thus, although the Chorus ostensibly sing of the impossibility of resurrection, this passage, instead, hints at the possibility, actualized in the trilogy, of death not ending life at all.

A fourth and final passage alludes to continuity beyond death through the Greek conceptualization of the soul. It is the only use in the

---

[33] Cf. *Cho.* 306–14; *Eum.* 230.

[34] ἐπαείδων here clearly refers to supernatural song, as in Cassandra's divinely inspired singing prophecy (θεσπιῳδήσειν, *Ag.* 1161). In an ironic echo, a member of the Chorus later declares that one cannot bring the dead (Agamemnon) back with words (λόγοισι, *Ag.* 1361).

[35] Fraenkel (1950), ad loc., points out that the same verb of leading up is used at *Pers.* 621 for the magical, temporary summoning of Darius' spirit from Hades, whereas the myth here involves the actual return of a person to life.

*Agamemnon* of the term *psukhē* that can include within its range of meanings "the shade of the dead," and one of only three such uses in Aeschylus.[36] Following Agamemnon's killing, the Elders use the term to indirectly invoke an abstract notion of selfhood, separable from the body (*Ag.* 1543–6):

> ἦ σὺ τόδ᾽ ἔρξαι τλήσῃ, κτείνασ᾽
> ἄνδρα τὸν αὑτῆς ἀποκωκῦσαι
> ψυχῇ τ᾽ ἄχαριν χάριν ἀντ᾽ ἔργων
> μεγάλων ἀδίκως ἐπικρᾶναι;
>
> Will you dare to do it – having slain
> your own husband, to bewail him
> and unjustly perform a graceless grace for his soul
> in return for his great accomplishments?

The Elders deny that Clytemnestra can properly perform the burial rites for Agamemnon, having slaughtered him. The stress of the passage is on the continuation of Clytemnestra's unholy acts. Yet the oxymoron "graceless grace" (ἄχαριν χάριν, *akharin kharin*, *Ag.* 1545; cf. *Cho.* 44) depends on the fact that the Elders are concerned with the postmortem welfare (the "grace/boon," χάριν, *kharin*) of the *psukhē* (ψυχῇ) of Agamemnon, achieved through proper burial ritual. The Elders have already used the term *kharis* in contexts of facing death *without* continuation, both when speaking of themselves and Cassandra.[37] This passage thus contains the hints of a reversal. It plays off of the continuity afforded by funeral rites: The living honor the dead, who become part of the "ancestors before the house."[38]

This is the first known use in Greek of someone fulfilling a *kharis* for someone else's soul.[39] The boon – rather than being about the living – is focused on the dead. The benefit to Agamemnon's soul is the ritual honor owed to one who achieved great things (ἀντ᾽ ἔργων μεγάλων, 1545–6). It contains within it the continuation of selfhood, since it is the dead Agamemnon who can still be honored or dishonored. This conceptually and linguistically separates his soul from his corpse. Here the *psukhē* is neither the image of the dead nor his memory. In fact, *psukhē*, the Homeric word for what remains of the dead in the underworld, evokes the Elders' previous mention of "being in the unseen places." The Elders' use of "soul" as receiving honor after the body is dead, then, reinforces the idea of personal continuity with both negative and positive possibilities. This becomes a major theme in the *Choephoroi*, half of which occurs around Agamemnon's dishonored tomb, and all of which is concerned with attempts to return his due honor.

---

[36] The other two are at *Pers.* 630 and *Eum.* 115 (on the unusual features of which see Chapter 6). Cf. Sullivan (1997), 144–6.

[37] For themselves, *Ag.* 550; for Cassandra the *kharis* is presumably "to die gloriously" (εὐκλεῶς . . . κατθανεῖν χάρις, *Ag.* 1304). See above, pp. 54–5, and Chapter 3.

[38] Who are mentioned in the context of Agamemnon's burial in *Cho.* 320–2. See Chapters 4 and 5.

[39] Sullivan (1997), 145.

## Summations/Connections

The Elders' references to death and types of continuity beyond it raise a series of questions: What are the implications of each of their positions for understanding actions in life, both private and political? How do their approaches to the end of life affect a reading of their stage character and its dramatic effects? How does their human perspective condition the divine manifestations later in the trilogy? The structural patterns evident in the analysis above help to answer these. In each of the four passages, the Elders simultaneously emphasize the limits of life and provide some notion of continuity. There are internal tensions in the passages, but, even more to the point, each of these notions of continuity after death differs significantly from the others. Aspects of each possibility are known in Greek culture, so each might seem to be perfectly natural on its own. Nevertheless, attentive audiences might sense the Elders' inability to reconcile the possibilities about which they sing. The contradictions between them thus outline the boundary of human wisdom. Instead of drawing conclusions for life from a consistent notion of the afterlife, or even from death as closure, the Elders continually proliferate conflicting perspectives.

The multitude of contradictory ideas problematizes any connection between their speech as characters and their lyrical allusions to existence after death. The Elders never follow through the implications of their references to a possible afterlife. They remain within the orbit of human knowledge and therefore chained to a limited understanding of causality, even when their speculation touches on themes that manifest as divine concerns later. This restriction can be seen in the first example, that of the dead at their graves (*Ag.* 452–5); the Elders do not allege that their political critique rests on any literal afterlife. In their words, the dead as images ("handsome men") never threaten to be agents in the world, unlike the Herald's mention of the possibility (in the negative) that they could "rise again." In the Elders' lyrics, the living cherish the memories of these men;

political action depends only on the families. It is by no means clear that the reaction to the mounting toll of the war would differ at all if the fallen soldiers were spoken of only in physical terms. This is evident in the Argive citizens' anger at the return of the dead as ashes (*Ag.* 441–3). The political force of this former passage is contingent upon neither actual intervention by the dead nor any reference to them continuing in the afterlife. Yet this restriction is belied by the ghostly returns in the rest of the trilogy and even within the Elders' own interaction with Cassandra.

In the second example (*Ag.* 461–8), the Elders allude to punishment after death to condemn unethical action in life. This example fits into a repeated schema in the *Agamemnon*'s choral passages: The gods check human overreaching, specifically mass killing in warfare. Yet the reference is allusive, and nowhere else do the Elders mention continuation of punishment in an afterlife. The clearest sequel ought to be in one of the numerous references to Agamemnon after his death in the trilogy, since he is the target of their critique while living. Throughout the Elders' reaction to his death, however, there is no mention of punishment in an afterlife, but a concern for his soul and burial rites. Moreover, although the *Choephoroi* is primarily concerned with Agamemnon's fate, including numerous references to his possible afterlife, none of these involve divine punishment. This lack of follow-up diffuses the ethical and political force of the Elders' allusion.

Yet as the trilogy progresses, theirs is not the last mention of retribution in the afterlife. The choruses of each play proclaim that transgressions will be punished in the beyond, a structural feature of the *Oresteia* that has yet to be explored.[40] Despite the Chorus of Elders not continuing on the theme, and raising other ideas of continuity after death, afterlife punishment is a repeated ethical-political concern of the *Oresteia*. Thus it is important to see the place of this first example in the larger schema of the trilogy. The Elders raise the theme of afterlife punishment, only to let it fade among other possibilities, after which it returns even more powerfully, to the point at which it becomes part of the revelation of the ethical framework of human life.

The myth of Asclepius raising the dead (*Ag.* 1019–24), the Elders' third perspective on possible continuity, contradicts on its face the closure of death. Through the myth, the Chorus again emphasize living justly and avoiding disaster by not transgressing human limitations. It is in this context that they also insist on an absolute ending to life (τέρμα, *terma*,

---

[40] Cf. *Cho.* 59–65; *Eum.* 267–75. See Chapter 7.

1002), regardless of any attempts to circumvent it. The focus on punishment in the myth combines the two elements: The harm that Zeus imposes on Asclepius is to chasten the superhuman act, which itself transgresses the rigid life–death boundary. That is, the primary meaning of the myth is that the dead are trapped below and efforts to bring them up again bodily are condemned.[41] The Elders thus first mention the possibility of the dead reentering the world, then distance it from reality. This is the most conspicuous instance of a double move that the Herald also made with the war dead: The presupposition of the example opens the door to human existence beyond death, but their conclusion barricades it again.

As with the above examples, the run of the action uncovers issues with these choral statements shortly thereafter. Most potently, Cassandra's superhuman visions demonstrate the continuation of the dead not only for themselves, but as forces that pressure the living. The Elders refuse to respond to her at the time. Their consistent suppression of preternatural knowledge in her scene demonstrates their attitude toward their epistemic limitations.[42] Instead, they continue to another type of possible continuation in their mention of grace for Agamemnon's soul in the fourth example (*Ag*. 1543–6). Yet the Elders indicate no sentience or continuity of Agamemnon's *psukhē* in the afterlife. In fact, Clytemnestra is the one who refers to his existence in Hades, where she sarcastically imagines his joyous reception by Iphigeneia (*Ag*. 1555–9, cf. 1525–9; Chapters 5 and 6). His continuation in Hades also becomes a crucial element of the mourning for the king in the *Choephoroi* (Chapter 4). The implication of this last example is that the Elders' willful ignorance extends beyond the political issues they face under Clytemnestra, and even beyond the encounter with Cassandra. The Elders never follow through on the meaning of any possible afterlife they themselves broach. The very plurality of ideas from the Elders might indicate that they are airing mere speculations.

Having examined their references to continuity after death, one can turn to the Elders' own actions in relation to their ideas. The Elders' deeds fizzle out, but not for lack of mentions of glory. The benefit they seek for Agamemnon's soul is due to his having achieved great deeds (1545–6). This benefit parallels their extending *kleos* to Cassandra for dying bravely.

---

[41] After being struck by lightning, Asclepius achieves immortality. He was himself a cult figure by the fifth century, possibly moving from a hero to a divinity over this time. Thus there is a complex interplay of death and immortality in this example, Currie (2005), 354–63.

[42] Goldhill (1984a), 88, draws attention to the paradox that the sure revelations of the future in the Cassandra scene undermine free will, whereas the Chorus's gridlock in the next scene is partly due to their ignorance of the future. Cf. Lebeck (1971), 31–2; and Nooter (2017), 177–8.

In the last parts of the *Agamemnon*, their rhetoric of dying in the fight against tyranny ties in with their mentions of a brave death leading to glory.[43] Yet all of these connections in speech are not enough to motivate action. The resistance of the Elders is ethereal; their *gnomai* seem to be marks of a collective wisdom ineffective in times of crisis.[44] It is tempting to assign the impotence of the Elders to their failure to stick to a single afterlife idea. One can diagnose the Elders with a particular symptom, that of systematically subverting their own speculation. They mention neither divine will nor universal justice when they threaten to oppose the *coup d'état*. Could it be that without a unified "ideological" or "religious" motivation, with only the notion of death as oblivion for themselves, the Elders falter in the ultimate moment?

On a structural level, it is worth asking what the inaction of the Elders demonstrates about the *Oresteia*. It is well established that the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* in particular offers a collective countervoice to the heroic tragic characters, and that they refrain from heroic action, as do other tragic choruses. Their ineffective condemnation has also been contrasted to the jurors of the *Eumenides*, whose judgment closes the human action.[45] More specifically, however, their search for a divine framework but inability to act is the counterpoint to the decision-making of individual characters in the rest of the trilogy: Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes make their choices with explicit appeals to divine support. But disastrous events are a crucible for beliefs. The energy needed for violence is a conflagration that the Elders – full of doubt, lacking vitality, never settling on one foundation – cannot sustain. The Elders thus seem to dramatize one human response to uncertainty about divine matters, and specifically continuity beyond death – paralysis.

One must be wary, however, of attempts to find the single "cause" of their inaction, as analyses of specific themes in the *Oresteia* are always in danger of doing. All of the constraints that afflict the Elders of the *Agamemnon* – infirmity, antiphrastic opinions, general uncertainty, fear, and the limits of tragic convention – are aspects of their sophisticated dramatic representation. To make the Elders' opinion on the afterlife the decisive factor in this regard would be overstating the case. There are no direct links in the text between their inaction and their varying speculations concerning the afterlife. Rather, the characterization of the Elders' diverging opinions about the fate of humans after death accounts for one aspect of their hesitation. These passages reinforce their speculation about the divinely controlled ethical structure of life on the one hand, and about human values on the other.

---

[43] This might have been especially resonant in Athens, where Tyrannicides were celebrated as agents of democracy, see the Introduction.

[44] Gould (1996), 223–4, 231–2; *contra* Dhuga (2011), 1–9, 76–117.

[45] Fletcher (2014).

The Elders' conflicting views as to the ethical framework of life and whether to include the afterlife in it provide human elements of the background for the divine standoffs at the end of the *Oresteia*. The Chorus mention for the first time the life–afterlife punishment continuum that the chthonic Erinyes later describe in more detail. The universal themes in Orestes' trial and the new law for Athens in the *Eumenides* are already present in the Elders' focus on the ethical and political issues in the carnage of war. The Elders present a dramatically compelling, all-too-human uncertainty concerning the afterlife. Whereas the divine characters of the *Eumenides* bolster their claims with specific references to Zeus and the *Moirai*, the Elders grope for an understanding of divine will more generally. They are left behind as the forces they foreshadow emerge, but their warnings condition the reception of the later revelations.

## CHAPTER 3

# *Prophecy on the Banks of the Acheron*

## *Thinking Cassandra Past Her Doom*

### Introduction

Death as the ultimate ending is the structuring assumption in the intensely moving Cassandra scene. Aeschylus reinvented this minor character from previous myths as a prophetess whom Apollo has cursed to be disbelieved.[1] Cassandra's overwhelming constraints are the emphasis from the start of the scene, the *Agamemnon*'s longest (1035–330).[2] The Trojan princess is already marked as a war captive, a concubine to Agamemnon, and a foreign house-slave to Clytemnestra (950–5, cf. 1035–71). The tense prelude to her first words involves uncertainty about her ability to comprehend what is said. The audience watches as Apollo's curse imposes physically coercive prophecy on Cassandra, which erupts from her in poetic cries. The greatest of Cassandra's oppressions is her preternatural knowledge of her fate (e.g. 1139, 1260–4). With no meaningful choices or agency, the enslaved prophetess of the *Agamemnon* appears uniquely powerless.[3]

Aeschylus exploits these immense constraints for three dramatic effects. First, Cassandra's foreknowledge is integral to the ironies woven into her past and present.[4] After the audience learns of the rejection of her prophecy at Troy (1210, 1212), they watch the dynamic slowly repeat at Argos. Cassandra can reveal the future to the Chorus, yet she is unable to affect either her own or Agamemnon's imminent slaughter. The sense of prophetic fulfillment redoubles when the fall of Troy is reenacted in their deaths, the last Trojan and the conqueror of Troy now corpses on stage. A second reaction to her immutable fate involves Cassandra resisting her killer, Clytemnestra, in the paltry ways allowed to her. She greets Clytemnestra's words with stubborn silence and chooses to walk on her own terms to the fateful door. For this the Elders term her "brave" (e.g. 1302). Despite being doomed, Cassandra exercises an aspect of volition, which is recognized within the play.[5] Last, Cassandra, as she goes to her death, predicts vengeance for herself as well as for Agamemnon, at least the latter of which comes to pass.[6] She emphasizes the finality of her own death (1291–4, 1327–9) and is never again mentioned by name. Cassandra's prophesied and fulfilled death thus triggers a set of ironies, conditions her unexpected bravery, and facilitates a feeling of closure.[7]

---

[1] The *Oresteia* is the first work that describes Apollo's relation to Cassandra and emphasizes her fatedness, Mitchell-Boyask (2006), 273. She has no prophetic powers in any of the Homeric passages in which she appears: *Il.* 13.365–7, 24.699–706; and *Od.* 11.421–2. The hypothesis of the *Cypria* points to the first instance of Cassandra foretelling the future (Κασσάνδρα περὶ τῶν μελλόντων προδηλοῖ, 1, 39, 11 Bernabé = Procl. *Chrest.* 94 Sev.). Pindar's fragmentary *Paean* 8 ascribes prophetic powers to an unnamed Trojan woman, possibly intended to be Cassandra (8a = 52i(A) Maehler); cf. Mazzoldi (2001), 123–34, 115–77, on Ancient Greek literary and artistic sources for Cassandra as prophetess. See Neblung (1997) for a comprehensive treatment of literary sources for Cassandra in antiquity.

[2] Lebeck (1971), 52, labels the scene the climax of the *Agamemnon*.

[3] Schein (1982), 12, likens her to a modern schizophrenic, her true insights combined with "utter helplessness." Cf. Knox (1972), 114.

[4] For ironies in the Cassandra scene, see Goldhill (1984a), 81–8; and Morgan (1994), 121–2. See further on irony in Greek tragedy Rosenmeyer (1996); Lowe (1996); and again Goldhill (2012), 13–37, who presents Sophoclean tragedy as a challenge to traditional notions of irony that posit a secure,

There is, however, an element of her scene that casts doubt on Cassandra's endpoint as a character and therefore ought to provoke reconsideration of these three themes. Cassandra depicts herself as continuing in the realm of Hades as she did in life (*Ag.* 1160–1):

νῦν δ᾽ ἀμφὶ Κωκυτόν τε κἀχερουσίους
ὄχθους ἔοικα θεσπιῳδήσειν τάχα.

Now by the Cocytus and the banks of the Acheron
it seems I will soon be singing prophecies.

This couplet has not drawn critical attention, being perhaps too brief and allusive.[8] Yet it transforms Cassandra's fate from ending in her murder to persisting in the afterlife, not only as a shade bereft of characteristics, but as an active prophetic figure. Close attention to the couplet raises a critical set

---

knowing audience judging unknowing characters. The analysis of the destabilization of the perspectives and knowledge of the audience through tragic language, paradoxes, and uncertainty is applicable to the *Oresteia* as well, as this chapter demonstrates.

[5] McClure (1999), 92–7; and Doyle (2008), 61–2, 65–74.

[6] *Ag.* 1279–85, 1317–20, 1323–6. Verses 1324–5 are corrupt, but for the sense of asking for vengeance for herself, see Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.

[7] On the dramatic power of this scene and its pathos, related to Cassandra's lament and dramatic time on stage, see Wohl (1998), 24 n. 41; and Doyle (2008), 67, 74; *contra* Rosenmeyer (1982), 306–7, who claims that Aeschylus reduces reasons, morality, and guilt to bare "poetic facts" that force audiences into becoming "historians, recorders of actions that are complete in themselves."

[8] It is ignored or treated as a vague mention of death by Fraenkel (1950), ad loc.; Denniston and Page (1957); Lebeck (1971); Goldhill (1984a); Conacher (1987); and Sommerstein (2008b).

of questions: If Cassandra continues to exist beyond her death, what becomes of the theme of foretold fate? What of the irony, resistance, and vengeance that depend on her immediate end?

In order to investigate the consequences of shifting Cassandra's end, one must conscientiously parse the couplet itself. Is her reference to the underworld simply a synonym for death, or does it literally refer to her afterlife? If the latter, we must investigate whether it is an actual prophecy or Cassandra's own deduction of her fate. The following sections thus examine the immediate context, meter, and vocabulary of the couplet. This chapter then investigates how the possibilities reconfigure our understanding of the three major dynamics arising from her inexorable death. First is how they affect the human and divine constraints that structure Cassandra's doom and consequent ironies. Second is their effects on her emphasis on closure. Last is how they shift the valences of her resistance. Attention to this afterlife couplet uncovers ethical nuances of her scene and complicates its well-known themes with previously unexamined aspects.

## Cassandra's Rivers

The larger passage from which it is taken demonstrates the tensions between possible readings of the couplet. It is nearly a précis of Cassandra's life, as it refers to her childhood and includes the destructive marriage that began the Trojan War (*Ag.* 1156–61):[9]

ἰὼ γάμοι γάμοι Πάριδος ὀλέθριοι φίλων·
ἰὼ Σκαμάνδρου πάτριον ποτόν·
τότε μὲν ἀμφὶ σὰς ἀιόνας τάλαιν᾽
ἠνυτόμαν τροφαῖς·
νῦν δ᾽ ἀμφὶ Κωκυτόν τε κἈχερουσίους
ὄχθους ἔοικα θεσπιῳδήσειν τάχα.

Woe, the wedding, the wedding of Paris, destructive of kin!
Woe, the ancestral drink of the Scamander!
Back then by your banks, wretched woman,
I was nourished to adulthood.
Now by the Cocytus and the banks of the Acheron
it seems I will soon be singing prophecies.

---

[9] On Cassandra's relationship to time, see Zeitlin 1966, 645; and Widzisz (2012), 61–9.

Cassandra links the flow of her life to the Scamander at Troy and its ebb to the Cocytus and Acheron, those pain-filled rivers of Hades.[10] The final couplet, if taken literally, indicates that Cassandra will continue beyond death. Whereas this world's currents drag her to her prophesied demise, the rivers at the end of the couplet betoken further suffering: Cassandra's curse could abide, even below the earth.

Cassandra's own second sight provides the first encounter with supernatural continuity of the dead within the *Oresteia*. Shortly after this passage, the prophetess literally sees the ghost Children of Thyestes (ὁρᾶτε τούσδε τούς … νέους, *Ag.* 1217–18). The couplet fits squarely, therefore, within the concerns of the trilogy about the afterlife, as will become evident in later chapters. Important to mention here, however, is Cassandra's link to Clytemnestra, her killer. Cassandra gives Clytemnestra the multilayered epithet, "mother of Hades" ("Ἅιδου μητέρ᾽", *Hadou mēter*᾽, 1235). In part this refers to Clytemnestra engendering death, but more figuratively it is also borne out by the queen's descriptions of and return from the underworld.[11] When living, Clytemnestra claims that Iphigeneia will embrace and kiss her killer, Agamemnon, by the river Acheron (*Ag.* 1555–9), a phrasing that echoes Cassandra's earlier reference to the same river.[12] Reinforcing but also reversing the dynamics, when Clytemnestra returns as a ghost in the *Eumenides*, she complains that *she* is the one haunted by those she killed.[13] This can be seen as a reference to Cassandra continuing in the afterlife, for the priestess is one of the two bodies over which Clytemnestra gloats on stage.

---

[10] Cf. *Sept.* 690, 856. See Mackie 1999, esp. 493, on these rivers of Hades in Homer and their connection to the Scamander, which is "fundamental to the life of Troy." Note that Aeschylus' combination of Cassandra's lament with these specific rivers could be read as a sophisticated Homeric allusion. In *Il.* 24.703, Cassandra bewails Hector's body with the verb κωκύω, from which the river Cocytus takes its name. She is tied to mournful shrieking in the *Odyssey*, as well; the only detail about Cassandra in Agamemnon's story is the most piteous (οἰκτροτάτην) sound she makes as she is cut down by Clytemnestra, *Od.* 11.421. Pindar's *Pyth.* 11.16–22, in which Clytemnestra is said to have sent Cassandra to the banks of the Acheron (Ἀχέροντος ἀκτάν) along with the soul of Agamemnon, seems similar enough to posit some influence. However, it is uncertain whether it dates to before or after the *Oresteia*, Medda (2017), 1.26–7.

[11] For further interpretations of this phrase, see Chapter 5.

[12] πόρθμευμ᾽ ἀχέων, literally "the passage/ferry of griefs" (*Ag.* 1558), is an etymological allusion to the Acheron, Denniston and Page (1957), ad. loc.; and Mackie (1999), 487 n. 8. Garner (1990), 36, points out the ironies in this underworld scene. On Clytemnestra's justifications for killing Agamemnon, see Neuburg 1991 and Foley 2001, 211–34. On Cassandra's links to Iphigeneia, see Wohl (1998), 111–16; and Doyle 2008, 58–62.

[13] "The reproach of those I killed never ceases among the perished" (ὧν μὲν ἔκτανον ὄνειδος ἐν φθιτοῖσιν οὐκ ἐκλείπεται, *Eum.* 96–7). For the other two references to Cassandra after her death, see below, p. 85.

This comparison with Clytemnestra demonstrates how characters' perspectives on the afterlife juxtapose with each other. The witnesses themselves have various degrees of believability and may even present conflicting stories. Clytemnestra is an admitted liar and murderer, whereas her ghost gives a different version of the afterlife than she did while alive. Further, beyond even the ghost children – who are passive and appear only to Cassandra – Clytemnestra's return from the underworld presents a dead character carrying on with similar speech and concerns as in life (Chapter 6). On the one hand, the Ghost of Clytemnestra's allusion to Cassandra in Hades supports the possibility that Cassandra's couplet is literally true. On the other hand, it has a far different emphasis from Cassandra's self-depiction of her cursed existence, by hinting that she takes part in Clytemnestra's punishment – acting as her own avenger.

A third possibility for Cassandra relates to the afterlife as a place of ethical retribution. One of the three choral references to punishment in the underworld can also apply to her. In the *Eumenides*, the chthonic Erinyes explicitly reveal that the god Hades punishes every mortal who transgresses (*Eum.* 267–75).[14] Cassandra's acts in life can be seen to fall into the category of "dishonoring a god" (θεόν . . . ἀσεβῶν, *theon* . . . *asebōn*, *Eum.* 270).[15] Cassandra recounts that her curse is due to somehow "conceding/consenting to" (ξυναινέσασα) and then "cheating" (ἐψευσάμην, *Ag.* 1208) Apollo's sexual advances.[16] Whereas the nature of each of these actions is left undefined, it is clear that in the living world she is punished by the god for frustrating him in a sexual context (see further below, pp. 79–80). The naming of impiety against a divinity as a cause for punishment in the *Eumenides* passage revives the possibility that Cassandra will continue to suffer in the afterlife.

Named figures exist in the realm of Hades, but whether they are punished or actively punish, whether they have power or demand action in the living world all depends on the speaker. With these contradictions, the *Oresteia* avoids a definitive stance on what happens to a person after death. It forces audiences to consider multiple perspectives, each in its context, but also in interplay with one another. These explicit references to others' afterlives and allusions to Cassandra's potential continuations provide the background for a closer examination of how her couplet functions on its own terms.

---

[14] For the other two references to afterlife punishment and further on this one, see Chapters 2 and 7.

[15] Zeitlin (1965), 504, designates Cassandra as a symbol of the disrupted relationship with the gods in the *Agamemnon*, since she is Apollo's priestess, destroyed by him.

[16] Morgan (1994), 125–7. On the paradoxes of Cassandra deceiving the god of prophecy and his part in avenging her, see Judet de La Combe (2001), II.400–1.

## Prophecy or Deduction? Divergent Possibilities for Cassandra

Cassandra is the only "seer" in tragedy who literally *sees* – both a past that did not happen to her and the future for the house beyond her death.[17] The stanza we are concerned with contains, by contrast, visual images related solely to her – memories of her own childhood and her own potential continuation after death. As with other personal information in her scene, this stanza is thus differentiated from her supernatural knowledge concerning the house of Atreus. The question of authoritativeness concerning Cassandra's vision of herself in Hades rests on whether one considers it to be a product of her superhuman sight or her human deduction.[18]

Cassandra's markers of emotion are the first elements in need of scrutiny. The emphatic repetition of the exclamation ἰώ ("woe," 1156, 1157) indicates the emotional charge of the passage and ties it to lamentation.[19] These cries of woe may also relate to her inarticulate howls and shrieks whenever she prophesies.[20] Comparable is an earlier passage beginning with ἰὼ ἰώ (1136–9), in which she first grieves for her own circumstances (with the pleonasm κακόποτμοι τύχαι, *kakopotmoi tukhai* "ill-fated fortunes," 1136), then struggles to determine why Apollo has brought her to the house of Atreus, and at last determines that she is to die with Agamemnon (1139). The Chorus claim, precisely at this point, that Cassandra is out of her mind and divinely possessed (1140–5, 1150–5).[21] Analogously, her cries in the afterlife stanza may indicate that she is in a trance. The rivers of Hades she names (1160) would then be marked as images before her, in line with the emphasis on vision in her other prophecies. In this reading of her laments, the afterlife couplet is part of her visionary speech that causes an almost physical response of woe. It would thus be a prophetic, divinely guaranteed representation of her fate.

---

[17] Rehm (2005) notes Cassandra's unparalleled status in tragedy as a "sensually present seer," since her prophecy also includes scents, sounds, and tactile components, 348–9. In 343–6, he discusses the use of terms for prophecy such as προφήτης and μάντις.

[18] Budelmann and Easterling (2010), 294, accurately point out that Cassandra moves from her visual images to deductions drawn from them as early as verses 1095–7, and that this remains a distinct epistemic structure throughout her scene; *contra* Rehm (2005), 349.

[19] Dué (2006), 152–3, compares the lament in verses 1167–71 to this passage and also gives a taxonomy of lament in tragedy, 8–21; cf. Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 1072.

[20] See Nooter (2017), 44–8, 138–43, for Cassandra's cries as something between embodying an animal and channeling a god; cf. Heirman (1975).

[21] Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 1150–5.

The scene, however, keeps the opposite perspective in tension. For the language surrounding the couplet could also indicate that the basis for Cassandra's declaration about the afterlife is *not* a divine vision. The Chorus proclaim that Cassandra is intelligible for the first time directly thereafter (1162–7).[22] Taking their usual, overly literal approach, with its emphasis on clear communication, they now understand her mention of Hades as only referring to death. They refer specifically to being struck by a "deadly" or "murderous" (φοινίῳ, 1164) bite on account of her painful fate (δυσαλγεῖ τύχᾳ, *dusalgei tukha* 1165).[23] Their response suggests that the couplet is metaphorical, nonprophetic speech.

In addition to the choral response, another clue is that Cassandra begins the larger passage (1156–61) by tapping into her own memory. She recalls her childhood by the river Scamander, which she links to the rivers of Hades. The balanced correlative construction, "then by (your banks) . . . now by (the banks of)" (τότε μὲν ἀμφί . . . νῦν δ᾽ ἀμφί, *tote men amphi* . . . *nun d'amphi*, 1158, 1160) marks an analogy. This suggests Cassandra's mind at work, rather than an induced vision. The earlier passage (1136–9) could be seen as a parallel regarding this point as well. There she asks a question ("why have you brought miserable me here?" 1138) only to answer it herself with a deduction clearly not linked to any visual language ("for no reason except to die with another, what else?" 1139).[24] If the two passages were truly akin, Cassandra's language in the afterlife couplet would have to be read as figurative. That is, even if the image refers to her literal afterlife – rather than death – Cassandra would be speaking on her own authority; she would be speculating about what will happen to her in the hereafter. Yet there is no way to choose between these two distinct ways of reading her cries of woe and visual image of the underworld. That very fact shows that neither the markers of emotion nor the invocation of her past resolves whether the passage is literal or metaphorical, a prophecy or human inference.

---

[22] On "clarity" in the context of the general failure of communication in this scene, see Goldhill (1984a), 81–8; and cf. Bees (2009), 190–1.

[23] On the Chorus's obtusely literal responses to Cassandra and the miscommunication this engenders, see Morgan (1994), 125. Budelmann and Easterling (2010), 292–8, argue that the Chorus demonstrates an emotional understanding of her situation despite their inability to get at her literal meaning.

[24] Using punctuation from Sommerstein (2008b) rather than the OCT.

Does the difference, then, relate to whether Cassandra's prophetic lines are sung or spoken? That is, can the meter of these lines determine their register? The couplet is in iambic trimeter (1160–1), whereas the earlier lines of the stanza are lyric (1156–9). Cassandra includes trimeters from 1080 onward within her four exchanges with the Chorus, of which this stanza is the penultimate. The lyric verses are sung, but it is not clear whether the trimeters are. Scholars generally agree that, at the very least, Cassandra's trimeters "indicate a note of restraint."[25] McClure locates Cassandra's transition away from lamentation and "involuntary" speech at her full shift to trimeters (1178ff.), which occurs only after the stanza in question.[26] However, Morgan (1994, 128) points to Cassandra's later "prophetic frenzy, even though she continues to speak in trimeters (1215ff.)." This is clearly accurate, as 1214–16 are verses filled with lamenting cries and references to prophetic agony (δεινὸς ὀρθομαντείας πόνος, 1215) preceding her vision of the dead children.

The issue of the afterlife couplet then turns on whether the trimeters indicate speech that the character delivers in her own voice, whereas the lyric portion is "inspired." In fact, the correlative construction (τότε μὲν ἀμφί . . . νῦν δ᾽ ἀμφί, *tote men amphi . . . nun d'amphi*, 1158, 1160) *crosses* this metrical boundary. It is doubtless possible that these two parts of a single construction are delivered in different registers, but is it plausible that Cassandra would *sing* about her Trojan childhood and then *speak* her prophetic vision of the underworld? This would contradict the rest of her prophetic scene. It is therefore impossible to prove that there is a rigid correspondence between meter and content here. Meter, for us readers at least, can provide no certain guide as to the inspired status of the couplet.

A third element that indicates ambiguity traces back to the language at the heart of the couplet. The verb ἔοικα (*eoika*, "I seem" or "it seems that I," 1161) bears a great deal of interpretive weight in determining whether Cassandra *sees* herself in Hades or *deduces* that she will continue there. This verb crowds the Cassandra scene, occurring five times in fewer than 120 lines, more than in any other scene in Aeschylus.[27]

---

[25] Denniston and Page (1957), 165–6; and Sommerstein (2010a), 151–4. This is the usual interpretation of Aristotle's labelling trimeter a spoken meter in *Poetics* 1449a20-26, although he does not there contrast it to lyric, but to "satyric" tetrameter. Cf. Hall 1989, 130–1, who sees Cassandra's lyricism as barbarian, set against ordered, Greek trimeters.

[26] McClure (1999), 94–6. For more on the changing meter in the Cassandra scene, see Weil (1908), 270–1; Fraenkel (1950), II.487–8, 539; Lebeck (1971), 54; Goward (2004), 75–6; and Medda (2017), III.148–55.

[27] *Ag.* 1062, 1083, 1093, 1161, 1180 account for five out of the eighteen uses in the Aeschylean corpus, including fragments.

The general range of meanings of ἔοικα relates to comparison: “to be like,” “to liken,” “to seem,” “to be seemly or fitting,” and so on.[28] In some Homeric uses, ἔοικα with the dative means “looks like,” indicating that the comparison concerns something literally visible to the speaker.[29] When used with a participle or an infinitive, it tends to stress the intellectual activity of comparison or conjecture: “to seem to do something,” “to be like.”[30] Of course, the comparison still relies on sensory input, since there must be physical indications for one thing to resemble another or for someone to seem to do something.[31] Yet the observable component of something that “seems about to happen” is not generally emphasized.[32] It would be especially difficult, typically, to read a visual meaning into the use of *eoika* with a future infinitive, since humans cannot “see” the future to compare it to the present. Thus, for Cassandra’s couplet, the normal translation of ἔοικα θεσπιῳδήσειν (*eoika thespiōdēsein*) would be, “*I seem* about to sing prophecies” or, in the impersonal translation, “*it seems* that I will sing prophecies.” This understanding of *eoika* points toward Cassandra’s mental deduction, not a literal vision.

The notion of “seeming” is not a neutral one in the *Agamemnon*, however.[33] In several other uses in the Cassandra scene, the verb *eoika* itself is part of a web of words and concepts indicating precisely the questioning of vision, communication, and knowledge.[34] In the first two instances of the verb, both spoken by the Elders about Cassandra, *eoika* almost immediately indicates the unreliability of what appears to be the case (*Ag.* 1062–3 and 1083):

---

[28] LSJ s.v. It is rarely used in tenses other than the perfect and then ambiguous with εἴκω, “to be like, seem likely.” These are grouped together in Chantraine, s.v.

[29] LSJ I.

[30] LSJ II and IV; cf. Smith (1985), 34–5; and Blanc (2012).

[31] Aeschylus emphasizes this through a peculiar use of προσεικάζω in *Cho.* 12. When Orestes sees the procession of women in black, he exclaims: “To what misfortune should I liken it?” See Lebeck (1971), 97–8.

[32] This is evidenced by the other grouping of the term ἔοικα, in the *Choephoroi*: First Orestes will “seem to be a stranger” (εἰκώς with the dative, *Cho.* 560), then the Chorus claim that this stranger “seems to be making trouble” (ἔοικεν with the present infinitive, 730). These are both knowing deceptions based on false appearance. The next two uses include future infinitives and are deduction from immediate circumstances: To the Servant “it seems” that Clytemnestra will be killed (ἔοικε with the future infinitive, 883–4), then “it seems” to Clytemnestra that Orestes is going to kill his mother (ἔοικας with the future infinitive, 922), both of which occur. Last, Clytemnestra exclaims “I seem to be singing a useless dirge, while living, to my tomb” (ἔοικα with the present infinitive, 926), a first-person and metaphorical usage that echoes, to a certain extent, Cassandra’s. Yet Clytemnestra’s use of ἔοικα is not followed by the future infinitive, nor does it have any possible “prophetic” interpretation. It is a poetically phrased deduction.

[33] As is, by now, widely recognized, see Goldhill (1984a), 14–88, and (1986), 3–29.

[34] ἔοικα with the meaning “seem” occurs in *Ag.* 1062, 1083, 1093, 1161, 1180. Within that range, the related προσεικάζω (“liken”) occurs in verse 1131; and ἐξῃκασμένα (from ἐξεικάζω, “make like, adapt”) in 1244.

> ἑρμηνέως ἔοικεν ἡ ξένη τοροῦ
> δεῖσθαι·
>
> The foreigner seems (*eoiken*) to need some clear interpreter.
>
> χρήσειν ἔοικεν ἀμφὶ τῶν αὑτῆς κακῶν·
>
> She seems (*eoiken*) about to prophesy concerning her own troubles.

In both quotations, *eoiken* with the infinitive establishes audience expectations about Cassandra, only for her to promptly subvert them. Cassandra does *not*, in fact, need an interpreter to understand Greek, as she "seems" to the Elders to need at first. Neither does she immediately prophesy about her own troubles after they declare that she "seems" about to (with the future infinitive χρήσειν). Rather, Cassandra surprises the Elders by communicating in Greek her uncanny knowledge of the history and future of the house of Atreus (1085–1129). The Elders' use of *eoika* thus marks their mistaken deductions about Cassandra.[35] On a more general level, the Elders' struggle to process her prophecy and their consequent inability to act on it both emphasize their limited, merely human understanding of the present, past, and – especially – future.[36] In this scene, they are a foil to the infallibility of Cassandra's prophetic knowledge, which is exempted from human epistemic uncertainty.[37]

Two possible readings of *eoika* in the afterlife couplet emerge, each with its own implications. If Cassandra's use of *eoika* with the future infinitive is not marked as prophetic, she would be stitching an afterlife onto the end of her life without the authority of revelation. The term *eoika* would exemplify human mental deduction, what "seems" to be the case, and would thus partake of uncertainty. The second possibility derives from the warping of normally unproblematic language due to Cassandra's abnormal abilities.

---

[35] In these cases, ἔοικα cannot be unlinked from the more prevalent δοκέω, in its meanings "I think, it seems to me," LSJ I, II 1–4. δοκέω is used to mark human beliefs that in tragedy later events often contradict. The examples in the Cassandra scene are still complex. The Chorus reply to Cassandra that to them she "seems" to be prophesying believable things (ἡμῖν γε μὲν δὴ πιστὰ θεσπίζειν δοκεῖς, 1213), yet do not act. Cassandra herself denounces Clytemnestra for "seeming" to rejoice at Agamemnon's return (δοκεῖ δὲ χαίρειν, 1238). On the connection of δοκέω in Aeschylus to unstable images, see Catenaccio (2011), 222–3.

[36] On the limits of the Chorus's knowledge, which is partly tied to the impenetrability of what lies beyond death, see Thalmann (1985a), 114–17; cf. Knox (1972), 112, 120–3.

[37] Goldhill (1984a), 88. Rehm (2005), 346, contrasts Cassandra insisting on the correspondence of her prophecy with truth in *Ag.* 1195–7 and 1272–3 with the fears of false prophecy in Greek culture generally and in Cassandra's scene specifically.

As detailed above (p. 74), Cassandra is precisely the one figure able to *see* the future. The example of the Children of Thyestes illustrates this, for they appear to her "bearing the forms of dreams" (ὀνείρων προσφερεῖς μορφώμασιν, 1218). The phrasing emphasizes that they are observable by the senses, having forms, yet are also somehow beyond perception; they are dreams seen by only the one with second sight, while she is awake and communicating to others. The disparity between Cassandra's literal vision and that of other humans is brought to the fore by her question to the Elders about the children: "do you see?" (ὁρᾶτε, *horate*, 1217).[38] They, of course, do not. The exceptional abilities of Cassandra, then, prompt us to be wary of interpreting *eoika* in this scene based on its regular usage. Due to Cassandra's second sight, *eoika* with the future infinitive may indicate that she is having a literal vision of her own future in Hades, precisely the unseen realm. From the mouth of the still-robed priestess of Apollo, this statement about continuing in the afterlife would gain sanction from a chain of authority leading to the highest supernatural powers of the Greek pantheon.[39]

The ethical and dramatic implications of these two possibilities for the afterlife couplet require the reexamination of the three major components of her scene in greater detail. Each of them depends almost exclusively on Cassandra's death as total ending: the dynamics of compulsion and fate, Cassandra's own emphasis on closure at death, and the rhetoric of resistance to fate. At the end of the final section, I will also draw out a further afterlife possibility for Cassandra. These interrelated aspects of Cassandra's death undergo profound reversals when her possible afterlife is taken into account. Moreover, the two separate readings of her couplet we have outlined interact disparately with each theme in the scene.

## Compulsion, Fate, Irony

Over the course of her scene, Cassandra reveals the increasingly powerful forces constraining her, from human coercion to divine determination. The intimations of forced marriage in three temporal realms mark her sexual, political, and supernatural captivity. In the past, Cassandra denied

---

[38] Sommerstein (2008b) punctuates this as a question: "do you see . . . ?" But the form is ambiguous with the imperative "see . . . !" Either way, all indications point to Cassandra literally seeing what the Elders cannot and continually emphasizing this disparity with her language.

[39] Cassandra does not disrobe until at least *Ag*. 1264. Griffith (1988), 552–3, claims that the disrobing of characters in the *Oresteia* before going to their deaths reveals their major characteristic through its loss, and that Cassandra's disrobing is her loss of prophecy. On Apollo's authority, see Fontenrose (1971), 85.

Apollo in connection with an aggressive erotic encounter;[40] in the present, she is an enslaved concubine to Agamemnon, the destroyer of her country; and in the future, she will be a "bride of Hades."[41] The supremely violent, sexualized depictions of this subjugated woman must be kept near to fully grasp her emotionally laden scene.

The duress of foreseeing her early death further cleaves Cassandra from the rest of humankind, who are spared the knowledge of their final day.[42] In performance, her braided prophetic garb enmeshes her with the very god to whom she has lost her freedom.[43] Metaphorically, it is a net that indicates she will soon be dragged down to the underworld.[44] Yet if, as she claims, Apollo has sent her to death (1275–6), a force more pervasive than his curse oversees her demise as well – fate.[45] For Cassandra's scene reverberates with terms that overlap in their references to destiny and death: ἀνάγκη (*anankē*, "necessity"), τύχη (*tukhē*, "fortune"), and μοῖρα (*moira*, "portion/lot/fate/death").[46] Ostensibly, Cassandra lacks all self-determination and choice.

---

[40] By indicating that Apollo came to her as a "wrestler" (παλαιστής, 1206), Cassandra marks his act as an assault. Many audience members would have known firsthand the violence and imposition of will in actual Greek wrestling, unsuited to the disparity in power between a god and a mortal woman. Aeschylus consistently uses wrestling as a metaphor in warfare and highly charged confrontations. Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc., note that love is rarely described as a wrestler. Cf. Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 1206–8; and Medda (2017), ad loc. Since the context includes Cassandra's human sexual slavery, her words strongly imply that the encounter was nonconsensual. Whether Cassandra escaped it through her "lying/cheating" is ambiguous. She is not with child, which is unlike other mythic sexual encounters of mortals with divinity (cf. *Od.* 11.249–50). Thus, "cheating" could be taken as a unique-in-myth reference to abortion, on which see Kovacs (1987), 333. This dynamic of unwanted pursuit and then an ambiguous/ambivalent sexual encounter with a god occurs earlier in Aeschylus with Io and Zeus throughout the *Suppliants*, befitting a play deeply concerned with unwanted and violent human sex and marriage, on which see Sommerstein (2010a), 114–18. It also seems to occur with the satyr play attached to that trilogy, the *Amymone*, in which the title character is pursued by a satyr and then is either forced by or consents to Poseidon (the sources are split), 107–8.

[41] The scene's perverted ceremonies of marriage define Cassandra as a commodity and as a virgin bound to death, see Seaford (1987), 106–7, 127–8; Wohl (1998), 110–14; Foley (2001), 92–4; Mitchell-Boyask (2006); Doyle (2008), 58–74; Brault (2009), 212–13; and Debnar (2010). On the sacrifice of virgins in general as the obverse of marriage ritual and on the motif of marriage to Hades, see Loraux (1987), 27–8; Rehm (1994); and Ormand (1999), 1–7, 95–8.

[42] Her insight reverses the ignorance of the death day with which Prometheus mythologically "blinds" the rest of mankind (*PV* 248–50). Cf. Schein (1982), 11–12; and Rehm (2005), 350.

[43] Sommerstein (2008b), ad 275, identifies her costume as "most likely the ἀγρηνόν, a reticulated woolen overgarment" worn by prophets on stage, according to Pollux.

[44] See Lebeck (1971), 63–8, on the imagery and role of nets as a marker of fate and death throughout the play.

[45] For a reading of Apollo's role in Cassandra's destruction as more general, rather than specifically sentencing her to death, see Fontenrose (1971), 109; and cf. Roberts (1984), 65–72.

[46] These terms are extraordinarily prevalent in Cassandra's scene: ἀνάγκη, 1042, 1071; τύχη or τύχαι, 1042, 1129 (κακόποτμοι τύχαι) 1136, 1165, 1230, 1276; μοῖρα, 1266, 1314; μόρος, 1145, 1246, 1297, 1321; and μορσίμων, 1048. Fraenkel (1950), ad *Ag.* 1535ff., gives his take on these terms, in which *Moira* (or the *Moirai*) sometimes denotes not destiny in general, but a more particular fate that invariably

Although there is much scholarship on tragic fate, Cassandra's situation differs significantly from other instances of divine compulsion in the *Oresteia*.[47] As discussed in the Introduction, the trilogy contains a number of scenes in which characters are driven by both divine constraints and human considerations into a choice between two abhorrent alternatives. As such, the decision in these fated moments is sometimes assimilated to the tragic agent's character, both their personality and political or familial role.[48] Yet the decision is also one for which the individual will suffer, the recurrent theme of *drasanti pathein*.[49] Cassandra, however, is neither a political actor nor one who can choose between sets of consequences. She frames her own situation as one without alternatives: Cassandra does not describe her cheating of Apollo as one of two paths, nor does she articulate any extenuating circumstances.[50] Cassandra also offers little by way of family curse or inherited traits by which to judge her actions toward Apollo and on stage.[51]

Bereft of choices, knowing her inexorable fate in advance, Cassandra is, in some respects, an exemplar of dramatic irony. The major ironies are in the disparity between the knowledge of the audience and that of the characters, dramatized in Cassandra's miscommunication with the Chorus and their failure to act on her prophecies. We get the sense that audience members ought to believe Cassandra, for their own knowledge of the story from Homer should make them fairly certain that her prophecy about Agamemnon will be fulfilled.[52] Similarly, there seems to be a Greek literary convention about prophecy – that it always comes true, but that the characters do not know this.[53] Aeschylus manipulates such expectations masterfully. As elsewhere in the *Oresteia*, the staged action first correlates to the off-stage story and then puts a twist on it. The Chorus of Elders affirm Cassandra's preternatural knowledge of the past (1106, 1242–4) and, unlike

---

punishes each sin. Thalmann (1985a), 100–4, sees *moira* as the universal division and bounding of harmonious parts, in alternation. Rehm (2003), 70–1, conceptualizes *moira* as "the circumstances into which we are born," contrasting *tukhē* as "'chance', 'luck', 'fortune', whatever 'happens' to us."

[47] She differs as well from the later *OT*. Sewell-Rutter (2007), 1–14, 137–75, gives a relatively recent in-depth analysis of fate in Greek tragedy, with bibliography. However, he also claims that fate in tragedy does not have a strong causal role, depth, or significance, at least when compared with narrative genres such as epic and Herodotus' histories, 149–50.

[48] On tragic fate and the choices within it in relation to "character," see Sewell-Rutter (2007), 174–5; cf. the discussion of tragic character in the Introduction.

[49] For the theme of "the doer suffers" or "unto the doer it is done," see Gagarin (1976), 60–1; and Sommerstein (2010a), 195–6.

[50] Morgan (1994), 125–7; and Debnar (2010), 132–3.

[51] Rosenmeyer (1982), 296–7.

[52] On the miniature Oresteia in Homer, see D'Arms and Hulley (1946); and Marks (2008), 17–35.

[53] Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 323–4; and Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 239–41.

the Trojans, claim to believe her (1212–13). Painfully, poetically, the cursed prophetess on stage unfurls the future in (eventually) comprehensible terms. Yet, to her frustration (1254), she ends up misunderstood, pitied, and still unable to convince her interlocutors to act. Instead, the Elders try to evade the revelations (1247). They cannot and will not prevent Agamemnon's death – or Cassandra's. The ironies of the scene therefore also depend on the rupture between the uncertainty of human knowledge and the certainty of divine inspiration in literary convention.

Cassandra's prophecy provides a further set of ironies concerning her own continuity beyond death. She claims that there will be vengeance against the killers for Agamemnon and herself. This demonstrates her ability to transcend her human oppressors through knowledge that extends past her murder. It also shows that Cassandra is not meant to be seen as a futile character, for her prophecies are continually fulfilled. They structure the action of the rest of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*. Yet there is no further mention of Cassandra by name after her death. Once Orestes closes the circle of prophecy by taking vengeance, Cassandra seems to have entirely discharged her dramatic function and to have been lost in the process.[54] The distance between Cassandra's impassioned prophecy of vengeance for herself and the later disregard for her creates a sense that her words were in vain. The dynamics of prophecy within the scene and following it reenacts Cassandra's curse. Yet foretold doom and foretold vengeance both depend on Cassandra's death as her endpoint.

## Shutting the Prophetic Eye, Silencing the Swan's Song

Cassandra's language itself heavily emphasizes death as closure. Despite the appearance of the ghost children and her couplet about singing in Hades, Cassandra seems to annul her unique connection to the afterlife. The three examples of Cassandra's use of the term "Hades" instantiate this theme. In each, it can be treated as a simple metonym for death, which translators generally do. Her first use of Hades is in a rhetorical question: "is it some hunting-net of Hades?" (1115). Here, "of Hades" (Ἅιδου, *Hadou*) only operates as a synonym for "of death/deadly." More layered is her description, mentioned above, p. 72, of Clytemnestra as a "mother of Hades" (Ἅιδου μητέρ᾽, *Hadou mēter'*, 1235). Despite its multiple possible allusions, the modifier, on its surface, acts as a synonym for "murderous."[55] Lastly, Cassandra apostrophizes the entrance into the house of Atreus: "I address these as the gates of Hades" (Ἅιδου πύλας, *Hadou pulas*, 1291). This reference is to both the entryway of the blood-soaked house and the gates of the underworld as a geographical place, with its well-known gates.[56] However, again there is no mention of souls or an afterlife existence. References to the underworld might call attention to the possibility of continuity, yet in the Cassandra scene, aside from the couplet in question, neither the Elders nor Cassandra touch on human existence in the afterlife. Instead, in these three references, "Hades" in the genitive attaches to a noun that represents the closure of life: the fatal net, the deadly agent, and the doors that lead to death.[57] Rather than calling attention to the underworld, these phrases are focused on death as ending.

---

[54] On the fulfillment of Cassandra's prophecies through Orestes' vengeance, see Lebeck (1971), 54–5; Rabinowitz (1981), 168; Schein (1982), 15; and Roberts (1985), 283–97.

The restriction to life can also be seen in the sole reference to divine judgment in the scene. The Elders had alluded to punishment after death before Cassandra arrived (*Ag.* 461–7). Yet when Cassandra refers to divine judgment and its results, she locates it *before* death (*Ag.* 1288–9):

> οἳ δ' εἶλον πόλιν
> οὕτως ἀπαλλάσσουσιν ἐν θεῶν κρίσει
>
> Those who took the city
> are coming off thus in the judgment of the gods

That is, Cassandra makes the divine punishment of the sackers of Troy coterminous with Agamemnon's impending murder.[58] This is consonant with the Children of Thyestes, who seem to seek Agamemnon's death, as does Clytemnestra in Cassandra's prophecy. It is also the reasoning behind Cassandra's repeated calls for vengeance against her murderers to take place in life. Through these, she appears to utterly deplete the prophetic power inherent in her last moments.[59] Cassandra's own curse and the violence against others in her prophecies reinforce the idea of one's lifetime as the locus of retribution.

Cassandra's statements concerning vengeance are analogous to her couplet about the afterlife. She attributes them neither to a vision nor to speech from a god. Her predictions occur after she throws off her prophetic accoutrements. Their phrasing, too, makes it difficult to see them as theologically authoritative. Cassandra's reference to judgment by an unnamed collective of deities (ἐν θεῶν κρίσει, *en theōn krisei*, 1289) is more akin in its vagueness to speculation by human choruses than to divinely inspired knowledge. Yet her declarations still carry weight; their source is a prophetess, herself on the verge of death, condemned by a god in life. Cassandra's statements about judgment in this life are thus tensely poised between divine revelation and human speculation. There is an unresolved contradiction between two possibilities of authority that mirrors the one in her couplet about the underworld. Despite the emphasis on closure, there is a pattern of doubtful authority behind Cassandra's statements. Such uncertainty may enable audiences not to take them at face value when they concern matters beyond her death.

---

[55] Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.

[56] On the gates of Hades, see Vermeule (1979), 35–6; Garland (1985), 48–51; and Tasso (2016), 1–25.

[57] As such, they connect with the Herald's "a watery Hades," *Ag.* 667, see Chapter 1.

[58] On the links in this scene between the fall of Troy and the Atreid family curse that the Chorus avoid addressing, see Lebeck (1971), 52–8. Cf. Daube (1939), 125–8; Fraenkel (1950), ad 1288; and Knox (1972), 113.

[59] She asks the Elders "as one about to die" (ὡς θανουμένη, 1320) to bear witness for her after her death (1317).

Finally, in the last part of her scene Cassandra repeatedly describes her own death as a definitive end (1292–4):

> ἐπεύχομαι δὲ καιρίας πληγῆς τυχεῖν,
> ὡς ἀσφάδᾳστος αἱμάτων εὐθνησίμων
> ἀπορρυέντων ὄμμα συμβάλω τόδε.
>
> I pray to receive a mortal stroke,
> as one unstruggling; my blood having poured out
> with easy death, let me close this eye.

The termination of vision in verse 1294, a physical sign of death, cuts off Cassandra's insight simultaneously with her life. It seems to contradict the notion that she could continue as a seer in Hades. Her prayer for the relief of an easy, good death (ἀσφάδᾳστος, εὐθνησίμων) may also be seen as an attempt to obviate any punishment thereafter. For the remainder of her scene, she maintains this emphasis on total oblivion. Near her last lines, Cassandra utterly renounces living ("Enough of life!" ἀρκείτω βίος, 1314; cf. 1327). When exiting the stage into the palace, she compares mortal existence to a shadow (σκιᾷ, 1328) and its end to a picture wiped out (1329).[60] There is no hint of a shade or soul that could continue in an afterlife. In encountering her death, Cassandra wishes for closure, for a rest from struggle.

The trilogy itself reinforces the theme of closure for Cassandra. In the rest of the *Oresteia*, Cassandra goes unnamed and almost unaccounted for. The three remaining references to her are all by Clytemnestra. The third was discussed above, pp. 72–3, the first two are sexualized and give her no form of continuity.[61] But there is a significant aspect to the first, in which after murdering her, Clytemnestra claims that, like a swan, Cassandra has sung her last song (*Ag.* 1440–7). By so powerfully closing off the voice of the prophetess, Clytemnestra negates the idea of Cassandra "singing prophecies" in the afterlife. Together, these references to closure at death – both desired by Cassandra and imposed on her from the outside – create a potent feeling of ending. In killing Cassandra, the trilogy seems to exchange her cursed sight for eternal blindness, her singing for silence.

---

[60] On the sense of closure in the ending of Cassandra's scene, including the three delays before going to death, see Goward (2004), 77–8. Cf. the Chorus treating death as eternal sleep (*Ag.* 1448–51) and a way to escape knowing evils (1538–40), shortly after the Cassandra scene, analyzed in Chapter 2.

## Resistance, Bravery, and the Possibility of Glory

In contrast to both the ironic futility of her fate and the quiet closure of her death is the theme of Cassandra's defiance, emphasized in more recent scholarship. Cassandra resists human and even divine forces as much as she can within the parameters of her situation. Her silence in the war-chariot dramatically foils Clytemnestra's verbosity.[62] Cassandra's journey into the house also reverses the dynamics of Agamemnon's earlier exit along the same path. The king loses the battle of language to Clytemnestra, defiles with his boots the rich fabrics she lays before him (repeating his sacrilege at Troy), and knows nothing of his coming murder. The enslaved prophetess, conversely, repels the deceptive language of the queen, strips off Apollo's prophetic robes, and leaves the stage with full knowledge of her fate.[63] Trampling her robes and other prophetic implements signals Cassandra's rebellion against Apollo.[64] Her protest is predicated on her upcoming death, as can be seen in her apostrophe to those accoutrements of the god: "I will destroy you before meeting my fate (μοίρας, *moiras*)" (1266). These scraps of resistance are a crucial element of Cassandra's scene – they return to her a measure of agency before she succumbs to doom. In broad outline, then, Cassandra's resistance in response to her known demise counterpoises the irony of unheeded superhuman knowledge.

---

[61] In the second reference, Clytemnestra alludes to Cassandra by claiming that Agamemnon's infidelity is justification for murdering him (*Cho.* 918). Debnar (2010), esp. 133–8, addresses the sexual status of Cassandra implied in these passages.

[62] On Cassandra's resistance through silence, as well as indications of her conformity to gender norms and barbarian status, see McClure (1999), 93–4; Hall (1989), 131; and Goward (2004), 74; *contra* Doyle (2008), 61–2, 65–74.

[63] Taplin (1977), 321–2; and Mueller (2016), 56–7.

[64] Mitchell-Boyask (2006), 278, focuses on tearing off the robes as a defiance of both the symbolic marriage to and prophetic control of Apollo. Cf. Sider (1978), 15–17; Morgan (1994), 128; and Rehm (2005), 351–5.

The fruits of such resistance lead back to the afterlife theme, for they could continue beyond the end of her life through glory. Cassandra's attitude toward suffering and her confrontation with fate earns distinction from the Elders for bravery. As she nears her death, over some thirty verses the Chorus and Cassandra exchange assonant words with τλ- and τολμ- roots meaning "suffering," "daring," and "being courageous."[65]

Within this range, the Chorus even posit that Cassandra's death is glorious (εὐκλεῶς, *eukleōs*, 1304). This implies that her death could have a positive outcome. Yet Cassandra herself challenges these evaluations in her exchange with the Chorus (1300–5):

Χο. ὁ δ᾽ ὕστατός γε τοῦ χρόνου πρεσβεύεται.
Κα. ἥκει τόδ᾽ ἦμαρ. σμικρὰ κερδανῶ φυγῇ.
Χο. ἀλλ᾽ ἴσθι τλήμων οὖσ᾽ ἀπ᾽ εὐτόλμου φρενός.
Κα. οὐδεὶς ἀκούει ταῦτα τῶν εὐδαιμόνων.
Χο. ἀλλ᾽ εὐκλεῶς τοι κατθανεῖν χάρις βροτῷ.
Κα. ἰὼ πάτερ σοῦ σῶν τε γενναίων τέκνων.

Chor. Nevertheless, the last moment is most honored.
Cass. The day has come. I will profit little by fleeing.
Chor. But know that you are courageous from a daring heart.
Cass. None of the fortunate hears these things said of them.
Chor. But I say to you it is a favor for a mortal to die gloriously.
Cass. Woe, father, for you and your noble children!

Cassandra's political and personal circumstances force scrutiny of the terms the Elders choose. When could one who has lost her city and family enjoy the "favor" or "boon" (χάρις, *kharis*, 1304) of a glorious death?[66] Commendations for bravery and the promise of *kleos* are both inherently problematic for someone about to be murdered. This difficulty is brought to the fore by Cassandra's insistence that she "will *profit* little" (σμικρὰ κερδανῶ, *smikra kerdanō*, 1301) by staying alive any longer.[67] The Chorus imply that such glory ought to comfort her before death, but Cassandra's negativity in verse 1303 directly refutes them. Her claim that no actually fortunate person would "hear" (ἀκούει) such things said about themselves focuses on the living.

---

[65] τλήσομαι, 1290[1289]; εὐτόλμως, 1298; τλήμων οὖσ᾽ ἀπ᾽ εὐτόλμου φρενός, 1302; ὦ τλῆμον, 1321.

[66] On the "essentially virile" glory of virgins about to die in tragedy, see Loraux (1987), 47–8. She ascribes Cassandra's victory as a *parthenos* to "agreeing to a bloody death that would launch the cycle of murders and so avenge her fallen family." This formulation, especially in its connection of victory with vengeance and glory, is problematic. First, Cassandra does not *agree* to her death, only faces it bravely, knowing that she can hardly delay it. Secondly, the only mention of glory comes from the Chorus, who do not grant it for future vengeance, but her present fortitude. Lastly, Cassandra never frames either the murder of Agamemnon or the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in terms of her agency in achieving vengeance for Troy or of her own glory. Cf. Wohl (1998), 31–7.

Along these lines, Cassandra's lament to her dead family in verse 1305 has generally been interpreted as either denying a glorious death to them – and by extension, to herself – or as a *non sequitur*, completely ignoring the previous statement of the Chorus.[68] Yet her response, having no adversative particle, could instead connect her upcoming death to that of her family in the Trojan War.[69] Read this way, Cassandra is not absolutely denying her own glory but might be implicitly supporting it by invoking the nobility of her dead siblings (γενναίων, 1305). Since at least some of them died in war, they are presumably eligible for the very "boon" and "glorious death" about which the Chorus speak.[70] However, Cassandra does not differentiate them nor mark their fate as positive; rather, her lamenting response to the Chorus (ἰώ, 1305) indicates that she considers that even those who died bravely in war have encountered a sorrowful fate. On this reading, Cassandra's words deny the very premise that glorious death is a boon, either to those fallen in battle or to their living relatives. None of her responses show Cassandra taking comfort in the Elders' offer of glory. She focuses, instead, on living misfortune, anguish at the moment of death, and the lamentable memory of her family.

Cassandra's rebuttals against the benefits of bravery and *kleos* in her last moments evoke another possibility. The Elders' positive valuation of her bravery at death could be directed to Cassandra's status *after* her life's end. This is an idea explicitly stated in a previous Aeschylean play, when Eteocles defends his decision to face his own brother in battle (*Sept.* 683–5). Eteocles addresses the possibility of death in a situation also framed as supernaturally imposed (in the context of a curse coming to fulfillment, ἀραὶ τελεσφόροι, *Sept.* 655). For him, the enjoyment of "profit" (κέρδος,

---

[67] This hearkens back to the earlier Herald's speech, where he claims that the suffering of the war has passed so that the war dead "do not even care to ever rise up again" (*Ag.* 568–9), and that for the survivors, "profit has prevailed" (νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, *nika to kerdos*, 571[574]), see Chapter 1. Cf. Cairns (2013), xxxi–xxxiii, for Antigone's *kerdos* in escaping her evils through death (*Ant.* 460–70).

[68] Both interpretations appear in Conington (1848) ad loc.; Verrall (1904); Fraenkel (1950); Denniston and Page (1957); and Sommerstein (2008b), with the later commentators either quoting or echoing the earlier ones.

[69] Wohl (1998), 111–13.

[70] This is precisely how Euripides' Cassandra, seemingly demonstrating her madness, characterizes the fall of Troy and the death of her relatives at *Tro.* 386–402. On the glory earned in the Trojan War and for Agamemnon's loss of it, see Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

*kerdos*) and "glory" (εὐκλείαν, *eukleian*) occurs specifically only after life is over ("among the dead," ἐν τεθνηκόσιν, 684–5).[71] Cassandra's statement about profiting little by extending life allows for the prospect that she, too, could benefit from glory, but only if she could continue to exist after death. Cassandra's afterlife couplet then opens up the possibility that she might enjoy the positive outcome of glory for a brave death, in addition to the possibility that it would be merely an extension of her curse.

## Summations/Connections

In line with how afterlife notions impact the rest of the *Oresteia*, the two options for interpreting Cassandra's couplet affect the reading of fate, irony, resistance, and bravery in her scene and beyond. On the one hand, if the vision of the underworld is Cassandra's own speculation – if her verses mean she "thinks it likely" that her punishment will continue even after death – Cassandra's actions on stage would indicate meaningful resistance. An unspoken reason for Cassandra trampling her prophetic implements would be in order *not* to sing prophecies in Hades. They represent her accursed role, and she rejects them not only for her last few moments but also into her possible continuity in the afterlife. Cassandra would thus extend into the future her control over her own voice, an observable theme from her silence to Clytemnestra and her discursive language to the Chorus. By desecrating the tokens of Apollo's priesthood, she would be trying to forestall an eternal continuation of compelled speaking.

In this reading, Cassandra's actions on stage have an aspect of volition beyond the recognized ones of initial silence and walking willingly to her death. While claiming there is no way to delay her final day, Cassandra battles her fate after all. She thus expands her limited opportunity for heroism and its rewards in an unexpected way. This branch of possibilities beyond the end of her time on stage allows an audience to consider that she could enjoy the *kleos* the Chorus offers if her resistance to divine forces were successful. These actions could allow Cassandra to achieve her desired oblivion, escape from punishment through her resistance, or gain the satisfaction of recognized bravery in an existence beyond. Such a bettering of one's fate after death is a clearly stated possibility for other main characters. Agamemnon's children and the Chorus of the *Choephoroi* make every effort to reverse his dishonored death, going so far as to envision him as an honored king in the afterlife (Chapter 4). Orestes claims heroic powers after death (Chapter 5). Clytemnestra's Ghost seeks a change in her honor below despite her murderous actions above (Chapter 6). Much in the same way, Cassandra's actions would overturn the narrative of her death. It becomes possible that she liberates herself from the hold of fate.

---

[71] Seaford (2012), 168–9.

The situation would be radically different if Cassandra's vision were understood as divinely inspired. In that case, her fate would be truly ineluctable, even after death; none of her actions could thwart it. Divine provenance would unproblematically run its course using Cassandra only as a mouthpiece for prophecy. Dramatically speaking, Cassandra would be situated within the theistic structure of the *Oresteia* so that, once her prophecy is completed by the vengeance she predicts, she is forgotten.[72] For Cassandra as a character, however, a divine fulfillment of her vision would forcibly reclothe her in the very priestly garments she trampled; her eyes would reopen, her mouth would sing again. Cassandra would gain no reprieve for her suffering through biological death, no *kleos* through bravery, and no relief from the curse of Apollo. Her afterlife could be understood as a second round of punishment.[73] Even the sense of completion from the trilogy's later consummation of Cassandra's prophecies would be partially undercut, since she would, presumably, be issuing new ones.[74] Perhaps her ignored prophecy would continue forever, extending the ironies of her life – there is no indication otherwise. All praise of Cassandra's resistance while living would also contribute to irony, since only punishment awaits her. In the nullification of her agency and in suffering for eternity, she would lose any reward for heroism and much of her relatable humanity.

As was demonstrated, the afterlife couplet is ambiguous between these two possibilities. Moreover, there is another option in interpretive tension with both: The couplet could be metaphorical, simply referring to death. One can thus deny any possibility of an afterlife, considering the closure and forgetting Cassandra seeks as the last word on her fate. Yet the trilogy itself does not let Cassandra rest; it revisits her afterlife through the Ghost of Clytemnestra's reference. This hint presents a third and different understanding of Cassandra's afterlife, from an undead character who herself continues below, who still has a voice after death (Chapter 6). Taking these indications about Cassandra's afterlife seriously returns us to the key question of this and the following chapters: What is the reason for maintaining multiple possibilities concerning continuation after death?

---

[72] Cassandra, seen as a dramatic element, plays a central role in the ominous tone, divine machinery, and themes of the *Oresteia* as a whole. Cf. Morgan (1994); and Debnar (2010), 142–3.

[73] It would thus connect to the three choral statements about punishment in Hades, on which see Chapter 7.

[74] Though it might seem counterintuitive to sing prophecies in Hades, there is, of course, precedent: Tiresias has the ability to see the future among the dead, not as a punishment, but a gift from Persephone (*Od.* 10.490–5; 11.90–137).

Instead of Cassandra' foretold ending, the couplet hints at alternatives through deliberately multivalenced vocabulary, meter, and content. The continual slipperiness of tragedy's poetic language has a role in undercutting the certainty of her speech, yet far more specific to Cassandra's couplet is the ambiguity concerning whether her end is truly her end.[75] The two readings of Cassandra's afterlife each present her as an open-ended problem. It is precisely through the tension between each possibility that Cassandra's scene can interact in a more layered way with the idea of fixed fate she herself presents.

This polysemy of endings sophisticates our understanding of her extreme constraints. Cassandra's choices become significant again – to the point that her rebellious living actions may even alter her envisioned situation in Hades. The theatrical audience may understand that Cassandra's prophecies are fulfilled, but even this does not close off her character. If she continues in the afterlife, there is always the possibility of her suffering punishments or singing new prophecies. During life, she ineffectively resists the political and divine narratives in which she is caught up; conversely, the story of her haunting Clytemnestra in Hades suggests a continuing agency, resistance, and retaliation against her own murderer. Cassandra's potential continuation also returns the possibility of some reward for her bravery, the enjoyment of which may be feasible in the afterlife. Aeschylus thus mediates between an entirely deterministic view of fate and this tragic character's humanity.[76] The enslaved, doomed seer accrues pathos in direct proportion to how nondefinitive her future is. Only thus does Cassandra circuitously reenter the contingency that envelops the rest of humankind. The afterlife multiplicity in her scene keeps even the prophetess synonymous with a fated end from being subsumed by it. Cassandra's potential for existing in the beyond reestablishes the barest basis for her freedom.

---

[75] For a similar dynamic, see the reversal of Oedipus' tragic fate in the *OC* as a challenge to the idea of the "tragic" in Marx (2012).

[76] These themes are far from the didactic use of her death, the "clarification," "enlightenment," or "learning" through Cassandra's suffering that a number of commentators have offered as the main effect of her scene, Gagarin (1976), 149; Lebeck (1971), 52, 58; Knox (1972), 123–4; Schein (1982), 15; and Brault (2009), 212–15.

### CHAPTER 4

# *Afterlives at the Tomb of Agamemnon*

## Introduction

What were in the *Agamemnon* the merest whispers concerning the afterlife are fully pronounced in the *kommos* scene of the *Choephoroi* (306–509). The extended mourning for Agamemnon transforms entirely the relationships of characters to the dead. Electra and Orestes have been disenfranchised by Agamemnon's murder and face his disgraceful burial. They and the Chorus of Slave Women are unable to honor him as he should have been originally, with a kingly funeral after a death in battle or following a long life at home. Unlike anything until this point in the trilogy, the mourners never speak of peaceful rest or of death as an endpoint. Instead, they alternate conceptualizations of Agamemnon's existence and power in the beyond in a sophisticated dramatic-religious scene. At some points, they focus on glory; at others, on the pitiful nature of his death. At some points, they call on him to rise from the dead or send his power from the tomb; and at others, they refer to his honored place among kings in the underworld. The *kommos* has been widely discussed, and yet the specific afterlives mentioned have not received sufficient attention, and even less has been written about the paradoxes created by cramming these divergent perspectives on the afterlife together.

These views and the contradictions between them, I argue, not only create a variety of dramatic effects but also entail specific ethical relations and political consequences.[1] The *kommos* and its surrounding scenes stand in contrast to previous mentions of the afterlife, which were not clearly relatable to actions on stage and only indirectly relatable to the characterization of speakers. In the *kommos*, the conceptualization of afterlife existence directly demonstrates the ethos and specific desires of the mourning characters. The ritual creation of various roles for Agamemnon speaks to the ethical problems of the relation of Agamemnon's remaining children to his filicide and Orestes' approaches to the matricide.

---

[1] On the definition of poetics, ethics (including the ethos of characters), and politics as they are used here, see the Introduction.

Politically, the scene is part of the transition between one coup and the next. The afterlife representations of each of the leaders reflects the rhetoric concerning their rule, as well as the justification for their replacement. The *kommos*, with its ritual call to raise Agamemnon and hints at his superhuman power, is also the transition point between the hesitating human speculation about chthonic forces and their actual manifestation on stage. The first section of this chapter touches on the unique but overlapping perspectives expressed by Electra, Orestes, and the Chorus. The remainder proceeds roughly in the order of the *kommos*. The second section untangles the divergent strands, particularly appeals to Agamemnon's unsettled spirit as opposed to the depiction of him as a king with the glory he deserves. The third section focuses on the most concentrated efforts to raise Agamemnon from the dead. The Summations/Connections section returns to the dramatic, ethical, and political implications of these multiple types of afterlives.

## Dramatic Setup and Relations to Agamemnon

The crisis of the kingly household is clear to the audience through Agamemnon's dishonored tomb, the setting for the whole first half of the *Choephoroi*.[2] The words of Electra, Orestes, and the Slave Women resonate with this distress, seeking a reversal of Agamemnon's fate. Yet this is not as simple as providing him proper rites. The *kommos*, in fact, is the fourth set of mourning and burial rituals for the king. The first was Clytemnestra's improper burial of him between the *Agamemnon* and the start of the *Choephoroi*, from which she excluded the citizens and family.[3] The second is Orestes' dedication of a lock of hair to his father at the tomb (*Cho.* 7–9). The third is Electra leading the Slave Women in a set of simple rites (124a[165]–164) after she specifically refuses to propitiate Agamemnon's spirit on behalf of Clytemnestra (84–123). The recurrence of burial rites thus reflects the depth of the predicament. Ritual alone is not enough to resolve the problems of Agamemnon's degradation and the loss of status for the entire family.[4]

---

[2] See Garvie (1986), xli–liv, for the staging.

[3] *Ag.* 1541–57; *Cho.* 429–33. Hame (2004), 524–7, demonstrates that all of Clytemnestra's actions after Agamemnon's death overturn traditional Greek ritual: his dismembering, making him *akosmos* "disordered," instead of the usual rite of arranging of the body, the *kosmos*; improper *prothesis*, as she lays him out for all to see; the absence of a funeral procession, the *ekphora*; and the sacrifice of Cassandra at his grave as the *prosphagma*. Cf. Seaford (1984); and McClure (1999), 70–1.

[4] See Brook (2018), esp. 170–9, on problematic and incomplete rituals in tragedy, indicating a lack of the closure they are meant to provide.

Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus differentiate themselves as characters through the relations they form to the dead king.[5] In general, the expressions of mourning from each character are appropriate to their primary roles as revenge-seeking son, unmarried daughter, and mourning household slaves.[6] Yet in the scene, each character simultaneously refines aspects of their individual persona and generates an interlacing web of possible afterlives for Agamemnon. They manifest their desires through their appeals to Agamemnon, their counterfactual wishes concerning his status after death, and their description of his supernatural powers. First, I sketch out the types of statements, character by character, focusing on what their grouping implies about each speaker. I then analyze them further in the following sections, with an emphasis on the mixture of afterlife views and the effects of each.

Orestes, the central character of the *Choephoroi*, presents a narrow range of perspectives on the dead. From his entry to the end of the *kommos* scene, his focus does not waver: Orestes is concerned with the kingly household, his place in it, and its current dishonor. He puts forward both Apollo's oracle and diverse human motivations to justify his act of vengeance (269–305). In the *kommos*, he hails the unnamed ancestors buried before the palace as watchers over the house (†προσθοδόμοις† Ἀτρείδαις, 322), representing the normal state of kingly honor.[7] Orestes expresses a wish that his father had died in war, in which case he would have a tomb in a foreign land and glory for the household (348–53; cf. *Od.* 1.236–40). Orestes thus focuses on a standard, even heroic form of masculine continuity: A father bequeaths the household to his son and is honored with a place among his ancestors. Orestes uses "two women" (δυοῖν γυναικοῖν, 304, referring to Aegisthus as well as Clytemnestra) and "female" (θήλεια, 305) as insults.[8] Orestes' views and character thus emerge in the *kommos* from the alternate picture he paints for Agamemnon, how he relates to the other mourners, and his attitude to his mother.[9]

---

[5] Lebeck (1971), 93–130, sketches out the development of Agamemnon's children and the Chorus's relationships to them, first as teacher and then as bystander. Cf. Brown (2018), ad 315–422.

[6] See the Introduction for the ethical aspects of these types of standard roles as part of the larger category of "character."

[7] The text and interpretation are disputed. The OCT daggers the first word; Garvie (1986), ad loc., takes it to be a generalizing plural referring to Agamemnon as a noxious spirit haunting the threshold. Sommerstein (2008b), ad loc., on the other hand, takes it to refer to the ancestors of the house, buried honorably, which is how I translate it as well. Cf. Sier (1988), ad loc. Note that the murderous history of the house of Atreus, which makes multiple appearances in the *Agamemnon*, complicates references to these ancestors.

[8] By contrast, Orestes does mention Electra's struggles at 16–19 and 252–4, and Brown (2018), ad 301, posits including a line with her suffering among his motives for vengeance. Nooter (2017), 205–9, in her careful examination of the structure and sound effects, claims that, although Orestes begins the six parts of the *kommos*, he is drowned out in "the overwhelming harmony of female voices."

Orestes' ethical dilemma is that, in order to reestablish the heroic, political, masculine structure, he must involve himself in a repetition of unheroic, plotting wrong.[10] He appears to frame his upcoming action as heroic when he speaks of a clash of Ares against Ares (461). This reference to the god of war is a feeble recharacterization of the coming killings, as Orestes himself reveals thereafter. The course of the vengeance follows Apollo's injunction to plot rather than to come with an army (554–9). Orestes thus mirrors the worst traits of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, the subterfuge that leads to kin-killing for which each was marked for death, rather than the great deeds of war that should have been his father's legacy and led to his proper burial (e.g. *Ag.* 574[572]–581, 1545–6).

Orestes' connection to the dark, vengeful forces that Clytemnestra invoked are evident in his establishing relationships with underworld divinities. Orestes begins the play by invoking Chthonic Hermes as an ally and referring to his father's power in the afterlife.[11] Instead of praying for rest or honor for Agamemnon's spirit, he addresses it directly for help (4–5), continuing to do so throughout the *kommos* (315–19, 479–80, 483–5, 497–9, 503–5). Orestes calls on Zeus to grant him vengeance and be an ally (18–19), with the hint that this is Zeus of the Underworld.[12] Orestes' continual invocations of divinities of vengeance undercuts his claims to finality and justice. This is reinforced by Orestes' declaration that, after correcting the dishonor to his father through killing his mother, he will be ready to die (434–8). Ostensibly, this would bring him peace after he has discharged his function as avenger (Chapter 5).

Rather than a glorious warrior, Orestes is a "fulfiller" in the *Choephoroi*, linked to ritual and supernatural occurrences. Cassandra has prophesied his return, whereas Orestes calls himself the answer to Electra's prayers (212–19) and later prays that he will be the referent of Clytemnestra's symbolic snake dream (540–50). Orestes' fulfilling of Electra's prayers raises the dramatic expectation for the similar prayers in the *kommos*. Specifically, Orestes attempts to reach Agamemnon (315–19) and even return him somehow to the world (456, 489, 491, 493, 495). Will Agamemnon appear as Orestes had? Will he demonstrate his power from the grave?

---

[9] Lebeck (1971), 116–23, highlights the avoidance of the word "mother" by both Electra and Orestes in the *kommos*. Orestes uses the disdainful plural and other ambiguous words of parentage until finally facing the act of killing Clytemnestra in verse 899. Cf. Goldhill (1984a), 141–2.

[10] In his mentions of the curses lined up against him (269–97), there are hints of the tremendous personal and political stakes and even of his ethical impasse concerning the matricide. For Orestes' ethical deliberation concerning killing his mother, see, among others, Zeitlin (1965), 496; Vellacott (1984a), 145–57; and Lawrence (2013), 89–100.

[11] Ἑρμῆ χθόνιε, πατρῷ' ἐποπτεύων κράτη, 1–2. For the restoration of the opening, missing in the manuscripts, from Aristophanes' *Frogs* and other sources, see Garvie (1970); Griffith (1987); and West (1990), 229–33. On Chthonic Hermes, see Chapter 1.

[12] Referred to repeatedly in the *kommos* (382–85 and 405–9; and cf. *Ag.* 1386–7). On the relation of Zeus to Hades, see Chapter 7.

The *kommos* shows Orestes to be a youth lacking parental guidance, under immeasurable ethical pressure, and attempting to act in the heroic mold. However, the forces Orestes activates are not his father's militaristic ones but his mother's deceptive ones. He invokes underworld powers of entrapment, effective in familial murder, and eventually repeats her crime. These elements complicate any simple justification of Orestes' vengeance through reference to Apollo's oracle. Orestes' alternation among direct appeals to Agamemnon in the *kommos*, disappointment thereafter, and interpretation of the dream illustrate the uncertainty and tensions in his own mind. The *kommos* thus provides a complex and even compromised background for his ethical choice.

Electra, by contrast, focuses on the burial ritual, her own marriage, and the amplification of Orestes. She demonstrates far more concern with feminine beings and claims. She is the first to worry about possible ethical transgression when she wonders whether wishing harm for kin is a pious act (εὐσεβῆ, *eusebē*, 122) and whether one should not ask for a judge, rather than an avenger (120).[13] As an unmarried young woman, she seeks guidance from the Chorus, who help her initiate the first formal mourning scene. There she unknowingly echoes Orestes' earlier prayer to Chthonic Hermes (124a–b, cf. 1), which she intensifies in the *kommos* with references to Zeus of the Underworld and the chthonic gods (394–9, cf. 382–3, 462, 540). She seeks an avenger from the gods below and the return of Agamemnon himself (140–5, 146–9, 332–6). To her prayers for herself, she adds concern with Orestes' loss of property (135–7), and in the *kommos* she emphasizes the lot of his two children (332–6), long after Orestes seems to have focused solely on himself. Electra groups Orestes and herself through references to her marriage, reuse of his vocabulary, and augmentation of his claims (479–80, 481–2, 486–9, 492, 494, 500, 508–9).

Electra demonstrates growth through the process of mourning. Schooled by the Chorus, Electra heads the first ritual.[14] She pours the drink offerings (149), commands the Chorus to bewail Agamemnon (150–1), and closes the ritual after one stanza of their lament (164). In the *kommos*, Electra declares her pain at the king's lack of proper burial (429–33, 444–50). To deal with the losses of family members, Electra grants Orestes three additional familial roles besides brother. He symbolically replaces their mother, sacrificed sister, and father (238–43; cf. *Il.* 6.429–30). Electra not only echoes Orestes' lines concerning the raising of the dead (457 and 496), she outstrips him, for instead of glory for death abroad she wishes that Agamemnon were not even dead (363–71). The Chorus, in response, imply that Electra's youthful speech needs to be moderated (372–4). Yet her movement in the scene is not toward restraint, but toward murderous vengeance: She calls for the splitting of the heads of Aegisthus and her mother (394–9). The mourning for Agamemnon thus gives Electra the opportunity to speak for herself, take action, and even mature, but the bloody circumstances also warp her development.

---

[13] Goldhill (1986), 22–3.

[14] This is a male responsibility in Greek culture, Hame (2004), 516–17.

The Chorus of Slave Women differ from the main characters in their generalizing statements, emphasis on the spiritual powers of the dead, and references to more divergent afterlife possibilities. Before the *kommos*, they sing an ambiguous and highly allusive stanza that refers to punishment after death for those prospering without justice (61–5).[15] The Slave Women also ask Agamemnon to hear prayers for vengeance (157–64). They revere Agamemnon's tomb, dishonored as it is, as an altar (106), hinting at the notion of a hero cult.[16] In the *kommos*, the Chorus supplement the speeches of Orestes and Electra with far more universal language. They begin the group mourning with prayers to the Fates, Zeus, and Justice, gods who support the ancient precept, "blood for blood" (306–14). They thus weave vengeance into even the first elements of the *kommos*. They add further references to chthonic gods and Fate (463–78) and possible references to the family curse (466–75). In terms of Agamemnon himself, the Chorus refer most directly to the continuation of the spirit of the dead and the role of lament in bringing him back to the world (324–31, cf. 400–4). On the other hand, they are also the only ones in the scene to depict Agamemnon in the underworld, as an honored king (354–62).

In another contrast, the Chorus heavily stress the physical. They tear their clothes and cheeks three times.[17] Their lament mixes their own loss of freedom and family, long ago, with the disasters of their masters.[18] They also graphically describe Clytemnestra's mutilation of Agamemnon (439–43). Toward the end of the *kommos*, they join the voices of the children in the attempted raising of the dead (458–60). Through their numerous perspectives on possible afterlives for Agamemnon, the Chorus focus on ways of activating the living. Specifically, they use both references to supernatural forces and their emphasis on the physical in service of transforming the political situation. These contrasting divine and physical aspects of Agamemnon's afterlife in their mourning, we will see, are directed at pushing the children toward vengeance.

---

[15] This corresponds to the hint concerning afterlife punishment by the *Agamemnon*'s Chorus (*Ag.* 461–8), and later that of the *Eumenides* (*Eum.* 267–75). See Chapters 2 and 7.

[16] For the tomb as a prop in performance, see e.g. Brown (2018), 15–16.

[17] 24–31, 152–5, 422–8. On the violent stage action implied in their words, see Conacher (1987), 112. On their swing from intense emotion ("like the Furies . . . they are frenzied by the justice of their cause") to detachment from the vengeance at the end of the play, see Rosenmeyer (1982), 163–73.

[18] 75–83. On their slavery and the double nature of themes of slavery in the *Choephoroi*, see Patterson (1991), 111–15. On their voices and grief, particularly marked as Eastern, see Nooter (2017), 214. On the issue of slavery in tragedy more generally, see Hall (1997), 110–18; and Hunt (2011), 32–5.

Dramatically speaking, the Slave Women are the foil, internal audience, and teachers of the children. Through guiding the mourning ritual, they help repair the severed relationship between children and father. Significantly, it is the Chorus who close off the *kommos*, by approving the honoring of Agamemnon (510–11). They thus urge the children to turn from emphasizing the dead toward enacting their roles in the vengeful plot. Despite all their references to the afterlife, the Chorus also quash the expectation of Agamemnon's literal rising. They further imply that help from below is not forthcoming. Yet this is not the final word. Instead, the Chorus are one voice in this interwoven song, to whose themes we now turn more closely.[19]

## Envisioning Agamemnon's Afterlives: Enraged Spirit, August King

The relations to dead Agamemnon that his mourners create are manifold and contradictory. They include overlapping character desires, differing conceptions of supernatural influence, and conflicting depictions of the dead with consequences for living action. Analyzing in order, we begin by parsing the conceptualizations of Agamemnon's spirit and its interaction with the world. This will draw out the implicit conflict between two views of Agamemnon's afterlife.

At the start of the *kommos*, Orestes refers more concretely to the afterlife than any character previously. Bolstering the Chorus's prayers to the gods for vengeance (306–14), in his first laments to his father he uses physical imagery (*Cho.* 315–18):

> ὦ πάτερ αἰνόπατερ, τί σοι
> φάμενος ἢ τί ῥέξας
> τύχοιμ' ἄγκαθεν οὐρίσας
> ἔνθα σ' ἔχουσιν εὐναί;

---

[19] On the polyphony of voices and ideas from characters on different social levels, especially slaves, in Greek tragedy, see Hall (1997), 118–24.

> Oh father, father of misery,
> saying or doing what
> could I succeed in wafting (you)
> here from afar where your bed holds you?

It is a point of contention among scholars whether Orestes at first seeks to waft words to where Agamemnon is lying, or whether he wishes to bring Agamemnon up to the world, as translated above.[20] Regardless of how this particular line is interpreted, Orestes uses more corporeal language than was found in earlier appeals. He addresses Agamemnon as held in his bed (ἔχουσιν εὐναί, 318), a phrasing reminiscent of that used for the dead of the Trojan War, who are held by the land (*Ag.* 452–5, Chapter 2), with no indication that they can respond. The Herald actively denied that these dead care to rise from their graves (*Ag.* 567–9), although the very negation indicates the possibility. Orestes, however, revises the notion of death as sleep that the Herald and the Chorus treat as eternal oblivion (Chapters 1 and 2). Rather, Orestes seeks the right words in prayer to wake Agamemnon, and even to cause his return.

Later in the scene, the theme of raising the dead recurs, but several other ideas intervene. The continual interruption obstructs easy interpretation, leaving the audience guessing at the start whether anything more than the standard language of lament is truly meant. The first intervening theme is Agamemnon's blocked honor, due to his lack of proper mourning rites. Orestes directs the second half of his stanza to returning it (*Cho.* 320–2):

> χάριτες δ᾽ ὁμοίως
> κέκληνται γόος εὐκλεὴς
> †προσθοδόμοις† ᾽Ατρείδαις.
>
> glorifying lamentation is likewise said to be grace
> for the race of Atreus before the palace.

Responding to his father's misery and begetting of misery (both senses of αἰνόπατερ, 315; cf. Sier (1988), ad loc.), Orestes declares that honoring the dead gives glory (εὐκλεής, *eukleēs*, 321) and thus bestows grace (χάριτες, *kharites*, 320) on the family, past and present. We have seen how in the *Oresteia* both glory and grace have already been problematic terms in relation to those violently murdered, such as Cassandra and even the

---

[20] See Lebeck (1971), 103–4; Goldhill (1986), esp. 21–3; Sier (1988), ad loc.; Brown (2018), ad 317; and Garvie (1986), ad loc., with a breakdown of the textual issues and bibliography on the difficulty of reaching the dead with the right words. Garvie also distinguishes two forms of thinking about Agamemnon's soul, at the tomb and away in Hades (xxxiii); cf. Schlatter (2018), 60–7.

Trojan War dead.[21] Exacerbating the issue, Agamemnon has not died in Homeric battle, as Orestes soon wishes he had (345–53). A "high-heaped tomb in a land across the sea" (πολύχωστον . . . τάφον διαποντίου γᾶς, 351–2) would have enabled the valorization of Agamemnon as a war hero at his mourning. The *kommos* only mentions such an honorable burial obliquely, with counterfactual wishes. Expressions of grace and honor in front of what may have been staged as an unworthy tomb draw additional attention to the difficulty of reversing Agamemnon's dishonor. Pouring libations and singing laments seem not to be enough, for thereafter the mourners suggest much more radical means.

In the first of these more extreme elements of the *kommos*, the Chorus activate Agamemnon's spirit for vengeance. They rebut Orestes' emphasis on honoring the dead by changing the focus to the enmity of the one murdered (*Cho.* 324–31):

> τέκνον, φρόνημα τοῦ θανόντος οὐ δαμά-
> ζει πυρὸς μαλερὰ γνάθος,
> φαίνει δ᾽ ὕστερον ὀργάς·
> ὀτοτύζεται δ᾽ ὁ θνῄσκων,
> ἀναφαίνεται δ᾽ ὁ βλάπτων,
> πατέρων δὲ καὶ τεκόντων
> γόος ἔνδικος ματεύει,
> τὸ πᾶν ἀμφιλαφὴς ταραχθείς.[22]
>
> Child, the fire's raging jaw does not
> destroy the spirit of the dead man,
> but afterwards he reveals his anger.
> The dead man is bewailed;
> the harming man is revealed,
> justified lament
> of parents and children seeks [him] out,
> when it is agitated and abundant in every way.

The Chorus emphasize the divide between the body – here having been burned away – and "spirit" (φρόνημα, *phronēma*, 324; cf. *Od.* 11.219–22). They are the first to speak of the dead man's anger (ὀργάς, 326) and ability to harm (ὁ βλάπτων, 328).[23] Crucially, they declare that the spirit is activated through ritual. The manner in which the dead might be able to intervene, however, is left unstated. Playing off of Orestes' "glory-giving lament" (γόος εὐκλεής, *goos eukleēs*, 321), which implies a pacific condition, the Chorus substitute "*justified* lament" (γόος ἔνδικος, *goos endikos*, 330). The switch to justification taps into the key theme of plotting and vengeance in the *Oresteia*. The Chorus themselves had introduced the lament by calling on Justice (τὸ δίκαιον, *to dikaion*, 308 and Δίκη, *Dikē*, 311), in addition to the Fates and Zeus, to help in the bloody requital against the murderers. Whereas family lament may honor and give rest to the dead, it is justice – specifically as it implies vengeance – that rouses them.

---

[21] See Chapters 1–3.
[22] Using Garvie's text (1986), 131–3, which follows M, over Page's OCT.
[23] For the controversies over the meaning of ὁ βλάπτων and its connection to ὁ θνῄσκων, see Sier (1988), 111–12.

The mixture of elements in the early part of the *kommos* demonstrates two major themes concerning the relations of the living to the dead. On the one hand, the Chorus imagine Agamemnon in the underworld; on the other, the children attempt to literally return their father from the dead or to access his power in other ways. We now examine each of these, in turn, to understand more clearly the views of the afterlife, their interplay, and their role in the plot.

In a radical deviation from any other view in the *kommos*, the Chorus at this point depict Agamemnon in a Homeric Hades. Whereas Orestes' unfulfillable wish was for a heroic death for Agamemnon that would benefit the household, the Chorus portray a strikingly royal existence in the underworld (*Cho.* 354–62):

> φίλος φίλοισι τοῖς ἐκεῖ καλῶς θανοῦ-
> σιν, κατὰ χθονὸς ἐμπρέπων
> σεμνότιμος ἀνάκτωρ,
> πρόπολός τε τῶν μεγίστων
> χθονίων ἐκεῖ τυράννων·
> βασιλεὺς γὰρ ἦσθ᾽ ὄφρ᾽ ἔζης
> μόριμον λάχος †πιμπλάντων
> χεροῖν πεισίβροτόν τε βάκτρον†.
>
> Dear to the dear ones who nobly died over there,
> being prominent
> as an august lord under the earth
> and an attendant of the greatest
> chthonic rulers there.
> For when you lived you were king
> of those wielding in their hands destined fate
> and the mortal-persuading scepter.[24]

In this brief passage, the Slave Women locate Agamemnon specifically in the underworld (κατὰ χθονός, *kata khthonos*, 355; χθονίων ἐκεῖ, *khthoniōn*

---

[24] For the textual problems in this passage, see Garvie (1986), ad 360–2; and Sier (1988), ad 361. The sense remains the same in most emendations.

*ekei*, 359). They distance Agamemnon's spirit from his shameful tomb so as to create for him a place of honor. The Chorus do so by packing these eight verses with far more pronounced references to his kingship than anywhere else in the *kommos*: "prominent as an august lord," "the greatest chthonic rulers," "for when you lived you were king," "wielding . . . the mortal-persuading scepter." Each phrase reinforces the idea that Agamemnon's afterlife rewards follow from his political position on earth. Nevertheless, the Chorus subtly hint at Agamemnon's gruesome death through an implicit contrast to his *philoi* who "died nobly (*kalōs*) over there" (φίλοισι τοῖς ἐκεῖ καλῶς θανοῦσιν, 354–5), that is, in war. The tension between the appropriate kingly honor and the current disgrace is evident in this exceptional and understudied image of Agamemnon's afterlife.[25]

Audiences might draw on two previous literary depictions of Agamemnon in the underworld as background for this passage. First, the theme of the honored king below bears similarities to the mention of kings in the underworld in *Odyssey* 11, and thus the *Oresteia*'s passage may seem to be merely a normative picture. Fascinatingly, however, the only parallel in the *Odyssey* is to Minos, who sits in judgment and honor in the afterlife as he did in life, surrounded by other souls and holding a scepter (*Od.* 11.568–71). Odysseus also describes Achilles as blessed and having great power among the dead, a description Achilles thoroughly denies.[26] The passage in the *kommos* is, in fact, nothing like the picture of Agamemnon himself in the *Odyssey*'s underworld. In Book 11, he is an anxious figure who repeatedly laments the dishonor of his murder and awaits any news of Orestes (*Od.* 11.387–466). In Book 24 (most likely added later, but still earlier than the *Oresteia*), the soul of Achilles explicitly contrasts Agamemnon's lordship in life with his pitiful death at home and lost honor. Agamemnon concurs by praising Achilles' death and lamenting his own again (*Od.* 24.19–97). Thus, the Slave Women's reference to Agamemnon in the afterlife conflicts significantly with his Homeric depiction.

Aeschylus' previous depiction of a ruler in the underworld presents the second literary contrast. In the *Persians*, King Darius both rises in response to barbarian magic and declares that he is powerful below (*Pers.* 686–92).[27] Yet his situation differs from Agamemnon's in terms of his uninterrupted honors, proper burial, and continued cult. Moreover, Darius is the one who refers to his own afterlife – it is not left to others to depict it.

---

[25] *Contra* Garvie (1986), ad 354–62, who, following Lesky (1967), denies that there is any possibility that a king would be deprived of honor in the afterlife because of a dishonored death.

[26] *Od.* 11.478–91, a passage that illustrates the problematic nature of political power in the afterlife already in Homer. For further on this passage, see the Introduction.

[27] Muntz (2011), 257–71, analyzes the raising scene as a mixture between a necromantic ritual and the worship of Darius as divine; and cf. Martin (2020), 67–76. See further Chapter 6.

Within the *Oresteia*, the audience has already heard one perspective on Agamemnon in the underworld, also antithetical to the one in the *kommos*. Having killed him, Clytemnestra declares that Agamemnon "should not boast gloriously in Hades (*en Hadou*)" (μηδὲν ἐν Ἅιδου μεγαλαυχείτω, *Ag.* 1525–9; cf. 1555–9), for Iphigeneia waits to hug and kiss him down below. Here, Clytemnestra specifically undermines Agamemnon's heroic bragging rights through reference to a reunion in Hades with the daughter he murdered. The *kommos* thus would not only reverse Clytemnestra's burial tactics but even overturn her description of Agamemnon below. If the Chorus's depiction were true, it would break the connection between Agamemnon's disgrace at death and his status in the underworld. They would instead return to him the rewards for kingship, simultaneously erasing his familial transgression and dishonored death.

The Chorus's image of Agamemnon as honored in the afterlife overturns audience expectation from the rest of the *kommos* and from previous representations of him. Audiences must decide what to make of its framing, for the depiction is not clearly marked as a fact. Aeschylus has not given the Chorus a main verb, and thus there is a grammatical debate concerning which form of the verb "to be" to fill in.[28] One possible translation supplies an indicative verb ("he *is* dear"), in which case the Slave Women are claiming that Agamemnon actually exists in a kingly position below.[29] On the other hand, in the absence of a marked switch of construction, the Chorus might be responding to Orestes' previous unfulfillable wish about death at Troy, in which case Agamemnon "*would* be dear."[30] The ambiguity (preserved in the above translation by retaining the elision of the verb from the Greek) is not only grammatical.[31] It also fits with the theme of choral speculation on the structure of life and death, for the Slave Women do not speak with any religious authority or support from the divine.[32]

---

[28] On the grammatical debate, see Garvie (1986), ad 354–62.

[29] Conacher (1987), 111, has the Chorus address Agamemnon with "illustrious are you now." This overtranslation promotes the idea that the Chorus convert the children's "unpromising laments to something more positive . . . a reminder that, even murdered, the King is still a power beneath the earth."

[30] Lattimore (1953), 105, puts it in the past counterfactual, "he would have held state"; and Meineck (1998), 83, in the present counterfactual, "he'd be welcomed."

[31] Translators who elide the verb include Collard (2002), 61; and Sommerstein (2008b), 257.

[32] Note the availability of actual divine speech and interpretation throughout the *Oresteia*: Calchas, Cassandra, the oracle of Apollo given to Orestes, the Pythia, the Erinyes, Apollo himself, and

The ambiguity is resolvable through careful attention to context, but this does not dissolve the complexity of the passage, only increases it. The peaceful image of reverence and power in no way comports with the distress over Agamemnon's ignominious burial, the reported threats from the oracle of Apollo, or the two previous choral references to punishment for offenders in the afterlife.[33] Similarly, every other address to Agamemnon in the *kommos* indicates that the characters understand his situation to be agitated or dishonored. Context, therefore, marks Agamemnon's pacific condition in Hades as wishful. The Chorus are immediately responding to Orestes' longing for military honor for his father. In this stanza, the Chorus create an image of the afterlife commensurate with Agamemnon's living status as king, not with his death. It is imagination as a product of desire.

A sophisticated and self-aware poetics surrounds this image. The missing verb, in context, should demand that audience members supply its potential form. But the fraught circumstances and competing mourning songs might well preserve the uncertainty for listeners; within the flow of performance, there might be little time for audience members to interpret the Chorus's phrase. The lack of verb thus may reaccentuate the possibility of a positive afterlife for Agamemnon, like the image of an empty throne awaiting a king. The divergence of the Chorus's vision from the fantasies of the children has consequences for its interpretation as well. Orestes began this counterfactual section of the *kommos* by imagining an alternate, heroic death for his father, with consequent benefits for his family in life (*Cho.* 345–53). Electra succeeds the Chorus by going further, imagining a scenario in which Agamemnon had not even died at Troy, but instead his killers were slain "thus" (οὕτω, 363–8).[34] In chastising her, the Chorus engage in an act of literary criticism – they claim that her speech is beyond the bounds of possibility.[35] By quickly discrediting Electra's fantasy, the

---

Athena. All speak of extrahuman affairs with more authority than does either human Chorus. On the issues attending the authoritative status of even divine speech in Aeschylus, see Parker (2009).

[33] The dishonored burial: *Cho.* 434, 443, 495; the "Erinyes generated from paternal blood" and a lengthy list of attacks against Orestes: *Cho.* 269–97, 925. The Choruses of all three plays refer to punishment in the afterlife in *Ag.* 461–8, *Cho.* 59–65, *Eum.* 267–75, on which see Chapter 7. Note also Agamemnon's role in haunting his killer, Clytemnestra, in the underworld in *Eum.* 96–7, on which see Chapter 6.

[34] Rather than Electra meaning that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus should have been killed "in battle at Troy," when she uses "thus" spectators might understand either "far from home," as suggested by Sommerstein (2008b), 258 n. 79, or "the dishonored way Agamemnon actually was," which an actor could indicate with a gesture toward the tomb, and which is what subsequently occurs.

[35] μεγάλης δὲ τύχης καὶ ὑπερβορέου μείζονα φωνεῖς· δύνασαι γάρ, *Cho.* 373–4; cf. *Supp.* 1059–61; and Conacher (1987), 111.

Chorus draw attention back to their own picture of Agamemnon. The implication is that they themselves must be speaking about something that can be attained. Their representation of the afterlife is meant to interact with the world not as comfort – since it is far from the perceived present state of Agamemnon – but precisely as a fulfillable result.

This suggestion that Agamemnon could regain his status as exalted king targets the major tension within the scene. Mourning is not enough to return honor to Agamemnon; he is unable to gain his rightful prestige in the afterlife until he is avenged. Hence, the Chorus contrast Agamemnon's potential position with his appalling death and mutilation, some of which they reveal only after this stanza. The Chorus thus heightens their pressure to help motivate the needed action.[36] First, they offer a further gnomic statement concerning retribution: "But [there is] a law that drops of blood flowing to the ground demand other blood" (*Cho.* 400–2, cf. 309–14). This use of fallen blood differs greatly from the use of the same image by the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* (1019–24). There, it illustrated the irreversibility of death; here, shed blood is an imperative to kill. This naturalizes vendetta, a thrice-old story.[37] Orestes responds by vowing vengeance openly for the first time (435–7), after which the Slave Women push again, recounting the horrific mutilation of Agamemnon's corpse (439–43). The contrast between the dead king's potential position in the underworld and his maimed burial crystallizes his deprivation, both of agency and honor. The Chorus motivate Orestes' dire act through this afterlife disparity.

## Raising Agamemnon from the Dead

The image of Agamemnon in Hades is both brief and singular in the *kommos*. Its emphasis on kingship and glorious deeds is supplanted by a vastly different theme, the children's almost frenzied attempts at connecting with their father. In what has been called the most complexly structured lyric in extant tragedy, the mourners resume accosting Agamemnon with three voices, begging him to arise in some way. The desperation for Agamemnon's presence rises to such a pitch that their calls nearly morph into a ritual raising of the dead.

---

[36] The debate between those who believe that the *kommos* motivates Orestes to vengeance and those who believe that his mind was made up already goes back to the start of German philology and is covered in Garvie (1986), ad 306–478. He describes the decision as paratactic, with aspects of it occurring in different scenes, which are understood by the audience as simultaneous. He does not, however, find any parallels to this poetics in tragedy, only epic, on which front Brown (2018), 33–4, critiques him. Goldhill (1984a), 137–8, denies any easy opposition between the scene's rituals and psychological motivation. McClure (1999), 44–5, reads this scene as Electra and the Slave Women using the inherently dangerous, feminine speech-genre of mourning to motivate vengeance. Bacon (2001), 52–3, draws out the similarities between the Slave Women and the Erinyes themselves. Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 496; and Conacher (1987), 113.

[37] *Cho.* 314; cf. Clay (1969).

The language of two sections of the *kommos* suggests that the children are working toward Agamemnon's literal reappearance. In the first (*Cho.* 456–65), the mourners mix demands for his actual presence with language that draws attention to calling and voices. Orestes addresses Agamemnon in the second person and uses the verb συγγίγνομαι (*sungignomai*), ambiguous between "to be with" and "to come to help": σέ τοι λέγω, ξυγγενοῦ πάτερ φίλοις ("I call *you* (*se*), father, *help/be with* (*sungenou*) your loved ones!" 456). Electra adds (ἐπι-) her voice (ἐπιφθέγγομαι, 457) as do the Chorus, joining (again ἐπι-) their voice to the din (ἐπιρροθεῖ, 458), creating a three-part harmony.[38] The Chorus sing of raising the dead, "hear [us] by coming into the light" (ἄκουσον ἐς φάος μολών, 459), again using this metaphor for life to indicate a return from the darkness and separateness of death (cf. *Ag.* 522 and Chapter 1). They continue to demand that Agamemnon join them against their enemies, this time by separating the elements of the compound συγγίγνομαι: ξὺν δὲ γενοῦ (*xun . . . genou*, "be with us/assist us," 460). In this section, the children never use any word for spirit or soul (as the Chorus did in 324–6) but persistently address Agamemnon as their father. Thus, the theme of children who never knew their father gives an emotional charge to this longing for his return.[39]

The beseeching of Agamemnon seems to override prior references to him as distant. Between the two sections of raising language, the children offer feasts and honor to his tomb (e.g. 483–8), asking for his help in a variety of ways. But their calls are far more personal than prayers and supplications to a hero or a dead ancestor; they desire that Agamemnon himself return. At the end of the *kommos*, the children resume the emphatic language of raising up Agamemnon: ὦ γαῖ᾽, ἄνες μοι πατέρ᾽ ἐποπτεῦσαι μάχην ("Oh Earth, send up to me my father to oversee the battle!" 489); and ὦ Περσέφασσα, δὸς δέ γ᾽ εὔμορφον κράτος ("Oh Persephone, give [us] his beautiful power (*kratos*)!" 490).[40] Even more literally, they sing of Agamemnon coming in physical terms: ἆρ᾽ ἐξεγείρῃ τοῖσδ᾽ ὀνείδεσιν, πάτερ; (“Father, are you not awakened by these disgraces (*oneidesin*)?” 495) and ἆρ᾽ ὀρθὸν αἴρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κάρα; (“Are you raising your beloved head erect?” 496). Through their intense need, the children create an almost palpable expectation of Agamemnon’s bodily or spiritual reappearance.

---

[38] See Nooter (2017), 219–20, on the intertwining of voices here and in the *kommos* more generally.

[39] See Goldhill (1984a), 137–53, on the importance of the father in the *Choephoroi*, in part using the Lacanian theory of the absent father.

[40] Sommerstein (2008b) translates, "give him to us in his beauty and power"; and Garvie (1986), "grant us his power in all the beauty of his form." Regardless of which translation is used here, the imperative δός and noun κράτος connect with the earlier lines in the *kommos*, "give me the power of your house" (μοι δὸς κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων, *Cho.* 480, cf. 1). For the ambiguity of *kratos* in the first verses and here, see Goldhill (1984a), 103–4, 151–2; cf. Schlatter (2018), 67–73; and Chapter 5.

These calls reinforce the dangerous proposition that the afterlife is not, after all, much sequestered from this life. It suggests that characters we have seen on stage can, in some way, rise again. This is consonant with the *Persians*, in which the act of raising the deceased king is central.[41] Yet, as many commentators have noted, the earlier play dramatizes foreigners engaging in magic, for which they are known.[42] In Greek culture, the very attempt might be seen as transgressive. A reference to such an attitude is contained within the trilogy itself: The Chorus of the *Agamemnon* has already sung of Asclepius resurrecting the dead, seen as a singular act that entailed punishment from Zeus (*Ag.* 1020–4).[43] Despite their differences from the *kommos*, both these precedents in Aeschylus create an expectation that Agamemnon might be literally brought back in some form. They also demonstrate that the *kommos* is far from normal funerary ritual, but a possible trespass in and of itself.[44]

This desire for Agamemnon’s literal return conversely draws attention to attempts to smother the power of the dead in the trilogy. Having foreseen the danger from Agamemnon, Clytemnestra has already tried to impede his rising by mutilating him (*Cho.* 439) and suppressing his burial rites. Once her nightmare indicates that this might not have worked – since she regards the dream as emanating from Agamemnon’s anger – Clytemnestra reverses course. By sending libations, Clytemnestra intends to calm Agamemnon’s spirit.[45] By the end of the *kommos*, however, there is no indication that any supplications whatsoever have actually affected the dead man.

---

[41] *Pers.* 607–842, esp. the address of chthonic powers: ἀλλά, χθόνιοι δαίμονες ἁγνοί, Γῆ τε καὶ Ἑρμῆ, βασιλεῦ τ᾽ ἐνέρων, πέμψατ᾽ ἔνερθεν ψυχὴν ἐς φῶς, *Pers.* 628–30; Γᾶ τε καὶ ἄλλοι χθονίων ἁγεμόνες, *Pers.* 640–1; and ἀνείης, Ἀιδωνεύς, *Pers.* 650; cf. *Cho.* 125–8. See Garvie, ad *Cho.* 489 and *Cho.* 1, where he notes that ἐποπτεύω is often used by Aeschylus “to describe divine, or semi-divine, superintendence of human affairs.”

[42] On the non-Greekness of raising Darius and calling him a *theos*, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 224–5.

[43] See the Introduction and Chapter 2.

[44] See Lebeck (1988); Herington (1988), esp. 133; and further bibliography in Garvie (1986), ad 306–478. *Contra* Sier (1988), ad 459, who differentiates between the raising in the *Persians* as a ritual act and in this scene as a “symbolic” act, not intended to bring back Agamemnon.

[45] The libations she sends are precisely the type that were used in funeral rituals and festivals to the dead, Johnston (1999), 46.

The ritual ends with a whimper. The characters make no mention of having received Agamemnon's power, of having seen a sign from him, or of being changed in any way. Scholars have suggested that Agamemnon somehow inhabits Orestes from this point on.[46] The desire to internalize at least the spiritual force of Agamemnon could certainly be one meaning of "give us your power" (490). Yet nothing in the text indicates, here or later, that Orestes carries his father within him. Orestes continues to refer to Agamemnon as separate from himself and gives his reasons for killing Clytemnestra at a number of places without mention of being possessed.[47] Instead, the *kommos* is declared ended through reference to the completion of ritual obligation. The Chorus announce that the honoring (τίμημα, *timēma*) of Agamemnon's tomb is over and that now is the time for action (*Cho.* 510–13). The mourners have returned a modicum of honor to the tomb in a secret, private ritual, repurposing the libations from Clytemnestra and promising future honors for Agamemnon. Despite their cries, however, no spirit arises, no voice comes from the grave.

The characters themselves recognize this failure, as a reversal of a specific term demonstrates. The Chorus began the *kommos* by declaring that the dead man can still be an agent of vengeance, particularly emphasizing that his spirit (φρόνημα, *phronēma*) is not destroyed by fire (*Cho*. 324–5). Yet immediately after the end of the *kommos*, Orestes speaks about his dead father as unable to receive the offerings of Clytemnestra (*Cho.* 517–18):

> θανόντι δ᾽ οὐ φρονοῦντι δειλαία χάρις
> ἐπέμπετ᾽·
>
> And it was a sorry grace that was sent to a dead man,
> one without any spirit (*ou phronounti*).

The implication is that not only were Clytemnestra's libations useless but so were all of the children's appeals to Agamemnon, since he has no spirit after death (using the participle from the same root, φρονοῦντι, *phronounti*).[48] Orestes thus indicates that the living characters have abandoned their dependence on help from their father.[49] By the end of the nearly 200 lines of the *kommos*, which heightened the dramatic tension, the children's expectation of literal return or even a sign from the supernatural disperses. Now, the living remnants of the house must plot their vengeance, leaving the dead to rest.

---

[46] Deforge (1986), 276–7; McCall (1990), 21–7; and North (1992), 52–3.

[47] Note his mention of the external forces of his father's Erinyes before and after the *kommos* (*Cho.* 269–97, 925) and the much-later appeal to Agamemnon by name (*Eum.* 598, on which see Chapter 5).

[48] Goldhill (1984a), 153–5, discusses this contradiction as a deliberate linguistic strategy. Johnston (1999), 7–8, notes that Homeric dead have no mind: "They are, in a word, *aphradeis*, lacking all those qualities expressed by that complex notion *phrade* and its cognates that make converse between intelligent creatures possible: wit, reflection, and complexity of expression." Cf. Sullivan (1997), 1–64, esp. 61–3. *Contra* Garvie (1986), ad loc., who denies that there could be any such idea in an extensive note that commences: "Most scholars agree that . . . it is out of the question that, after

This fizzling of expectations indicates that the characters of the *Choephoroi* create their relationships to the dead not from a real understanding of supernatural continuation, but purely from their desires.[50] Further action supports the notion that their human knowledge is lacking, but in an unexpected way, for the characters' disappointment is almost immediately reversed. After the apparent impotence of the ritual, Orestes inquires as to the motivation for sending libations. When told of Clytemnestra's dream, he interprets it as referring to his vengeance and immediately prays to the earth and his father's tomb for its fulfillment (ἀλλ' εὔχομαι γῇ τῇδε καὶ πατρὸς τάφῳ, *Cho.* 540). That is, having been told by the Chorus to move on, and seeming about to start the action itself, Orestes abruptly returns attention to the grave as an aid to his own discharging of the prophecy (ἐμοὶ τελεσφόρον, 541). The audience is guided back to the possibility that the prayers for Agamemnon's help were successful after all. The characters hint that this is so when the Chorus declares (551–2): "I certainly choose you as my divine-sign-interpreter in this matter, may it be as you say!" The Slave Women want the dream, traditionally linked to the dead, to be capable of consummation by Orestes. Yet they emphasize interpretation rather than certainty. In the denouement to the *kommos*, the mourners only hesitatingly attribute supernatural power to Agamemnon's spirit.

The *kommos* taps into the *Oresteia*'s self-awareness concerning issues of prayer and fulfillment throughout. This can be seen in a related example from earlier in the *Choephoroi*: Electra only learns of Orestes' return after her staged prayers seeking him. Orestes himself frames his arrival as a response to her prayers (*Cho.* 212–13). The point is that Electra's entreaty was effective, creating a template for other prayers in the future (τὰ λοιπά, 212). Yet the spectators have actually been privy to Orestes' return preceding the onstage ritual that requested it. They can thus challenge the effectiveness of this particular ritual through the timeline of the action,

---

the kommos has established that Agamemnon's φρένες are intact . . . Orestes should here state the opposite." Cf. Fraenkel (1950), ad *Ag.* 739; and Brown (2018), ad *Cho.* 517.

[49] The ineffective *kharis* here also indicates the failure on the same terms as the attempts at *kleos* in *Cho.* 320; cf. *Ag.* 550, 1305, 1543–6, discussed in Chapters 1–3.

[50] For a list of hypothetical reasons why Agamemnon may not respond, see Martin (2020), 82–3; and for the argument that he does, through the reciprocal agency of Orestes, 163–75.

keeping an ironic distance from Electra's prayers as they happen and are "fulfilled."

The sequel to the *kommos* displays a similar dynamic concerning Agamemnon's spirit. When the rituals and intense prayers appear to go unanswered, Orestes evinces disappointment. Once Clytemnestra's dream is recounted, however, Orestes turns to Agamemnon's tomb immediately. Orestes recants his declaration that the dead man has no spirit. The suggestion (never enunciated) is that the prayers to Agamemnon worked. Yet, chronologically speaking, the dream occurred the night before the ritual. It is the very reason the Slave Women and Electra were sent to the tomb in the first place. Aeschylus gives the spectators enough information in both of these proleptic fulfillments to question the effectiveness of ritual. In the absence of a sure divine sign, the relationships to the dead at this point are ambiguous. Did the prayers reach Agamemnon? Or is the *kommos* a purely human ritual without supernatural consummation?

## Summations/Connections

The interweaving of afterlife views in the *kommos* can be understood in different ways: for its effects on the audience, for understanding the characters, and for human continuation after death throughout the trilogy. Concerning the first of these, it is up to each audience member to connect the sundry types of afterlife to each other, since they are segregated in the text. For instance, the counterfactual wishes for Agamemnon's glory from each of the mourners are sectioned off from wishes that Agamemnon return as a vengeful spirit. The experience of deeply divergent perspectives within the three-part polyphony of this emotional and ritual scene has numerous potential effects. It might come off as an artistically crafted funeral lament, lengthy and elevated, in line with its importance in the plot. Alternatively, the juxtaposition might feel insignificant. However, for audience members who do perceive the contradictions between views, their quick alternation might generate whiplash. Similarly, if raising the dead is felt to be a transgressive act (as the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* have already asserted), there might be a sense that the characters are going too far. Some audience members might dread, and others delight at, the prospect of a ghost appearing (as the Ghost of Darius does in the *Persians*, and the Ghost of Clytemnestra does in the *Eumenides*). The dynamic ritual, the *mélange* of afterlife possibilities, and the deep uncertainty as to the outcome are the poetic underpinnings of the *kommos*.

Concerning the dramatization of the characters, the scene is a high point of longing. The children pine for the absent father in their laments. They send their words to him, ask for his aid, and (at points) even seek his physical return. The rituals that the children offer the dead focus on Agamemnon's role as father, referring to the ancestors before the house and to Electra's future wedding. The theme of Orestes' replacement of family members – both dead and condemned to death – plays directly into this: The children are in emotional need. The Chorus, too, lament their lost family members, simultaneously with their protector, Agamemnon. Familial loss is thus the affective background for the poetic force of the scene. This serves as a contrast to the political characterization of Agamemnon in the previous play, in which warfare and the citizens played a major role. Clytemnestra has, to a certain extent, already undercut Agamemnon's political role after death, and the emphasis on family in the *kommos* actually continues this trend. We will return to this contrast in the following chapter.

Theoretically, the laments in the scene could have offered the feeling of closure that ritual is meant to provide. The first mourning, before the *kommos*, is meant to release the dramatic and religious tension by correcting Agamemnon's dishonored burial. This is precisely how the Chorus also summarize the ending of the *kommos*: The honoring of Agamemnon's grave is accomplished. Yet the elaborate lyrics (and, presumably, theatrically compelling choreography) in the *kommos* were meant to do more, they call for Agamemnon either to rise or to give some demonstration of his power. The results are unsatisfactory. Orestes labels Agamemnon "a dead man lacking spirit," dramatically reinforcing the feeling of inefficacy. At that point, it is clear that the characters lack sure knowledge of which, if any, relationships to the dead are true.

The reversal of this disappointment is immediate, yet it also demonstrates a problem with human knowledge of the beyond. Once the dream of Clytemnestra is interpreted on stage, Orestes' prayer to Agamemnon's tomb operates on two dramatic levels. First, he appears to take the dream as an indication that the appeals to Agamemnon worked. Secondly, the audience members are now privy to multiple events (Orestes' arrival, the dream of Clytemnestra) that have preceded the prayers for them. This prolepsis enables the audience to retain their distance from the literal language of the prayers, simultaneously keeping open the possibility of their fulfillment. Thus, despite the continual appeals to Agamemnon and the chthonic gods, the scene maintains uncertainty concerning the continuity and effectiveness of prayers to the dead.

From the evidence in the chapters up to this point, I posit that the *Oresteia* sets up an extremely constrained relationship of human knowledge to the beyond. The effect is that contradictory views of the afterlife reach a dramatic culmination in the *kommos*. Were Agamemnon's ghost actually to arise, many of the other human perspectives on the unknown afterlife would show themselves redundant or ungrounded. Instead, the tension between views is maintained precisely because the appeals to Agamemnon are met first with silence, then with an ambiguous response. On a local level, the *kommos* is the capstone of uncertainty about the beyond.

Concerning the broader ethical aspects of the *Choephoroi*, the *kommos* is doubly problematic due to the interrelated issues of how it portrays Agamemnon and what it justifies. Ethically, Orestes' (and Electra's) dilemma has been heavily discussed, However, generally missing from scholarship have been the effects of their conflicting conceptualizations of Agamemnon after death, which are integral to justifications for killing Clytemnestra. The children repaint Agamemnon positively through a replacement of Iphigeneia (Chapter 5). In death, he is no longer the child-killer but the blank figure of a father they never really knew. Even more strikingly, beyond the ancestor to whom they will sacrifice at family events, the *kommos* presents, in part, the children ritually summoning Agamemnon as a superhuman avenging force. Since the children's repeated calling out for their father's afterlife power does not raise him, is not responsible for the dream, and offers no described supernatural benefit, what does it accomplish? Among the other strands, the process of forging Agamemnon as powerful from beyond the grave demonstrates the children's attempt to actively shore up the imperative for the murder of their mother.

On the political level, the mourning for Agamemnon includes the symbolic replacement of the dead king with his heir. It prepares for the second *coup d'état*, which will place Orestes on the throne. The political problems associated with Agamemnon's afterlife are double: his connection with the dead of the Trojan War and his passing along the kingly household to Orestes. In terms of the first, the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* specifically indicate that he is subject to curses above and punishment below (Chapter 2). This is then a further, political reason to consider Agamemnon's death and afterlife as negative. Orestes touches on the issue of war in the *kommos* when he wishes Agamemnon had solidified his glory by dying at Troy. The Chorus also address this problem by immediately following Orestes' wish with the image of glory in the afterlife, which prominently includes those who did receive the glory of a battlefield death. The valorization of Agamemnon is thus the template for Orestes' heroism later, as a kin-killer freed from guilt. Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, this political move into the afterlife does not follow the expectations from the lives of either Agamemnon or Orestes.

The *kommos* mixes the need to gain power from Agamemnon's spirit with the second political issue, that of succession. After both scenes of lament for Agamemnon, the Chorus insist that he must be left behind in order to move on with pressing action. Changing the focus from the dead to the living connects powerfully to the theme in the speech of the Herald about the casualties of the Trojan War: One must suppress the profound effects that violent death can have in order to get on with life. However, because ritual alone does not return the dishonor that Agamemnon lost, the tension continues. In the *kommos*, the Slave Women press Orestes to act through the imagined picture of Agamemnon as honored king in Hades, which stands in contrast to the mutilation of his corpse. Instead of rest and closure, it is, in fact, Agamemnon's dishonor that goads the coup. The *kommos* thus presents the first instance in the *Oresteia* – and perhaps even in extant Greek literature – in which a fictional depiction of the afterlife motivates extreme political action.

The variety of perspectives on the afterlife in the *kommos* presents a trenchant example of the poetics of multiplicity. First, the mourners manifest distinct characters through the concerns that their views demonstrate. Secondly, the *kommos* is the central human example of the afterlife used for specific goals: not only honoring, but regaining domestic and political power, and even motivating kin-murder. Thirdly, the individual speculations and prayers concerning the dead are each acceptable within Greek religion and literature, yet the condensed polyphony presents aesthetic, thematic, and religious contradictions that cannot be resolved. Finally, the human views of the afterlife provide crucial background for the undead and superhuman ending of the *Oresteia*.

In the rest of the *Choephoroi*, direct appeals to Agamemnon disappear. Instead, the justified act of vengeance leads to Orestes' blood-madness, ambiguously either within him or divinely imposed.[51] The *Eumenides* then replaces human uncertainty with superhuman access to the afterlife. Clytemnestra's Ghost appears on stage, giving what seems to be a first-person account of the realm of the undead. Yet even in her speech the strain between conflicting ideas of the afterlife is a powerful rhetorical tool for the manipulative queen (Chapter 6). The Erinyes voice another account of the afterlife of humans, which the Choruses of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* had hinted at, but which the *kommos* utterly ignores: eternal punishment after death (Chapters 2 and 7). Lastly, Orestes is never punished for his crime but transforms into a civic hero (Chapter 5). Thus, the many human perspectives in the *kommos* do not even touch on the divine possibilities beyond death so prominent later in the *Oresteia*. Instead, the *kommos* is a turning point in the trilogy toward the greater dramatic and supernatural effects of the afterlife.

---

[51] See Brown (1983).

## CHAPTER 5

# *Heroes in the* Oresteia

## Introduction: Traditional Hero Cult

The word “hero” (ἥρως, *hērōs*) is only found once in the extant plays of Aeschylus, in the mouth of the Herald of the *Agamemnon* (*Ag.* 516).[1] Although used in the context of the Trojan War, the word has already changed meaning from Homer’s use of it as a synonym for “lord.”[2] By Aeschylus’ time, it signifies a technical term for a class of semidivine figures who were worshipped alongside the gods as lesser forces.[3] Many are thought to have been nameless local powers that became associated with named figures from mythology. There is also evidence for the hero cult of living figures since the archaic period and in the fifth century.[4] The Herald introduces the term, but this use is not the only example of heroes and heroization in the trilogy. The *Oresteia* makes unmistakable references to the power of both Agamemnon and Orestes after death. This kind of metamorphosis radically alters their dramatic functions, ethical arc, and political importance. Both Agamemnon and Orestes were worshipped as heroes in other Greek cities, and Orestes had roles in Athenian religion and folklore, facts that suggest potential effects on Athenian audiences. The role of heroes in the *Oresteia*, however, has not been the topic of focused study.[5]

---

[1] The only other attributable use is in *Epigonoi*, fr. 55, 3, τὴν δευτέραν γε κρᾶσιν ἥρωσιν νέμω, “I allot the second share of mixed wine to the heroes,” on which see Sommerstein (2008c), 58–9. Aeschylus’ *Niobe* fragment mentions “those close in blood to the gods,” which seems to be a reference to descendants of divinities rather than heroized mortals. In *Sept.* 587–8, Amphiarus refers to enriching the enemy land through his death as a prophet buried there. Cf. Parker (2011), 108–9.

[2] On the uses of the term in Homer, see Nagy (1999), 114–17, who covers some of the differences in the eighth century between Homeric song, which emphasized Panhellenic *kleos*, and the decidedly local aspects of contemporary hero cult. See Currie (2005), 60–71, for more on the etymological debates and distinction between early religious and nonreligious uses. Cf. Hes. *Op.* 159–60, ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἳ καλέονται ἡμίθεοι, and 172, ὄλβιοι ἥρωες; and on the deification of mortals, *Theog.* 942, 949, 950–5, 988–91.

[3] Rohde (1925), 115–38, argues that, despite the lack of early direct evidence, hero cult must have preceded Homer, remained preserved in local traditions of ancestor worship, and reemerged thereafter. Burkert (1985), 203–8, is an updated overview and argues that the epic directly influenced the reemergence of hero cult, which had been peripheral. Bremmer (2006), 15–20, offers a reappraisal of the vocabulary of ἥρως in Homer and thereafter, arguing that the civic hero cult concept did not really exist before the sixth century. Currie (2005), 47–57, challenges the notion of direct influence of epic on hero cult, preferring to see them as “independent but related.” Cf. Farnell (1921), 280–360.

[4] Currie (2005), 3–9; Jones (2010), 3–47; and Parker (2011), 103–23.

The contemporary religious conception of heroes requires further specification as background for understanding the dynamics in the trilogy. A hero must be carefully differentiated on the one hand from a god and on the other from ghosts and independent demons.[6] Evidence strongly suggests that heroes are always thought to have once been human beings, now exercising supernatural powers around a locale, often specified as their grave.[7] This accounts for their chthonic aspects. A volcanic metaphor may be appropriate for understanding the cult site: Heroes have a fixed place in the upper world, which at any time may erupt with underworld pyrotechnics. They may be beneficent or malevolent, similarly to Greek divine powers in general, but especially chthonic ones. They are often associated with snakes in ritual art.[8] Much like gods and *daimones* in Greek worship, they are a diverse group. They may be named or unnamed, male or female.

In the lived experience of Athenians and other Greeks, heroes played a vivid and pervasive role. Shrines littered the ancient landscape; civic, family, and pseudokinship groups organized rituals to honor them. Heroes could relate to individuals, with power over childbirth, healing, or marriage; watch over a group, such as slaves or sailors; or protect whole cities.[9] There are stories of heroes fighting alongside the Greeks at Marathon. At Salamis, the Greek armies prayed to the local heroes to aid them in just such a way.[10] However, between the eighth and fourth centuries BCE, they never serve as a template for thinking about the afterlife for regular humans.[11] Instead, named heroes connected worshippers with local or

---

[5] Unlike Oedipus in Sophocles, e.g. Bowman (2007), with bibliography.

[6] Currie (2005), 66–70, posits an early, two-tier stratification of the divine world into higher ruling gods and minor deities, the heroes. These latter were always and only objects of cult but developed from a mixture of types: On the one hand, what we would understand as secular "knights," a closed company of warriors in mythical time; and, on the other hand, as "saints" in modern Western religions, a sacred group that is still open to expansion.

[7] Burkert (1985), 203–5; Kearns (1989), 1–4; and Parker (2011), 103–4.

[8] See Salapata (2014), esp. 231, for an extended study of hero tablets from the sanctuary of Agamemnon and Cassandra, which include numerous snake images.

[9] On the varieties of hero types and their worship, with examples from Attica, see Kearns (1989) 1–102; cf. Burkert (1985), 203–8; Antonaccio (1998); and Albinus (2000), 57–66.

[10] The fact that historical accounts of war include the visible manifestation of supernatural heroes indicates to Rohde (1925), 136–8, that there was a real belief in them and distinguishes them from the gods, who do not appear in this way. Cf. Kearns (1989), 44–6.

[11] Rohde (1925), 138.

Panhellenic myths. The majority were offspring of gods, glorious fighters, founders of cities, or egregious transgressors.

The divinity of Greek heroes is not predicated on right action; Oedipus, Helen, and others received cult worship despite deeds that would appear to ethically disqualify them from praise or desire for imitation.[12] The very fact that they overstepped the limits of humanity in life seems to be the reason for their enhanced power after death. The potential political use of these powerful dead is evident in multiple stories about cities claiming and reburying the bones of heroes, whether of those associated with them or with their enemies.[13] Thus, beyond their quotidian religious aspects, heroes have a connection with the past through myth and perceived political effects. These qualities, along with their ethical ambiguity, are also major themes in the *Oresteia*'s representations of its hero characters.

Both Agamemnon and Orestes were mythical figures with central roles in the Panhellenic songs of Homer, Stesichorus, Simonides, and Pindar.[14] Evidence points to two Laconian hero shrines with claims to being Agamemnon's grave, although whether they were identified with him before the *Oresteia* is disputed.[15] The inclusion of Orestes in an aetiological story for the Athenian *Choes* ritual appears to be part of an earlier tradition of his impurity, which Aeschylus might be rejecting when Orestes insists on his ritual purity by the time he arrives in Athens.[16] Athenian religion had several other stories concerning Orestes as a harmful spirit.[17] These facts suggest a preliminary set of questions: What are the dynamics of the *Oresteia*'s transformations of previously staged human characters into afterlife figures with semidivine powers? How do the afterlife fates of Orestes and Agamemnon relate to the characteristics of the heroes that the Herald mentions, and of heroes in Greek culture more generally? What are the implications of their transformation within the play?

A wide spectrum of heroic characteristics and powers occurs in the *Oresteia*'s examples. Following the treatment in Chapter 4 of the *kommos* scene, this chapter examines how the depictions of Agamemnon as king, father, and afterlife power in the *Choephoroi* relate to Agamemnon's living character in the previous play. It then turns to Orestes' death and afterlife, which involve issues of matricide, the nature of his power over Argos, and his place in the Athenocentric ending of the trilogy. We will see how the memory of their survivors and the references to their postmortem power alter the evaluation of these two characters' life and death, their personality and purview. The manner in which the *Oresteia* pits ancestor worship and hero cult against each other gives specific insights into its approaches to individual and political values.

---

[12] As Parker (2011), 104, puts it, "piety and moral virtues do not normally make a hero; star quality, exceptionality, newsworthiness are the relevant criteria in the majority of cases."

[13] Kearns (1989), 44–56, with warnings about the use of literature as evidence.

[14] Pindar *Pyth.* 11.31–3; *Nem.* 11.34, cf. 8.12. Stesichorus and Simonides are each said to have written an *Oresteia* before Aeschylus, on which see Salapata (2011), 40–2. Cf. Brown (2018), 4–7.

[15] Salapata (2011), 27–53, lays out the evidence for Agamemnon's hero cult at Amyklai from the seventh century BCE, from a tradition that preceded his location in Argos in poetry; cf. (2014), 27–44, with bibliography.

[16] On Orestes at the *Choes*, see Burkert (1986), 221–2; and Johnston (1999), 65. Orestes' pollution is used to justify the unique ritual of eating alone and in silence at this festival, an explanation at odds with Orestes' declaration in *Eum.* 443–53.

[17] On Orestes as an undead figure in Athenian religion before the *Oresteia*, see Liapis (2006).

## The Anonymous Heroes and the Trojan War

Little may be gleaned, ostensibly, from the Herald's fleeting mention of "heroes" in the *Agamemnon*. Unnamed, their functions are merely implied in passing, and they are never heard from again. Unsurprisingly to careful readers of the trilogy, this ancillary mention in the first play echoes with variations in the following ones. The Herald's invocation of heroes sets a baseline by which to measure the characterization of Agamemnon and Orestes as powerful undead acting in the world.

At first glance, the only context for the heroes of Argos is their connection with the expedition to the Trojan War (*Ag.* 513–17):

τούς τ᾽ ἀγωνίους θεοὺς
πάντας προσαυδῶ τόν τ᾽ ἐμὸν τιμάορον
Ἑρμῆν, φίλον κήρυκα, κηρύκων σέβας,
ἥρως τε τοὺς πέμψαντας, εὐμενεῖς πάλιν
στρατὸν δέχεσθαι τὸν λελειμμένον δορός.

I address all the assembled gods
and the protector of my own office, Hermes, dear Herald,
revered by heralds, and the heroes who sent forth,
may they receive back, with kind intention, the army,
the remnant of the spear.

The Herald addresses the heroes as part of a larger arc of divine forces, from the land itself to the Olympians. The divinities include Zeus who watches over the land (509) and brings justice or vengeance (525–6). Next comes Pythian Apollo, who oversees disease and its cure (509–13), then the assembled gods.[18] Finally comes his own tutelary divinity, Hermes the

---

[18] Or "the gods of the Assembly," following Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.

Herald (515).[19] In this case, mention of the heroes seems only connected with the army (στρατόν, *straton*, 517).[20] The positive aspect of their power involves blessing the departing expedition and receiving it back with "kindly intention" (εὐμενεῖς, *eumeneis*, 516).

The prayer, however, follows directly on the negative aspects of the invoked divinities. The Herald mentions vengeful Zeus and harmful Apollo, as well as Hermes (whose chthonic aspect is evident several times in the trilogy, Chapter 1). The prayer thus has an apotropaic aspect, warding against the malice of divinities, among which are the heroes.[21] It is tempting to see in the term εὐμενεῖς (*eumeneis*) a prefiguration of the title for the *Eumenides* ("the Kindly Spirits," Εὐμενίδες). There is no mention, however, of the name Εὐμενίδες (*Eumenides*) within the *Oresteia*, only a synonym in Athena's description of the Erinyes (εὔφρονας, *euphronas*, *Eum.* 992).[22] Instead, Orestes *does* become a hero with connections to the Argive army and uses the language of kind intention with the same root (εὐμενέστεροι, *eumenesteroi*, *Eum.* 774). Both blessings and hostility are associated with heroes as chthonic powers in Greek culture, which the Herald's prayer highlights and the rest of the trilogy picks up on.

These heroes are local, not traveling with the army, as is evident from the language of sending forth the expedition and receiving it back.[23] In this respect, it is significant that they are not here connected with domestic flourishing: The Herald makes no mention of festivals, cultic honors, or blessings conferred.[24] This contrasts with the transformed Erinyes at the end of the *Oresteia*, who are promised exactly these, as honors due to local divinities. The Herald also does not connect the unnamed heroes to any specific generation previously, such as the mythical heroes that preceded the Trojan War. Anonymity is a feature of some Greek hero cult sites, which not uncommonly contain dedications marked only "to the hero."[25] Yet this usage contradicts the afterlife continuation of Agamemnon and Orestes, so deeply tied to myth.

---

[19] On the Herald sometimes being identified with Talthybius, see Chapter 1. On Talthybius' heroic powers and cult, related to Hermes, see Parker (2011), 8–9, 107.

[20] See Fraenkel (1950) on the inclusion of local heroes together with gods in prayers, and cf. Hdt. 8.109.3; Thuc. 2.74.3, 4.87.2; Lyc. 1; and Ar. *Av.* 881, where bird heroes are invoked.

[21] Yoon (2012), 49, ties the Herald's divine invocations to the dark undertones of each divinity mentioned and to heroes as dead humans.

[22] The title *Eumenides* exists only in the material that was later appended to the text. Euripides' *Orestes* (408 BCE), which calls the spirits that chase Orestes Εὐμενίδες from the start, may be responsible for these identifications, see Sommerstein (1989), 10–13; and Brown (1984).

[23] Note the identical language used in Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.1 of prayers to the local gods and heroes in one land to kindly send an expedition off and in the next land to kindly receive them: προσευξάμενοι θεοῖς καὶ ἥρωσι τοῖς Περσίδα γῆν κατέχουσιν ἵλεως καὶ εὐμενεῖς πέμπειν σφᾶς . . . εὐμενεῖς δέχεσθαι. Cf. Denniston and Page (1957), ad 516.

[24] As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the Herald repeatedly and unexpectedly emphasizes death at his homecoming and never mentions any positive aspects of domestic or civic life.

I suggest that the indefinite reference to heroes in a military context and the lack of any emphasis on glory have two specific effects later in the trilogy. First, they downplay the natural notion that the living conqueror, Agamemnon, will join these "descendants of Atreus before the house" (*Cho.* 322).[26] His glory was already a problematic theme in the Herald's speech (Chapter 1). Once Agamemnon is murdered and buried without public rites, the vagueness of the reference to heroes allows for significant questions concerning his exact postmortem fate. Secondly, in calling for the heroes to be kindly to the expedition, the Herald sets up the afterlife of Orestes, whose main purview in his hero speech is the military policy of Argos and whose language echoes this passage. Thus, complex familial and civic associations and the ambiguities of these potent undead are introduced into the trilogy with the first, nearly unmarked mention of humans with supernatural powers after death.

## Agamemnon's Power from the Grave

From the praise of Agamemnon in life and at his tomb, and the fact that he was widely known as a civic-military hero, there is an expectation that he will become a powerful postmortem figure. Yet that is far from the outcome of the *kommos*. To best understand the actual status of Agamemnon in the rest of the trilogy, it is vital to pick apart the intricately interwoven references to his power, to his relationships with family and the city, and to the rituals promised at his tomb. Building on the previous chapter's focus on Agamemnon's mourners, the picture of him in Hades, and his failed raising, this analysis focuses on the possibility of his hero cult.

The influence of dead Agamemnon on the living world becomes evident in his children's appeals to aid from supernatural beings. Most pertinent is the language of "power," exemplified by the only four uses of *kratos* in the *Choephoroi*, each addressed by Agamemnon's children either to him or to a divinity:

(1) Ἑρμῆ χθόνιε, πατρῷ᾽ ἐποπτεύων κράτη,
σωτὴρ γενοῦ μοι ξύμμαχός τ᾽ αἰτουμένῳ· (*Cho.* 1–2)

---

[25] Despite strong material and textual evidence that the locals knew precisely who their heroes were, see Salapata (2014), 4.

[26] For the textual issues with and interpretation of προσθοδόμοις Ἀτρείδαις (*Ag.* 322), see Chapter 4.

> Or. Chthonic Hermes, watching over paternal power (*kratē*),
> be a savior and ally to me asking.

> (2) μόνον Κράτος τε καὶ Δίκη σὺν τῷ τρίτῳ
> πάντων μεγίστῳ Ζηνὶ συγγένοιτό μοι. (*Cho.* 244–5)

> El. Only let Power (*Kratos*), and Justice, with the third,
> Greatest of All, Zeus, be with me.

> (3) πάτερ τρόποισιν οὐ τυραννικοῖς θανών,
> αἰτουμένῳ μοι δὸς κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων. (*Cho.* 479–80)

> Or. Father, who died in a nontyrannical way,
> give the power (*kratos*) of your house to me asking.

> (4) ὦ Περσέφασσα, δὸς δέ γ᾽ εὔμορφον κράτος. (*Cho.* 490)

> El. Oh Persephone, give [us his] beautiful power (kratos).

Each of these examples of asking for *kratos* is a prayer, or nearly one. The children require divine aid, since they have lost any living friend who might be a helper (376–7), have been forbidden an army, and have been shut off from other human help by the requirement for secrecy (556–9). What form, then, might this abstraction, "power," take? The referents are not quite the same. Quotations (1) and (2) solicit the aid of divinities themselves: Hermes, Power (*Kratos*), Justice, and Zeus.[27] By contrast, the phrasing in (3) seeks from Agamemnon the "power of your house" (480), which indicates the desire that he transfer to the children authority over domestic and political affairs. This authority accords with the gist of quotation (2), which invokes a deified *kratos*, together with similarly deified justice and Zeus in his dominant aspect, "Greatest of All," as qualities necessary for ruling.[28] The main notion in quotations (2) and (3), then, is of an ancestor at the tomb being asked to bless his descendants for the rule of the house and, by the very use of the word "power," the state.

The term *kratos* is of a different order in quotations (1) and (4). Calling on Chthonic Hermes or Persephone conceptualizes Agamemnon's *kratos* as that of an underworld spirit who could supernaturally aid his children. This power can be thought of as manifesting in his physical return, a possibility examined in Chapter 4. Alternately, it could be the continuing power of the king in the underworld, who sends his influence up. In the next section, we examine the dynamics of the latter alternative more thoroughly, together with the mentions of cultivation and worship, as possible indications of Agamemnon becoming a hero. This would account for the connection of *kratos* in quotations (1), (2), and (4) to divinities, both Olympian and chthonic, and in (3) to the house. Yet how do the characters conceive of Agamemnon's power? Does he maintain his political influence over Argos? Considering how Agamemnon has been represented both in the *Oresteia* and in Panhellenic cult, the answers are counterintuitive.

---

[27] See Garvie (1986), ad 244–5, for the combination of *Kratos* and Justice.

[28] This is why some editors change the manuscript's μοι in 245, referring to Electra, to σοι, referring to Orestes, see Sommerstein (2008b), ad loc., with notes.

## *Agamemnon as Political versus Domestic Figure*

Since both civic heroes and familial ancestors were worshipped at tombs, it must be specified what type of future sacrifices and eternal honors are offered to Agamemnon at his grave. Along with the above-mentioned mythic, cultural, and political background for the figure of Agamemnon, the specific vocabulary of *kratos* implies that he is a potent figure with influence approaching that of a divinity. One would therefore expect his continuing role after death to be an influential one, related to his kingly power. Supporting that assumption, in the portrayal of living Agamemnon, political concerns definitively predominate over familial ones. Before he arrives on stage, the Chorus sing of his sacrificing his daughter for the army's sake (*Ag.* 104–249).[29] Upon his return from war, Agamemnon tramples his family in a number of ways: He brings back a concubine for his wife to take care of and shows no affection for Clytemnestra, regard for Orestes, or defense of his actions toward Iphigeneia.[30] The Trojan War and the rulership of Argos define him far more than his family.[31]

---

[29] See the Introduction for the debate concerning the ethics of Agamemnon's decision.

[30] Easterling (1973), 7–10, denies that Agamemnon's language in the scene is a mark of a psychologically coherent person. Instead, it is only to be read as typifying a king coming home from a war. Whereas her warning is well taken, several things speak against denying psychological readings altogether in the context of understanding the *Choephoroi* scene: Aeschylus does not *create* Agamemnon but plays off of a well-known figure. The *Iliad* gives him a distinct set of personality traits, to which other characters react (several of them wishing, for example, that their leader had different ones). Secondly, and related to the first point, the fact that Agamemnon shows no evident care about Orestes in the *Agamemnon* directly contrasts with *Odyssey* 11, in which his spirit is greatly concerned with his son. Lastly, and most relevant here, is the clear disjunction between his figure on stage in the *Agamemnon* and the children's description of him in the *Choephoroi*. One should not be dismissive nor regard it as an inconsistency for the sake of plot, for then one loses the usual way audiences respond to characters, as generally coherent figures. Moreover, one is then denied other ways of interpreting what only *seem* to be inconsistencies, such as new perspectives on a character after their death.

[31] Zeitlin (1965), 495; cf. Peradotto (1969), 237–61.

In light of this characterization of Agamemnon when alive, it is almost a shock that precisely the political aspect dwindles most in references to him following his death. Although the mourners in the *Choephoroi* affirm that Agamemnon's dishonored burial does not befit a king, their requests for his power deemphasize his political ties and link him much more closely to the "house." That Agamemnon's children address him as "father" rather than "king" ought to come as no surprise.[32] Despite the fact that the ruling house is naturally associated with control over the city, it is evident that the mourners emphasize the domestic.[33] Exemplary is Electra's prayer to Zeus in which she is concerned for the withering of the ruling stock (ἀρχικός . . . πυθμήν, 260) and the raising of the house from a small to a great one (ἀπὸ σμικροῦ . . . μέγαν δόμον, 262–3). The choral passage that follows creates a subtle opposition between regaining the "paternal hearth" (ἑστίας πατρός, 264) and the political power that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are currently exercising (τοὺς κρατοῦντας, *tous kratountas*, 267). Orestes reinforces the emphasis on lineage later when he asks Agamemnon not to wipe out the seed of Pelops, in order for Agamemnon himself to continue existing (503–4, cf. 236). Throughout the *kommos*, the mourners repeatedly connect Agamemnon with the hearth, the household, and continuity through children but barely mention the citizens or the state.

The emphasis on the domestic severs the former king from political influence in Argos after his death. In the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, Clytemnestra's actions are clearly tactical moves to this effect. She tells the Elders that the burial is not their concern (οὐ σὲ προσήκει τὸ μέλημ', *Ag.* 1551) and is not for those outside the household (τῶν ἐξ οἴκων, 1554). Clytemnestra thus separates the city from Agamemnon and Agamemnon from the city. Electra in the *kommos* refers to this act to condemn her mother and – solely in this passage – highlight the politically shameful fate of her father (*Cho.* 429–33):

ἰὼ ἰὼ δαΐα
πάντολμε μᾶτερ, δαΐαις ἐν ἐκφοραῖς
ἄνευ πολιτᾶν ἄνακτ'
ἄνευ δὲ πενθημάτων
ἔτλας ἀνοίμωκτον ἄνδρα θάψαι.

Woe, woe, hostile,
all-daring mother, in hostile funeral,

---

[32] For the children's emphasis on Agamemnon's role as father, see Chapter 4.

[33] The Chorus of Slave Women repeatedly address him as master (e.g. ὀλομένῳ δεσπότᾳ, 153; ὦ δέσποτ', 157), but this is tied to their concern with the household, not the city *per se* (cf. the juxtaposition of δόμων and δόμους with δεσποτᾶν in 50–4).

> a king without the citizens,
> without lamentations and unmourned
> you dared to bury the man.

Clytemnestra has attempted not only to preemptively block Agamemnon's ability to rise from the dead by mutilation (*Cho.* 439) but also to deny him the honor due to a king after death by preventing the customary funeral rites. In the *kommos*, even as the children and Slave Women more properly mourn Agamemnon, Clytemnestra's political hold continues to affect the form in which the rites are finally performed: There are still no citizens present. Throughout, the lamentation is a household affair.

This schism between Agamemnon's political character when living and the domestic character given to him after death is evident in Orestes' approach to vengeance as well. Immediately before the *kommos*, Orestes describes his motivations as divine, personal, financial, and political (269–304). Most relevant is that he distinguishes "my great grief for my father" (300) from the motivation of freeing the citizens (πολίτας, *politas*) from subjugation (302–4). Thus Orestes' action diverges into two different themes, only one of which he and Electra return to. When praying to Agamemnon, Orestes specifically refers to *kratos* over only the house (δὸς κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων, 480). He even attributes the glorious conquest at Troy to the citizens (302–3), thus eliminating the separation between king and people, between Agamemnon's individual decision for war and citizen anger at him. Since Orestes must accomplish his plot, by command of the oracle, nearly alone (556–9), he neither involves a foreign army nor rouses the citizens. Orestes himself must rescue the citizenry; yet he never requests any help related to the city from his father in the *kommos*.

Once Orestes has murdered his mother and Aegisthus, he declares them to have been double tyrants (διπλῆν τυραννίδα, *diplēn turannida*), father-killers, and ravagers of the house (*Cho.* 973–4). Each accusation divides the familial murder from the simultaneous act of the *coup d'état*, for each is easily categorized as belonging to either the domestic or the political sphere. The *Eumenides* contains a subtle actualization of the separation: Orestes claims that Clytemnestra committed *two* polluted acts in killing Agamemnon (δυοῖν ... μιασμάτοιν, *duoin ... miasmatoin*, *Eum.* 600). One might expect a neat separation between the domestic and political aspects of the act, ascribing to Clytemnestra the murder of both her husband and the king. The meaning is not self-evident, though, for the Erinyes ask for clarification (601). In his answer, Orestes defies expectations by specifying that Clytemnestra killed her husband and his own father (πατέρ᾽ ἐμόν, *pater' emon*, 602), thus doubly emphasizing the domestic at the expense of the political. The discussion continues to focus on mothers and fathers until Apollo takes over; it is up to the god to impress on the judges, at great length, the fact that Clytemnestra killed a powerful *king* (625–39). Therefore, while the ideational ties between Agamemnon's domestic and political character always exist, the mourners and Orestes himself continually minimize the relationship of the dead Agamemnon to the state. For a figure universally known as "the great king" from poetry, and one promised eternal glory for conquering Troy in the *Agamemnon*, this shift is deeply significant.

## *From Dishonored Tomb to Ancestor Cult*

The subtle terminological differentiations that mark Agamemnon's loss of political power after death set up the matter of his postmortem rites. Agamemnon's tomb burgeons in the opening scene of the *Choephoroi* from a place of almost unholy dishonor to a site of worship. Yet what kind of worship? This is a matter that has not been discussed enough in considering Agamemnon's arc within the *Oresteia* as a whole.[34] It demonstrates a sweeping transformation of Agamemnon's afterlife status and spheres of influence.

At the play's start, the tomb is a symbol of corrupted ritual, which denotes Clytemnestra's unchallenged domestic and political authority.[35] The mourners' struggle against this situation begins with deliberation over ritual. Electra seeks advice as to how best to dispose of Clytemnestra's libation (*Cho.* 84–105): Should she pray on behalf of a "loving wife," ask for repayment in kind against Clytemnestra, or even regard the spot as a permanently dishonored one (ἀτίμως, *atimōs*, 94 [96])? Following these alternatives, references to the tomb itself begin to assume the vocabulary of cult. Even before the first mourning ritual the Chorus indicate the path forward (106):

> αἰδουμένη σοι βωμὸν ὣς τύμβον πατρός
>
> Respecting your father's tomb as if it were an altar

---

[34] Exemplary is Gagarin (1976), 106–7, who claims that the transfer of Agamemnon to Argos allows for an easier identification between the *oikos* and *polis* in the context of the treaty. The fact that Agamemnon plays no role in the treaty indicates that statements such as these elide important differences between father and son, domestic and political, as will become evident.

[35] Zeitlin (1965), 504–5; and Hame (2004), 521–3.

The Slave Women specify that their "respecting" or "being in religious awe" (αἰδουμένη, *aidoumenē*) does *not* mark Agamemnon's tomb as an altar, but precisely the opposite: They are acting *as if* (ὥς, *hōs*) it were one.[36] They indicate that it is not a holy site, at least not yet. Electra picks up on their reverence concerning the tomb in verse 108 (cf. 200), and both parties pray to the gods, not least to bring back an avenger (124a [165]–163). When these prayers are ostensibly answered by Orestes' appearance (212–13), the tomb becomes far more of an altar. Together the mourners supplicate the gods in the *kommos*, sometimes conjoining Agamemnon to them as a supernatural power. Through the introduction of the term "altar" and the implied efficacy of prayers uttered there, the spectators are privy to an incipient cult.

What kind of cult this is becomes evident shortly thereafter. Just as Electra's prayer to Zeus links the god's worship to raising the house of Agamemnon again (*Cho.* 260–3), so the children ply their dead father with sacrifices to gain his help. Mixed in with the other themes of the *kommos* is the restoration of his dishonored tomb to its rightful status among the family resting places. The prayers to Agamemnon, with a reference to "the descendants of Atreus before the house" (322) rather than the anonymous heroes of the Herald (*Ag.* 516), turn his tomb into a place of ancestor cult. They thus help redeem Agamemnon's dishonor through lineage rather than military valor or civic honor. This is specified most clearly in Orestes' and Electra's promises of rituals to Agamemnon (*Cho.* 483–8):

> Ορ. οὕτω γὰρ ἄν σοι δαῖτες ἔννομοι βροτῶν
> κτιζοίατ᾽· εἰ δὲ μή, παρ᾽ εὐδείπνοις ἔσῃ
> ἄτιμος ἐμπύροισι κνισωτοῖς χθονός.
> Ηλ. κἀγὼ χοάς σοι τῆς ἐμῆς παγκληρίας
> οἴσω πατρῴων ἐκ δόμων γαμηλίους,
> πάντων δὲ πρῶτον τόνδε πρεσβεύσω τάφον.
>
> Or. For this way the customary feasts of mortals
> could be established for you; but if not, you will be
> dishonored among those feasting well
> on the smoking burnt sacrifices of the earth.
> El. And I will bring wedding drink offerings
> to you from the full inheritance from my father's house;
> and I will honor this tomb first of all things.[37]

---

[36] For questions of staging and the denial that the tomb was represented by the festival altar, the θυμέλη, see Garvie (1986), xli–xlvi; and Brown (2018), 15–16.

[37] Lebeck (1971), 121.

Orestes and Electra offer only family cult, with weddings and sacrifices for the dead at the tomb.[38] They negate Agamemnon's possible future dishonor (ἔσῃ ἄτιμος, *esē atimos*, 484–5) with future honor (πρεσβεύσω, *presbeusō*, 488). Since this passage falls between the last two requests for Agamemnon's *kratos* (480, 490), the omission here of any political reference is particularly significant. The children do not offer Agamemnon civic festivals, nor do they mention any others coming to worship him, whether Argive citizens or outsiders. The children's promises of specifically family rituals in verses 483–8 delimit the future sphere of influence of the deceased Agamemnon. These elisions correspond with never claiming that Agamemnon would offer supernatural protection of Argos. His cultivation, and therefore afterlife potency, is reduced to the domestic.

Throughout the rest of the *Oresteia*, Agamemnon's supernatural influence is similarly up for interpretation. As shown in Chapter 4, since Agamemnon fails to rise, the one form in which his power might seem to manifest itself is the dream of Clytemnestra.[39] Orestes interprets the snake-dream as an omen and immediately offers prayers to the Earth and the tomb of Agamemnon for its fulfillment (*Cho.* 540–1). This implies that the dream is a manifestation of Agamemnon's chthonic power, a connection that may be greatly strengthened by the close symbolic association of snakes with heroes.[40] Yet there is no continuation of this theme; the causal connection between Agamemnon and the dream remains in the realm of inference. In the rest of the *Choephoroi*, the tension and triumph rest on Orestes acting nearly alone. Supernatural aid, including that of Agamemnon's spirit, is limited to implications, prayers, oracles, and the interpretation of dreams.

The reduction of Agamemnon's afterlife potency in the *kommos* and the rest of the *Choephoroi* extends into the *Eumenides*. Agamemnon's power goes unmentioned, except for one anomalous line. When Orestes seeks protection against the Erinyes' cross-examination and savage threats, he declares that his father's spirit will assist him (*Eum.* 598):

> ἀρωγὰς δ᾽ ἐκ τάφου πέμψει πατήρ.
>
> My father will send help from the grave.[41]

---

[38] For the familial aspect of these promised rituals, see Hame (2004), 529–34.

[39] *Cho.* 510–13. *Contra* Whallon (1958), 271–5, who only associates the dream with Clytemnestra and Orestes. Cf. Roberts (1985), 283–97.

[40] See further Garvie (1986), xx.

[41] I use the future πέμψει, as read by the scholiast, which is restored by Scaliger from πέπμει and followed by Sommerstein (1989).

By this point in the trilogy, the prayers for success seem to have been fulfilled by Orestes having accomplished his plot. Moreover, Clytemnestra herself has already risen from the underworld at the start of the *Eumenides*, spurring the Erinyes to action and demonstrating the sinister potency of the dead. Yet Agamemnon's help never manifests in the *Eumenides*. There are several interpretations available within the play for this puzzling truancy. One is given in the Erinyes's response: They immediately dispute the possibility that *any* dead would succor Orestes, because he killed his mother (*Eum.* 599). Despite their status as chthonic divinities, their reasoning should not be taken as definitive. They offer tendentious interpretations throughout the *Eumenides*, and other divinities contradict and eventually defeat them. The second possibility stems from the similarity of this entreaty to the *kommos* where Agamemnon is so often beseeched to aid; subsequent to that scene, Agamemnon's impact on the world is stunted, not only in words but also in action.

Through the mourners' domestic vocabulary as well as Agamemnon's failure to directly manifest, he becomes, by the end, an ancestor figure. This is clear from the cult offered to him and from his curtailed influence in the remainder of the trilogy. The inverted fate of the hubristic conqueror and child-killer tells us much about the trilogy's rewriting of character after death on the ethical and political fronts, as well as the possibilities it opens up for the next generation.

## *Revaluing Agamemnon's Life and Death*

Distancing Agamemnon after death from political influence in Argos and from supernatural power more generally leads to several counterintuitive consequences, all having to do with the assessment of his life. Once he is dead, the narrative and value of Agamemnon's life are out of his control. However, the *Oresteia* shows that they are still subject to contestation in the living world, as well as in the underworld: Clytemnestra's judgment on him is opposed by the actions and memorialization of his children. Yet, as we saw, the children rewrite Agamemnon differently than he would, focusing on his familial role. To better understand the postmortem transvaluation of Agamemnon, it is necessary to first briefly revisit statements concerning the value of life made by or about him before his death. Then one must examine how his legacy interacts with these standards and the ethical and political representations of his character. This comparison gives a better perspective on the specific patterns through which he is reconceptualized after death.

In the *Agamemnon*, the paradigm announced for judging the life of a king only concerns the glory of his deeds. When announcing the return of the expedition, the Herald ties Agamemnon's worth to his destruction of Troy (*Ag.* 529–32):

> τοιόνδε Τροίαι περιβαλὼν ζευκτήριον
> ἄναξ Ἀτρείδης πρέσβυς εὐδαίμων ἀνὴρ
> ἥκει· τίεσθαι δ᾽ ἀξιώτατος βροτῶν
> τῶν νῦν·
>
> Throwing such a yoke on Troy
> the king, the elder son of Atreus, a blessed man,
> has arrived. He is the worthiest to be honored of mortals
> living now.

The values of epic glory are paramount in the Herald's speech. Victory in a massive campaign and the destruction of a city are the criteria of being both "blessed" (εὐδαίμων, *eudaimōn*, 530) and worthy of honor (τίεσθαι . . . ἀξιώτατος, *tiesthai* . . . *axiōtatos*, 531). Clytemnestra, in the tapestry scene, takes to a sacrilegious extreme this "honoring" of Agamemnon. To the unctuous strewing of divine offerings under his feet Agamemnon responds by cautioning that he is not to be praised excessively while living, especially not as a god (*Ag.* 916–27).[42] He goes on to deny that he can be labeled fortunate, insisting that only after the ending of life can one know its value (927–9):

> καὶ τὸ μὴ κακῶς φρονεῖν
> θεοῦ μέγιστον δῶρον. ὀλβίσαι δὲ χρὴ
> βίον τελευτήσαντ᾽ ἐν εὐεστοῖ φίλῃ.
>
> And not to think badly
> is the greatest gift of god. It is necessary to deem a man blessed
> who has ended his life in welcome prosperity.

Type of death affects reputation; appraisal of a human must account for the whole of life. Agamemnon's sentiment is seen as a traditional Greek value by commentators.[43] Its immediate dramatic effect, however, is deep irony, since he is ingloriously butchered so soon after its utterance. His life's end in a bloody tub, his mutilated burial, and the queen gloating that these are the just rewards for his own actions all destroy any notion of his ending his life "in welcome prosperity." The reversal of everything he stood for in life would be permanent under the criteria Agamemnon himself laid out. In the trilogy, though, the poetics of the beyond offers possibilities of redemption for which the endpoint of life does not account.

---

[42] Scodel (2006), 122–3, 128–31, masterfully draws out the aspects of "social memory" in public praise in the *Agamemnon*, with its dark contrasts to the previous anger of the citizens at the casualties of war and Clytemnestra's open contest with Agamemnon. On the "persuasion" or "fabric" scene, see further Konishi (1989); and Morrell (1996), 141–64.

[43] The similarities to Solon in Hdt. 1.32 and numerous later examples from tragedy are often pointed out, see Denniston and Page (1957); Fraenkel (1950); and Medda (2017), ad loc.

The struggle over Agamemnon's postmortem reputation has a broader scope than the problem of his military glory. At stake is whether Agamemnon is even honored as a person. In one of the last lines of the *kommos*, Orestes cautions that Agamemnon will remain dishonored in the future unless the proper chain of events occurs. Agamemnon's afterlife, memory, and cultic honors are out of his control. Everything depends on his children, whose task it is to avenge him, restore his reputation, and perpetuate rituals on his behalf. There is no further mention of the citizens glorifying Agamemnon. The reliance on his children's actions compels further scrutiny concerning Agamemnon's negative relationship to his own family.

The *Oresteia* never represents any interaction between Electra or Orestes and their living father. Both children, however, maintain their focus on Agamemnon as an unproblematic father figure. Such a transformation involves a dubious set of linguistic substitutions, as the main anxiety concerns his murder of his own daughter, their sister. The polluting act that leads to his own murder serves as an obstacle to Agamemnon's ethical desert for familial honors above and glorious kingship below. Clytemnestra has already reconnected Iphigeneia with Agamemnon in the afterlife, imagining the daughter hugging and kissing her father. Clytemnestra explicitly declares that Agamemnon's child-murder destroys the possibility of heroic status in the afterlife ("let him not boast gloriously in Hades," *Ag.* 1525–9, 1555–9). Yet nowhere do the children ever consider Iphigeneia's afterlife, nor that she could problematize her father's fate.

Instead, Electra, in a shocking reversal, suppresses the act of filicide (*Cho.* 235–42). Describing the deed, Electra uses the evocative oxymoron "the sister ruthlessly sacrificed" (τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὁμοσπόρου, *Cho.* 242).[44] The ethical effect of her grammar is immense; her seemingly unmarked use of the passive voice (τυθείσης, *tutheisēs*) with no agent obfuscates Agamemnon's responsibility for the unholy sacrifice.[45] In the first play of the trilogy, the Chorus and Clytemnestra both harp on Agamemnon's culpability. Electra's use of "ruthless" in the *Choephoroi* demonstrates that her evaluation of the act has not changed, but she has altogether erased the actor.

---

[44] Sacrifices, requiring ritual purity, can neither be ruthless nor involve human victims in standard Greek religion. Cf. Zeitlin (1965).

[45] Garvie (1986), ad 255, points out the ironic echo of the child-sacrifice when Orestes, just thirteen verses later, calls Agamemnon "the sacrificer (θυτῆρος) who greatly gloried [Zeus]."

In this same stanza, Electra repeatedly uses the terms "father" and "paternal" (235, 237, 240) without qualification. She thus continues to gloss over Agamemnon's crime against his family and his own continuity.[46] Going further, Electra explicitly *replaces* her sister with Orestes (238–43). Since Electra is the only living female child and has been representing the household in Orestes' absence, her ouster of Iphigeneia is a potent erasure of the dead. From the surviving children's perspective, it annuls their mother's justification for murder and camouflages their father's crime.[47] This move to clear Agamemnon contradicts the treatment of ethical transgressions in almost any afterlife reference in the rest of the trilogy.

In fact, the next reference to Agamemnon's afterlife implies the disquiet of his spirit. Clytemnestra's Ghost places Agamemnon in the underworld as the implied referent of "those I killed," who hound her soul (*Eum.* 96–7, Chapter 6). This reference to his spirit conflicts with the pacific image of the great king on his throne in the underworld. Moreover, if she is to be believed, Clytemnestra's story implies that she is suffering in some way for her murders above.[48] Such an afterlife punishment for those who transgress greatly is a repeated theme of each of the choruses of the *Oresteia*, especially the Erinyes, who themselves hand the shedder of kindred blood to the judgment of Hades.[49] Why, then, would Agamemnon not suffer in the same way? Do his children somehow free him from punishment for familial murder? The implication of the *kommos* is that ritual action and vengeance will change Agamemnon's state below. Yet there is no follow-up. The last mention of Agamemnon, Orestes' request for his help, is scoffed at by the Erinyes (*Eum.* 598). Agamemnon never directly manifests his power and is never cleared of wrongdoing. His ethical crimes remain an unresolved problem, since they lead to Orestes' further kin-killing, regardless of the valorization of the father–king–hero.

The effect of Agamemnon's murder of his child and heavily criticized war deeds does not withstand the intense rewriting of Agamemnon's legacy in his mourning scene.[50] Such a new, blank-slate characterization of Agamemnon liberates his children and the Chorus to categorically condemn Clytemnestra for his murder. If Agamemnon is clean of blood, the vengeance against Clytemnestra is free of the ethical complication of her act.[51] The laundering of Agamemnon's reputation remains effective for the duration of the trilogy. Not even Clytemnestra, in her self-defense, disinters the family crime of Agamemnon, only charging him with sexual faults of his own (μάτας, *Cho.* 918).[52] The children win the fight over his legacy; they turn Agamemnon into a morally unproblematic ancestor worthy of worship.

---

[46] Note that the word for sister that Electra uses is literally "same-seed" (ὁμοσπόρου, *Cho.* 242), echoing her description of Orestes a few verses earlier as "seed" of the house (σπέρματος, *Cho.* 236, cf. 503–9) in the context that children continue the familial line.

[47] Zeitlin (1965), 490–2.

[48] On the Ghost of Clytemnestra's rhetoric and its believability, see Chapter 6.

[49] *Ag.* 461–8; *Cho.* 59–65; and *Eum.* 267–75.

Thus, after Agamemnon's death, there is both a struggle over his reputation and an overall revaluation of his living status. Clytemnestra does everything she can to his corpse, reputation, and living children to undercut the kingly glory Agamemnon explicitly sought in life. Her complete dishonoring requires a struggle to return some honor to him, which takes up fully half of the *Choephoroi*. Moreover, for Agamemnon as father not to be polluted as their mother is, his children must erase his transgressive deeds. They never, in fact, restore kingly honors to Agamemnon. They consider this absent father figure only on a familial level.

The reduction of Agamemnon's honors resonates greatly with religious and political notions about him. Within the *Oresteia*, unlike in contemporary religion, Agamemnon never receives wider cultivation. Despite all the possibilities for an aetiology of a hero cult that his *kratos*, ties with divinities, the previous mention of heroes, and Orestes' later heroic powers suggest, Agamemnon at his tomb only gains funerary rites in the restrictive sense of familial devotion. Although the reference to him as a king below seems to maintain his politically honored status, the language and context suggest it is only a *potential* outcome. Beyond the implied ascription of Clytemnestra's dream to Agamemnon, there is no evidence after the *kommos* of his continuing supernatural power in the living world. In the *Eumenides*, it is explicitly denied. Thus, references to Agamemnon after his death defy all previously stated criteria for the evaluation of his worth, including that of ending life well, of earning glory from kingship and war, and even of being condemned for destroying his own family. From the moment of his demise, there is a struggle over rewriting not only his legacy but also the structure of his postmortem existence. Instead of the glow of glory or the civic honor of hero cult, by the end of the trilogy Agamemnon's possible afterlives merely smolder. They give off nothing but the vaporous outlines of his life.

---

[50] *Contra* readings that that end their ethical or moral evaluation of Agamemnon with his murder, such as Peradotto (1969), 249–61.

[51] On the erasure of Clytemnestra's justifying arguments before her murder in the *Choephoroi*, see Foley (2001), 230–1.

[52] This charge against Agamemnon is answered by Orestes' references to the man's toil and labor (*Cho.* 919, 921) and dies with Clytemnestra. It is not one of the Erinyes' arguments. Garvie (1986), ad loc., ascribes the restriction of Clytemnestra's defenses in the *Choephoroi* to the imperative to avoid arousing sympathy for her, lest her murder be seen negatively.

## Orestes: Suicide, Tyrannicide, Hero

Only one living character in the *Oresteia* deliberately confronts their own afterlife: Orestes prophetically declares his postmortem transformation into a semidivine figure (*Eum.* 762–77). The supernatural powers he claims correspond to the attributes of a hero figure, although he does not call himself one. Through him, Aeschylus forges links between a mythic character and two *poleis*, Argos and Athens, in both mythical and historical time. In the process, Aeschylus geographically dislodges the contemporary historical claims on the power of Orestes the hero. To get the full range of the ethical and political effects of his transformation, we first examine earlier statements concerning Orestes' own death in the trilogy. These lead to an analysis of his heroic status. The final sections contrast Orestes' and Agamemnon's afterlives, demonstrate interactions with contemporary cultic ideas, and establish the significance of Orestes' heroism for the mythical Athens of the trilogy.

### *Orestes' Deaths*

Orestes describes three different types of death for himself. Each declaration creates a relationship to human death that provides both the foundation and contrast for his last pronouncement, that of heroic immortality. The first instance comes as a wish to die. Midway through the *Choephoroi*, Orestes yokes his end to the act of matricide (*Cho.* 438):

> ἔπειτ᾽ ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμαν.[53]
>
> When I have removed [her from life], may I perish!

In expressing the wish to end his own life once he has taken Clytemnestra's, Orestes melds two themes. First, he implies that the deed is so great that it will fully deplete his very existence;[54] secondly, he implies a promised sacrifice of himself in order to accomplish the killing.[55] Each resonates differently with related statements from other characters and with the dynamics of death as closure.

---

[53] See Garvie (1986), ad loc., against the OCT addition of <σ'> as an object for the participle, although the following arguments remain the same regardless.

The first theme is closely linked with other "wishes for death" in the *Oresteia*, especially the exclamations of the Herald, the Chorus of Elders, and Aegisthus in the *Agamemnon*.[56] These characters never act on their ostensible wishes, marking the statements as instances of a rhetorical trope – with varying significations. The Chorus of Elders declare that they are ready to die in action, yet their vociferousness merely heightens the irony of their impotence (*Ag.* 1362–5, 1652). The Herald and Aegisthus, on the other hand, seem to be declaring a readiness to let go of life itself as a way of marking the immensity of their just-completed effort. Ostensibly, Orestes' sentiment is closely related to the latter two declarations, especially that of Aegisthus, who plotted the murder of kin. Having given his backstory and described his role in the plot, Aegisthus closes his speech with the sentiment that now he could happily end his life (*Ag.* 1610–11):

> οὕτω καλὸν δὴ καὶ τὸ κατθανεῖν ἐμοί,
> ἰδόντα τοῦτον τῆς Δίκης ἐν ἕρκεσιν.
>
> Even dying is therefore noble for me,
> having seen this man in the nets of Justice.

Aegisthus rhetorically conjoins his death to the accomplishment of his life's task, the avenging of his dead siblings and what he sees as the usurpation of the state (*Ag.* 1577–1609). The sight of justice accomplished provides him a sense of closure to life. This is analogous to the logic of the Herald's remarks at the accomplishment of his *nostos* (*Ag.* 539). Yet Aegisthus is not, in actuality, ready to die or even to disappear into the life of a private citizen. In response to the Chorus's threat of armed uprising and civic turmoil, he avows that he will maintain his and Clytemnestra's rule by force (*Ag.* 1637–42). Instead of dying happy, Aegisthus continues to contend for life and power.

---

[54] Zeitlin (1965), 496, contrasts the zeal with which other avengers in the trilogy kill to Orestes' reluctance and inner conflict: "Orestes is aware of the repulsive nature of his task. He wishes just to do the thing and then die himself." Cf. Lebeck (1971), 200–1.

[55] Goldhill (1984b), 170; and cf. Neitzel (1979), 133–46.

[56] See Chapters 1 and 2. Garvie (1986), ad loc., gives *Hy. Aphro.* 153ff. and several examples that postdate Aeschylus for the theme of "when I have achieved my object let me die content."

Like Aegisthus, Orestes defends his murders, does not end his life thereafter, and assumes rulership over Argos. Unlike Aegisthus and the Herald, though, Orestes announces his willingness to die *before* the act is accomplished. He is thus dissimilar to the Chorus of Elders as well, since they twice proclaim their willingness to die in resistance to tyranny yet fail to launch their undertaking. Moreover, Orestes continually wrestles with the horror of his deed; thereafter, he suffers what can be seen as internal psychological repercussions.[57] This is in contrast to Aegisthus, who never critically scrutinizes the ethics of his action, is clearly self-satisfied at his vengeance, and openly proclaims that he will maintain control of Argos through violence. These distinctions help put Orestes' "wish for death" in context. For the characters of the *Agamemnon*, the expression of such a wish is generally a mark of a desire for peace (the Herald), of truncated action (the Chorus), or of unrepentant violence (Aegisthus). In Orestes' speech, it marks the ethically repulsive deed demanded of him.[58]

The other undertone of Orestes' first declaration about his death is as a pledge of his own life. The optative of wish (ὀλοίμαν, *oloiman*, "may I perish!") implies a link to prayers to the divine for fulfillment with a future sacrifice.[59] In this case, it is a self-sacrifice.[60] This corresponds with other instances of the corrupted sacrifice motif, especially that of the Erinyes threatening to sacrifice Orestes after his act.[61] The problematic ethical nature of the matricide shows itself in that it potentially demands a life in return. Whereas Orestes is not explicitly offering himself to the gods, this moment resonates with his later afterlife status. At that point, too, his death transcends individual concerns and involves both a promise and a threat of further violence.

The second example of Orestes depicting his own death is part of the plot to enter the palace. Deceptively bearing the news of his own demise symbolically removes Orestes from the realm of the living as a necessary step for his return to his rightful place.[62] It also foreshadows his transformation into a hero; in both instances, Orestes unnaturally stands apart from the end of his life. A proleptic echo of his future power is found in the culmination of the plot, in the enigmatic cry that "the dead are killing the living" (*Cho.* 886). It is a knot whose threads interweave many themes in the trilogy, but whose local significance Clytemnestra untangles instantaneously: It refers to Orestes, back from the dead, against whom she arms. The irony of this moment only intensifies at the start of the *Eumenides*, when the dead character who continues exercising violent effects on life is Clytemnestra herself. The deaths of Orestes' parents and his own fabricated demise each includes at least the possibility of a bloody return. These anticipate Orestes' power from beyond the grave.

---

[57] See Brown (1983), 13–22.

[58] For Orestes' ethical quandary as he is about to kill his mother, see, among others, Zeitlin (1965), 496; Lesky (1966), 80; Peradotto (1969), 258–61; Vellacott (1984a); Rehm (2003), 65–7; and Lawrence (2013), 89–100. None of these analyses, however, takes into account Orestes' afterlife.

[59] See Garvie (1986), ad loc., for the weaker suggestion (following Lesky) that ὀλοίμαν is Orestes indicating that the act will lead to his own destruction.

[60] Parker (2005a), 75–6, mentions that all Greek oaths involved conditional "self-cursing," but denies that this is the same notion of "consecration" that happened in Ancient Rome. He does not address any examples from the *Oresteia*, however. On Orestes as fulfiller of prophecies, and thus offering ritual closure, especially as τελεσφόρος (*Cho.* 212–13, 540–1), see Roberts (1985), 285; and Goldhill (1984b), 170–2.

[61] *Eum.* 303–5. See Zeitlin (1965), 485–6; and Chapter 7.

The third instance of Orestes speaking of his own death as a type of closure comes as he awaits the verdict of the jurors. He marks this as the moment of consequence for himself with a seemingly unambiguous dichotomy of life and death (*Eum.* 746):

> νῦν ἀγχόνης μοι τέρματ᾽, ἢ φάος βλέπειν.
>
> Now it is the end of a noose for me, or to see the light.

The emphasis of the statement is on finality, including the linguistic play with the "end" (τέρματ᾽, *termat'*) of a noose. Yet a significant elision complicates this disjunctive statement: Does a guilty verdict mean Orestes is still subject to the blood-sucking death that the Erinyes threaten, or will the new, civic law execute the murderer? Orestes' meaning is clarified by a consequential cultural detail: Greek law never contained any provision for hanging.[63] With his words, therefore, Orestes testifies that, regardless of whether he is subject to death under the old law or the new law, he will hang *himself*.[64] Were he to be found guilty, Orestes would be unable to control his death's meaning in the way he did for Agamemnon through promises of honors, sacrifices, and familial continuity. There would be no heir to the house. Instead, Orestes would close the circle of vengeance with his noose.

---

[62] Both the Eleusinian Mysteries and the ephebic rituals contain symbolic movements out of life and a return to society. On these rituals and tragedy, see the Introduction; and on Orestes partaking of these initiatory patterns, see Goldhill (1984a), 166.

[63] Sommerstein (1989), ad loc.

[64] Suicide is unusual in Greek tragedy, with Ajax who actually falls on his sword as the notable exception. It is considered to be a woman's death, especially suicide by hanging, on which see Loraux (1987), 3–18. Aeschylus' Chorus of Suppliants, for instance, twice threaten to hang themselves if there is no escape (*Supp.* 154–61, 784–91). As usual, Euripides plays off of the *Oresteia* brilliantly, having the condemnation of the citizens end in Orestes *begging* to kill himself, and being offered the choice of sword or rope, with other strong linguistic echoes of this scene (*Or.* 945–54).

Orestes' three mentions of his death are oriented toward ending; he never indicates the possibility of an afterlife.[65] They are focused, instead, on either the plot to kill Clytemnestra or its consequences. Their poetics maximizes the psychic pressure on Orestes, and consequently on audiences: the pathos of his pretended death, the frisson of his dead-man-walking vengeance, and the stakes of his murder trial. None would work as well rhetorically, dramatically, or as plot points were there simultaneous mentions of the continuity of Orestes' influence beyond death. The cycle of vengeance ends in a twist, however: The new law does not claim Orestes' life; rather, it *requires* his afterlife.

## *Orestes the Civic-Military Hero*

After the trial, Orestes' language becomes confident and god-driven. He claims powers beyond human abilities, begins to fulfill promises, returns to rule Argos, and establishes an eternal alliance with Athens. Of all the examples of the afterlife in the trilogy, Orestes' ethical transformation is most clearly manifest, and his powers are the most imbricated with politics, both within and without the drama.

The trilogy radically rewrites Orestes' character after the trial through his relationship to death. Specifically, he no longer needs either to pledge his life or to fear his end. Orestes frames his immediate relief in Olympian terms: He thanks his divine benefactors Apollo, Athena, and Zeus for restoring his rule over the house in Argos (*Eum.* 754–61). Tellingly, he does not propitiate the chthonic powers that he and Electra had invoked for vengeance from the very start (e.g. *Cho.* 1–2, 490, 540), or Agamemnon's spirit, to whom he often appealed (including at *Eum.* 598). Although these chthonic forces are spurned, the power of the dead is far from forgotten. Orestes abruptly turns to his own future potency from the grave in his final speech (*Eum.* 762–77):

> ἐγὼ δὲ χώρᾳ τῇδε καὶ τῷ σῷ στρατῷ
> τὸ λοιπὸν εἰς ἅπαντα πλειστήρη χρόνον
> ὁρκωμοτήσας νῦν ἄπειμι πρὸς δόμους,
> μή τοί τιν᾽ ἄνδρα δεῦρο πρυμνήτην χθονὸς

---

[65] Note that Hades is prominent in other examples of hanging: The *Odyssey* contains a similar conjunction of themes and language, when Oedipus' mother goes down into the house of Hades by hanging herself but leaves him to the woes of a mother's Erinyes (*Od.* 11.277–80). Each example of a hanging threat in the *Suppliants* mentions Zeus of the Dead or Hades: Ζῆνα τῶν κεκμηκότων ἱξόμεθα, *Supp.* 158–9; Ἀΐδας ἀνάσσοι, 791.

ἐλθόντ᾽ ἐποίσειν εὖ κεκασμένον δόρυ.
αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ὄντες ἐν τάφοις τότε
τοῖς τἀμὰ παρβαίνουσι νῦν ὁρκώματα
†ἀμηχάνοισι πράξομεν† δυσπραξίαις,
ὁδοὺς ἀθύμους καὶ παρόρνιθας πόρους
τιθέντες, ὥς αὐτοῖσι μεταμέλῃ πόνος·
ὀρθουμένων δὲ καὶ πόλιν τὴν Παλλάδος
τιμῶσιν ἀεὶ τήνδε συμμάχῳ δορὶ
αὐτοῖς ἂν ἡμεῖς εἶμεν εὐμενέστεροι.
καὶ χαῖρε καὶ σὺ καὶ πολισσοῦχος λεώς·
πάλαισμ᾽ ἄφυκτον τοῖς ἐναντίοις ἔχοις,
σωτήριόν τε καὶ δορὸς νικηφόρον.

I now depart towards my home
having sworn an oath to this land and to your people
for the whole fullness of future time
that no helmsman of my land coming here
will bring against you a well-equipped army.
For we ourselves being in our tomb then,
against those who transgress my present oath
will bring inescapable misfortunes,
making their marches spiritless and their paths ill-omened
so that they regret their undertaking.
But if it is rightly maintained, and
they always honor this city of Pallas with an allied army
we would be kindlier to them.
So farewell both you and your city-dwelling people.
May you have an inescapable wrestling trick against your enemies,
one that saves and brings victory for the army.

Orestes' promise to act from beyond the grave runs counter to his previous approaches to the end of his life. The tomb is connected to his power; it is somewhere he can simultaneously "be in" (ὄντες ἐν τάφοις, *ontes en taphois*, 767) and yet act from. That is, "being in the tomb" is not being dead but now means being a hero at his shrine. Although he does not specify where it would be located, he speaks of acting against those on the way to Athens (δεῦρο, 765; ὁδοὺς, πόρους, 770).[66] More generally, Orestes describes the punishments or beneficence he would mete out as only directly affecting the people of Argos. Each of these aspects accords in general with Greek notions of hero cult.

---

[66] Sommerstein (1989), ad 767, notes that neither of the two known tomb sites of Orestes (Tegea and Sparta) is near the path from Argos to Athens.

Yet numerous peculiarities distinguish this heroization from previous allusions to heroes or cult in the *Oresteia*. First, it is neither divine fiat nor worship given by others but Orestes' own prophecy that effects his transformation.[67] Orestes' words constitute a double speech-act: He swears an oath (ὁρκωμοτήσας, 764) and claims he will enforce it "for all time" (εἰς ἅπαντα πλειστήρη χρόνον, *eis hapanta pleistērē khronon*, 763). This is an astonishing declaration from the mouth of a human character, not least because there are two Olympians on stage with him. It accords with the previous promise of alliance between Argos and Athens, in which Orestes has already broached the language of the future, and even eternity (ἐς τὸ πᾶν, *es to pan*, *Eum.* 291). Orestes is also echoing Apollo's words to Athena (669–74), promising Argos as an ally "for all time" (ἐς τὸ πᾶν χρόνου, *es to pan khronou*, 670; αἰανῶς, *aianōs*, 672). Crucially, however, neither of the previous mentions of the alliance with Athens contained any hint of Orestes' heroization. In the first, Orestes merely names his Argive people (τὸν Ἀργεῖον λεών, *ton Argeion leōn*, 290) as the allies, whereas Apollo specifically refers to Orestes' descendants (τοὺς ἔπειτα, *tous epeita*, 672). With the new information in the hero speech that Orestes himself will enforce the oath, he takes control of his own postmortem existence. Orestes' use of future-oriented language, reserved in the trilogy for divinities and prophets, seems to give him agency over his own destiny and to exemplify his superhuman powers.[68] The form of his declaration already marks its efficacy.

The language of the hero speech implies supernatural powers. Orestes evinces the ability to directly intervene in human affairs, as opposed to the Ghost of Clytemnestra, who must act through the intermediary Erinyes. This is evident in his claims that he will affect the *thumos* (as "spirit" or "courage") of men and the omens given to them (ἀθύμους, *athumous*; παρόρνιθας 770). Ideationally tied to the language of divine forces as well is his promise to be more kindly (εὐμενέστεροι, *eumenesteroi*, *Eum.* 774) to those who keep his oath. It echoes the Herald's prayer to the heroes to be kindly to the returning army (εὐμενεῖς, *eumeneis*, *Ag.* 516). The promise also serves to reconnect Orestes to the Erinyes, but only to their transformed version, whom Athena asserts will be kind-minded to Athens

---

[67] As Sommerstein (1989), ad 767–71, points out, this is opposed to the later tragic treatments of heroes with tombs and cults in Attica: Oedipus in Soph. *OC* 574–628, 1522, and Eurystheus in Eurip. *Heracl.* 1032–6. Goldhill (2000), 52–5, draws attention to just how strange this self-heroization is, on the literary, cultic, and political levels. See Kearns (1989), 50–2, 189, 208–9, on Oedipus as hero and the multiple traditions concerning his tomb; and 49, 164, on Eurystheus' disputed burial and cult.

[68] On Cassandra's language of the future, see Chapter 3. On Athena's, see Chapter 7.

(εὔφρονας, *euphronas*, *Eum.* 992). Thus, Orestes' language of transformation not only means he will continue in the afterlife but also asserts specifically superhuman powers over the living.

Orestes has committed a crime for which he barely escapes madness, demonic punishment, and a guilty verdict in court, yet he emerges as a civic hero. The issue of Orestes' release therefore has a political dimension to it. This even relates to his release from pollution. In response to Orestes' claims, the Erinyes deny that human purification could ever cleanse him. It is, in fact, the civic trial that is responsible for the final purification.[69] Gone is Orestes' matricide; there is no mention of further expiation. One of the most unusual features of Orestes' heroization is that there was another afterlife in store for him, replete with retribution for his crime. Immediately before his first promise of an alliance to Athens, Orestes was threatened with underworld punishment in Hades, despite all human cleansing and Apollo's protection (*Eum.* 267–75, Chapter 7). This is labeled the common lot of any mortal (τις . . . βροτῶν, 269) who violates sacred relationships. Yet for Orestes, the civic trial and resultant heroic afterlife replace underworld retribution for ethical transgressions.

Instead of suffering continual punishment, Orestes the hero becomes a pillar for the Athenian military future. The Athenian dimension to the oath provides insights into the specifics of his heroization. For Orestes' transformation from person to hero also enacts a momentous reversal of his domestic and political relations. In a countermovement to Agamemnon's arc, which reduced a conqueror in life to a family cult figure, Orestes' hero speech refers to the household only before his death (*Eum.* 754–61). He is concerned with what humans, specifically other Greeks, will say (τις Ἑλλήνων ἐρεῖ, 756), relates himself positively to Argos after long exile (Ἀργεῖος ἀνὴρ αὖθις, 757), and emphasizes enjoying the goods of the paternal house (ἔν τε χρήμασιν οἰκεῖ πατρῴοις, 757–8). Once the speech reaches Orestes' heroic powers, though, its contents upend his living relationships to the household and the city.

The hero speech contains a dominant military theme, which Orestes has never displayed in life. As a young man returning nearly alone to his home country, he was explicitly barred from bringing an army by Apollo's prophecy (*Cho.* 556–9). This frees him from the stain of waging war against his homeland, the act that haunts Polynices, both living and dead. But it is also symbolic of Orestes' lack of the Homeric glory that defined his father's deeds. By contrast, Orestes' hero speech is crammed with martial vocabulary. He calls the "people" of Athena her *stratos* (τῷ σῷ στρατῷ, *tō sō stratō*, *Eum.* 762), a term that was used exclusively for a military expedition in the *Agamemnon*, including in the Herald's hero prayer (στρατόν, *straton*, *Ag.* 517).[70] Further, Orestes uses the synecdoche *doru*, "shaft/spear," for "army" three times in eleven lines of this hero speech (*Eum.* 766, 773, 777), which again echoes the Herald (δορός, *doros*, *Ag.* 517). This is by no means an unmarked usage. The Herald's mention of the spear was in the context of the decimation of his companions in war. Orestes himself emphatically declared that Athena would win his and Argos' allegiance *without* the spear (ἄνευ δορός, *aneu doros*, *Eum.* 289). Both of these earlier uses focus on the destructiveness of warfare. This is far from the case in Orestes' hero speech, which ends by equating salvation with victory in war (δορὸς νικηφόρον, *doros nikēphoron*, *Eum.* 777). Athena and the Erinyes will pick up on precisely these militaristic notions, with similar vocabulary, in the final portion of the trilogy.

---

[69] Meinel (2015), 135–9, discusses some perspectives on the problem that purification rituals do not seem to lead to release (λύσις) for Orestes.

The transformation of Orestes triggers a vast political shift. Argos, so prominent a few lines earlier, sinks from preeminence as soon as Orestes mentions his afterlife. His supernatural powers manifest only in respect to the oath and civic alliance. Moreover, Orestes' abilities manifest clearly as threats, but he only gives vague hints of possible rewards (*Eum.* 772–4). Yet this duality signals more than simple Greek concern about the ambivalence of divine powers, especially chthonic ones. Orestes literally threatens his own people (*Eum.* 768–71) but promises their military prowess for the exclusive benefit of Athens (*Eum.* 772–7). Although both the previous plays take place in Argos, which is now free, aiding Athens in warfare will determine the prosperity of Argos now and "forever."[71]

The heroization of Orestes contains a further, subtle thematic link to Athens. For the city did have a cult to two aristocrats known as the "tyrannicides."[72] The language of tyranny may seem unmarked at times in the *Oresteia*.[73] Yet there are certainly links to the negative overtones tyranny would have had in contemporary Athens.[74] Orestes, for instance, never calls himself a tyrant. He boasts of killing the double tyrants (τυραννίδα, *Cho.* 973). The Chorus of the *Choephoroi* describe this same act as liberating Argos (ἠλευθερώσας πᾶσαν Ἀργείων πόλιν, 1046) through cutting the heads off the two snakes (δρακόντοιν, 1047). The deliverance from tyrants, with its understated connection to Athenian democratic folklore, may color the political aspects of Orestes' actions. He may come off to some members of the audience as being a political liberator by virtue of being a tyrant-killer. The reverse is true as well: Orestes' trial in Athens justifies his act of kin-killing as a political one. In this view, Orestes the hero and ally supersedes Orestes the mother-murderer.[75] Yet both of those positive aspects have to operate at a remove from Athens. The fact that Orestes is due to resume his monarchical inheritance demonstrates his "otherness" from this aspect of Athenian political thought.[76] He will be a king in another state. The powerful connection promised to Athens is thus focused on the time after Orestes the human being has died.

---

[70] On the change in meaning of *stratos* from "expedition" in the *Agamemnon* to "people" especially in Athena's speeches in the *Eumenides*, see Chapter 7.

[71] Chiasson (1999), 139–61, highlights the chronological melding of past, present, and future, bringing heroic events up to the present moment of the Athenian audience and beyond. See Chapter 7 for further discussion on Athena's use of eternity.

[72] See the Introduction.

[73] E.g. Orestes describes the manner of his father's death as "nontyrannical" (*Cho.* 479), the earliest use of the adjective τυραννικός, see Garvie (1986), ad loc.

[74] Cf. Griffith (1995), 91 n. 101, 94 n. 109.

## Summations/Connections

A politico-religious struggle over cult is clearly in progress both within the *Oresteia* and, as a number of scholars have suggested, in contemporary Greek history. The move by Athens to incorporate the cults of other cities from around the Greek world, even the festival of Dionysus itself, is congruent with Athenian political ambitions, already evident during the period in which the *Oresteia* was written.[77] Whereas gods could have numerous worship sites, hero cults were generally restricted to one or a few locales, even for such widely known figures as Agamemnon. The local and human aspects of hero cult enabled it to take on a political significance in the struggle between *poleis*, although one of indeterminable value. There is external evidence, for instance, that a connection to Agamemnon was central to Laconian claims of preeminence over the Peloponnese.[78] In addition, Herodotus' story about the Spartan requisition of Orestes' bones for reburial demonstrates that there was political value – whether internal, external, or both – to associating with these named figures as protective heroes.[79] The *Oresteia* treats the afterlives of Agamemnon and Orestes much differently, however, from the historical and cultic evidence mentioned. Thus, Agamemnon's and Orestes' movement from stage-character to afterlife object of cult must be examined on the terms of the trilogy, to which other interpretations, such as the interaction with the politics of contemporary Athens, must be subordinated.

---

[75] Vellacott (1984a), 151, draws attention to the fact that the appeal in Euripides' *Orestes* to the possibility of taking Clytemnestra to court is already implied in the *Agamemnon*'s citizen condemnation of the tyrants. The *Oresteia* itself thus hints at ways of punishing and possibly regaining political power other than matricide. This possibility is given little attention in the *Choephoroi*, only appearing in the negative, when Orestes declares that he is to come secretly, that is, without bringing an army or rousing the citizens (*Cho.* 556–9).

[76] Seaford (2012), 104, suggests that the hostility of tragedy to Thebes as an "elsewhere" is partly due to its historical support of Athenian tyrants.

[77] Kurke (2013), 101–75, argues for a contest of genre and ritual between Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Pindar's mini-Oresteia of *Pyth.* 11. The latter she dates, with substantial evidence, to 454 BCE, a few years before Aeschylus' trilogy (although see Medda (2017), 1.26–7). She suggests that Pindar's Oresteia is part of his attempt to restore cults to their proper, geographically specific origins, in response to Athenian tragedy's appropriation of them for Athens. This occurred just as the city itself was attempting to assert hegemony over surrounding territories, in the so-called "first Peloponnesian war" of 461–446 BCE; cf. Thuc. 1.107–13. By contrast, Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 102–4, denies the idea of an Athenian annexation of rituals connected to tragedy.

The three instances in the *Oresteia* of cult to the dead are distinct in their patterns. In the *Agamemnon*, the heroes are anonymous, colorless ancestors supplicated for kindness on behalf of the army; in the *Choephoroi*, ancestor cult is promised to Agamemnon with an emphasis on the continuity of the house; and in the *Eumenides*, Orestes foresees himself as the supernatural guardian of a military alliance for Athens, without any mention of cult. Examining the purview of Agamemnon and Orestes after death uncovers the striking, and little-discussed, transformation. The trilogy radically dislocates their living ethos and their relation to political themes. The two transitions from living characters to heroic figures demonstrate an erasure of ethical consequences, seemingly contrary to all the vengeance-driven statements within the play.[80] Although Agamemnon was murdered and Orestes nearly killed, there is no repercussion past the threshold of death for their crimes against kin. The unfathomable horrors of family murder give way to afterlife heroism.

The mechanisms of clearing away living transgressions differ for each character. The children's memorializing of Agamemnon ends the conflict over his glorious reputation. Clytemnestra had already subverted it with the stage-managed sacrilege upon his return, his murder in a tub, the gloating over his death, the distancing of citizens from his funeral, and the mutilation of his corpse. Since he has children who rewrite his memory and return his burial rites, both Agamemnon's crimes and his dishonorable death seem to evaporate. The contest over his afterlife status, however, is one without sure knowledge. Clytemnestra, the Slave Women, and Agamemnon's children all lack divinely supported insight. The children's mentions of honors are therefore not focused on the underworld. They do not address the claims of Clytemnestra about his reunion there with Iphigeneia nor the Slave Women's depiction of him as a great king below. Instead, the children treat Agamemnon as a figure of domestic cult. In a generally unrecognized move, they thus minimize both his effect on the rest of the trilogy and his militaristic glory – the latter of which depends on a specific type of memorialization. Agamemnon's whitewashing is part of ending the foul familial legacy, allows an ethically simpler vengeance for Orestes (since Clytemnestra is less justified in her own killings), and permits familial praise. The substitution of father figure for glorious warlord has far-reaching political consequences: The Trojan War is minimized in the political discourse of the rest of the trilogy, and the great conqueror gives up his power to protect his state.

---

[78] On this point, Kurke (2013), 144, quotes Syragos of Sparta (Hdt. 7.159): "Indeed, greatly would the Pelopid Agamemnon groan were he to learn that the Spartiates were deprived of the leadership [lit. hegemony] by Gelon and the Syracusans!"

[79] Hdt. 1.66–8; cf. Huxley (1979). On the political use of mythical hero figures, see Kearns (1989), 44–56; and Boedeker (1998). Salapata (2014), 38–9, sees heroes as part of both internal community-building and external propaganda; *contra* Parker (2011), 117–22.

[80] Especially the repeated theme that "he who does must suffer" (*Ag.* 1564); cf. Gagarin (1976), 57–86; and Sommerstein (2010a), 193–7.

This transformation of Agamemnon after death thus opens political space for Orestes to grow into. Just as there was no glory in Agamemnon's dying at the hands of his wife, Orestes claims no glory for killing his mother. Likewise, he participates in no military expeditions to put him on par with his father.[81] Finally, the subtle implications of tyrannicide in its Athenian meaning in the *Choephoroi* are not marked in the *Eumenides* as a political accomplishment. Orestes thus comes off as decidedly unwarlike and unpolitical until the end of his life. Yet it is the reduction of Agamemnon's political potency in the afterlife that lets Orestes take up the position of Argive civic-military hero.

A ritually purified, forensically cleansed Orestes transitions the political focus of the trilogy from Agamemnon's epic glory to Athenian militarism. Orestes can only become a civic hero due to his acquittal in Athens and after multiple promises of help to the Athenians. His personal arc means that he owes favors to a foreign city, and his hero speech therefore diminishes Argos in favor of Athens. One might ask, would a powerful conqueror like Agamemnon allow such a subordination? Orestes' metamorphosis funnels into the trilogy's Athenocentric ending.

Heroization marks the final consummation of Orestes' prophecies, a theme associated with Orestes from his first arrival on stage. Yet there is a break. Once Orestes becomes a hero, his acts and words are impossible to interpret psychologically. These types of analytical tools assume human paradigms, desires, and limits. As Orestes receives his own release and fulfillment, he leaves the stage. His departure marks the end of the individual, human portion of the trilogy, which then concerns itself with purely divine and political themes.

---

[81] Peradotto (1969), 257–9, distinguishes between Agamemnon's emphasis on the glory that makes mortals jealous and Orestes' victory being "unenviable" (ἄζηλα, *Cho.* 1017).

Following out the afterlife of characters in the *Oresteia* demonstrates that they may continue to be rewritten, even multiple times. Some, like Agamemnon and the war dead, are reconceptualized by the living, others, like Orestes and Clytemnestra (Chapter 6), speak for themselves. The poetic power of these afterlife transmutations warps the framework of human life and death, upends easy ethical ideas, reverses the themes displayed by characters while living, and radically alters the politics of the trilogy. In the case of Orestes' trial, justification of his acquittal through supernatural benefits to Athens draws attention to a double aspect of his heroization. On the one hand, it is grounded in Athenian desires for divinely supported, continual victory. On the other, it raises questions concerning that desire by linking it to inhuman acts, suspect reasoning, and the bellicose themes that had been deeply undercut earlier in the trilogy. The treatment of heroes is thus another crucial component of the *Oresteia*'s self-aware challenge to ethical norms and political desires, just at the moment it seems to embrace them.

## CHAPTER 6

# *The Ghost of Clytemnestra*

## Introduction: Clytemnestra's Reappearance and Ethical Appeals

At the end of the *Choephoroi*, Orestes kills his mother, Clytemnestra, and displays her corpse to humans, gods, and the theatrical audience as proof of his just vengeance (*Cho.* 973–1006). In an eerie reversal at the start of the *Eumenides*, Clytemnestra reappears on stage, bearing the wounds of her murder, to demand vengeance against Orestes. Like the living queen, the Ghost of Clytemnestra marshals rhetoric to effect action in the world, rousing the sleeping Erinyes as her proxies by reciting a multitude of wrongs concerning her dishonor and suffering (*Eum.* 94–139). The Ghost thus extends Clytemnestra's character and claims beyond the presumed closure of her life.

Yet so much interferes with audience members, readers, and scholars heeding her arguments.[1] First is her identity, for the figure on stage is the afterlife remnant of the deceptive queen who turned on her husband, children, and state. Apollo himself had sanctioned taking vengeance on her. Audiences may be inclined to dismiss her claims as unworthy of consideration, for they belong to an irredeemably villainous character who has been condemned by an oracle and whose murder furnishes the plot of the *Choephoroi*.[2] By contrast, within the *Eumenides* her claims *are* treated seriously: The Erinyes take up Clytemnestra's demand for vengeance in their pursuit of Orestes. They subsume her position into their more general ethical imperative by insisting that retribution for kin-murder is a pillar of justice and that letting Orestes go unpunished threatens the order of mankind. As the *Eumenides* progresses, though, Clytemnestra's stage presence and arguments fade. Whereas Orestes remains on stage with his divine champion Apollo, the Ghost of Clytemnestra disappears. The Erinyes' universal arguments during Orestes' trial no longer resonate with Clytemnestra's personality or claims.[3] When the Erinyes succumb to Athena's new justice, accept a place of honor in Athens, and release Orestes, they ignore the consequences for the very one who invoked them. No voice speaks for Clytemnestra.

---

[1] The most influential analyses of Clytemnestra nearly ignore the Ghost and her particular issues, e.g. Winnington-Ingram (1948); Betensky (1978); Rabinowitz (1981); Vellacott (1984a); Goldhill (1984a); Neuburg (1991); McClure (1999); Foley (2001); and Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012). See now Schlatter (2018), 97–124, for a running commentary on chthonic issues in the scene; and Martin (2020), esp. 90–8.

[2] Clytemnestra loses the *agōn* with Orestes physically, and this, momentarily, seems proof of the triumph of his arguments (*Cho.* 894–930). See Foley (2001), 230–2.

Returning critical attention to the Ghost of Clytemnestra will demonstrate that dismissing her based on these two (contradictory) reasons misses the compelling ethical challenges she poses. The ominous, inventive Clytemnestra returns from the dead precisely to defy the quashing of individual claims based on a notion of the larger social order, even one that is divinely supported. Her Ghost's continuing demand for vengeance, moreover, extends the salience of ethical questions past the endpoint of life. She invokes her individual honor after death and hints at an underworld society, both notions that the political finale of the trilogy fails to address. This chapter picks up on previous human interactions with the underworld and examines how they extend to the claims of the dead themselves. Especially pertinent are the manifold provocations against normative values specific to the status and claims of the Ghost of Clytemnestra.[4]

A recurrent structure is necessary to dissect her fraught and thematically interconnected rhetoric. What is the Ghost's relation on the one hand to the living Clytemnestra and on the other to the afterlife from which she emerges?[5] The first section comprises a close reading of the Ghost passage in order to uncover a set of linguistic and ideational problems in her speech. This provides a framework for further analysis in the following sections of the Ghost's self-reference and bodily representations, the rhetoric of her arguments, and her description of her disgraced afterlife. The last section focuses on the stakes of her claims within the scene, which the conclusion uses to elucidate the extraordinary challenges this early and unique ghostly figure poses to ethical thought.

---

[3] Bacon (2001), 48–57; Winnington-Ingram (1948); and Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012), 309–27.

[4] On normative ethical theory, normative values, and the general challenges that tragic characters pose to both, see the Introduction.

[5] Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012), 308, puts this forth as a general, unanswered question: "Kann sie in diesem letzten Auftritt noch als menschliches Selbst beurteilt werden oder ist ihre Individualität als Lebende nun als tote Schattenfigur aufgehoben?"

## The Rhetoric and Themes of the Ghost's Claims

The Ghost of Clytemnestra affects the living world through her language alone; she invokes demonic agents rather than herself attacking or haunting Orestes. The rhetorical claims she uses to activate the Erinyes must first be unpacked sequentially, since she reinforces them through repetition and shifts the meanings of her terms over the course of the speech (*Eum.* 94–103):

> Κλυταιμήστρας Εἴδωλον
>
> εὕδοιτ᾽ ἄν, ὠή· καὶ καθευδουσῶν τί δεῖ;
> ἐγὼ δ᾽ ὑφ᾽ ὑμῶν ὧδ᾽ ἀπητιμασμένη
> ἄλλοισιν ἐν νεκροῖσιν, ὧν μὲν ἔκτανον
> ὄνειδος ἐν φθιτοῖσιν οὐκ ἐκλείπεται,
> αἰσχρῶς δ᾽ ἀλῶμαι. προυννέπω δ᾽ ὑμῖν ὅτι
> ἔχω μεγίστην αἰτίαν κείνων ὕπο.
> παθοῦσα δ᾽ οὕτω δεινὰ πρὸς τῶν φιλτάτων,
> οὐδεὶς ὑπέρ μου δαιμόνων μηνίεται,
> κατασφαγείσης πρὸς χερῶν μητροκτόνων.
> ὅρα δὲ πληγὰς τάσδε καρδίᾳ σέθεν·
>
> The *Eidōlon* of Clytemnestra
>
> You would be asleep! Hey! And what use are you sleeping?
> I, thanks to you, having been dishonored thus
> among the other dead – the reproach of those I killed
> never ceases among the perished
> and shamefully I wander. And I proclaim to you that
> I am blamed the most by them.
> Having thus suffered appalling things at the hands
> of my nearest kin,
> not one of the divinities is wrathful on my behalf,
> although I have been slaughtered by matricidal hands.
> See these wounds in your heart!

Even from the first two words of the transmitted Greek text, an important issue ought to provoke scrutiny of Clytemnestra's status: It is uncertain how to name the figure on stage. Although scholars frequently refer to this character as "the Ghost of Clytemnestra," the text does not. Of the available terms in Greek for soul, phantom, or dream, the primary medieval manuscript labels the character Κλυταιμήστρας Εἴδωλον, "the *image* (*eidōlon*) of Clytemnestra."[6] The term *eidōlon* is common in Homer, in conjunction with other terms for the dead.[7] It occurs, however, only three times in the text of Aeschylus, only once in the *Oresteia* (*Ag.* 839), and not at all in this scene.[8] What then, is the proper term for this reappearance of Clytemnestra, instead of "image"? The ancient label (εἴδωλον, *eidōlon*) suggests the effectiveness of the dramatic delay before Clytemnestra announces that she is appearing in a dream (ὄναρ, *onar*) at verse 116. This is more than twenty verses after she begins speaking. Up until that point, the audience is necessarily unclear about her state: Is she a ghost able to act in the world? Is she a powerless image whose words will go unheeded? The cryptic beginning to the scene should not be ignored. Uncertainty at the start as to the status and power of the Ghost is a component of the scene's aesthetic and the background for her polysemous rhetoric.

---

[6] For the manuscript tradition, see the OCT, v–xii; and West (1990), 319–54. The manuscript stage directions refer to the Ghost of Darius in the *Persians* as an εἴδωλον as well, which may indicate a later

From her opening words and appearance among the snoring Erinyes, it is evident that the Ghost of Clytemnestra's primary dramatic function is to wake them.[9] The scene revolves around this function: She chastises them for sleeping (*Eum.* 94), continues her reproaches as they snore (118–39), and disappears forever when they awaken (140). The revenant Clytemnestra is, however, much more than a phantasmagoric alarm clock for the Erinyes. She activates them as her surrogates to chase and prosecute Orestes, since she appears to be powerless in the living world. Yet it is crucial to distinguish her from them, due to the claim sometimes made that she is an Erinys herself, or their master.[10] This would overemphasize her supernatural status and assimilate her arguments to theirs.[11] Although she lets slip these "hounds of vengeance" (*Eum.* 129–32, cf. *Cho.* 924 and 1054), she does not control them, as is seen by their eventual renunciation of her cause. She is still the remnant of a human being.

---

convention. Since, however, εἴδωλον is not how the characters refer to these figures, it provides a textual starting point for examining the terminology actually used. Cf. Martin (2020), 128–9.

[7] Vernant (1991), 186–8; see the Introduction.

[8] Agamemnon uses *eidōlon* metaphorically (εἴδωλον σκιᾶς). The other Aeschylean uses are not decisive: one is attested in a fragmentary satyr play (TrGF 78a, 6). The other is at *Pr.* 568, where Io refers to either an image or a phantom of the dead Argos haunting her as a gadfly, although Sommerstein (2008c), following M. Schmidt, excises the phrase that includes εἴδωλον.

[9] Whereas the precise staging of the character is unknown, the situation is clear. On Clytemnestra's appearance and the debate over her staging, including whether she was staged at all, see Sommerstein (1989), ad 94–139, 103.

[10] Clytemnestra's Ghost is occasionally described *tout court* as an Erinys, as in Rabinowitz (1981), 170, or as their leader, as in Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012), 308; and Anderson (1932), 313–19.

[11] Clytemnestra in the *Ag.* stops just short of calling herself an Erinys, although she invokes Justice, Ruin, and the Erinys (Ἐρινύν, *Ag.* 1433) who was her helper, and later claims to herself be the "ancient, bitter avenging spirit" (ἀλάστωρ, *Ag.* 1501) of the house, a claim the Chorus dispute (*Ag.* 1505–8); see Foley (2001), 211–34; *contra* Neuburg (1991).

The humanity of the Ghost of Clytemnestra underlies several of her claims for vengeance. The first is her assertion of the Erinyes' transgression against her honor (*Eum.* 95–6): "I, thanks to you, having been dishonored (ἀπητιμασμένη, *apētimasmenē*) thus among the other dead." The Ghost of Clytemnestra appropriates ideas of honor and dishonor from the living world and applies them to a general conglomeration of the dead (ἄλλοισιν ἐν νεκροῖσιν, "among the other dead," 96; and ἐν φθιτοῖσιν, "among the perished," 97). Within this group, she specifies that those she killed (ὧν . . . ἔκτανον, 96) maintain persistent and damaging accusations against her. She reinforces the notion of continuing social relationships by referring to blame (ὄνειδος, *oneidos*, 97; cf. ὀνείδεσιν, *oneidesin*, 135) and shame (αἰσχρῶς, *aiskhrōs*, 98). Nevertheless, she does not take responsibility for the causes of her dishonor but uses it to chastise the Erinyes. She continues to build up foundations for her – still unstated – claims with the allegation that none of the divinities care about a mother slain by her own child (102). Clytemnestra thus embeds her afterlife dishonor, shame, and blame within the framework of social and kinship bonds.

The connection with her previously living body enables the Ghost to focus attention on her wounds (πληγὰς τάσδε, 103) as marks of the crime against her. When rolled on stage in the previous play, her corpse might have been clothed in this same bloody costume (*Cho.* 973–1006).[12] In that case, the wounds would have represented the results of offstage violence. Their appearance on the incorporeal Ghost of Clytemnestra, however, now compels questions about their physical status: In what way, precisely, are these "wounds"? The phrase "see these wounds in your heart" (ὅρα δὲ πληγὰς τάσδε καρδίᾳ σέθεν, 103), moreover, exposes the problems that physical vision presents when applied to supernatural viewers and a spectral object. Does the Ghost intend for the Erinyes to see the wounds in their sleep, when they still seem unaware of her, or when awake? The Ghost's language and her liminal status involve issues of corporeality and spectatorship, which complicate the claim for vengeance that she derives from her wounds.

Whereas appealing to divinities to requite sacrifice is standard in Greek ritual, the Ghost of Clytemnestra incites the Erinyes to chase Orestes by a shaming procedure (*Eum.* 106–16):[13]

> ἦ πολλὰ μὲν δὴ τῶν ἐμῶν ἐλείξατε,
> χοάς τ᾽ ἀοίνους, νηφάλια μειλίγματα,
> καὶ νυκτίσεμνα δεῖπν᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάρᾳ πυρὸς

---

[12] On the staging of the corpses of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, see Garvie (1986), lii–liii.

[13] I exclude the deeply suspect verses, 104–5; cf. West (1990), ad loc. and Sommerstein (1989), ad loc.

> ἔθυον, ὥραν οὐδενὸς κοινὴν θεῶν·
> καὶ πάντα ταῦτα λὰξ ὁρῶ πατούμενα,
> ὁ δ᾿ ἐξαλύξας οἴχεται νεβροῦ δίκην,
> καὶ ταῦτα κούφως ἐκ μέσων ἀρκυστάτων
> ὤρουσεν, ὑμῖν ἐγκατιλλώψας μέγα.
> ἀκούσαθ᾿ ὡς ἔλεξα τῆς ἐμῆς περὶ
> ψυχῆς· φρονήσατ᾿, ὦ κατὰ χθονὸς θεαί·
> ὄναρ γὰρ ὑμᾶς νῦν Κλυταιμήστρα καλῶ.
>
> Surely you have lapped up many things of mine indeed:
> wineless drink offerings, sacred appeasements,
> and night-holy meals over a hearth of fire
> I sacrificed, at an hour shared by none of the gods.
> And all these things I see trampled underfoot.
> He has gone, escaped just as a fawn,
> and what's more, lightly from the midst of nets,
> he darted, greatly mocking you with squinting eyes.
> Hear me, as I have spoken for my very
> soul! Mind it, O underworld goddesses:
> For in a dream, I, Clytemnestra, now call you!

The Ghost uses deliberately unsolemn vocabulary (ἐλείξατε, "you have lapped up," 106; and λάξ . . . πατούμενα, "trampled underfoot," 110) mixed with sacred language (νυκτίσεμνα "night-holy," 108; ἔθυον, "I sacrificed," 109). This verbally reproduces the Erinyes' double nature, as both demons enforcing gruesome punishments (*Eum.* 70–2, 186–97, 385–8) and holy, ancient divinities (393–6). The sacrifices, chthonic in nature, ought to refer to those meant to ensure Clytemnestra's vengeance against Agamemnon.[14] Yet the Ghost of Clytemnestra now seems to regard her previous sacrifices as having created a general obligation for the Erinyes to support her, which she turns against her son. Their failure to fulfill their duty reemphasizes her earlier criticism of the shortfall in divine concern (101). This disrespect is evident in the Ghost's accusation that the underworld goddesses themselves are trampling on sacred ritual (110). The metaphor reverses the previous instances of trampling in the trilogy, in which humans debased items belonging to the gods.[15] Honor and dishonor are at stake as well in

---

[14] The goddesses are underworld divinities (κατὰ χθονὸς θεαί, 115) and thus the sacrifices are at night, "at an hour shared by none of the gods" (108–9). On chthonic sacrifices and the Erinyes, see Scullion (1994), esp. 82. Compare Clytemnestra's sacrificial language at *Ag.* 1384–98. Cf. Rynearson (2013), 10–11; and Zeitlin (1965), 474–83.

[15] Agamemnon trod on the sacred fabrics (*Ag.* 904–74), and Cassandra stripped herself and trampled on the sacred robes that marked her as Apollo's prophet (*Ag.* 1264–70); cf. Sider (1978), 15–17.

Orestes "mocking" the Erinyes (ὑμῖν ἐγκατιλλώψας μέγα, 113) and thus disrespecting Clytemnestra too.

The previous references to vision become a marked motif of the Ghost's speech in this passage. The uncommon verb for mocking (ἐγκατιλλώψας) combines squinting (ἰλλός) and seeing (ὀπ-) roots.[16] It reinforces the unusual but only subtly marked sensory shift of seeing in one's heart (ὅρα … καρδίᾳ, *hora* … *kardia*, 103) and connects with the Ghost metaphorically seeing (ὁρῶ, *horō*, 110) her sacrifices trampled underfoot. This motif intensifies in the climactic verse 116, as the Ghost of Clytemnestra signals via the word ὄναρ that she herself knows she is in a dream of the Erinyes.[17] "Dream" finally answers the question of how to label this iteration of Clytemnestra's stage character. It also opens the door to comparisons – within the *Oresteia* and other texts – between dreams, images, and ghosts.

Speaking for herself is vitally important for the Ghost of Clytemnestra, since her only advocates are temporarily incapacitated. It also differentiates her from other undead mentioned in the *Oresteia*. Characteristically, Clytemnestra's words become potent speech-acts. In the three verses that begin to disturb the Erinyes, she calls on them to listen (ἀκούσαθ', 114) and pay heed (φρονήσατ', 115), and emphasizes her own speaking (ἔλεξα, 114) and calling (καλῶ, 116). That she has spoken on behalf of her own *psukhē* (τῆς ἐμῆς περὶ ψυχῆς, 114–15) marks the stakes of her ethical claims, yet is also a deeply ambiguous reference: Is the *psukhē* her life, her image on stage, her disembodied soul in Hades, or a combination of these? Each possibility has different implications for the grounding of her claims and the consequences of completed vengeance for her continued existence.

Although presumably the audience could easily intuit the identity of the figure on stage through costume and her speech before verse 116, the Ghost of Clytemnestra's dramatic announcement of her own name (Κλυταιμήστρα) builds on the status she held in life as a queen and the power she has exerted as the central manipulator in the first play and the object of vengeance in the second. Her high status, in turn, grounds the dishonor she claims to suffer in the afterlife (95). Clytemnestra's name couples with and reinforces her invocation of the Erinyes (ὑμᾶς …

---

[16] Sommerstein (1989), ad loc.; cf. Chantraine, s.v. and Beekes, s.v. on the ocular associations of ἰλλός in addition to the ὀπ- root (under ὄπωπα).

[17] This is the adverbial use of ὄναρ, "in a dream," (cf. *Eum.* 131) as Smyth (1926); the LSJ, s.v. 2.II; and Sommerstein (1989) translate. There are those who translate ὄναρ appositively, "as a dream" (cf. *Ag.* 82), e.g. Podlecki (1989). Cf. Goldhill (1984a), 215.

καλῶ, 116), in the final position in this speech, just before they begin to whine. But her self-naming moment foregrounds an ethical problem as well, that of continuity between her living character, the inanimate corpse on stage in the previous play, and her reanimated, speaking figure. The issue raised by the "I" who makes claims and its relation to the living or dead world is one that requires precise parsing.

As the previously silent Erinyes start moaning on stage – demonstrating already the efficacy of the Ghost's language – she continues to urge them on (*Eum.* 117–28):

Χο. (μυγμός)
Κλ. μύζοιτ᾽ ἄν· ἀνὴρ δ᾽ οἴχεται φεύγων πρόσω·
†φίλοις γάρ εἰσιν οὐκ ἐμοῖς† προσίκτορες.[18]
Χο. (μυγμός)
Κλ. ἄγαν ὑπνώσσεις, κοὐ κατοικτίζεις πάθος·
φονεὺς δ᾽ Ὀρέστης τῆσδε μητρὸς οἴχεται.
Χο. (ὠγμός)
Κλ. ὤζεις, ὑπνώσσεις· οὐκ ἀναστήσῃ τάχος;
τί σοι πέπρωται πρᾶγμα πλὴν τεύχειν κακά;
Χο. (ὠγμός)
Κλ. ὕπνος πόνος τε κύριοι συνωμόται
δεινῆς δρακαίνης ἐξεκήραναν μένος.

Chor. (*whine*)
Clyt. You would be snoring! But the man has gone, fleeing far;
[For suppliants are not dear to me.]
Chor. (*whine*)
Clyt. You are too drowsy, and you do not show compassion for suffering;
But Orestes, the murderer of this mother, has gone.
Chor. (*moan*)
Clyt. You moan, you drowse – will you not quickly get up?
What affairs have been assigned to you except to produce bad things?
Chor. (*moan*)
Clyt. Sleep and toil, powerful conspirators,
have drained the terrible serpent of wrath.

The Ghost attempts to invoke the Erinyes' pity (κοὐ κατοικτίζεις πάθος, 121), a somewhat ironic move thanks to her nearly simultaneous appeal to their evil function (125). The pathos (πάθος, 121) she describes doubles her previous reference to suffering (παθοῦσα, 100), although it remains unspecified if this pain stems from the original betrayal by Agamemnon, being killed by Orestes, being hounded by the dead in the afterlife, or all three.[19] She specifically emphasizes that Orestes murdered her as his mother (φονεὺς . . . τῆσδε μητρός, *phoneus* . . . *tēsde mētros*, 122), cycling back to her mention of "matricidal hands" (χερῶν μητροκτόνων, *kherōn mētroktonōn*, 102). The rhetorical recurrence to previous themes and language links the Ghost both to the living Clytemnestra's incantatory rhetorical technique and to the Erinyes' repetitively binding dance and obsessive harping on their dishonor.[20] The deictic in the phrase "this mother" (τῆσδε μητρός, *tēsde mētros*, 122) also moves the frame of reference to her nondream self, since it refers to the biological mother that she was when living. Like the deictic in "these wounds" (πληγὰς τάσδε, *plēgas tasde*, 103), it represents a facet of the vacillation of frames of reference between the presence of the one who was wronged and the absence inherent in her appearing in a dream and not having a biological body. Moreover, it continues the ethical problem surrounding Clytemnestra's motherhood from the *Choephoroi*. What do the types of distance from the living world that Clytemnestra's death, appearance in a dream, and continuing abdication of her ethical accountability as a mother do to her own language of presence and obligation?

---

[18] "Desperatus," OCT.

Although she is decidedly human, many references within this speech yoke Clytemnestra thematically to the Erinyes. In the *Choephoroi*, Clytemnestra was bitten by a snake in her dream, standing for her son who returned from ostensible death (Chapter 5).[21] In the *Eumenides*, Clytemnestra herself is the dream (116) and describes her avengers as a snake (δεινῆς δρακαίνης, 128), tethering their chthonic state to her own.[22] She urges them to perform their assigned duty (πέπρωται πρᾶγμα . . . τεύχειν κακά, 125). The verbs do the work here, indicating that the Erinyes have a specific, unchangeable function. This raises the question of how Clytemnestra's claims relate to the transformation of the Erinyes' avenging, outsider position in the old law to a cherished, insider one under the new law. If they can move from murderous, polluted, and dishonored to honored, why is Clytemnestra never given the opportunity?

---

[19] This emphasis on suffering loops back to the living queen's speech to Agamemnon, in which her tendentious story of torment in his absence was one of her rhetorical ploys (*Ag.* 855–913). Cf. Foley (2001), 209.

[20] On Clytemnestra's *telos* prayer or binding song in *Ag.* 958–74, see McClure (1996). For the Erinyes' repetitions, see Rosenmeyer (1982), 284–310, 343.

[21] On the dream experience and its precedents, see Brown (2018), ad *Cho.* 523–39.

[22] Lebeck (1971), 14; and Rabinowitz (1981), 168–72.

As the Erinyes begin to awaken, the Ghost's final lines focus attention on their dreaming, and thus on her own status (*Eum.* 129–39):

> Χο. (μυγμὸς διπλοῦς ὀξύς)
> λαβὲ λαβὲ λαβὲ λαβέ· φράζου.
> Κλ. ὄναρ διώκεις θῆρα, κλαγγαίνεις δ᾽ ἅπερ
> κύων μέριμναν οὔποτ᾽ ἐκλείπων φόνου.
> τί δρᾷς; ἀνίστω· μή σε νικάτω πόνος,
> μηδ᾽ ἀγνοήσῃς πῆμα μαλθαχθεῖσ᾽ ὕπνῳ.
> ἄλγησον ἧπαρ ἐνδίκοις ὀνείδεσιν·
> τοῖς σώφροσιν γὰρ ἀντίκεντρα γίγνεται.
> σὺ δ᾽ αἱματηρὸν πνεῦμ᾽ ἐπουρίσασα τῷ,
> ἀτμῷ κατισχναίνουσα, νηδύος πυρί,
> ἕπου, μάραινε δευτέροις διώγμασιν.
>
> Chor. (sharp double whine)
> Get him! Get him! Get him! Get him! Look there!
> Clyt. You are pursuing a beast in a dream, and you bellow like
> a dog never abandoning concern for gore.
> What are you doing? Get up! Do not let toil conquer you,
> nor, soothed by sleep, ignore pains.
> feel a stab of pain in your liver from just reproaches;
> to the wise they are like goads.
> But you, send after him bloody breath,
> waste him away with fumes, with fire from your insides,
> follow him! Waste him away with a second pursuit!

This interplay between what the theatrical audience sees in the dramatic frame and the "dream" is already present with the Erinyes' first articulate words. These indicate that they believe they are actually pursuing Orestes, even mimicking the chase (λαβὲ λαβὲ λαβὲ λαβέ, 130), while they are still lying asleep on stage. One can almost hear the disgust in Clytemnestra's line, "what are you doing? Get up!" (τί δρᾷς; ἀνίστω, 133). The Erinyes' φράζου ("look there!" 130) is a deictic indicator that picks up on and complicates the present–absent dynamic and visual themes of the Ghost's language, since they are pointing out an unseen Orestes as if he were visible to them. When the Ghost complains that they are pursuing a wild beast within one dream (ὄναρ διώκεις θῆρα, *onar diōkeis thēra*, 131) from which she, another dream (ὄναρ, *onar*, 116), is trying to wake them, she indicates to the audience that two dreams are occurring on different levels. Moreover, she is exhibiting a remarkable degree of self-awareness concerning her status within this doubly problematic dream-state.

When they do awaken, the Erinyes refer to Clytemnestra as the "reproach from dreams" (ὄνειδος ἐξ ὀνειράτων, *oneidos ex oneiratōn*, 155), which sums up the Ghost's effective goading in one condensed expression. The strong assonance of the phrase draws attention to Clytemnestra's own use of these terms (ὄναρ, *onar*, 116 and 131; ὄνειδος, *oneidos*, 97). Their use of the plural, "dreams" (155), has multiple possible referents. It could simply stand for the singular, could refer to dreams each Erinys was seeing, or could refer to the double dream of Orestes escaping and Clytemnestra chastising. As we will see, the layered and uncertain references to dreams and their link to reality is in line with other passages in the *Oresteia*. It is less possible to untangle them, I will argue, than to recognize that they double the Ghost's problematic physical state and draw attention to her tenuous pleading.

The dynamics of Clytemnestra's body play out inversely to the Erinyes' embodiment. They were only abstract references in the *Agamemnon* and invisible in the *Choephoroi*, but their embodiment is a central theme in the *Eumenides*.[23] Its effects manifest themselves in this Ghost passage, where they are both visible for the first time and momentarily prevented from fulfilling their function. Sleep is not only a physical impediment, but, the Ghost warns, its mollifying quality could also undermine their obligations: "nor, soothed by sleep, ignore pains" (134). These pains are either hers (again appealing to her sufferings in life or the underworld) or their own, since she hurts the Erinyes by means of goading accusations (135–6). Their possible softening and pain derive from the fact that the Erinyes are now staged; their avatars give physical referents to otherwise metaphorical language. This is especially true in the mixture of nonphysical ideas with body parts in the command to "feel a stab of pain in your liver from just reproaches (*oneidesin*)" (ἄλγησον ἧπαρ ἐνδίκοις ὀνείδεσιν, 135), and is possibly behind the references to "fumes" and "fire from your insides" (138–9), as well as to "seeing in the heart" (103). Their physical presence, speech, and insistence on their rights are the foundation for the appeasement through persuasion and honors that Athena initiates. The Erinyes themselves at one point also declare a surprisingly middle-path attitude in an often-quoted passage (*Eum.* 526–30) and at the end add positive blessings to their functions. These aspects of their later character might then connect to the bizarre non sequitur in this passage, when the Ghost avers that reproaches are goads for the "wise" or "moderate" (σώφροσιν, *sōphrosin*, 136). Either adjective seems entirely out of place as a possible description of the Erinyes in this scene. The irony is all the more apparent as the Ghost of Clytemnestra is in the midst of urging them to shrivel her son up with bloody breath (137). The incongruity in Clytemnestra's speech serves as a brief hint of things to come but also differentiates the Erinyes from her, the one whom the trilogy never appeases.

---

[23] On a theatrical level, her very reappearance fits the general pattern in the *Oresteia* of the increasing embodiment of superhuman elements. Early in the trilogy, characters invoke supernatural forces as abstractions; then, characters declare that they perceive these forces manifesting their efficacy through visions and signs; last, the forces themselves appear hypostatized on stage and speak. Cf. Lattimore (1953), 13–15; Kitto (1961), 23; Lebeck (1971), 1–3; and Sommerstein (2010a), 171–81. On this arc for the Erinyes, Apollo, and Athena, see Brown (1983), 29–30; and Bacon (2001), esp. 48 and 52.

The Ghost demands blood-for-blood vengeance, in line with the living Clytemnestra's justification after her murder of Agamemnon. To interpret the substance and dynamics of her pleas, it is crucial to conceptualize them in ethical terms.[24] Despite the paranormal circumstances, the Ghost builds her case on human foundations: shame, personal honor, motherhood, and divine wrath for familial crime, all of which are imbricated with the ethical concerns of the trilogy.[25] An audience attentive to the perspectives of characters in the play ought – when these touch on social norms and ethical matters – to consider her claims. Living Clytemnestra raises ethical questions beyond acceptable social confines.[26] Her confrontations with society are the key to her living character's tragic, ethical importance. It will become evident that the Ghost of Clytemnestra intensifies those challenges to normative constructs, in part by breaking with so many aspects of life itself.

## The Dream of Clytemnestra: Presence, Self-Reference, and Image

The bases for the Ghost's claims are greatly affected by her status as a dream and as an afterlife figure. She manipulates references to her body and current state in ways distinct from earlier ghostly figures in extant literature. There is, in fact, precedent for the demands of the dead, even for ghosts of formerly living characters returning to ask for actions to affect their underworld existence. By contrasting Clytemnestra to her two

---

[24] See Foley (2001), 202–3 n. 3, on the living Clytemnestra's ethical claims for vengeance; cf. Vellacott (1984b), 63–75.

[25] Zeitlin (1965), 482–3, examines how at first Clytemnestra is justified in avenging her lost child and then loses that justification, in part through the predatory behavior against her own children.

[26] Foley (2001), 207–34, emphasizes the living Clytemnestra's dangerous questioning and subverting of male dominance – sexual, political, linguistic, and violent.

Homeric forerunners, one gains a better understanding of Aeschylus' innovative poetics and ethical challenges.

The ghost of Patroclus (*Il.* 23.62–107) is Clytemnestra's most obvious precursor in surviving literature. Both appear in the dream of their addressee (Achilles and the Erinyes respectively), begin their rebukes of the sleepers with the same verb (εὕδω), and describe their suffering in the afterlife to motivate the addressee's actions in the living world.[27] Patroclus is called a *psukhē* ("soul"), yet he does not refer to himself as either a *psukhē* or a dream.[28] When, in a poignant moment, Patroclus asks Achilles to give him his hand (23.75), Achilles' inability to embrace the image instantly exposes the discontinuity between the living Patroclus and his impalpable, shrieking, fleeing *psukhē* (23.99–101). This ending to the Patroclus scene emphasizes the disparity between the *psukhē* and the living person in terms of how both characters conceptualize its corporeality. The *psukhē* acts and speaks as if he is still physically cohesive. Achilles, at first, takes the *psukhē* for his embraceable companion, yet the action dramatically reveals the *psukhē*'s immaterial nature.[29] This undead dream scene thus draws attention to the problematics of self-reference and incorporeality after death.

In Homer, when ghosts demand action on their own behalf, they are concerned with ritual burial, not vengeance.[30] Even though Achilles becomes obsessed with avenging his friend's death, the ghost of Patroclus does not even mention his killers but focuses his companion on the immediate fulfillment of the burial that will enable him to proceed through the gates of Hades (23.71).[31] This is the case as well with the ghost of

---

[27] Patroclus begins his exhortation to Achilles with the indicative εὕδεις, "you are asleep!" (*Il.* 23.69). Clytemnestra's beginning, εὕδοιτ᾽ ἄν, "you *would be* asleep!" (*Eum.* 94) may be read as a sarcastic optative (Smyth §1826).

[28] The *Iliad*'s narrator names the visitation in Achilles' sleep the "*psukhē* of Patroclus" (ψυχὴ Πατροκλῆος, 23.65), as does Achilles once he has awakened (Πατροκλῆος . . . ψυχή, 23.105–6). On the other hand, within the dream Achilles addresses the figure as his actual companion (23.94–8), not a *psukhē*, nor a dream. The Patroclus figure does not use any of the terms *psukhē*, *eidōlon*, or *onar* for himself, only for others in the underworld (ψυχαί, εἴδωλα, 23.72).

[29] Vernant (1991), 189; and Gazis (2018), 73–4. Odysseus' mother, when questioned by her son as to whether she is "some image" (τί . . . εἴδωλον, *ti* . . . *eidōlon*, *Od.* 11.213) sent to deceive him, responds that after death "the *psukhē*, like a dream (ὄνειρος, *oneiros*), having flown out, flutters about" (*Od.* 11.219–22).

[30] Vengeance is entirely suppressed in all instances of the Homeric afterlife, not only in the Patroclus scene. The shade of Agamemnon, for example, narrates to Odysseus Clytemnestra's treachery and his attempt to kill her as he was dying but mentions nothing about vengeance now that he is dead (*Od.* 11.405–56), only asking about the whereabouts of his son (457–61). Contrast this with the very start of the *Odyssey*, in which Zeus already reveals the requital brought by Orestes on Aegisthus (1.40–3). Cf. D'Arms and Hulley (1946); and Marks (2008), 17–35.

[31] That is, the *Iliad*'s scene mainly spurs the fulfillment of a human ritual obligation. Richardson (1990), ad 23.69–92, puts this in the context of Homeric double motivation.

Elpenor (*Od.* 11.71–6), who is simultaneously concerned to set up a reminder of his existence for the living.[32] The ghost of Elpenor explicitly states that his shade would become a supernatural affliction on Odysseus in the living world were he to be left unburied (11.73). Despite such threats, however, not one of the Homeric dead ever manifests power over the living, nor do the living show much fear of their threatened vengeance.[33] With this background, it is now possible to return, in greater detail, to the Ghost of Clytemnestra's rhetoric, her claims, and their complications.

Like the ghosts of Patroclus and Elpenor, the Ghost of Clytemnestra articulates her demands rhetorically to the agents who she hopes will fulfill them. By contrast, however, she supports her claims by emphasizing her *presence*, most obviously by linguistically drawing attention to her visible self ("this mother," τῆσδε μητρός, *tēsde mētros*, *Eum.* 122) and her wounds ("these wounds," πληγὰς τάσδε, *plēgas tasde*, 103). The intervention of the Ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides* as a speaking, present, undead figure allows her to break the silence of her corpse on stage in the *Choephoroi*. Yet her speeches proceed to diverge widely from those of the ghosts of Patroclus and Elpenor, drawing attention to the anomalies of ghostly speech concerning the visible first person, the represented spectral body, and continuity after death.

The first set of such differences concerns self-reference. The Ghost of Clytemnestra uses first-person singulars for her underworld self (e.g. ἐγώ, ἀπητιμασμένη, 95; ἀλῶμαι, 98; ἔχω, 99), her previous living self ("I killed," ἔκτανον, 96), and her current stage-figure ("I declare," προυννέπω, 98). In this, she resembles the ghosts of Patroclus and Elpenor, each of whose references to himself appears to present a unified self as current speaker, formerly living individual, corpse, and afterlife *psukhē*.[34] Neither Homeric ghost, however, mentions his name or current status (whether as a dream or a *psukhē*). The figure in the *Eumenides* both refers to herself as Clytemnestra and draws attention to the fact that she appears in a dream (ὄναρ γὰρ ὑμᾶς νῦν Κλυταιμήστρα καλῶ, *Eum.* 116). In this multilayered self-reference, she invokes the Erinyes with a first-person verb (ὑμᾶς . . . καλῶ) and simultaneously uses her naming as a self-invocation

---

[32] He is also a *psukhē* (ψυχὴ Ἐλπήνορος, *Od.* 11.51), and his ambush of Odysseus before the other dead represents his not having entered the house of Hades proper. See Tsagarakis (2000), 33.

[33] Hence the dishonoring of enemy corpses and seeming unconcern for the cremation of common soldiers, on which see Garland (1984).

[34] E.g. Patroclus' imperative (*Il.* 23.71): θάπτε με ὅττι τάχιστα, πύλας Ἀΐδαο περήσω, "Bury *me* as quickly as possible so that *I may pass* through the gates of Hades!" In this command, the ghost of Patroclus refers to his corpse as himself ("bury me") and to his underworld existence ("so that I may pass through") equally as himself.

(Κλυταιμήστρα). Clytemnestra's conjuring of her own presence is only made more eerily potent through her simultaneous understanding of her absence, of herself as a dream.

The Ghost of Clytemnestra convolutes the issue of her presence further when she refers to interrupting the second dream the Erinyes are experiencing: "You are pursuing a beast in a dream" (ὄναρ διώκεις θῆρα, *onar diōkeis thēra*, *Eum.* 131). The Ghost, visible to the audience, is commenting on a dream that is invisible to them. Her metaphorical use of words for vision within the dream (especially ὅρα . . . καρδίᾳ, 103; ὁρῶ, 110; ἐγκατιλλώψας, 113) only further problematizes her effective invisibility. For she is not only both present and absent, as is any ghost, but she is also *unseen by any internal audience.* Unlike the *psukhē* of Patroclus or the Children of Thyestes, she never appears to any human beings – not to Orestes nor to the Pythia, who both see the Erinyes. She is not even visible to the Erinyes themselves, who only see Orestes in their sleep and never address Clytemnestra when they awaken, implying she is already gone. Her *mise en abyme* displacement of presence and visibility puts Clytemnestra at multiple removes from the living, human world.

The Ghost's liminal status as an incorporeal double of a dead, dissembling murderer distills the *Oresteia*'s recurrent problematizing of image as false presence. The trilogy often connects such suspicion with the issue of language as false image. The *Agamemnon*, especially, is glutted with critiques of the veracity of both. The Chorus and Clytemnestra in dialogue equate the "phantoms of dreams" (ὀνείρων φάσματ', *oneirōn phasmat'*, *Ag.* 274) with divine deception (δολώσαντος θεοῦ, 273), with "the (vain) belief . . . of a slumbering mind" (δόξαν . . . βριζούσης φρενός, 275), and with "unwinged rumor" (ἄπτερος φάτις, 276). They also connect "dream-appearances" (ὀνειρόφαντοι, *oneirophantoi*, 420) with "(vain) beliefs" (δόξαι, 421) and oppose dreams to the truth (εἴτ' οὖν ἀληθεῖς εἴτ' ὀνειράτων δίκην, 491, cf. 980–1). Agamemnon, as well, describes deception within the "mirror" of social relations as "an image (*eidōlon*) of a shadow" (κάτοπτρον, εἴδωλον σκιᾶς, 839). Human characters in the *Agamemnon* thus enmesh the language of image with epistemological problems. This is especially evident in the Chorus's anxiety over the living Clytemnestra's verbal fabrication, linked with her "dream" of Agamemnon's death (889–94).[35] The whole complex of dreams and images as connected with fiction, wish fulfillment, and death thus permeates Clytemnestra's living language.

---

[35] On living Clytemnestra's problematic speech, see Goldhill (1984a), esp. 68, 74–5, 77; and on these themes in her Ghost scene, 213–15. Foley (2001), 207, shows that rumors and dreams are spoken of as "women's thinking" in the trilogy; cf. McClure (1999), 74–9. On Clytemnestra's fabrications connected with dreams, see Catenaccio (2011), 205–8.

Dreams linked with the repeated murders of the house of Atreus invade waking life. Although the categories of dream and image are labeled unreal, the dreams themselves seem increasingly potent over the first two plays. The Children of Thyestes model a dream-vision that appeals for vengeance (*Ag.* 1217–38). Yet in appearing to Cassandra alone they represent more an omen of a future murder than an incitement to act. In the *Choephoroi*, by contrast, the plot revolves around Clytemnestra's dream. Fear of its force causes her to order the libations for Agamemnon; for the mourners, it signals Agamemnon's power and approval of the upcoming vengeance; and Clytemnestra herself acknowledges it as prophetic in her dying moments (*Cho.* 928–9).[36] The interpretation of the dream's symbolic language adds a dynamic of riddle and solution to Clytemnestra's murder. It also implies a deferred communication between the chthonic dream-sender, Agamemnon, and the dream-interpreter and fulfiller, Orestes (523–50).[37] By the end of the *Choephoroi*, the Erinyes have taken on the role of chthonic nightmare, unseen by the Chorus yet already acting on Orestes' mind (1020–62).[38] Thus, the previous dreams and visions connected with Clytemnestra are dramatically circuitous, but they create a potent expectation that when one appears, its portent will be consummated.

The Ghost of Clytemnestra is a nexus of the issues related to dream-images and their fulfillment. The Ghost's ethical argument becomes warped due to – but also despite – her spectral continuity of form. For the Ghost's resemblance is less to Clytemnestra's living body than to her corpse. The Ghost supports her claims by pointing to her wounds as irrefutable evidence for her petition through a verb of seeing and a deictic: "See these wounds" (ὅρα δὲ πληγὰς τάσδε, *hora de plēgas tasde*, *Eum.* 103). She thus draws on the oft-repeated ethical claim in the *Oresteia* (before the new law of Athena) that bloodshed necessarily entails further bloodshed. This emphasizes the physicality of the wounds and the liquid drawn from them, a recurrent, fluctuating theme in the trilogy.[39] Yet unlike wounds on a living being, those on the Ghost of Clytemnestra operate as signs without substance, just as subject to her manipulation as language and image.

---

[36] See Mace (2004), 39–50; and Catenaccio (2011), 211–21.

[37] See Chapter 4 for the interpretation of Clytemnestra's dream and Chapter 5 for Orestes as fulfiller.

[38] For the psychological effectiveness of the Erinyes on Orestes, see Brown (1983), 15–22. The Chorus insist that they are imaginings (δόξαι, *Cho.* 1051), but he denies precisely this (οὐκ εἰσὶ δόξαι, 1053); cf. Catenaccio (2011), 222–3.

[39] On the logic of blood for blood in the *Oresteia* and its connections to other liquids such as dew, milk, libations, and the Erinyes' venom, see Lebeck (1971), 80–91; and Sommerstein (2010a), 171–8.

The Cassandra scene in the *Agamemnon* allows a clarifying comparison for the links between images, dreams, and wounds. Cassandra points out the dead Children of Thyestes (invisible to the Chorus and, presumably, to the audience) with the same verb in the imperative and deictic as the Ghost of Clytemnestra uses for her wounds: "see these children!" (ὁρᾶτε τούσδε τούς … νέους, *horate tousde tous … neous*, *Ag.* 1217–18). Cassandra describes them holding their flesh and innards in their hands (1220–1). These she interprets to be the signs of their murders that demand requital against Agamemnon (1223–38). Yet Cassandra's language stresses that these are only visions of the children, not their reanimated corpses. She sees them "bearing the forms of dreams" (ὀνείρων προσφερεῖς μορφώμασιν, *oneirōn prosphereis morphōmasin*, 1218), although she is not asleep.[40] Cassandra's reference to the dead children as images without substance nevertheless leads to her interpretation of their wounds as a call for vengeance, providing a template for the *Eumenides* scene.

The Ghost of Clytemnestra, by contrast, is both the interpreter of her own wounds and staged to be visible to the audience. These seemingly minor differences are immensely significant. The wounds from Clytemnestra's violent murder leave stains that her Ghost now uses to exceed their intended purpose, the vengeance with which audiences might have sympathized. Near the end of the *Choephoroi*, Orestes displays his mother's corpse to humans, the gods, and the audience with verbs of seeing (e.g. ἴδεσθε, *Cho.* 973; ἴδεσθε δ' αὖτε, 980; and δείξαθ', 984) and describes the killing of his mother as justice (ἐνδίκως φόνον τὸν μητρός, 988–9; and κτανεῖν τέ φημι μητέρ' οὐκ ἄνευ δίκης, 1027).[41] Perhaps the corpse was then clothed in a bloody costume now worn by Clytemnestra's Ghost.[42] In transporting these brutal marks back from the afterlife, though, the Ghost strips them of the signification Orestes assigned. In her telling, the gory writing on her body recounts none of Orestes' dilemma and plotting, nor any divine justification from Apollo's oracles. Instead, the Ghost treats the wounds as a palimpsest on which she overwrites Orestes' meaning with her own. The reversal is consummate: Whereas the murderer points to the wounds on the corpse, claiming that they are marks of justly completed vengeance, the dream of the murdered now points to the very same marks on herself and counterclaims that it is just to seek vengeance against their maker.

---

[40] Mace (2002), 53; and Catenaccio (2011), 209–10.

[41] On this display of justice, see Rousseau (1963), esp. 126–7; and Goldhill (1984a), 101, 198–9.

[42] Again, the staging is unknown, but see Sommerstein (1989), ad 94–139.

The complicating factor in this struggle over meaning is that the marks themselves are not actual wounds. In fact, it is precisely the deictic in the phrase "these wounds" (πληγὰς τάσδε, *plēgas tasde*, *Eum.* 103) that conjoins several levels of representational fiction.[43] Although presumably visible to the audience, the wounds cannot be biological injuries for two reasons. First, as is evident from her placement in a dream, the Ghost of Clytemnestra lacks material substance in the dramatic world.[44] That is, the marks visible on her image alert an audience to the lack of biological wounds even *within* the play; any representation of wounds, even a spray of ruby blood out of a gaping neck, would still fail to designate a human body's wounds, since they are worn by an apparition. This ghostly figure is not meant to be identical with the corpse but is a dream of the incorporeal dead queen. Clytemnestra's visible wounds are thus superfluous.[45] Since the wounds to which the Ghost of Clytemnestra points with her demonstrative lack substance, the ethical appeal from them is deeply compromised.

One might well suspect this first point: Are not the wounds visible on Clytemnestra's Ghost merely a natural extension of the wounds that her body suffered at the moment of death? Support for this critique comes not only from the appearance of the Children of Thyestes but also from the precedent of *Odyssey* 11, in which Odysseus tells of encountering wounded and bloody soldiers among the dead (*Od.* 11.40–1). The *Iliad*'s ghost of Patroclus, however, provides a powerful counterexample. His appearance illustrates that there is no requisite connection between wounds on a corpse and wounds on the dream of the dead. The *Iliad* explicitly states that Patroclus' *psukhē* appears like the living Patroclus in body and clothing (*Il.* 23.66–7). In other words, he appears as he was in any other moment of life – any moment but his naked, spear-pierced, battlefield death. Even in Odysseus' underworld story, the images of the dead often do not bear the marks of their death. Especially telling is the case of Agamemnon, who cannot be imagined to be covered in stab wounds from his murder by

---

[43] On deictics as bridging reality and fantasy, see Felson (2004), 253.

[44] See Holmes (2010), esp. 41–83, 228–74, for understandings of the biological body in Greek thought and the possibilities of nonphysical action (divine or demonic) that affects it. Cf. Williams (1993), 21–30.

[45] They are also not dramatically necessary, as Cawthorn (2008), 22, points out: "Wounds function as the marks, the evidence or inscriptions, of violence, regardless of whether these wounds are textual, reported, or enacted."

Clytemnestra, for, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Odysseus asks him whether he was killed in battle or drowned (*Od.* 11.397–403). Since the Ghost of Clytemnestra forges an imperative for vengeance in part from the reference to her visible wounds, it is essential to emphasize that their appearance on her image is neither literarily nor culturally necessary.[46]

The second point concerning the Ghost's wounds is that her appearance – in a double set of dreams and on stage – complicates her argument from the physical even further. Clytemnestra's mention of wounds directs the attention of the sleeping Erinyes and the audience to a costume.[47] The imperative "see" (ὅρα) initiates a type of vision detached from human sense perception. It also operates at a double remove from literal sight for the internal audience, the Erinyes. They either see Clytemnestra's Ghost in a dream, or do not see her at all, since they appear to be paying attention exclusively to their chase of Orestes in another dream. Moreover, the command "see!" works differently for the theatrical audience, who presumably see the Ghost as a costumed representation of a dream. This is therefore more than a simple reference to stage machinery. The audience must treat either a portrayal of wounds on her costume or even nothing at all as the invisible dream of wounds on the image of an animate corpse.[48] The effect is that of a hall of mirrors and transparencies, which draws attention to the very nature of this character's visibility.[49] Like Homeric ghosts that cannot be embraced and the visions that flit through the arms in the *Agamemnon* (*Ag.* 423–6), the body marked as an image or a dream is acknowledged within the literary work to be deceptive to its viewer. In this case, the viewer is the audience. The compromised wounds thus indicate a sophisticated piece of metatheater: The Ghost's reference to her costume implicates spectatorship and locates the production of dramatic meaning in nonliteral seeing.[50] Additionally, even the audience must see them in the

---

[46] Note, too, that grave goods did not picture the animate dead (even the war dead) as injured, but as they were in life or as winged souls, cf. Vermeule (1979), 1–23.

[47] On deictics in tragedy pointing out stage material, like props (or in this case, a costume), see Mueller (2016), 7; and on Clytemnestra's net–trap–robe theme, 42–69. On Aeschylus' use of terrifying costumes for the Erinyes from later evidence, see the *Vita Aeschyli* 9 (=TrGF 3 T A1.30–2) with discussion in Calder (1988); and Frontisi-Ducroux (2007), 165–74.

[48] It is significant in this context that the Erinyes themselves were previously invisible abstractions who are now staged characters. They draw the audience's attention to the nature of the dramatized image. See Bacon (2001), 57; and Zeitlin (1965), 488–98.

[49] Johnston (1999), 24–5, relates the problem of image in Greek social and religious attitudes about ghosts to the nature of tragedy as a genre: "The ghost – the *eidōlon*, the *skia*, the *phasma*, that thing that is here in front of our eyes and yet not really here – emblematizes quite nicely the slippage between reality and illusion that tragedy loved."

[50] This example of Aeschylean metatheater is subtle but operates like the more explicit examples in later playwrights that have drawn far more attention from scholars. It corresponds to the focus of

"mind's eye" or, as the Ghost puts it, "heart."[51] That is, regardless of their visual presence on a costume, for their ethical effect they must be *felt*.

The Ghost of Clytemnestra's staging and language advertise that the character before the audience is only the façade of a human being, a mere dream of demons. The layers of precarious visibility and ambiguous presence comprise the multiple removes between the ethical appeals of the Ghost and those of living characters. These fissures in her language of self-reference thus undermine one basis of her imperative for vengeance. Crucially, the Ghost herself seems almost aware of it. Her very vocabulary of dreams and visibility simultaneously destabilizes presence, center, and reality. It is a set of obfuscations that extends the rhetorical mastery of the living Clytemnestra. This is part of the Ghost's double move to support her ethical claims through linguistic manipulation: She makes dubious assertions but blurs their structure to avoid refutation.

## The "Mother of Hades": Inventing and Warping the Afterlife

The Ghost's uncorroborated story of her own afterlife (*Eum.* 95–8) ought to arouse just as much suspicion as her phantom wounds. Her narration is reminiscent of the rhetorical techniques that the living queen used to manipulate Agamemnon. After the murder, Clytemnestra straightforwardly admitted to having used deceptive language (*Ag.* 1372–3). Yet duplicity was not her only tool; for the sake of vindicating her action to the Chorus of the *Agamemnon*, she also invented an underworld tale. In her response to the Elders' question concerning who will grieve for the dead king, Clytemnestra described an ironic scene in which Iphigeneia – the daughter Agamemnon had bound, gagged, and slaughtered – embraces and kisses him in the house of Hades (1555–9, cf. 1525–9).[52] The living Clytemnestra's verbal invention of this postmortem episode clarifies the Ghost's later depiction of the underworld in two ways. First, she justified

---

the second wave of metatheatrical studies of Greek tragedy sketched out in Dunn (2010), 5–6, the subtle use of stage properties as empty signs that can be filled with meaning but also draw attention to the dramatic illusion. Cf. Zeitlin (1990), 63–96, and (2010), 266–7; Ringer (1998); Dobrov (2001); and Mueller (2016), 1–8; with important challenges from Rosenmeyer (2002); and Thumiger (2009).

[51] On the use of metafictional or metatheatrical self-awareness as a device to connect with the theatrical audience on levels other than narrative immersion, see Ringer (1998), 7–19; Dobrov (2001), 4–18; and Dunn (2010), 5–17.

[52] Garner (1990), 36, catches the ironic reversal in this fantasy embrace and draws attention to the Homeric allusion in the phrase Clytemnestra uses (περὶ χεῖρα βαλοῦσα, *Ag.* 1559): This is almost precisely how Odysseus describes his fruitless attempt to embrace his mother's shade (περὶ χεῖρε βαλόντε, *Od.* 11.211, cf. 11.392–4; *Il.* 23.75, 99–101).

Agamemnon's slaying by appealing to their daughter's continuity after death. That is, Iphigeneia's nondisappearance implied an ethical basis for vengeance on her behalf.[53] Secondly, depicting Agamemnon facing the daughter he killed in the afterlife strengthened Clytemnestra's argument that her act was only a segment of a greater cycle of punishment that included superhuman elements, such as the curse of the house and underworld suffering.[54]

The image that the living Clytemnestra created of Iphigeneia (whom she names in *Ag.* 1527 and 1555) waiting to embrace her murderous father ties into the assertion by the Ghost that those she killed (presumably Agamemnon and Cassandra, although she suppresses their names) relentlessly hound her in the afterlife (*Eum.* 95–8). Now it is Clytemnestra's Ghost who fears an embrace by the victims of murder, effectively reversing the imagined familial reunion scene between Agamemnon and Iphigeneia. Clytemnestra (living and dead) conjoins human relations in the afterlife to murderous action in both these depictions: in the *Agamemnon* as part of justifying her killing after the fact, in the *Eumenides* to activate the Erinyes for vengeance.

Linking the ideas of Clytemnestra's involvement with the afterlife and rhetorical invention is Cassandra's moniker for the queen, "mother of Hades" (Ἅιδου μητέρ', *Hadou mēter'*, *Ag.* 1235).[55] Clytemnestra's Ghost is strongly linked to Hades, presumably appearing from that realm (cf. the Ghost of Darius, *Pers.* 685–92). But since Clytemnestra is the only source for her own afterlife, it is crucial to recognize that her depiction of it in the *Eumenides* only correlates with her own in the *Agamemnon*, not with any other mentions of the afterlife in the trilogy. Conspicuously absent is any acknowledgment of a divine system of moral punishment. Clytemnestra's Ghost does not describe hounding in life by divine spirits of vengeance and subsequent retribution in the afterlife, which is the worldview articulated by the Elders of the *Agamemnon* (*Ag.* 461–8, cf. *Cho.* 59–65). Nor does her tale corroborate the Erinyes' description of the afterlife in the *Eumenides*, in which the chthonic goddesses themselves drag mortals down to punishment by Hades (*Eum.* 267–75). This Great Assessor of humankind (μέγας . . . εὔθυνος βροτῶν, *megas* . . . *euthunos brotōn*, 273) is said to punish every mortal who transgresses (τις . . . ἤλιτεν βροτῶν, 269).[56] Hades as judge of ethical action, though, does not figure into Clytemnestra's afterlife. The Erinyes even claim to Orestes that Clytemnestra is "free by virtue of being murdered" (ἡ δ᾽ ἐλευθέρα φόνῳ, *Eum.* 603), effectively eliminating from consideration the issue of her continuing punishment.[57] Thus the play gives ethical room for Clytemnestra to make her arguments. Even as the Ghost seeks help from universal forces of requital, she evades linking her afterlife to divine punishment.

---

[53] Wohl (1998), 107, and n. 25.

[54] See Neuburg (1991); and Foley (2001), 211–34, on the living Clytemnestra's stated motivations: human, from her own reasons, on the one hand, and divine, as part of the curse of the house, on the other.

[55] This pregnant label, more fully "the raging/sacrificing (θύουσαν is ambiguous) mother of Hades," has diverse meanings. Perhaps all simultaneously in play are the murders Clytemnestra commits; her connection to the dead Iphigeneia; her murder by Orestes; more speculatively, a reference to a mythic divinity, "the mother of Hades" (which Rohde connects with Hekate); and/or a proleptic reference to her returning as a ghost. Cf. Rohde (1925), 591–2; Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.; Zeitlin (1966), 646–52; Rabinowitz (1981), 156–67; and Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc.

Instead of ethical punishment by Hades, the Ghost of Clytemnestra recounts a far more personal ordeal in the underworld. When she attempts to move the Erinyes to pity her suffering (κοὐ κατοικτίζεις πάθος, 121; cf. παθοῦσα, 100), Clytemnestra portrays herself as the victim, not only of Orestes, but also of other dead below. The idea of the pressure of the other dead is akin to one in the speech of the ghost of Patroclus. In his narrative, the dead are an umbrageous multitude that crowd him away from the house of Hades: "but I wander *purposelessly*" (ἀλλ᾽ αὔτως ἀλάλημαι, *all' autōs alalēmai*, *Il.* 23.74). When the Ghost of Clytemnestra laments "and I wander *shamefully*" (αἰσχρῶς δ᾽ ἀλῶμαι, *aiskhrōs d' alōmai*, *Eum.* 98) she employs the same verb (ἀλάομαι, *alaomai*) and even echoes the alliteration – an intriguing reminiscence of the Homeric scene. Significantly, she replaces the notion of simple exclusion with active shame. She thus extends concern with one particular aspect of society to the world below; her Ghost links αἰσχρῶς (*aiskhrōs*, "shamefully," 98) and αἰτία (*aitia*, "responsibility, guilt, blame," 99) with ὄνειδος (*oneidos*, "shame, reproach," 97), which is used more often in this scene than in the rest of the trilogy combined.[58] Together, these words strongly imply a community with social norms.[59]

---

[56] This description specifically includes the crime of a child against a parent (*Eum.* 270–1), which fits the Erinyes' addressee, Orestes, but, intriguingly, excludes Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. See Chapters 4, 5, and 7.

[57] Contrast the Erinyes' later claim about afterlife punishment that dead transgressors are "not very free" under the earth (θανὼν δ᾽ οὐκ ἄγαν ἐλεύθερος, 339–40).

[58] Compare the three uses of ὄνειδος in this section of less than sixty lines with only two in the rest of the *Oresteia* (*Ag.* 1560 and *Cho.* 495).

[59] Williams (1993), 75–102, proposes a much-debated theory of Greek notions of heroic honor and shame (in tragedy especially) as internalized forces – instead of simply social pressure – but ones that can always potentially come from an agent outside of the self. On the notion of responsibility in the vocabulary of *aitia* in Greek thought more generally, see 50–8; and cf. Cairns (1993), esp. 178–214, on Aeschylus.

Both in life and in the afterlife, however, Clytemnestra defies communal mores, twisting the normative meanings of shame and responsibility.[60] The terms *aiskhrōs*, *aitia*, and *oneidos* might seem to indicate that Clytemnestra is facing humiliating punishment below.[61] The Ghost, however, actively revises the meaning of *oneidos* in her next lines. She minimizes its connection with "shame," redirecting its force toward its other meaning, "reproach." With this reproach, she incites the Erinyes to kill on her behalf: "Feel pain in your liver from just reproaches (*endikois oneidesin*)" (ἄλγησον ἧπαρ ἐνδίκοις ὀνείδεσιν, *Eum.* 135).[62] This is the Ghost's only mention of any form of the term *dikē*, "justice." She uses it solely to intensify her admonitions against the Erinyes, rather than to claim that the act of vengeance she calls for is just.[63] As part of her avoidance of ethical responsibility, the Ghost redirects the negative pressure of her vocabulary away from herself and toward an imperative for murder.

Instead of justice or societal good, the Ghost's rhetoric focuses value purely on herself. Her appeal to the Erinyes is partly grounded in the argument that the lack of vengeance causes her dishonor (ἀπητιμασμένη, *apētimasmenē*, 95).[64] The Ghost attempts to protect her "honor" in a manner that neglects the other crucial aspects of τιμή (*timē*), both "office" and "duty." She intends no reciprocal contribution to society, as is necessary when honor operates in the living world. Clytemnestra's Ghost rather links her honor and dishonor to the Erinyes.[65] She reminds the dark deities of her nighttime offerings (106–9) for which they now owe her this pursuit. Ironically, she herself invokes duty by urging the Erinyes to perform their "assigned functions" (πέπρωται πρᾶγμα, 125), which they continually associate with their own "honor" and "dishonor."[66] In disconnecting honor from duty, the Ghost thus differentiates herself from the Erinyes, who several times articulate their function as valuable in the largest schema of the social order, and whose acceptance of honors in Athens leads them to abandon her cause.

---

[60] Cairns (1993), 204–6; and Foley (2001), 201–34. Goldhill (1984a), 89–91, links the rhetoric of Clytemnestra's appropriated κράτος, "power/political power," and lack of αἰσχύνη, "shame," with that of her transgressive language and sexuality.

[61] Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012), 304, 336–7, among others, treats this shame and dishonor as Clytemnestra's punishment and the mark of her final defeat, without reference to how the Ghost manipulates these very terms to continue her claims through the Erinyes.

[62] See Nooter (2017), 266–7, on the transformation of Clytemnestra's words into physical pain for the Erinyes.

[63] The living Clytemnestra, by contrast, consistently emphasized the rightness of her acts, even claiming that the goddess Justice was on her side after killing Agamemnon (e.g. *Ag.* 1432). Cf. Foley (2001), 201–34.

[64] Her protest also echoes the dishonor that the Chorus of the *Choephoroi* attributes to Agamemnon and his children (ἀτίμους, *Cho.* 443, cf. 94, 408, 485). See Sommerstein (1989), 101–2 n. 95.

[65] ἐγὼ δ' ὑφ' ὑμῶν ὧδ' ἀπητιμασμένη, "I, dishonored thus by you" (*Eum.* 95), or "thanks to you" as e.g. Sommerstein (1989) translates.

[66] E.g. *Eum.* 394, 780, 792, 796, 807, 824, 838, 845, 853–4.

These problematic elements together compromise the afterlife that Clytemnestra's Ghost narrates as a foundation for her ethical claims. With her appeal to another realm, the Ghost provides herself an "elsewhere" that is free from the socio-political mores of Argos (and Athens).[67] She can thus ignore the reciprocal relations involved in words like "shame" and "honor" and convolute their meanings for her own ends. She depicts her suffering below, but instead of the conclusion that others might draw from it – that this is divine or human punishment for her crimes – she twists it into motivation for further familial bloodshed. Evident in the Ghost's afterlife story are the connections to the living Clytemnestra's duplicity. These, alongside her arguments from individual dishonor and her tendentious interpretation of "reproach," all undercut her ethical appeals. Moreover, the *Eumenides* itself takes the transformation of reproach even further, since the Erinyes *only* refer to Clytemnestra as the "reproach from dreams" (ὄνειδος ἐξ ὀνειράτων, *oneidos ex oneiratōn*, 155).[68] "Reproach" thus comes to replace Clytemnestra's name, which is never spoken by any character again. The Ghost makes specific linguistic moves to transform social pressure into vengeance, using the same vocabulary with which the other characters write her out of the play.

## Speaking for Her Very Soul

Clytemnestra loses. Once the *Eumenides* moves to Athens, Athena uses civic, collective language to overturn the kingship and kinship structures of Argos. The ending of the trilogy deliberately shifts the focus away from individual characters and thus from Clytemnestra's personal arguments. It would be irresponsible to the ethical claims of tragic characters, however, to simply accept their dramatic fate. Tragic characters routinely suffer ignominious endings, sometimes without redeeming reversals. For an ethically responsible reading, one must integrate the perspective of the character involved. It is thus imperative to heed how the Ghost of

---

[67] The Ghost's treatment of the afterlife as an "elsewhere" is analogous to what Zeitlin (1990) identifies in the classic analysis of the theatrical setting of Thebes (and Argos) as a "site of displacement" for Athens; cf. Seaford (2012), 102–4; and Kurke (2013).

[68] Cf. Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012), 308 n. 112.

Clytemnestra marks the stakes of her own ethical appeals. She does so with a striking use of the term *psukhē* (*Eum.* 114–15):

> ἀκούσαθ᾽ ὡς ἔλεξα τῆς ἐμῆς περὶ
> ψυχῆς·
>
> Hear me, as I have spoken for my very
> soul!

The phrase "for my very soul!" (τῆς ἐμῆς περὶ ψυχῆς, *tēs emēs peri psukhēs*) summarizes the Ghost's pleading. Yet the term *psukhē* here involves a further problem of self-reference, besides those of dream and insubstantiality. Whereas in Homeric afterlife scenes *psukhē* denoted the ghosts and dead themselves, the Ghost of Clytemnestra never refers to herself as a *psukhē*. Instead, her language here objectifies her *psukhē*, preventing it from being identified with her speaking self. The phrase, doing something *peri psukhēs*, is only found a few times before Aeschylus, but in each instance means "defending one's life from death."[69] Needless to say, this gloss is utterly incongruous in the current context. The dead Clytemnestra no longer has any life to save. Aeschylus, through this poetic paradox, forces his audiences to seek a different interpretation.

The concerns of Homeric ghosts suggest that, although they never explicitly declare it, they could be thought of as speaking "on account of" or "for the benefit of" their *psukhē*, in the sense of improving their soul's condition in the afterlife. This interpretation rests on the demands of the ghosts of Patroclus and the ghost of Elpenor for ritual burial, which would provide their *psychai* entry into the realm of Hades. As a basis for her claims, the Ghost of Clytemnestra does appeal to the cultural mores of obligation to the dead. Yet through her unparalleled use of *peri psukhēs*, she demands the spilling of kindred blood for "the benefit of her soul."[70] Unlike the Homeric ghosts, then, the Ghost of Clytemnestra returns to provoke a cultural transgression. She thus undercuts the positive societal functions of ritual, instead twisting the claims of the dead against the living. In extant epic and tragic literature, she is the first ghost to directly demand her own vengeance.

---

[69] The analysis here expands on Sommerstein (1989), ad loc.: "this plays on two senses of ψυχή. Normally, to speak or run or fight περὶ ψυχῆς meant to do so 'for one's life, with one's life at stake' (e.g. *Il.* 22.161; *Od.* 22.245; Eur. *Hel.* 946) . . . only since (Clytemnestra) is dead, she has not been speaking 'for my life' but 'for <the welfare of> my spirit' (also ψυχή)." On the normal use of the term *psukhē*, etymologically connected with breath, "only when there is a question of life and death," see Burkert (1985), 195–6. Cf. Chantraine, s.v.; and Beekes, s.v.

[70] Her language never refers to funeral ritual or any of the possible salvation rituals in the Greek world, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries, on which see the Introduction.

Aeschylus' treatment of two other dead rulers serves to clarify the point about Clytemnestra's desired change of status in the afterlife. First, Clytemnestra's Ghost is in strong contrast with the earliest extant Aeschylean ghost scene. In the *Persians*, King Darius is actively raised by others in a ritual, speaks for himself, and emphasizes his honor in the underworld (*Pers.* 607–842). The Ghost of Darius is, in fact, called a *psukhē* (ψυχήν, 630). He does interact with the living world by repeatedly demonstrating concern about the Persian state (e.g. 682) and his son (e.g. 739–51). He even imparts insight to the elders about the change of values at death. Darius sententiously advises them (and thus the theatrical audience) to "give pleasure to your soul (*psukhē*)" (ψυχῇ διδόντες ἡδονήν, 841) because wealth is of no use to the dead (τοῖς θανοῦσι, 842).[71] Note that this benefit is for the living soul, contrasted with the dead spirit himself. Nevertheless, he does not ask anyone to act on his behalf nor indicate that he will act in the world. Moreover, unlike the ghosts of Patroclus, Elpenor, and Clytemnestra, the Ghost of Darius does not demand any action that might affect his underworld state – he does not need to. He himself declares his power in the underworld (*Pers.* 688–92), and the language and rituals in the scene attest to his honor above. This provides a stark antithesis to the afterlife dishonor and powerlessness of which the Ghost of Clytemnestra complains and to the benefit she seeks through vengeance.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from Darius, two previous scenes of the *Oresteia* – both related to the murdered Agamemnon – contain themes that parallel the Ghost of Clytemnestra's concerns. The first is the Elders expressing consternation over Agamemnon's potential funeral (*Ag.* 1543–6, Chapter 2). They demonstrate the robust link in the *Oresteia* between proper ritual and actual benefit to the *psukhē* by using the phrase "on behalf of his soul" (ψυχῇ . . . χάριν, *psukhē* . . . *kharin*, 1545). This is synonymous with the Ghost of Clytemnestra's later *peri psukhēs* but refers to the rites, rather than to vengeance on his behalf. The second relevant example responds to the abased burial that Clytemnestra actually gives Agamemnon (Chapters 4 and 5). The Chorus of Slave Women, Orestes, and Electra in the *kommos* scene (*Cho.* 306–513) restore to Agamemnon his lost ritual lamentation and even endeavor to raise him from the dead (315–22, 456, 459) or gain his power (244–5, 479–80, 490). The Slave Women, moreover, accentuate the divide between what ought to be Agamemnon's position as a king honored in the underworld (354–62) and his actual burial as a mutilated and dishonored (ἀτίμους, *atimous*, 443) corpse. They use this disparity to inflame his progeny to vengeance.[72] The children, in turn, promise their father future household rituals for his help in killing Clytemnestra (*Cho.* 483–8). Every character in the scene appears to accept that kin-killing, and not merely the correct rituals for Agamemnon, can effect the change of status they desire for his afterlife. The benefit that the Ghost of Clytemnestra seeks by having Orestes killed therefore echoes the benefit to Agamemnon's afterlife that the mourners previously used to justify killing her.

---

[71] Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 223–7, explores the gulf between what the audience would have seen as the foolhardy behavior of Darius while alive and the wisdom of his Ghost, which an audience could interpret as the result of his change of status after death and nearness to the divine. Cf. Muntz (2011), 257–71; and Parker (2009), 128–9.

The Ghost of Clytemnestra epitomizes the "old justice" of unending vengeance, even from beyond the grave. She disregards entirely the social aspect of ritual closure, evident in the Elders' concern for civic mourning in the *Agamemnon* and the more private concern for household mourning in the *Choephoroi*. Instead, the Ghost of Clytemnestra focuses on murderous acts, ignores civic or familial obligations, and never mentions a desire for ritual lamentation. The reasons she proffers for vengeance, in their focus on her pain and dishonor, also differ from the universal claims the Erinyes make in Orestes' trial, ostensibly on her behalf. Acting for her own *psukhē* means privileging herself as an individual.

## Summations/Connections

At every turn, the Ghost of Clytemnestra undercuts the bases of normative ethics, tearing at the social fabric with her claims and actions. The dead queen stands out from previous undead figures in Homer and tragedy by explicitly seeking a change in her afterlife honor not through ritual but through vengeance. Unlike them, also, her living character has already been condemned ethically as a murderer, kin-killer, and liar. The living Clytemnestra deceived through language, took control of the house, and violently subverted the state. For this, she was killed by her own children. That is, in part her own actions and in part her murder by family severed the bonds required for ritual burial, with its positive memorialization, social reintegration, and a sense of closure. Yet despite these seemingly irredeemable issues with her living character, her postmortem fate could have unrolled differently. She could have never appeared at all and become whitewashed over time, like Agamemnon, whose pattern her death follows. He – despite his murderous transgression against the household, being killed by his wife, and receiving a dishonored burial – does eventually gain familial lament and honors.[73] Clytemnestra could have returned from the underworld reformed, chastised by punishment, or only demanding proper ritual.[74] Instead, her Ghost rises implacable, raging about her dishonor, and calling for kindred blood. Her reappearance thus pushes the social problems inherent in the living Clytemnestra's actions and rhetoric to their logical limits.

---

[72] Clytemnestra's Ghost goading the Erinyes might be the mirror image of the Chorus of Slave Women attempting to rouse Orestes to kill his mother, cf. Zeitlin (1965), 496; and Chapter 4.

The Ghost's exceptional challenge is only intensified by her precarious arguments. The emphasis on her status as a dream leads to questions about how far her body can be denatured before her arguments from physical wounds become insubstantial as well. Exactly where she seems to engage emotion most immediately – wounds seen in the heart, underworld shame as an unavenged mother – her language reveals the shifting nature of its referents. Each key phrase the Ghost utters disintegrates its presumed signified: Her wounds are not wounds, her disgrace is not punishment for her acts, and her afterlife depiction fits no one else's. Controlling the narrative and eluding all mores frees the Ghost of Clytemnestra to reinterpret her "shame" and "dishonor" in the afterlife, not as punishments for her transgressions, but as reproaches against the Erinyes themselves. Her story of the afterlife and continuing rhetorical mastery enable her to warp even these sufferings into markers of an ethical imbalance in duty that must be corrected in her favor.

The living queen, bereft of political and physical power, had to rely on language to weave an entrapping web and overturn the social order.[75] While repugnant for her actions, her dramatic and rhetorical virtuosity captivated audiences internal and external.[76] As a ghost, Clytemnestra is again innovative with her oratory, even depicting a similar underworld scenario to the one the living queen created for Agamemnon. Clytemnestra, when living, wrote her own play, carefully scripting the return of Agamemnon to include an act of impiety and to culminate in her long-planned vengeance. Analogously, her Ghost breaks the frame of the drama;[77] she metatheatrically directs the action on stage by rousing the Chorus.[78] She flickers with self-awareness, with an understanding that she is a dream and knowledge of another, invisible dream.[79] The living Clytemnestra masterfully manipulated Agamemnon through language and stagecraft; the Ghost of Clytemnestra extends this rhetorical cunning to the image of herself, to her depiction of life beyond death, and to her allusions to the theatrical illusion.

---

[73] As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5. In fact, redemptions of Clytemnestra begin after the *Oresteia*, for already in Euripides' *Orestes* Helen sends libations to honor her sister's grave (94–125). On the changing receptions of Clytemnestra, see MacEwen (1990); Komar (2003); and Hall (2005).

[74] At the end of the *Agamemnon*, for example, Clytemnestra acts to mollify further conflicts, shifting the representation of her character, on which see Foley (2001), 228–9.

[75] The living Clytemnestra's linguistic potency shares many features with feminine forces marked as monstrous and disruptive in myths of masculine, divine order, which are consequently suppressed, as Rabinowitz (1981) demonstrates comprehensively. Cf. Zeitlin (1978).

[76] Betensky (1978) rightly connects the dramatic force of the living Clytemnestra with her inventive language both within the play and for the theatrical audience. She is thus similar to Odysseus, the sympathetic fabricator, on which see Pucci (1998), 131.

Throughout, Clytemnestra has no divine support, no prophet, oracle, or command from the gods as Agamemnon and Orestes have. Even her champions, the Erinyes, who at first take up her ethical claims, eventually abandon her. They shift to themselves the vocabulary of reproach and honor that the Ghost had attempted to redefine. They generalize Clytemnestra's claims, thus annulling her singularity. Despite their corrupt femininity, despite their connection with blood and punishment that made them abhorrent, they gain honor from Athena.[80] It becomes evident over the rest of the *Eumenides* – as the other characters mute Clytemnestra's name and undercut her role as mother and queen – that the new social system and justice of Athena is meant to suppress Clytemnestra.[81] Within the context of the trilogy as a whole, Clytemnestra's claims are compromised and then forsaken.[82]

---

[77] Ringer (1998), ix–x, 8–12, argues (concerning Sophocles' tragedies) that creative characters who act as directors, role play, and deceive are part of a suite of devices for calling attention to dramatic illusions and simultaneously creating connections for audiences with their own cultural background (with the contemporary *polis*, the theater, and the festival setting).

[78] R. Cioffi, in a 2015 Society for Classica Studies talk, "Night of the Waking Dead: The Ghost of Clytemnestra and Collective Vengeance in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*," suggestively likened Clytemnestra's Ghost to a chorus leader, even to a *choregos* directing the Erinyes, which hints at metatheatrical possibilities from a different angle. Cf. Nooter (2017), 160 n. 38, on Clytemnestra as director and author of the Erinyes.

[79] Although there are no explicit statements within the *Odyssey* equating Odysseus' story of the underworld with artful invention, one can trace the concatenation "ghost-image-dream-story-deception," Pucci (1987), 76–109, and (1998), 131–77.

[80] Brown (1983), 34, sees the whole *Eumenides* as changing the terms of the debate from the previous human cycle of retribution to a wholly divine issue, only resolved by the conversion of the Erinyes; cf. Sewell-Rutter (2007), 79–109.

[81] Note that the same actor would have played Clytemnestra and Athena, adding a metatheatrical connection. See Brown (2018), 20–3, for the complex splitting of roles between and within the *Oresteia*.

[82] Foley (2001), 201–34, demonstrates that, even though the living Clytemnestra justifies herself and demands to be treated comparably to male autonomous agents, judgment in the *Oresteia* always

It is precisely the abandonment by all humans and divinities that the Ghost complains of, and, through force of personality, returns from the dead to resist. In asking to right a wrong done to an individual, the Ghost reengages the living Clytemnestra's multidimensional character.[83] For the living queen was not, by any means, a flat villain but challenged a system that oppressed women and killed her daughter.[84] To recognize the full power of Clytemnestra's tragic personality is to see that she keeps fighting the lost fight, even after death.[85] The Ghost of Clytemnestra names herself and calls out, implicating internal and external audiences.[86] When she narrates her experience in the underworld with the first-person singular, the Ghost makes a personal entreaty. Despite the compromised nature of her words, she insists that her hearers "*listen*" in all seriousness, since she is "*speaking* for her very soul."

By the act of locution, dramatic characters demand ethical respect for their hypostasis. Some have declared it a fundamental of drama, the imperative to count the persona, *prosōpon*, mask, or character, as a person, not merely as a means to further plot, dramatic tension, or an idea.[87] In speaking, the Ghost awakens not only the sleeping Erinyes but also anyone who hears.[88] The Ghost's words thus implicate each individual

---

ends up being given along gendered lines; cf. Winnington-Ingram (1948); McClure (1999), 70–92; and Zeitlin (1965), 589–93.

[83] See Easterling (1973), 3–7, on stage presence and entanglement in relatable human dilemmas as criteria for emotionally credible characters in tragedy, with specific reference to the *Oresteia*.

[84] Zeitlin (1996), 87–111, discusses the *Oresteia*'s depiction of the problems that women pose in Greek cultural representations, especially tragedy, as always a radical Other in a male-dominated society, never an end in themselves, a dynamic that their deaths, especially, display; cf. Loraux (1987), 1–3.

[85] Vellacott (1984b), 62–75, among others, claims Clytemnestra is the real "tragic heroine" of the *Oresteia*; cf. Anderson (1929); and Winnington-Ingram (1948).

[86] The Ghost's speech thus resonates with Clytemnestra's transgressive public discourse in the *Agamemnon*, which has drawn much critical attention. Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 481–3; and McClure (1999), 70–80. On silence as the adornment of women, see Loraux (1987), 1–3, 21, 26–7; and McClure (1999), 5, 7–8, 20–8, 32–9, who builds on work of Zeitlin and Winkler to show that women who speak for themselves are immediately transgressive. Foley (2001), 207–9, discusses Clytemnestra's mixing of masculine and feminine roles through the usurpation of masculine speech.

[87] Nagy (2010) theorizes one way of connecting the theatrical actor to a notion of outreach to the dramatic audience (37, emphasis original): "Just as *subjectivity* can be analyzed in terms of the *person* in *grammar*, it can also be analyzed in terms of the *persona* in *theater* . . . in Greek, the noun πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*) likewise means 'theatrical mask' . . . a subjective agent, an 'I' who is looking for a dialogue with a 'you.'"

[88] Altieri (1998) focuses on the "lyrical I" that cries out of literary texts and calls for ethical engagement. Critiquing Nussbaum and others who use literature to either establish ethical generalizations or supplement them, he rightly claims that listening to characters in literature encourages thinking through complexities lacking in such universalizing theories. On direct address in the second person implicating the theatrical audience of the *Oresteia*, see Sommerstein (1989), ad 526–8.

audience member in the (over)heard command to listen, to "see," to imagine in one's heart. Clytemnestra – dead, dreamt – is calling out to us.

Although the *Oresteia* stands so early in the Western theatrical tradition, its Ghost scene continues to solicit reconsideration of this potent character. As a formerly living human who now lacks substance, yet has speaking presence, who must motivate through argument, image, and story-telling, the Ghost darkly illuminates tragedy's ability to raise serious ethical issues.[89] Clytemnestra eloquently demands respect for herself, even after death, a respect the drama finally withdraws from her. Yet she represents a nexus of challenges to ethically normative theories and notions of virtuous actors. Through the Ghost, an audience confronts the possibility that human ethical claims may be valid even for a transgressor against the state, destroyer of family, and shameless deceiver, even as spoken by a character who is dead, who is harassed in the afterlife, and who pleads within a dream of demons. The Ghost of Clytemnestra's key provocation is in the tension between the estrangement she causes and the pull of her ethical appeals: She is spectral, guilty, yet human.

---

[89] Clytemnestra, both living and dead, is thus ethically significant in complementary ways to later tragic female characters who have drawn much attention for breaking social barriers, such as Antigone, who has credibility as a moral actor, and Medea, who has enough magical power to escape punishment; cf. Foley (2001), 172–200, 243–71.

CHAPTER 7

# *The Tablet-Writing Mind of Hades*

## *Omniscient Ethical Judgment*

### Introduction

The culmination of the afterlife as a challenge to the value systems in place in the *Oresteia* is the justice of Hades. Although allusions to underworld punishment occur in each play of the trilogy, the only explicit reference to Hades' ethical concerns is a brief, often-overlooked passage in the *Eumenides*. In fact, verses 267–75 are one of the earliest descriptions in extant Greek literature of Hades as a universal judge. The Erinyes declare that after they kill Orestes, he will see every impious mortal punished by Hades, "the great assessor of mortals beneath the earth" (273–4). Crucially, the passage contains the first catalogue of Hades' specific ethical concerns.[1] Since the punishment of Hades has rarely been included in discussions of justice in the *Oresteia*, its significance for understanding the trilogy as a whole has been neglected.[2]

The role of Hades' code in the *Oresteia*'s contest over justice is undervalued mainly because one must extrapolate both its layered ethical effects and the singular features of its divine agent from a few lines. Again a recursive technique is necessary. The first section offers a preliminary reading of the poetics of the Hades passage. The second section then analyzes the wide network of references and allusions to Hades and afterlife punishment throughout the trilogy. Drawing on this background, the third section returns to a deeper reading of the processes of Hades' justice, his ethical concerns, and his divine characteristics. The fourth section addresses the troubling questions raised by the trilogy concerning the very relationships that Hades ostensibly protects. It also uncovers the problematic language used for the punishing divinity himself. In lieu of a Summations/Connections section, the final section argues for an implicit clash between the justice of Hades and that of Athena. Their divine values and laws are antithetical in vocabulary, legal techniques, and political effects. The contrast enables audiences to critique Athena's "new law" on grounds internal to the *Oresteia*. Hades' justice is thus not only relevant within the trilogy but also illuminates a set of tensions within Greek religious-ethical-political thought.

---

[1] Previous instances include *Odyssey* 11, in which punishment is reserved for specific transgressors against the gods, and *Olympian* 2, in which all mortals who misbehave are subject to punishments. See further the Introduction.

[2] This passage is almost entirely absent from discussions of justice in the *Oresteia*, e.g. Sommerstein (2010a), 193–203, following Kitto (1961). It is even excluded from studies of tragedy that focus extensively on justice, morality, and the Erinyes, such as Sewell-Rutter (2007), 18: "with the notion of *post mortem* punishment, which does not figure prominently in tragedy, we shall not be concerned." Cf. Vellacott (1984b), 116–27. However, see Schlatter (2018), 144–59, for a recent commentary and useful comparanda.

## Jurisdiction of Blood; Justice of Vision

The Hades passage is a revelation of specific and targeted divine oversight of human action. It is heavily colored by the concerns of its speakers, represented as embodied demons of vengeance.[3] The framework, then, is the Erinyes' obsession with blood and refusal to acknowledge Orestes' human or divine purification.[4] Not only does maternal blood compel them (ἄγει γὰρ αἷμα μητρῷον, *agei gar haima mētrōon*, *Eum.* 230), they also use blood to determine *jurisdiction* over Orestes. Immediately before the Hades passage, the Erinyes acknowledge that Orestes desires to be brought to trial before Athena (257–60) but claim that his mother's blood prevents it (αἷμα μητρῷον, *haima mētrōon*, 261–3). Instead, the Erinyes must capture Orestes in order to suck his blood in requital (ῥοφεῖν ἐρυθρὸν ἐκ μελέων πελανόν, 264–7). Finally, they threaten to send him, depleted of blood, to the underworld for further punishment (267–75):

> καὶ ζῶντά σ᾽ ἰσχνάνασ᾽ ἀπάξομαι κάτω,
> <ἵν᾽> ἀντιποίνους τίνῃς μητροφόντας δύας·[5]
> ὄψῃ δὲ κεἴ τις ἄλλος ἤλιτεν βροτῶν
> ἢ θεὸν ἢ ξένον τιν᾽ ἀσεβῶν
> ἢ τοκέας φίλους,

---

[3] For their previous functions in literature, art, and religion, see the Introduction.

[4] They make it clear no absolution is possible, not even through the purification rituals declared to be sufficient by Apollo and Orestes: To the Erinyes (as to the Pythia), Orestes still has blood on his hands (*Eum.* 41–3, 237, 280–7, 445–52; cf. *Cho.* 66–74, 520–1). As the Erinyes describe it, Apollo's sanctuary is dripping with blood (164–70). This cannot literally be the case but raises the issue of whether even pollution is a matter of perspective, on which see Meinel (2015), 136–9; *contra* Sidwell (1996), 52–7.

[5] Instead of the OCT addition of ἵν᾽ for the final clause (rare in Aeschylus), Sommerstein (1989), ad 267–8, corrects to ἀντίποιν᾽ ὡς (following Schütz); but cf. Verrall (1908), ad 268.

> ἔχονθ᾽ ἕκαστον τῆς δίκης ἐπάξια.
> μέγας γὰρ Ἅιδης ἐστὶν εὔθυνος βροτῶν
> ἔνερθε χθονός,
> δελτογράφῳ δὲ πάντ᾽ ἐπωπᾷ φρενί.
>
> And having drained you dry while living, I shall haul you off below,
> so that you may pay in requital matricidal sufferings.
> And you will see – if some other mortal has transgressed,
> dishonoring a god, or a guest-friend,
> or their dear parents –
> each one getting due recompense of justice.
> For Hades is the great assessor of mortals
> beneath the earth;
> he watches over all things with his tablet-writing mind.

The Erinyes in this passage expose the universal rules concerning transgression and requital. Their own function is thus only part of a larger system of punishment, one that extends past the loss of blood, the loss of life. Whereas the immediate context is Orestes' matricide, they claim that *every* mortal (τις . . . βροτῶν, *tis* . . . *brotōn* 269, 273) is subject to scrutiny by an omniscient judge and infernal torturer.[6] Any human who commits crimes against a god, guest-friend (*xenon*), or parent must pay for it in the afterlife. Since the Erinyes are chthonic divinities, their depiction of the underworld comes across as authoritative.[7] Despite the statement's seeming novelty within the trilogy, it is not presented as an establishing moment. Rather, the Erinyes draw back the veil on the preexisting divine schema.

This vision of justice is a justice of vision. The Erinyes themselves track the scent of blood, but they stress Hades' preternatural sense of sight.[8] His comprehensive gaze (πάντ᾽ ἐπωπᾷ, *pant' epōpa*, 275) encompasses all human actions.[9] Hades' recording memory (δελτογράφῳ . . . φρενί, *deltographō* . . . *phreni*, 275) then fixes these actions in a metaphorical written record, presumably to be read at the time of death.[10] The optical emphasis of overseeing and reading subtly parallels Orestes seeing (ὄψῃ, *opsē*, 269) the punishment of others below. Thus, in this passage bristling with visual ideas, Aeschylus poetically inverts the popular etymology that derives the name Hades from "the unseen."[11] The poet creates an image that is no image: The invisible judge is the universal spectator.

---

[6] For previous, generally more restrictive, notions of punishment in the afterlife see the Introduction.

[7] Their authority rests on their status as chthonic divinities, who Athena herself says have great power beneath the earth (*Eum.* 950–1), and on whom she calls when she wants to restrain the underworld (1007–9). However, on the questionable authoritativeness of revelation from even divine characters in Aeschylus, see Parker (2009).

[8] By sniffing out illicit bloodshed, they supernaturally transect human dissembling, *Eum.* 244–53, 316–20; cf. *Ag.* 368, 694–5, 1185–6.

[9] ἐποπτεύω is often used by Aeschylus "to describe divine, or semi-divine, superintendence of human affairs," Garvie (1986), ad 1; and Sommerstein (1989), ad 220. Cf. *Eum.* 224. The larger passage begins with "look! look!" (ὅρα, ὅρα, *Eum.* 254). The following line is corrupt but in the manuscripts also includes another command to see or look, λεύσσε, and πάντα, "all things." For the textual issues, see West (1990), 276–7.

## Hades and the Afterlife throughout the Trilogy

Such paradoxes (the punishment of the bloodless and the vision of the invisible) are felt also in earlier allusions to afterlives in the trilogy. Previous chapters of this book have examined such multivalent references from the perspective of characters, uncovering the relationships between their ethical positions and their understanding or ignorance of afterlife possibilities. Now, in order to frame the Hades passage in the poetic context of the entirety of the *Oresteia*, we return to the most relevant antecedents, which may be split among three categories: allusions to the divinity Hades, references to humans existing in the underworld, and lyrical passages about divine justice after death.

The name "Hades" is rarely used in the *Oresteia*, and only once does it refer to the divinity himself in the OCT text (in our *Eumenides* passage).[12] Instead, invocations of the underworld god – perhaps counterintuitively for us – twist into invocations of Zeus. The trope is common in Archaic Greek literature and Greek religion across time periods; references to Zeus in chthonic contexts routinely signify his reflection below.[13] In Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, the poetics of this usage is made explicit: the Chorus of Suppliants call on "the most hospitable Zeus of the Dead" (*Supp.* 157–8), and Danaus refers to the story (ὡς λόγος) of a judgment of the dead "in (the house) of Hades" (*'ν* Ἅιδου, *'n Hadou*) by "another Zeus" (Ζεὺς ἄλλος, 228–31). Thus, a binary relation between the "highest" and "lowest" divine brothers is explicit. Are Zeus and Hades enforcing the same law in different realms? Do they have opposing functions? The full answers to these questions must wait until the contrast between the law of Hades and that of Athena (which she associates with Zeus) at the end of this chapter.

---

[10] For memory as writing in the *phrēn*, see *Cho*. 450 (τοιαῦτ' ἀκούων < > ἐν φρεσὶν γράφου) and *Pr*. 789 (ἣν ἐγγράφου σὺ μνήμοσιν δέλτοις φρενῶν). Cf. Nooter (2017), 216–18. In Aesch. fr. 281a 19–23 TrGF, it is *Dikē* "who writes men's sins 'on the tablet of Zeus' which is opened and read on a man's day of destiny." See Sommerstein (2008c), 277–85, for translation and commentary. On tablets in tragedy as metapoetic prop, see Mueller (2016), 155–78.

[11] See the Introduction for the etymology of Hades and the katabatic *Odyssey* 11, in which visions of those suffering below are a key theme. In the rare references to punishment below in previous Greek literature, there is no mention of the divine vision of the judge.

[12] The other six uses of "Hades" in the *Oresteia*, all in the *Agamemnon* (667, 1115, 1235, 1291, 1387, 1528), are primarily synonyms for "deadly," as discussed in Chapters 1, 3, and 6.

[13] Homer: Ζεύς τε καταχθόνιος καὶ ἐπαινὴ Περσεφόνεια, *Il.* 9.457; Hesiod: Διὶ χθονίῳ Δημήτερί θ' ἁγνῇ, *Op.* 465; Soph. *OC* 1606; and cf. Rohde (1925), 158–60.

The references to Zeus by humans in vengeful contexts in the first two plays provide the necessary background. The first putative example is the subject of editorial controversy, however. Clytemnestra, having killed Agamemnon, pours the third libation, traditionally reserved for Zeus, to "Hades (Ἅιδου, *Hadou*) under the earth, the Savior of the dead" (*Ag*. 1386–7, following the codices). The OCT and Loeb editors, among others, here "improve" the text by substituting "Zeus" (Διός) for the codices' "Hades" (Ἅιδου). They do so without any textual support. The idea behind the emendation is that Aeschylus *should have* written "Zeus under the earth," a phrasing similar to that in the *Suppliants*, rather than the seemingly redundant "Hades under the earth." Against these, Medda (2017), III.323–4, retains the codices' "Hades," with comparanda from tragedy.[14] Medda rightly asserts that the original reading only adds to the blasphemous nature of Clytemnestra's speech, which also affixes one of Zeus's traditional epithets, Savior (Σωτήρ), to Hades.[15] For our purposes, regardless of the text one chooses, the reference to Hades is clear, as is the perversion of the characteristics of Zeus.

This Zeus–Hades pairing structures the characters' invocations of chthonic power in the *Choephoroi* as well. Among the numerous mentions of underworld forces, Orestes calls on "Zeus, who sends up from below avenging ruin" (*Cho*. 382–5, cf. 1, 18–19).[16] Electra, too, refers to Zeus in close proximity to chthonic gods (394–9, cf. 124a–b, 462, and her prayer to Persephone in 490). Each of their numerous appeals to infernal forces specifically solicits action or power in the living world (Chapter 4). They correspond to Clytemnestra's invocations, yet their dynamics are inverted. Clytemnestra's libation to Zeus of human blood from the husband whom she slaughtered is a further blasphemy. She does gain divine champions, the Erinyes, but these are first treated harshly, then lose the trial, and finally abandon her cause. By contrast, since Apollo's oracle condemns Clytemnestra, it validates the vengeance that Electra and Orestes seek from chthonic divinities, as does the run of the *Eumenides*. Thus, although both mother and children connect Hades and Zeus in service of bloody kin-murder, the trilogy manipulates audience sympathies to treat the invocations of chthonic divinities oppositely.

---

[14] The other tragic examples are *Eum*. 273–4 (our Hades passage); *PV* 152–4; Eur. *Alc*. 237; and *Phoen*. 810.

[15] See Zeitlin (1965), 473; Aesch. fr. 55.4 TrGF; and *OC* 1556–8. Zeus the Savior is invoked by Orestes at *Eum*. 759–60; cf. Burian (1986); and Goldhill (2000), 53–4.

[16] Following the manuscript and Sommerstein's Loeb over the OCT's ἀμπέμπειν.

Depictions of humans in the underworld earlier in the trilogy constitute the second set of necessary background references. Grouped together, certain new patterns emerge. The Chorus of the *Agamemnon* allude to the myth of Asclepius "leading up" (ἀνάγειν, *Ag.* 1023) Hippolytus from the underworld. This introduces the possibility of return from the dead for humans in exceptional circumstances and simultaneously reinforces its impossibility otherwise. The violent reaction from Zeus to Asclepius' resuscitation models direct divine punishment, but only for aberrant, superhuman transgressions (Chapter 2). In another example, Cassandra suggests she might continue to sing prophecies by the rivers of the underworld (*Ag.* 1160–1). Despite her second sight, the reference is ambiguous: It *could* mean an eternal extension of Apollo's curse. Since she never mentions any punitive agent or injurious alteration of her state, her couplet does not reveal any structured view of afterlife punishment (Chapter 3).

Still in the first play, after murdering Agamemnon, Clytemnestra insists that he should not boast in Hades (ἐν Ἅιδου, *en Hadou*, *Ag.* 1528). She also imagines his underworld reunion with Iphigeneia by the "ferry of grief" (πόρθμευμ' ἀχέων, *porthmeum' akheōn*, 1555–9), a reference to the underworld river Acheron. Hers is a poetic construction, outside of any claim to divine support. By contrast, among the songs of lament for Agamemnon, the Chorus of the *Choephoroi* in verses 354–62 depict him as potentially regaining the honor due to a king in the afterlife. They thus open the door to a change of status after death but never claim that this has actually happened. In the numerous, contradictory references to Agamemnon in the underworld, at his tomb, or spiritually present, neither the Chorus nor his children ever suggest chastisement for Agamemnon's killing of Iphigeneia or of innocents in the Trojan War (Chapter 4). Lastly, in the *Eumenides*, Clytemnestra's Ghost depicts her shameful wanderings, blame, and suffering among the dead (*Eum.* 95–8).[17] Even in this context, the Ghost does not mention the divinity Hades or any sort of ethical punishment but rather a type of human dishonor projected below.

---

[17] As noted in Chapter 6, the Erinyes describe Clytemnestra as "free by virtue of being murdered" (603), which excludes her from the underworld lack of freedom that they promise transgressors (340–1).

Such brief references allude to the afterlife as a possibility or create relationships to it. Yet they do so without definitive statements or sure, divine knowledge – even from the prophet Cassandra. The human Choruses, especially, refer to myth and counterfactual situations, again without the suggestion of true knowledge and with little effect on the following action. Since none of these references depicts Hades as ethical punisher, at first glance one might categorize them as mere ignorance of the afterlife justice that is later revealed. Yet each has elements that escape the context of their scenes. Together, they offer a catalogue of character speculation on the divine framework of the world.

The ostensible ignorance of humanity makes the third set of background references a striking counterpoint. Once in each play of the trilogy, the Chorus sing a condensed tale of structured divine punishment. Just as it is the Erinyes who reveal Hades' punishments in the *Eumenides*, the Choruses of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* each allude to a tripartite system of divine ethical retribution: in life, leading to death, and after death. In the *Agamemnon*, the Elders warn of the potential consequences of the Trojan expedition for its leader (*Ag.* 461–8):

> τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ
> ἄσκοποι θεοί, κελαι-
> ναὶ δ᾽ Ἐρινύες χρόνῳ
> τυχηρὸν ὄντ᾽ ἄνευ δίκας
> παλιντυχεῖ τριβᾷ βίου
> τιθεῖσ᾽ ἀμαυρόν, ἐν δ᾽ ἀί-
> στοις τελέθοντος οὔτις ἀλ-
> κά·
>
> For the gods are not
> heedless of men who kill many,
> and dark Erinyes, in time, make faded
> the man who prospers without justice
> by a reversal of fortune, by a wearing down of life,
> and there is no defense for him
> being among the unseen.

With generalizing language, the Chorus broaden their critique from the immediate referent, Agamemnon. They first apply the Erinyes' punishment to all those "who kill many" (461). They then further expand it to anyone who "prospers without justice" (464). This universalizing move in the context of the overturning of fortune in life, followed by death, followed by punishment in the afterlife is a precursor for the Hades passage in the *Eumenides*.

The Elders' specific terminology also presages the Erinyes' song. In the first part, the Elders draw attention to the visual aspect of divine oversight, when they claim that the gods are "not unwatchful" (οὐκ ἄσκοποι, *Ag.* 461–2). They turn to the obverse of the theme by referring to dead humans as "among the unseen" or "in the unseen realms" (ἐν . . . ἀίστοις, *en . . . aistois*, 466–7). This type of reversal is later echoed in the Hades passage, in which Orestes will "see" (*Eum.* 269) the punishments that the etymologically invisible Hades dispenses, who himself "watches over all things" (275).

The analogies continue in the overturning of human luck and escape from punishment. The Elders sing that the Erinyes reverse the fortune (παλιντυχεῖ, *Ag.* 465) of the fortunate man (τυχηρόν, 464) and wear down his life (τριβᾷ βίου, 465); whereas the Erinyes themselves sing of "withering" or "draining dry" (ἰσχνάνασ', *Eum.* 267).[18] Using visual terms again, the Elders describe how the Erinyes "make faded/obscure" (τιθεῖσ' ἀμαυρόν, *Ag.* 466); similarly, in the *Eumenides*, the victim of the Erinyes becomes a shadow (σκιάν, *Eum.* 302). The songs of the Choruses of the *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides* thus reinforce each other through echoing terms, patterns, and metaphors. Yet there is one crucial difference between the passages: The only crime specified by the Elders, that of "killing many" (*Ag.* 461), is omitted from the Erinyes' later list of transgressions. We shall soon see how that this subtle exclusion is politically meaningful and consistent with Hades' purview.

A second passage about punishment, this time by the Chorus of the *Choephoroi*, operates along similar lines. Its intricate construction and possible corruption (being unmetrical) make it interpretively challenging. Yet the similarities in structure and vocabulary to the *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides* passages are unmistakable (*Cho.* 59–65):

> τὸ δ᾽ εὐτυχεῖν,
> τόδ᾽ ἐν βροτοῖς θεός τε καὶ θεοῦ πλέον·
> ῥοπὰ δ᾽ ἐπισκοπεῖ Δίκας
> ταχεῖα τοὺς μὲν ἐν φάει,
> τὰ δ᾽ ἐν μεταιχμίῳ σκότου
> μένει χρονίζοντας ἄχη,
> τοὺς δ᾽ ἄκραντος ἔχει νύξ.

---

[18] For a discussion of the reversal of fortune and wearing down of life, see Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981), 11.463–6.

Prospering,
this, among mortals, is a god and more than a god.
But the scale of Justice watches over,
soon, those in the light,
but pains await those spending time
in the borderland of darkness,[19]
and faint night holds others.

Due to its allusiveness and intricate syntax, this passage does not appear meant as a clear and definitive theological statement. Moreover, the Slave Women are not seers; despite their being foreign and having a role in the mourning rituals, they are never said to have contact with divinities or to interpret signs.[20] Therefore, one must take this passage as either speculation or a statement of culturally accepted beliefs (Greek or foreign), rather than as a divine revelation.

Similarly to the other two choral passages, the song in the *Chorephoroi* contains three temporal periods, in this case marked by progressively less light. Yet, whereas light and darkness seem to indicate life and the lack of life (as they normally do), the middle term, "in the borderland of darkness" (ἐν μεταιχμίῳ σκότου, *Cho.* 63–4), is disputed.[21] This twilight zone alludes either to the edge of death or to death itself. In both interpretations, however, the "faint/dim/powerless night" (ἄκραντος . . . νύξ, 65) poetically evokes the afterlife, in which the dead are both less visible and less powerful.[22]

Besides its corresponding structure, this passage exhibits numerous associations with the other two choral passages about the afterlife in terminology and ideas. The Slave Women represent divine judgment through the "scale of Justice" (*Cho.* 61), which, in an instance of hypallage, "watches over" (ἐπισκοπεῖ, *episkopei*, 61) those who have overstepped reverence (σέβας, *sebas*, 55). This maps closely onto the Elders' "not unwatchful gods" (οὐκ ἄσκοποι θεοί, *ouk askopoi theoi*, *Ag.* 461–2) and the Erinyes' depiction of Hades with his "tablet-writing mind" (*Eum.* 275), who "watches over" (ἐπωπᾷ, *epōpa*, 275) anyone who acts irreverently (ἀσεβῶν, *asebōn*, 270). The visual metaphors of watching over and fading light (σκότου, *Cho.* 63, and ἄκραντος . . . νύξ, 65) connect to the Elders' phrase, "among the unseen" (*Ag.* 465–7; cf. *Eum.* 267, 274–5, 565), and to the Erinyes "making faded" the transgressor until he or she is a shadow (*Eum.* 302). Lastly, the emphasis on good fortune (τὸ . . . εὐτυχεῖν, *to . . . eutukhein*, *Cho.* 59) ties in with the Elders predicting the reversal of fortune through the Erinyes for the man without justice (παλιντυχεῖ, *palintukhei*, *Ag.* 464–5; cf. *Eum.* 553–65).[23]

---

[19] I translate the OCT text, but verses 63–4, especially, have a variety of emendations and alternate readings, which do not affect my argument.

[20] This is reinforced when the Chorus designate Orestes as their favored interpreter of the dream of Clytemnestra (*Cho.* 551–2), on which see Chapter 5. For their references to superhuman forces in the *kommos*, see Chapter 4.

[21] Sommerstein (2008b), 219 n. 17, does consider the most apparent, although still uncertain, set of referents as: punishment during life, late in life, and in the afterlife, *contra* Garvie (1986) ad 61–5. Cf. *Eum.* 175–8, 339–40; *Sept.* 742–5; *Supp.* 413–16.

[22] In Homer, the "powerless (ἀμενηνά) heads of the dead" reside in Hades (e.g. *Od.* 10.536); cf. Tsagarakis (2000), 105–23; and Pind. *Ol.* 2.57–8.

The tripartite division and the metaphors of the three choral passages are so strongly reminiscent of each other that they show a hidden thread of concern with ethical punishment after death running through trilogy. The Erinyes' revelation of Hades is reinforced for the audience by the repetition of elements from the two previous songs. Moreover, the human Choruses' speculations are retroactively justified. Despite the human Choruses having no specific contact with the divine, the connections to later revelation bolster the notion that choral songs are meant to give some insight into the operation of the universe.[24] Yet the fact that the Erinyes give a far clearer presentation of the mechanism modifies our understanding of what human Choruses can know. The intersections and contrasts among these three passages demonstrate that humanity can intuit the divine structures in which it is embedded, but only partially and ineffectively.

The third set of background references comes from the Erinyes' allusions to Hades and the underworld. Since the only earlier mention of Hades as underworld punisher is not by name, it has sometimes been missed. When the Erinyes awaken, they sing that Orestes will never escape punishment (*Eum.* 175–7):

> ὑπὸ δὲ γᾶν φυγὼν οὔποτ᾽ ἐλευθεροῦται,
> ποτιτρόπαιος ὢν δ᾽ ἕτερον ἐν κάραι
> μιάστορ᾽ εἶσιν οὗ πάσεται.[25]
>
> Even fleeing under the earth, he will not ever be free,
> and, although he turns as a suppliant, he will go
> where he will get another polluter (*miastōr*) on his head.

---

[23] For the theme that justice comes late, see Garvie (1986), ad 61–5.

[24] On the authority of the human choruses in divine matters as buttressed by later revelation, see Parker (2009), 133–7.

[25] The OCT corrects the codd. ἐκείνου to εἶσιν οὗ. Both this correction and the original text support the arguments presented below.

The Erinyes create a continuum between Orestes' flight from them (φυγών, 175), his suppliancy to men and to Apollo (ποτιτρόπαιος ὤν, 176), and his ending up "under the earth" (ὑπό . . . γᾶν, 175). There has been some discomfort in connecting this ἕτερον . . . μιάστορ' (*heteron . . . miastor'*, "another polluter") to Hades. However, that the Erinyes are here describing Orestes entering the underworld is evident when the earlier choral passages are taken into account. This passage also resonates with the Erinyes' other references to the underworld. First is the Hades passage, in which he is the assessor of mortals "under the earth" (ἔνερθε χθονός, *Eum.* 274, cf. *Ag.* 462–8).[26] Second is that those who do wrong "go under the earth, and dying they are not very free" (γᾶν ὑπέλθῃ· θανὼν δ᾽ οὐκ ἄγαν ἐλεύθερος, *Eum.* 339–40). The third characterizes this punishment as occurring in a locale of gloom, for there is no "endpoint" (τὸ τέρμα, *to terma*, 422) to the Erinyes' chase besides the place "where joy is not customary in any way" (423). The referent of "another polluter" is thus manifestly Hades.

These human and demonic references together form the ideational framework for Hades' punishments. They overlap to characterize the ubiquitous "old law" of the Erinyes: All human transgressors are subject to them in life, and once they enter the underworld will be eternally bound and punished by Hades, without any possibility of release. The passages from the first two plays provide insight into the human perspective on divine ethical punishment. The human Choruses appear to tap into a true understanding of punishment, yet they have only a vague picture of the divine mechanism. The Erinyes' claim that *every* transgressor of particular laws will suffer from the divinity amplifies the previous choral claims. Such punishment is revealed to be an intrinsic part of the consequences of human action above. It thus raises the stakes for all ethical decisions.

Ethical punishment must be feared in order to be effective and must be known in order to be feared.[27] Crucially, however, no human character ever mentions it during the numerous discussions of consequences for violent action. It is not even present in any depictions of the afterlife by individual characters; neither Cassandra nor the Ghost of Clytemnestra discloses a structured divine punishment below. Thus, the revelation of afterlife ethical judgment in the final play condemns retrospectively the blindness of previous ethical decisions. Conversely, it stands apart from the frameworks in which justice is presented. Both of these insights characterize the judgment of Hades in the trilogy as a law that operates absolutely, yet one that humans fail to heed.

---

[26] Note the close parallel to *Supp.* 228–31, where flight under the earth after death is no escape from punishment by "another Zeus among the dead." Cf. *Supp.* 414–16; Sommerstein (1989), ad 175–8; Geisser (2002), 141–2; and Martin (2020), 58.

[27] E.g. *Eum.* 389–94, 517–25, 696–9. Cf. Sommerstein (1989), ad 34 and 389–90; and Bacon (2001), 58.

## The Great Assessor: Laws and Process in the Underworld

### *Corporeality and Incorporeality*

The human Choruses of the previous two plays allude in abstract terms to punishment after death, but it is fleshed out, so to speak, only in the Erinyes' Hades passage. Returning to their description uncovers the poetic force of the passage, the mechanism imagined for human continuation after death, and the ethical import of Hades' laws. The Erinyes' few lines about the underworld avoid any details of punishment, whereas these demons are otherwise pervasively concerned with imposing physical vengeance and suffering.[28] The passage is thus in proximate tension with the Erinyes' threat to deprive Orestes of the liquid necessary for biological life (*Eum.* 264–7).[29] From the poetic contrast derives a difference in method: In a paradox familiar from religions with infernal damnation and exploited already in Archaic Greek poetry, Hades punishes only the bloodless.[30]

The tension between physical and immaterial differentiates Hades' punishment from instances of human vengeance in the *Oresteia*, which turn the living into corpses. The tableaux scenes in particular emphasize this corporeality of the dead: Clytemnestra stands over the bodies of her victims (*Ag.* 1372 ff.), and Orestes does so in turn over her and Aegisthus (*Cho.* 973 ff.). The audience might, however, be dramatically prepared for the sufferings of the *immaterial* dead by previous ghostly manifestations in the trilogy: Cassandra sees the mutilated Children of Thyestes as "the forms of dreams," whose entrails are visible (*Ag.* 1218, Chapter 3). Clytemnestra's Ghost points to her physical wounds, which might be visible to the audience (*Eum.* 103, Chapter 6). In those scenes, characters and audiences alike interpret the marks of punishment on corpses and ghosts. The continuing wounds of these figures infest life and propel further vengeance.

---

[28] E.g. Apollo's characterization of their barbarian-style *dikē*, punishments, and animality as not fit for the gods (186–97); their demonic binding dance (328–33 = 341–6); and their overflow of poisonous violence against Athens after the acquittal (782–5 = 812–15).

[29] See *Cho*. 278–95 for the shriveling of the transgressor in life by chthonic powers, and cf. 302.

[30] Fragments 229 and 230 of Aeschylus' *Sisyphus the Stone Roller* mention the dryness of the dead, on which see Sommerstein (2008c), 232–9. For the religious-cultural notion of the dead as drained of blood, connected with burial rituals, blood sacrifices to chthonic beings, and reanimating the dead through blood, see Burkert (1985), 60; and Heath (2005).

The Hades passage gains its dynamism from an opposite movement. Rather than the dead reappearing to affect the living world, the living seem to breach the underworld. The verse depicting the handoff between the Erinyes and Hades is deeply unsettling in this regard. In the first verse, the second-person pronoun for Orestes is the object of both being drained dry while living (ζῶντά σ᾽ ἰσχνάνασ᾽) and being dragged into the underworld (σ᾽ . . . ἀπάξομαι κάτω, 267).[31] The transition between the two realms thus reads as almost corporeal, with the Erinyes hauling the clearly still-sentient Orestes past the barrier of death. Their use of active verbs in the second person (ἵν᾽ . . . τίνῃς, "so that you may pay," 268; and ὄψῃ, "you will see," 269) furthers the impression of a living *katabasis*. Notable in this regard is that the Erinyes do not refer to souls, phantoms, images, or merely the *phrenes* of humans in the underworld, as Archaic literature does.[32] Instead, the term they use for dead humans in the underworld is "mortals" (τις ἄλλος βροτῶν, 269, cf. 273). The poetic blending of life and death lends an eerie proximity to the punishments. The more terrifying the afterlife is, the more it ought to have ethical effects on the living, since the Erinyes aver that fear of punishment ought to moderate human behavior (e.g. *Eum.* 517–28). It is thus not for Orestes that dread is most relevant, since he has acted and is already trapped. Rather, the Erinyes sing of Hades for *us*.

The abstraction of corporeality in this passage has a second dynamic: It distances Hades from the physical world. The use of *phrēn* illustrates the maneuver. In the Erinyes' lines elsewhere, *phrēn* can be a locus either of physical suffering or of incorporeal sentience. When used physically, referring to the "midriff" or internal organs, *phrēn* links the Erinyes' own embodied suffering with the afflictions they cause to humans.[33] In its nonphysical aspect, *phrēn* mostly stands for understanding and decision-making in Aeschylus.[34] This is especially true in the *Oresteia* in passages related to the Erinyes. For example, because of their assault, Orestes' *phrenes* spin into madness at the end of the *Choephoroi* (*Cho*. 1024).[35] In the *Eumenides*, the Erinyes' song binds the *phrēn* of their victim (δέσμιος φρενῶν, *desmios phrenōn*, *Eum.* 332), destroying it (φρενοδαλής, *phrenodalēs*, 330) to the point that a person cannot comprehend his own fall, since it renders him "witless" (ἄφρονι, *aphroni*, 377). In these passages, then, *phrēn* interweaves the physical and abstract aspects of the Erinyes' justice.

---

[31] The Erinyes in this scene use forms of the verb ζάω "to live" grouped more closely together than anywhere else in Aeschylus: ζῶντος, 264; ζῶντα, 267; ζῶν, 305. The *Oresteia* plays with the connections between life and the afterlife almost wherever the verb ζάω appears: "For when you lived (ἔζης) you were king" (concerning Agamemnon in the underworld), *Cho.* 360; and "the dead (τεθνηκότας) are slaying the living (τὸν ζῶντα)," *Cho.* 886. Cf. *Cho.* 926; *Eum.* 603–4.

[32] In Pind. *Ol.* 2.57–8, it is "the helpless *phrenes* of the dead" (θανόντων . . . ἀπάλαμνοι φρένες) that pay the penalties (ποινὰς ἔτισαν) in Hades. This is either a synecdoche for the human being as a whole, or the portion left after death, analogous with Pindar's use of *psukhē* (70). Cf. Currie (2005) 31, 36.

[33] E.g. *Eum.* 158–9. See Sullivan (1997), 16; and Sommerstein (1989), ad 155–8.

[34] As it does sometimes in Homer, see Gazis (2018), 74, with bibliography.

The Erinyes' sometimes-physical *phrēn* is dramatically relevant in the *Eumenides*. Athena – who herself is given the capacity to think well by Zeus (φρονεῖν, *phronein*, 850) – reverses the Erinyes' negative uses of *phrēn*. She offers them a place free from their own internal pain (893) and directs their mental energy (φρονοῦσιν, *phronousin*, 988) toward "intending good" (εὔφρονας εὔφρονες, *euphronas euphrones*, 992). For Hades, by contrast, the terminology of *phrēn* is only abstract. It is the locus of his writing: "he watches ... with his tablet-writing mind" (δελτογράφῳ ... φρενί, *delographō* ... *phreni*, 275). Hades does not act in the world physically, as the Erinyes do. The metaphorical phrase even marks the absence of material writing: No one else can read the tablets of Hades' mind. Their relationship to corporeality and incorporeality thus differentiates Hades from both the Erinyes and the Olympians – who act in the living world – in ways that have significant consequences for the application of his law.

## *Chthonic Process and Athenian Terminology*

Comparing the judicial terms used to depict Hades to those used for the Erinyes, humans, and Olympians in the *Oresteia* locates his justice more precisely. The tension between vengeance and legal language in the Hades passage combines several of the themes related to the Erinyes. First is their insistence on the rigid correspondence between punishment and crime.[36] In the Hades passage, they connect Orestes paying a penalty (τίνῃς, *tinēs*, 268) to his mother's suffering with the term ἀντιποίνους (*antipoinous*, or with the adverbial ἀντίποινα, *antipoina*, both meaning "in requital," *Eum.* 268). As elsewhere in the *Oresteia*, this formulation welds a word or prefix of exchange (ἀντι-, *anti-*) to one of justice or penalty (the ποιν-, *poin-*, stem).[37] The Erinyes' presentation of justice here fits into the universal ethical pattern they consistently disseminate, that of every mortal receiving "due recompense of justice" (τῆς δίκης ἐπάξια, *tēs dikēs epaxia*, *Eum.* 272). That is, each human gets the "deserts" (ἄξια, *axia*) for their impious acts. The phrase "due recompense of *dikē*" is, in fact, a pleonasm, in the sense that the Erinyes have been using *dikē* throughout to mean reciprocation in kind for evil acts. Whereas this rigid relationship between crime and punishment might seem too obvious to mention, the very circumstances of Orestes' case draw attention to it. The only explicit target of the Erinyes' pursuit in the trilogy is never actually punished but is rewarded with a return to kingship. The Hades passage thus emphasizes the "balancing" aspect of the Erinyes' justice at the very moment it is being discarded.

---

[35] The Chorus relate Orestes' madness to blood (*Cho*. 1056), which Sullivan (1997), 38–9, compares to the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* attributing madness to blood in Clytemnestra's *phrēn* (*Ag.* 1426–8). Hence, we have a continuing connection between the Erinyes' bloody nature and their effects on the *phrēn* of humans. Cf. Goldhill (1984a), 229–30.

[36] See the Introduction for the "balancing" aspect of the Erinyes in previous literature.

Throughout their time on stage, this balancing is always in tension with the Erinyes' superfluidity, endlessness, and overwhelming violence. Their infringement of all boundaries in pursuit of blood typifies their legal vocabulary as well. At the start of their binding dance, the Erinyes expand on their judicial functions (*Eum.* 312–20):

εὐθυδίκαιοι δ᾽ οἰόμεθ᾽ εἶναι·
τὸν μὲν καθαρὰς χεῖρας προνέμοντ᾽
οὔτις ἐφέρπει μῆνις ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν,
ἀσινὴς δ᾽ αἰῶνα διοιχνεῖ·
ὅστις δ᾽ ἀλιτὼν ὥσπερ ὅδ᾽ ἀνὴρ
χεῖρας φονίας ἐπικρύπτει,
μάρτυρες ὀρθαὶ τοῖσι θανοῦσιν
παραγιγνόμεναι πράκτορες αἵματος
αὐτῷ τελέως ἐφάνημεν.

We consider ourselves straight-judging:
no wrath from us creeps upon
the one presenting clean hands,
and unharmed he goes through his lifetime;
but whoever, having transgressed, just like this man,
conceals his murderous hands,
being present as upright witnesses
for the dead we appear with final authority
against him as debt collectors of blood.

---

[37] A key parallel lies just above this passage (*Eum.* 264–5): "No, you must give in exchange (ἀντιδοῦναι) red gore." Cf. *Ag.* 1420; *Pers.* 808; Pind. *Ol.* 2.58.

The theme of balance is evident when the Erinyes refer to themselves as "debt collectors of blood" (πράκτορες αἵματος, 319). Depriving the one who sheds blood, in turn, of his own blood is their method of redressing the asymmetry through the *lex talionis*, indicated by the technical language of debt.[38] But, in fact, their method and violence tilt the scales too far.

The Erinyes are intent on hoarding every judicial role. They declare themselves "witnesses" (μάρτυρες, 318), "judges" (εὐθυδίκαιοι, 312), and executioners, since they collect the bloody debt with "final authority" (τελέως, 320).[39] Yet, no matter how "correct" their judgment (εὐθυ-, 312; ὀρθαί, 318), in unifying all the functions that are segregated in human courts, the Erinyes undercut the purpose of each. First, they hear no argument and thus forestall conflicting opinion.[40] Secondly, they allow no influence from others on their decision. Lastly, they have no respect for suppliants, a sacred Greek obligation (176). They thus discard all continuing relationships that hearing out the context of a transgression, giving a temporary reprieve, or even granting forgiveness can offer society – the very features of Athena's new law that benefit Athens. The Erinyes exclude any amelioration that, in the ending of the *Oresteia*, characterizes both the Olympian mandate and human judicial processes.

Returning to the Hades passage, we find even more specific allusions to Athenian law. Most consequential for understanding the function of Hades is his designation as the "great *euthunos* of mortals" (εὔθυνος, 273). *Euthunos* is literally "straightener," and thus came to mean "assessor" or "auditor" in its technical use in Athens for "one who audits magistrates after their term in office."[41] This is reinforced by ἀπάξομαι (267), from ἀπάγω ("to lead before a magistrate").[42] The legal color to the language thus shades *dikē* (272) toward its more technical meaning of "trial," which it increasingly adopts in the *Eumenides*.[43] Even the tablet of Hades' recording mind (the δέλτος in δελτογράφος, 275) may allude to the tablets used in the Athenian legal system to receive complaints and transfer cases between jurisdictions. Aside from specific vocabulary, it has been suggested that the phrasing "seeing all things" should be read in light of the fact that magistrates were scrutinized for both private and public actions.[44] The technical terms of the passage thus prompt comparison between Hades' process and both Athena's new law and the contemporary Athenian legal system.

---

[38] Cf. e.g. *Cho.* 400–4. On the old justice in part as defined by blood for blood, see Meinel (2015), 119–27.

[39] MacLeod (1982), 134, points out that in the *Agamemnon* the terms πράσσεσθαι and πράκτωρ, normally used for legal fines and exaction of debt, refer to the total destruction of Troy (*Ag.* 111, 705, 812, 823). On legal language in the *Agamemnon*, see Daube (1939).

[40] *Contra* Gagarin (1976), 73–5, who claims that the Erinyes are supporters of judicial process based on their insistence on oaths and correspondences between their language and Athena's.

[41] *Ath. Pol.* 48.4. See Bakewell (1997), 298, with further citations.

[42] See Sommerstein (1989), ad 267–8, 273–5. The assessing or auditing may have been done in front of a subsection of the Areopagus council, with which the Erinyes became associated as the *Semnai Theai*. There is some speculation that Ephialtes removed precisely this power from the Areopagus, to which this theme in the *Oresteia* would be a strong contemporary allusion.

[43] Including, not long before, the related term ὑπόδικος ("defendant," *Eum.* 259), which the Erinyes deny Orestes can be. On the movement of *dikē* and related terms toward a legal sense in the trilogy, see Sommerstein (2010a), 193–200.

Instead of a legal process affected by human contingency, the Erinyes present the law of Hades as absolute and supreme. Their language reinforces the notion of ultimate sanction through a theme we have analyzed in the speech of human characters: Hades geminates Zeus. This is the other facet of *euthunos*, for Aeschylus has previously used the very same term for Zeus himself. According to the Ghost of Darius, Zeus is the "chastiser of overly arrogant minds" and is a "harsh assessor" (εὔθυνος βαρύς, *euthunos barus*, *Pers*. 827–8). This is the only other occurrence of the term *euthunos* in Aeschylus, and it is also in a punishing context, delivered by an underworld denizen. The thematic and linguistic connections include Queen Atossa's earlier attempt to clear the Great King of Persia from ever being subject to scrutiny or assessment by his people, using this very vocabulary (οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος, *oukh hupeuthunos*, *Pers.* 213). By depicting Zeus as a *euthunos*, the Ghost of Darius not only undoes this defense of the Great King but also expands the purview of ethical retribution to all humanity.[45] The *Oresteia*'s Hades passage formalizes this universalization through itemizing the violations and relocating the arena of punishment to the afterlife.[46] In the realm of Hades, there should be no doubt about the divine nature of such punishment. The vocabulary of Hades' justice overlaps with that of the king of the gods in the final procession of the *Oresteia*, as well. The members of the procession sing that "all-seeing Zeus" (Ζεὺς πανόπτας, *Eum.* 1045) supports the Athenians.

The law Hades administers below and his power over men are thus sanctioned by his total perception and auditing of all humankind, both characteristics that, in other contexts, Aeschylus reserves for the highest Olympian. Whereas the vocabulary surrounding underworld justice often alludes to the Athenian system, the analogies to Zeus as the great auditor and to the Erinyes' unified functions tend toward a singular, divine version of law. The Erinyes present the judgment of Hades as undivided and unappealable.

---

[44] Both analogies are suggested by Bakewell (1997), 298–9. For the idea of totality in πάντα, "all things," cf. Zeus bringing all things (πάντα) to fulfillment (759) and seeing all (πανόπτας, 1045); and the Erinyes managing all human affairs (πάντα . . . τὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους, 930–1).

[45] See Goldhill (1988), 191, and n. 24, with bibliography.

[46] Cf. Pind. *Ol.* 2.58–59, in which Hades is unnamed (τις) but his judgment beneath the earth (κατὰ γᾶς δικάζει) is of the things done under the rule of Zeus (τὰ δ' ἐν τᾷδε Διὸς ἀρχᾷ).

## *The Code of Hades: Defining Ethics*

Never before in Greek literature are the violations punished by Hades specified. In enumerating them, the Erinyes appear to be outlining a simple, preexisting, universal code. The seeming self-evidence of the list is bolstered through its distinctly condensed phrasing (*Eum.* 270–1):

> ἢ θεὸν ἢ ξένον τιν' ἀσεβῶν
> ἢ τοκέας φίλους
>
> dishonoring a god, or a guest-friend,
> or their dear parents

On closer examination, however, the list of transgressions manifests particularities both in its selection and how its terms play out in the trilogy.

According to this catalogue, Hades is solely concerned with a human breaking preexisting bonds with another being or beings. That is, he governs violations of sacred relationships, an act labeled irreverence (*asebeia*, implied in ἀσεβῶν, *asebōn*). These relationships are referred to by naming the party to whom one is obliged: the human–divine relationship, broken by dishonoring a god (θεόν, *theon*); the guest–host friendship of *xenia* (ξένον, *xenon*); and the parent–child kinship, *philia* to one's begetters (τοκέας φίλους, *tokeas philous*).[47] The Erinyes only accuse Orestes of the filial violation. They enumerate the others to demonstrate their broader concerns. These are evident also from their later urging of the cultivation of similar sacred relationships between humans: reverence to parents (τοκέων σέβας, *tokeōn sebas*) and honor to guests (ξενοτίμους, *xenotimous*, *Eum.* 538–48). Such bonds between anthropomorphic beings (humans or gods) involve requiting good already or potentially given.

---

[47] Cf. *Supp.* 701–9, in which the Suppliants wish for the state to protect *xenoi* (ξένοισι), honor the gods (θεούς), and revere parents (τεκόντων σέβας), as the three "written" statutes of Justice (ἐν θεσμίοις Δίκας γέγραπται). Like the metaphorical tablets of Hades' mind, the reference to divine writing draws attention precisely to the lack of physical writing. These laws are thus often classed under "unwritten laws." For these in the *Suppliants*, see Sommerstein (2008a), ad loc. On the *Eumenides* passage, see Schlatter (2018) 127 n. 7. For the "unwritten laws" in the *Antigone* (ἄγραπτα . . . νόμιμα, *Ant.* 454–5), connected with Hades, see Griffith (1999), ad loc.; and Fletcher (2008), esp. 88–90.

Thus, the code amounts to a guideline for being an individual at the barest level: reciprocity. In the *Oresteia*, Hades is the god of ethics.

The concern with only ethical, individual actions is – perhaps surprisingly – consistent throughout the *Oresteia*'s references to Hades. For one, the relationships itemized in the Hades passage are cleanly distinct from politics. This contrasts with the other references to punishment in the trilogy, nearly all of which are intertwined with political concerns. Specifically absent in his code is any reference to the killing of many and the sacking of cities, which were precisely the circumstance in which the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* had first sung of such underworld punishment (*Ag.* 461–8). Additionally, the purview of Hades' laws is universal. None of the three Choruses describe them as culturally specific or delimited by membership in a *polis*. The Erinyes, in fact, assert that all mortals must obey them. They thus differentiate Hades' law from the thoroughly *polis*-based law of Athena.

In its exclusion of competing jurisdictions, chthonic justice rejects the claims of other forms of justice in the *Oresteia*. First, the Erinyes deny that other divinities participate in the balancing of the universe. They repeatedly accuse the Olympians of transgressing justice by hindering the Erinyes' punishing role (*Eum.* 155–61, 711–12, 747, 780 = 810, 839 = 873). In their telling, the Olympians have nothing to do with the dishonor and pollution of ethical punishment (350–66, 385–6).[48] Other divinities cannot override the Erinyes' law nor provide release. Thus, the Erinyes reject Apollo's purification of Orestes and, initially, the appeal to Athena as judge. Secondly, the Erinyes also reject structured punishment by humans. Trials have no place in their justice. The Hades passage confirms the exclusion of human justice due to the absolute disparity of power between humans and gods. The deliberate structural antithesis is evident in the two juxtapositions of βροτῶν (*brotōn*, "of mortals") with a god (θεόν, *theon*, 269; Ἅιδης, *Hadēs*, 273). Humans make their choices in life, and those who transgress are the object of chthonic punishment thereafter. The civic legal structure instituted by Athena, therefore, specifically opposes the jurisdiction of Hades.

In sum, the Erinyes and Hades monopolize ethical punishment and give it a strict schema. The code of Hades outlines certain relationships the Greeks commonly considered sacred: reverence to gods, guests, and parents. Yet the transgressions mentioned are, in fact, a specific subset of societal concerns. They are focused on the individual and are decidedly nonpolitical.

---

[48] Burkert (1985), 200–2, notes that in literature the Olympian gods demonstrate repugnance for anything to do with death, whereas in cult the chthonic and Olympian often stood side by side.

The whole of the Erinyes' justice, including the references to Hades, is framed in universal and divinely validated language, which has consequences. First, the notion that the underworld is the endpoint for humans gives a sense of permanence. Secondly, the distinctions between the Erinyes and Hades, both chthonic, are subtle, but crucial. In part, they correspond to embodiment in general, which is mimicked on stage. It is the distinction between operating in the world and being at a distance. The Erinyes emphasize their physical *phrēn* and change their mind, ensconcing themselves in Athens for festivals and honors. Hades' exclusively mental *phrēn* connects with the lack of blood in his realm, his invisibility, his distance from the upper world, and thus his disregard for honors bestowed by humans. The difference between the Erinyes and Hades on these fronts leads to unresolved issues concerning the validity of underworld justice.

Regarding authority and law, the terms for Hades' code differentiate it from the other examples of divine and human justice. The twinning of Zeus and Hades, especially through the shared vocabulary of overseeing all things, provides the latter a cloak of absolute authority.[49] Yet the natural conclusion that divine law is continuous between Olympian and chthonic powers is incorrect.[50] The trilogy itself explicitly contradicts such a structure through repeated denials of any Olympian connection to ethical punishment. In terms of human justice, the legal language used for Hades ties it to Athenian practices, specifically through the reference to him as a *euthunos*. Implied in this universal projection of the Athenian term is a technocratic concern with justice. On the other hand, the trilogy registers deep unease concerning the structure of Hades' justice and the content of his laws, to which we now turn.

## The Dark Side of Hades' Law and Character

### *Precarious Relations*

It is not immediately obvious why the transgressions that Hades punishes should be problematic, for they are a précis of the disorder and violence within the *Oresteia*. Moreover, Hades' justice is represented as an eternal, sacred, stable ethical code overseen by an impartial judge, which punishes only criminals. Yet examining the three named relationships exposes significant difficulties concerning the application of Hades' justice. The extraordinarily overdetermined nature of each relationship in the trilogy already subverts it at the moment of its articulation.

---

[49] On Zeus's kingliness in the *Oresteia*, see Grube (1970); Lloyd-Jones (1971); Griffith (1995), 104–7; and Sommerstein (2010d), 168–9.

[50] *Contra* Schlatter (2018), 158–9, 169–71.

Most evident thematically is the fraught vocabulary of kinship. Neither the general context of the trilogy nor the specific language of the confrontation between parties in the *Eumenides* allows for *tokeus* ("parent," *Eum.* 271) to remain a neutral term.[51] The Erinyes are pursuing an instance of a child rising up against his parent, yet the motif of parents behaving murderously toward children resounds throughout the trilogy, reversing the order of the rule as represented by the Erinyes. What of Agamemnon murdering his daughter? The question is asked by Clytemnestra, who sometimes conceptualizes herself as a manifestation of a demonic avenger (e.g. *Ag.* 1433, 1501; Chapter 6). What of Clytemnestra murdering her husband? This is the grounds on which Orestes and Apollo challenge the Erinyes (e.g. *Eum.* 604). Naming the transgression of child against parent insufficiently accounts for the blood-crimes that animate vengeance in the trilogy. Consequently, the phrasing of the ethical code itself draws attention to its incompleteness.

Even more directly applicable to this seemingly straightforward relationship are two related subversions in the trial, which have been widely discussed. First, Orestes and Apollo disavow any biological link between mother and child. Apollo, especially, attacks the notion of a mother "begetting" (the verbal idea behind *tokeus*) and names Athena as an example of a motherless child (662–6). The second subversion is that Athena approves this explanation as part of her reason to acquit the matricide: She was born of no mother (736). This line of argument is inapplicable to human beings. Thus its use in the trial destabilizes any solid foundation for an ethical code built on the parental relationship and, even further, on biology or kinship.[52] Consequently, through an unexpected dramatic turn, the foundational moment of the new law actually denies the very relationship that both human vengeance and the old law uphold.

---

[51] τοκέας φίλους indicates a restriction to parents, but the issue of the exact sense of *philos* remains open: Is it simply part of a set phrase here, adding nothing to the meaning? Alternately, could it expand this moral framework to include the constructed aspects of *philos* just as the Erinyes expand their own mandate from avenging blood crime to all human relationships? Goldhill (1984a), esp. 226, makes this point, based on the redefinitions of *philia* that excluded Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroi*. For discussions of *philia* in Classical Greece and specifically on its use as "kinship" or "friendship," see Konstan (1996); (1997), esp. 53–92; and (2006), 169–82. Belfiore (2000), 1–20, is more focused on tragedy and argues for the expansion of the term *philos* (not just *philia*) in tragedy to include both family and friends, *contra* Konstan's more restrictive notion; but cf. the response in Konstan (2001).

The same dynamic is at work with the second relationship, *xenia*, a notion critical to the unfolding vengeance scenes of the *Choephoroi*. In that play, Orestes is a prime example of one who abuses the hospitality afforded to a *xenos*.[53] His violation of this bond reenacts Atreus' crimes against Thyestes, his brother and guest, for which Aegisthus (a hidden *xenos*, as it were) eventually takes vengeance.[54] During the trial, Apollo's uncoupling of a mother from being a *tokeus* turns her into a "stranger" (ξένη, *xenē*) to her baby, also a "stranger" (ξένῳ, *xenō*, *Eum.* 660). Again, the arguments at the trial undercut the old law that chastises the violation of the sacred rights of strangers.[55] In acquitting Orestes of killing a stranger, who is simultaneously his parent, the new law pointedly disregards both transgressions.

The last – and seemingly most stable – of Hades' concerns, the relationship between human and divine, follows this pattern as well. In the early part of the trilogy, humans catastrophically subvert this relationship. First Agamemnon's obliteration of the temples of Troy and the chain of human sacrifices surrounding the house of Atreus devastate the sacred ties Hades is supposed to protect.[56] The transgression that the Erinyes condemn therefore occurs without any mention that Hades punishes Agamemnon for it. Secondly, Clytemnestra commits acts that (other characters deem to) violate every aspect of piety (e.g. *Ag.* 1409–11), yet the Erinyes claim that Clytemnestra is "free by virtue of being killed" (*Eum.* 603). Thirdly, it is arguable that an infraction against two rules together is contained in the story of Zeus imprisoning his own father (641–2), the violence of divine child against divine parent. Availing themselves of this myth (which both they and Apollo treat as fact), the Erinyes characterize the whole age since the ascent of Zeus as one of brutality and retribution.[57] The Erinyes' objection to Olympian interference is predicated on Zeus's own actions: He has implicitly violated the very code that Hades enforces for mortals. Apollo, however, dismisses these claims (644–51), and both he and Athena still appeal to Zeus as final authority (e.g. 620 and 797). Both the selectiveness of the old law's divine punishers and the Olympian statements during the trial thus problematize the categorical condemnation of "transgressions against a god."

---

[52] On these arguments and their implications, see Winnington-Ingram (1948), 143–4; Zeitlin (1978), 106–12; Gagarin (1976), 87–8; and Sommerstein (1989), ad 657–66.

[53] Bacon (2001), 52–7, notes that *xenos* and its compounds occur thirteen times in the sixty-six lines of the scene between Clytemnestra and Orestes and links these to Apollo's later argument against her.

[54] *Ag.* 1577–1611, and note the use of *xenia* in verse 1590. Cf. Roth (1993), 14–17.

[55] For the political aspects of *xenia*, see Griffith (1995); against which Goldhill (2000), 50.

[56] Zeitlin (1965) and (1966).

[57] On Zeus as a vengeful god, see Denniston and Page (1957), xxviii–xxix. This mention of Cronus fits with the choral passage in the *Agamemnon* about the overthrow by their respective sons of Cronus and Uranus, who, although he was μέγας (as Hades is) is no longer said to exist (*Ag.* 168–73). Cf. Clay (1969), 9.

The obligations of humans to divinities, children to parents, and guests to hosts are thus up for redefinition. The gods themselves violate them without consequence, whereas human violators are not consistently punished. The upholders of the old justice fail to truly enforce it; they cannot even keep a grip on its terms. The Erinyes' ever-narrowing concern with kindred blood also undermines the ostensibly absolute ethical system, since they punish one type of familial violation but leave others unrequited. Such a convergence of fractures eventually enables Athena's law to demolish the Erinyes' claims in the trial, building a new foundation on the rubble. The trilogy, however, never indicates that Hades' justice or *modus operandi* ever change. Athena clearly states that chthonic forces continue to present a danger for the city (*Eum.* 1007–8). We will return to the dynamic at the end of the trilogy that accounts for both the continuation of Hades' justice and the destabilization of its terms.

## *The Polluted Judge*

First is the matter of the punishing divinity himself. The depictions of Hades contain troubling parallels to the issues with his laws. The legal terms in the Hades passage give the impression that he is a juridical, dispassionate balancer of the universe. As already discussed, the passage only offers the vaguest hints concerning his punishments, a reticence that seems to distinguish both his method and characteristics from those of the Erinyes. Yet from another passage, Hades can be understood to be contaminated similarly to the trilogy's other avengers.

When the Erinyes refer to Hades as *miastōr* (μιάστορ', *Eum.* 177), they draw attention to the more general problem with punishing figures in the *Oresteia* and beyond. The term *miastōr* literally means "polluter," or "polluted one," depending on whether the emphasis is on actively polluting (as its form implies) or on pollution inherent in the agent. It derives from μίασμα (*miasma*, "pollution"), which is used seven times in the *Oresteia*, including once immediately prior, in *Eum.*

169.[58] When used to refer to Hades in verse 177, the term *miastōr* causes consternation and twisting among translators. Sommerstein (2008b), who notes that the reference is to Hades, translates it as "avenger," apparently to avoid calling the god polluted. Others even go so far as to emend the text in order to shift the implied referent.[59] For comparison, the only other occurrence of *miastōr* in Aeschylus is in *Cho.* 944, where the Chorus apply it to both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.[60] There, scholars and translators unproblematically render δυοῖν μιαστόροιν as "two who were unclean" (Smyth); "two stained with murder" (Lattimore); "two polluted wretches" (Garvie); and "two defilers" (both Meineck and Sommerstein). This crux in translation when Hades is the referent alerts us to a need for an extensive reconceptualization. Once one accounts for the etymology of *miastōr*, there is no escaping the fact that the Erinyes are referring to Hades – the seemingly objective "assessor" of mankind – as part of the cycle of polluting and polluted vengeance.

What precisely causes this staining of Hades? In the first two plays, *miasma* accrues to human killers due to their violation of a person's sanctity, spilling sacred blood.[61] In the third play, the Erinyes locate Orestes' actions firmly within this framework: "Oh, polluted with murder (μιαιφόνε, *miaiphone*) … do you disown the most kindred blood (αἷμα, *haima*) of your mother?" (*Eum.* 607–8; cf. 169–70). They continually dispute the possibility of cleansing defilement by any method – even those prescribed by the gods – short of sucking the killer's own blood and sending him to Hades. Their unremitting attacks on Apollo rely on this very tenacity of pollution, through which they undermine his purity and thus his authority (e.g. *Eum.* 163–72). The Erinyes' own lot is a dishonored one (ἀτίετα … λάχη, *atieta* … *lakhē*, 385), despite their insistence on their honor, precisely because of their connection with violent punishment.[62] The Erinyes understand that their function is defiled and makes them unfit for association with the Olympians.[63] The same violence inherent in punishment pollutes Hades – despite his interaction only with the bloodless – and earns him the epithet *miastōr*.

---

[58] μιάστωρ and μίασμα are both derivatives of μιαίνω "to stain, soil, defile" (LSJ). Cf. Chantraine, s.v.; Beekes, s.v.; Parker (1983), 104–43, with 312 on the *Oresteia*; and Burkert (1985), 75–82.

[59] E.g. Smyth (1926) changes the referent to a future murderer who will come against Orestes from "his family" or "the same seed," by correcting the codd. ἐκείνου (177) to ἐκ γένους, despite the fact that such a possibility is mentioned neither in myth nor in the rest of the *Oresteia*. Georgantzoglou (2002) justifies this textual correction by an assertion that Hades exists outside of the conceptual pattern of pollution because of his role as assessor, a preconception whose falsehood the analysis herein demonstrates.

[60] *Miasma* is used twice to describe Clytemnestra: *Ag.* 1645; *Cho.* 1028.

[61] See Geisser (2002), 139–46, on vengeance and blood pollution for the *miastōr*.

[62] Sidwell (1996), 49.

There is a further reason implied for why Hades is polluted. The *miastōr* passage differentiates between Hades and the Olympians concerning a sacred Greek relationship not mentioned in his code: the rights of suppliants. Greek culture is filled with stories of the fierce pollution attending the violation of these rights.[64] Apollo himself declares that he will not desert Orestes because it is terrible for either gods or men to abandon a suppliant (*Eum.* 232–4). Yet Hades in the *miastōr* passage ignores supplication (176). Therefore, although the Erinyes describe Hades with technocratic vocabulary, they also associate him with their own unremitting excesses in pursuit of justice.

Two related problems concerning the justice of Hades follow from this pollution: Both the unmediated character of Hades' judgment and his nature as sole arbiter become suspect. Each of these is evident in the metaphor of tablets (δελτογράφῳ . . . φρενί, *deltographō* . . . *phreni*, *Eum.* 275), which now can be located more specifically in the Athenian legal system. In Athens, tablets that move cases from court to court are necessary due to multiple authorities and jurisdictions.[65] Even within one human court, judgments account for mitigating circumstances, supplication for mercy, and even appeals to self-interest.[66] Instead of such a system, the image of the tablets within the mind of Hades is one of a single recording, meant to stop an event from changing its significance. The emphasis on the sole, removed, unbribable judge contravenes any splitting of authority, leniency due to circumstances, appeal to the interest of the court, and, most importantly, possibility of release.

The legal terminology surrounding Hades' solitary judgments thus offers Athenian audience members a chance to reflect on whether justice is to be entrusted to one entity, even a divinity. In the *Eumenides*, Athena demonstrates her wisdom by explicitly denying that it can. She declares that neither humans alone nor a divinity alone can preside over cases of great magnitude.[67] We have covered the characteristics of Hades and his laws, with their evident problems, as well as the connection of afterlife judgment with themes throughout the trilogy. Now the full significance of this ethical code remains to be analyzed in the context of the new Olympian law that presumes to transform humankind.

---

[63] The Erinyes speak of "standing apart from the gods in the sunless scum," 386. Cf. Vellacott (1984b), 121; and Burkert (1985), 200–2.

[64] Parker (1983), 146, 181–6. On supplication (ἱκετεία) in Greek literature, see Gould (1973); and for the focus on it in the *Suppliants*, see Turner (2001).

[65] Bakewell (1997), 298–9. A further allusion involves Athena's acting analogously to the Athenian *basileus*. This was previously a political office that, by the time of the *Oresteia*, mainly involved religious duties, but whose holder also conducted the preliminary investigation that determined to which court a case belonged, Griffith (1995), 97 and nn. 117–18.

[66] On Orestes' trial in the context of Athenian legal practice, see Sommerstein (2010b).

## Contrasting Athena's and Hades' Justice

The *Iliad* offers a subtle precedent to the relation of Hades to Athena – in an unsubtle setting. The goddess dons the helmet of Hades to be invisible in battle even to Ares, whom she trounces.[68] Not furious bloodlust, but expertise in warfare – wise violence – is the ethos of Athena from the start. Beyond using craft to win, Athena demonstrates wisdom by reintegrating the power of the defeated. After she vanquishes Poseidon to become the tutelary deity of Athens, she preserves his cult for the benefit of the city.[69] Athena's manipulation of Hades' power in the *Iliad* and the absorption of the elder Poseidon are acts mirrored in the *Oresteia* when the goddess resolves the ongoing chthonic vengeance that haunts the trilogy. By ending the cyclical curse of the Atreidae with which she seemingly has little to do, Athena simultaneously gains Orestes as an ally and integrates the defeated Erinyes, both for the benefit of Athens.

Athena describes her new justice in positive, divine language, minimizing any mention of violence. The goddess insists that she has won through divine persuasion, implicitly contrasting her pacific rhetoric to the threatening language of Apollo.[70] Athena's entire focus is on the flourishing of the city. She institutes the trial with its voting, marking it as a "new law," which leads scholars to see the whole ending as an aetiology for and modeling of democratic practice.[71] Finally, the mechanism of Olympian intervention, the process of the trial, the verbal agon in which Athena finally placates the Erinyes, and the religious procession at the end all reinforce the motif of closure.[72] They indicate that the new law supersedes the old law, forever.

---

[67] *Eum.* 470–2. There does exist a version of the mythical trial of Orestes in front of a jury of gods, which might have been current before the *Oresteia*, see Sommerstein (1989), 4.

[68] αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη δῦν' Ἄϊδος κυνέην, μή μιν ἴδοι ὄβριμος Ἄρης, *Il.* 5.844–5. Again here Homer playfully etymologizes Hades' name, negating the verb of seeing from which it originates, Gazis (2018), 36–40.

[69] Bowie (1993), 18, 27–8; and Loraux (1993), 3–71.

[70] Rynearson (2013), 18–21.

[71] Euben (1982), esp. 27–9, following Hannah Arendt's theories, attributes extensive positive features to the new justice based on its political form and Athena's blessings, including reconciliation of diversities into a restored yet new unity, an active complementarity of reciprocity (which precludes domination), acknowledging the legitimacy of the other, and looking backward and forward in time, especially into the other's point of view; cf. Chiasson (1999) and further examples in the Introduction.

Within the divine world of the *Oresteia*, however, the process and ethical aspects of Hades remain as a challenge to the seemingly purified and eternal new world order. A two-part comparison therefore closes this chapter. The first section differentiates the processes of Hades from those of the new law as represented on stage and as connected with Athenian practices. The second section focuses on Athena's transformation of underworld themes. Contrasting the supposedly superseded justice of Hades exposes the pernicious implications of Athena's collective, political, and thoroughly bellicose solutions.

## *Hades' Singular Justice versus the New Law*

The structural qualities of the court that Athena institutes can be summarized thus: It is (1) an independent (2) administrator that (3) hears both sides and (4) is able to inflict drastic penalties (5) narrowly on the guilty.[73] Most of these five characteristics controvert some feature of the Erinyes and of the general cycle of retribution surrounding the house of Atreus and the Trojan War. Each is easily understood as a defining feature of both Athena's dramatic court within the play and the courts in historical Athens. Unaccounted for in previous analyses of this new justice, however, is that the enumerated features are nearly all present in the judgment of Hades. Moreover, judicial process, as represented in the *Oresteia*, is far from optimal or unified. The split Athenian jury, the gendered and political arguments, and the one-sided outcome are hardly an advertisement for the operation of a human court, despite Athena's direct superintendence.

Such issues contrast sharply with the earlier depiction of Hades' divine judgment, many features of which outstrip any possible human procedure. Hades, to address point (1), is far more "independent" from both specific conflicts and political entanglements than are human jurors. The pressures of humanity's temporally embedded position manifest in the proceedings of the "first trial." The contending parties make profuse promises to and existential threats against Athens: Apollo repeatedly attempts to bribe the jurors with a military alliance, whereas the Erinyes warn that they will unleash global violence if denied and follow through when they lose by threatening to poison the city.[74] These persuasions and threats are unproblematic for Hades, who sits apart from humanity. Whereas the *Oresteia* dramatizes the placation of the Erinyes with promises of cult, no such promises are made for Hades, who neither suffers pain nor requires honor. After the enlistment of the Erinyes for Athens (and that of Zeus), Hades is the only punishing divinity who maintains an apolitical posture.

---

[72] See Goldhill (1984a), esp. 257–83; and Dunn (1997), esp. 84–91.

[73] These points (which I have numbered for clarity) are distilled from Sommerstein (2010a), 199–202, although they draw together arguments made by numerous scholars.

On procedural (2) and evidentiary (3) grounds, there are no reasons given to prefer a human jury to a sole divine judge. Neither Athenian law in general nor the trial of Orestes in particular demonstrates more rigor than a divinity would. Concerning the administrative quality of justice (2), the technical terms applied to Hades (especially *euthunos*) strongly evoke the Athenian civic process. As opposed to (3) "*hearing* both sides," Hades *sees* all things. His penetrating vision cleaves through the obscurity that shrouds human observation. Moreover, in the trial itself, Orestes' refusal to take an oath is sometimes related to Athenian procedures, where defendants and witnesses had to swear concerning the guilt or innocence of the accused.[75] Yet oaths need play no part for Hades, since his unrelenting panopticism dispenses with testimony. Thus, the disparity between the judgment of Hades and the human judicial system draws attention to the fact that the latter is always based on imperfect knowledge. The contrast between divine and human processes subverts the trilogy's support for an inherently flawed system.

The main rebuttal to such a challenge within the ending is the only major attribute of the new law absent in Hades' process: reciprocity. This is the other aspect of (3) "hearing both sides." Hades does not listen to testimony. His invisibility betokens the impossibility of confronting him. One could claim, with Athena herself, that this is the superiority of the new law. Through persuasion, the human court system betters the complex of human vendetta, demonic action above, and divine punishment below. Mutuality is the key to Athena's new justice. Yet the contrast with Hades' law draws attention to several aspects of Athena's civic system not based on persuasion, peaceful integration, and mutuality.

Unpacking the characteristic of (4) "drastic penalties" begins to uncover these nefarious issues with Athena's justice. Violent punishment, as we saw, involves pollution for Hades, earning him the designation *miastōr*.

---

[74] Sommerstein (2010b), 30–1, sketches out the problems of "off-topic" or bribing language for the various contemporary Athenian courts and relates it to the tendentious language of the parties in the *Oresteia*'s trial; cf. Vellacott (1977), esp. 121–2.

[75] Sommerstein (2010b), 27–30, suggests that in many practical situations this would disqualify witnesses who did not know the whole story but might have seen an important part.

This connection cannot be entirely stifled when Athena and the Erinyes promote fear within the city (*Eum.* 517–28, 696–9) and sharp anger (705) as a fundamental carry-over from the old law. Yet the punishing of wrongdoers is entirely glossed over in both the trial and Athena's descriptions of the Athenian future. Neither she nor the Erinyes enumerate any consequences for the punishers, whether they keep the city in line or kill outsiders in war.

Such a one-sided view of justice extends to the last ostensible characteristic of the new law, that punishments must be inflicted (5) "narrowly on the guilty." The Erinyes explicitly limit Hades' castigations to an individual, for his or her actions. Thus, Hades' justice has no innocent casualties, such as the victims of vendetta, war, human malevolence, or divine caprice so prevalent in the trilogy. Moreover, even in a restricted, legal context, human determination of guilt is subject to the problems of persuasion and interest. Having compared the processes of Athena's civic law to Hades' singular judgment, we turn to the questions that have arisen: On what thematic grounds does the new law claim superiority to chthonic justice? Can punishment within the city and warfare outside of it be free from the pollution of blood, if only they are divinely blessed?

## *Against Chthonic Forces: Athens United in* Phrēn

To understand these issues of violence, pollution, and the city, we turn to the new plan for Athens, which builds on chthonic foundations. Athena leverages the Erinyes' power among those beneath the earth for the benefit of her city.[76] She reverses specific characteristics of the Erinyes in order to remove Athens from the old cycle of vendetta. For example, Athena recontextualizes their outsider *timē* as honor *within* the political sphere when she describes what will accrue to Athens and to the Erinyes if they join it. The Athenians can give such honors because they have the most festivals, are her chosen people, and are the most pious.[77] Yet, as we will see, this positive aspect is clearly not enough to cure the ills of civic infighting. In order to maintain internal harmony, Athena and the Erinyes require an extreme remodeling of the city, which entails tremendous violence. The justice of Hades, as described, preserves the possibility of scrutinizing this transformation on terms other than those of Athena.

---

[76] *Eum.* 951; cf. 1007–9.

[77] For the Athenians as honorable and pious, see 804–7, 854–7, 867–9, 892–7, 1026–31, 1033–47.

In the service of remedying the self-destructive vendetta practiced by humans under the old law, the ending of the *Eumenides* emphasizes a theme that also occurs in the politics of historical Athens: *Collectivity* is Athena's dominant conception of the city. As opposed to the individualistic, honor-loving, and cursed royalty of Argos, the Athenians are pointedly nameless. There are no heroes in this Athens, nor even a single named human character.[78] Instead, Athena and the Erinyes stress total political agreement (*Eum.* 984–7):

χάρματα δ᾽ ἀντιδιδοῖεν
κοινοφιλεῖ διανοίᾳ,
καὶ στυγεῖν μιᾷ φρενί·
πολλῶν γὰρ τόδ᾽ ἐν βροτοῖς ἄκος.

And may they return joy for joy
with intent to love with common purpose,
and to hate with one mind:
For this is a cure for many things among mortals.

This is as strong a move toward collective thought as one can have, for the Athenians must not only *love* in common (κοινοφιλεῖ διανοίᾳ, *koinophilei dianoia*, 985) but also *hate* with one mind (στυγεῖν μιᾷ φρενί, *stugein mia phreni*, 986). Individual decision-making in one's *phrēn* must be subordinated to the corporate *phrēn* of the state in order to receive blessings. According to the Erinyes, love and hatred, as long as they are in unison, are a "cure" (ἄκος) for the problems of all humanity (ἐν βροτοῖς, 987). Thus, in contrast to the chthonic punishment of an individual for bloodshed, the new justice of Athena is fully political.

Such concord is not for the sake of peace but relies heavily on warfare. The goddess foreshadows Athenian militarism with a linguistic move that has not received sufficient critical attention. She repeatedly refers to the Athenians with a term that previously in the *Oresteia* only referred to the army: The *polis* becomes synonymous with the *stratos*.[79] All the uses of *stratos* in the

---

[78] Collective activity is the perpetual and binding thread in the description of Athens: from the start of the play (where Athenians are referred to by the kenning "children of Theseus," Θησέως τόκοις, *Eum.* 402), through the trial (where they are only addressed as a multitude), in Orestes' promises, in the persuasion scene, and in the final benedictions. In the *Persians*, Athenian anonymity contrasts with the named lists of Persian grandees, offering a subtle accentuation of Athenian collectivity and democratic ideology. See Goldhill (1988), 192–3; and Garvie (2009), xvi–xxii. Yet whereas the *Persians* is concerned with an ongoing war, the *Eumenides* is referring to Athens more generally.

[79] Sommerstein (1989), ad 566, notes that the term στρατός in 566, 668, 683, 762, 889, as nowhere else in Aeschylus, "denotes the citizen-body of a state *as civilians*." He stresses that the formerly militaristic term is now used for the "Athenian στρατός enforcing Dikē by judgement." This

*Agamemnon* are in unambiguously military contexts and mean "army/expedition/war."[80] There are no mentions of the term in the *Choephoroi*. In the *Eumenides*, outsiders such as Apollo and Orestes still use *stratos* in a military context.[81] Athena, however, uses *stratos* in reference to the Athenians in ways that can only be rendered in English by "people" and related terms.[82] Unanimity and a militaristic mentality are thus subtly entwined. This hints at the violence just below the surface of the ending's blessings.

The militaristic themes are a reaction to the dark forces pulling at humanity, threatening civic upheaval. Vengeful acts in general and the Erinyes in particular are associated with *stasis* throughout the trilogy.[83] Cassandra's mention of a *stasis* over the palace is immediately interpreted by the Chorus of Elders as her invoking an Erinys (*Ag.* 1118–19). In the *Choephoroi*, Electra names the group of herself, the Chorus, and Orestes a *stasis*, as they plot to overthrow the tyrants (*Cho.* 114, cf. 458).[84] The Erinyes describe themselves as a *stasis* (στάσις ἁμή, *Eum.* 311). Lastly, Athena reverses each of these uses when she wards away civil war: "I pray that *Stasis* (Στάσιν) never roar in this city" (*Eum.* 977–8).[85] The solution she crafts to *stasis*, however, is that of the *stratos*.

Whereas Athena claims that she uses *erōs* together with *peithō*, "persuasion," to placate and incorporate the Erinyes, this does not actually lead in the expected direction.[86] Chthonic forces are behind Athena's use of *erōs*,

---

reading, however, elides the nefarious effects of Athena's repurposing of the term in the context of the militaristic emphasis of the ending.

[80] *Ag.* 341, 345, 517, 538, 545, 573, 624, 627, 634, 639, 652, 670, 955, 987. At 547, the OCT daggers στρατῷ because the reference should be to the people (Heimsoeth suggests λεῷ). Cf. στρατιά, 799, and numerous related words.

[81] Apollo links the city and the στρατός closely when promising military aid (τὸ σὸν πόλισμα καὶ στρατόν, *Eum.* 668), and Orestes repeats the usage in his promises of victory (χώρᾳ τῇδε καὶ τῷ σῷ στρατῷ, 762).

[82] When Athena first orders an assembly of Athenians, she commands (566–9): "Herald, call the people (στρατόν) to order . . . to the people (στρατῷ)." When she declares the council of the Areopagus will be a bulwark for the people, Athena unambiguously uses *leōs* ("people") and *stratos* as synonyms, both referring to the collected Athenians, not soldiers on an expedition (681–3): "Now hear my ordinance, people (λεώς) of Attica . . . the people (στρατῷ) of Aegeus." The military idea behind *stratos* has not faded, for only a few lines later, she uses the root in a compound to refer to the Amazons invading with an army (στρατηλατοῦσαι, 687). Finally, Athena warns the Erinyes not to let "harm come to [this city's] people (στρατῷ)" (889); *pace* Taplin (1977), 392–5, 410–21.

[83] *Stasis* (literally "standing") in its unmarked meaning often refers to a "band" or "group," that is, people who stand together (LSJ II). In political contexts, *stasis* refers to "standing apart," and is thus translated "faction," "revolt," or even "civil war," the ultimate internal threat to the stability of a city (LSJ III). Thucydides uses *stasis* as a keyword to describe degeneration into intracity violence during the Peloponnesian war, see Edmunds (1975); and Orwin (1988).

[84] See Lebeck (1971), 115. [85] In this last passage, the OCT capitalizes *stasis* as a divinity.

[86] The Erinyes will feel *erōs* for the honors they left behind if they fail to choose Athens (*Eum.* 851–7, esp. ἐρασθήσεσθε, 852). Cf. Rynearson (2013), 3–5.

as is clear from her declaration that the "terrible *erōs* for glory" (δεινὸς εὐκλείας ἔρως, 865) within men cannot be dampened. Via a further move (which resonates linguistically with ἔρως, *erōs*), she transforms the Erinys (Ἐρινύς) through her own struggle (*eris*) for good (ἀγαθῶν ἔρις ἡμετέρα, 974–5).[87] This good is neither conditional nor pacific, for she announces that it will be permanently victorious (νικᾷ . . . διὰ παντός, *nika* . . . *dia pantos*, 974–5).

Through the language of light and persuasion, Athena shifts victory and struggle away from associations with bloody pollution.[88] Yet this maneuver is not so easily accomplished within the tight linguistic web of the *Oresteia*. Not only is *peithō* compromised by Clytemnestra's destructive uses of it, but both *eris* and *erōs* are catastrophic terms already in the trilogy.[89] The erotics of warfare echo an earlier, fraught example of the excessive *erōs* for violence, the one that Clytemnestra warned could settle on the profit-seeking Greek *stratos* (ἔρως δὲ μή τις πρότερον ἐμπίπτῃ στρατῷ, *Ag*. 341).[90] This is precisely what happens to the victorious army, and it is seen to be the cause of the impiety that leads to divine punishments.

Athena attempts to overcome all such negative repercussions by granting war total theological benediction. Her cure for the internal "terrible *erōs* for glory" in men is "plenty of foreign war" (*Eum*. 864). She urges the Erinyes to give blessings of "victory without evil" (νίκης μὴ κακῆς, *nikēs mē kakēs*, 903). That is, the Athenians are meant to wage unending war and yet avoid the requital for bloodshed prevalent throughout the *Oresteia*.[91] Athena unequivocally applies to Athens the heroic connection between killing in war and glory (913–15): "I would find it unendurable not to honor (τιμᾶν, *timan*) this city among mortals as a victory-city (ἀστύνικον, *astunikon*) in glorious contests." The civic harmony Athena urges is thus not actually pacific, persuasion-based, and mutually honoring.[92] Athena's new law and the Erinyes' incorporation into the city does not eliminate fighting, only changes its direction. Civic unification obliges *outward* violence.

---

[87] Gagarin (1976), 117, claims that the bloody *eris* of the two earlier plays transforms in the *Eumenides* to creative *eris* as a Hesiodic competitive striving (*Op*. 11–26). On the distinction between *eris* as "conflict" and as "competition," see Thalmann (2004).

[88] For the arc of "victory" in the *Oresteia*, see Sommerstein (1989), 239.

[89] For the issues of *peithō* in the *Oresteia*, see Zeitlin (1965), 507; Buxton (1982), 105–14; Goldhill (1984a), 263–5; and Nooter (2017), 281.

[90] See Chapter 1 for a discussion of victory, *erōs*, and profit in the context of the Trojan War.

[91] Athena herself models such a victory through her own rhetorical trickery, using the verb νικάω (*nikaō*): she declares that "Orestes wins (νικᾷ, *nika*) even if the vote is equal (ἰσόψηφος)," *Eum*. 741, but interprets those results to the Erinyes in exactly the opposite way, soothing them with, "you have not been defeated (οὐ . . . νενίκησθ', *ou* . . . *nenikēsth'*), but the case truly resulted in an equal vote (ἰσόψηφος)," 795–6.

[92] Cohen (1986), 136–40, presents the most vociferous challenge to the internal political justification of the new law of Athena. He points to the flawed arguments of the trial, especially, as markers that the

Despite being applied to a state instead of an individual, the structure of killing for glory necessarily entails the problems of the heroic mentality that tragedy so often dramatizes, including the critiques of the Trojan War earlier in the trilogy. Athena herself recognizes the "evils" that can come from victory in battle. These evils Athena would drive away forever, on the one hand through the restructuring of civic violence to face outward, and on the other through a strategy of accruing protection against chthonic forces. She has already gained Orestes as a heroic guardian, linked with the afterlife. She also seeks a bulwark in the Erinyes against the underworld forces that wreak havoc on a state (*Eum.* 1007–9):

> κατὰ γῆς σύμεναι τὸ μὲν ἀτηρὸν
> χωρὰς κατέχειν,[93] τὸ δὲ κερδαλέον
> πέμπειν πόλεως ἐπὶ νίκῃ.
>
> Driving it away, restrain under the earth what is destructive
> to the country, and send to the city
> what will bring gain upon victory.

Instead of sending individuals to ethical punishment, the Erinyes are now to curb the underworld. They are to convey "gain" (κερδαλέον, *kerdaleon*, 1008) for the state, understood as "victory" (νίκῃ, *nikē*, 1009). Athena thus reuses concepts already problematic in human descriptions of the Trojan War, which included afterlife punishment for the "killing of many," desire for gain (*kerdos*), and the need to suppress the claims of the war dead.[94] In Athena's schema, the Erinyes themselves should not proscribe bloodshed in war but should support it – since total victory is politically advantageous.

Athena recognizes that the negative powers that affect humanity lie beyond her immediate control. Consequently, she attempts to extenuate the forces of the underworld as part of her efforts to overturn human contingency itself. Primarily, Athena emphasizes *ending*. This is in line with the human need for closure that crisscrosses the trilogy, often marked by the use of *terma*. The Chorus of the *Agamemnon*, for example, sing that

---

new law is defective and based on threats of violence. He also suggests that the linguistic ties between the ending and the Trojan War intimate the brutality of Athenian policy in the coming generations.

[93] Accepting the codices and Sommerstein (1989) over the OCT's correction (following Burges) to ἀπέχειν.

[94] On profit (*kerdos*) and its problems in earlier parts of the *Oresteia* and the rest of Aeschylus, see Chapters 1 and 3. Athena herself recognizes the negative connotations of profit in calling her council "untouched by (desire for) profits" (κερδῶν ἄθικτον τοῦτο βουλευτήριον, *Eum.* 704, cf. 990–1).

the goddess Justice "guides all things to their end" (τέρμα, *terma*, *Ag.* 781, cf. 1177). Athena instantiates Justice in the *Eumenides*, and this notion of ending inflects even her entrance into the controversy: She immediately interrogates the Erinyes as to the "endpoint" of their chase (τὸ τέρμα, *to terma*, *Eum.* 422, cf. 633–5). This, they answer, will only be in the place with no happiness, understood as the underworld (423, cf. 950–1). The implication of this exchange and the transformation of the Erinyes is that Athena will offer a different *terma*; she bifurcates her justice specifically from the afterlife as the endpoint of ethical punishment.

The reformed Erinyes have both a blessing and a punishing aspect in the city, the latter of which instills fear in the citizens. Yet the theme of ending through the vocabulary of *terma* uncovers an aspect of the city that is masked by both the deemphasizing of their punishments and the acquittal of Orestes: the internal violence of Athena's justice. Orestes himself refers to it when describing the possible outcomes of the trial: "now is the end (τέρματ', *termat'*) of a noose for me, or to see the light" (*Eum.* 746, cf. Chapter 5). This language undercuts any radical break with previous notions of justice as violence, for it makes clear that upon conviction Orestes faces a coerced death, whether the court, the Erinyes, or he himself will be the agent of his *terma*. There is no indication that his life's ending, moreover, will release him from facing punishment in the underworld. Athena's court, then, promises deliverance neither from the violence of the law above nor from the possibility of afterlife judgment.

Athena's own mentions of *terma*, paradoxically, evoke *eternity*. Her radical solution to recurrent violence, the individual's finitude, and afterlife punishment is to emphasize the ever-enduring city. Through facing forward, Athena releases humanity from the recurring past that dominated the temporal structure of the trilogy. Cajoling the Erinyes, Athena repeatedly asserts the permanence of her promises (*Eum.* 898–9, cf. 891–2):

> Χο. καί μοι πρόπαντος ἐγγύην θήσῃ χρόνου;
> Αθ. ἔξεστι γάρ μοι μὴ λέγειν ἃ μὴ τελῶ.
>
> Chor. And will you make a pledge to me for all time?
> Ath. It is possible for me not to say what I will not fulfill.

*Telos* (in the verb τελῶ, *telō*, 899) here, as often, concatenates the notions of "fulfillment," "ritual initiation" (in the promises of cultic rituals for the Erinyes), and "ending."[95] There is a completeness and finality to Athena's words. The Erinyes embody the closed circle of vengeance and threaten that, if they retreat, humanity will spiral downward into permanent crime. Athena, however, straightens these curves, promising an eternally climbing path.[96]

---

[95] On *telos* with *dikē*, see Fischer (1965); Goldhill (1984a), 224, and (1984b), 169–74; Chiasson (1999), 148–59; and Seaford (2012), 126–7, 190–205.

The goddess insulates her declarations from human vicissitudes through constant recurrence to Zeus. She attributes the eternal mooring of the Erinyes to both Persuasion (Πειθοῦς, *Eum.* 970) and Zeus of the Assemblies (Ζεὺς ἀγοραῖος, 973). At the end, this highest Olympian power is said to revere (ἅζεται, 1002) the Athenians, a statement that differentiates them from the rest of humanity.[97] The *Eumenides* does not stop there, for the Erinyes are related to the *Moirai*; binding one, therefore, influences the other.[98] The last lines of the play conjoin to Athens the highest powers of permanence in the Greek universe: "Zeus, the all-seeing, and *Moira* (Ζεὺς πανόπτας . . . Μοῖρά τε) have thus come to the aid of Pallas' citizens" (1045–6).[99] All the previous conflicting values of humans and divinities are put aside for the martial, eternal, sanctioned victory of Athens.

The dangers of warfare within the trilogy cannot be purified away by Athena's insistence on total divine justification. Previously Agamemnon had claimed precisely such consensus among divinities in support of his own victory (*Ag.* 813–17):[100]

> δίκας γὰρ οὐκ ἀπὸ γλώσσης θεοὶ
> κλύοντες ἀνδροθνῆτας Ἰλιοφθόρους
> ἐς αἱματηρὸν τεῦχος οὐ διχορρόπως
> ψήφους ἔθεντο, τῷ δ᾽ ἐναντίῳ κύτει
> ἐλπὶς προσῄει χειρὸς οὐ πληρουμένῳ.

---

[96] The *Eumenides* prepares for Athena's uses of eternity from the start. Apollo's promise to Orestes insinuates that there will be an everlasting aspect to the acquittal, beyond the specific case (ἐς τὸ πᾶν, 83). Athena consistently emphasizes the perpetuity of her newly founded laws in similar language: "An ordinance, which I will establish for all time" (εἰς ἅπαντ᾽ . . . χρόνον, 484); "learn my laws for all time to come" (εἰς τὸν αἰανῆ χρόνον, 571–2); "this council of judges also into the future, always" (καὶ τὸ λοιπόν . . . αἰεί, 681–4); "for the benefit of my citizens into the future" (ἐς τὸ λοιπόν, 707–8). Cf. Chiasson (1999), esp. 156–9; but see Porter (1990), 44–5, who questions this use of "forever"; and Goldhill (1984b), e.g. 169–76, on the problems of teleology.

[97] This is part of what Sommerstein (2010a), 202–3, means by stating that gods are in some way *responsible* to mortals and have obligations toward them, implying that the divinities would suffer if they break such obligations; *contra* Griffith (1995), 106–7; and Chiasson (1999), 154–5.

[98] *Eum.* 956–67. The Erinyes ask blessings of the goddesses of marriage and the *Moirai*, their sisters on their mother's side (ὦ Μοῖραι ματροκασιγνῆται), goddesses of righteous apportionment (δαίμονες ὀρθονόμοι). See Hammond (1965), 42–55, and Chapter 4 for a discussion of fate and apportionment terms in the *Oresteia*.

[99] The previous line is corrupt, and I follow Sommerstein (2008b) in punctuation and translation over the OCT; cf. West (1990), 294–5.

[100] Cf. MacLeod (1982), 133–4.

> For the gods, hearing no pleas uttered by the tongue,
> without split opinion cast their votes
> into the urn of blood for the massacring destruction of Troy;
> toward the opposite vessel only
> hope approached – it was filled by no hand.

Agamemnon dismisses both division of opinion and persuasion. That is, he annuls the ideas behind Athena's rhetoric of peaceful integration and Athenian democratic practices. Instead, Agamemnon's imagery deliberately transmutes voting (note especially ψήφους, *psēphous*, 816) into divine unanimity. The passage illustrates the direct route from such consensus to total destruction. Agamemnon himself uses the terms "urn of blood" and "massacring" (ἀνδροθνῆτας, 814). He boasts of the destruction of Troy as a whole, not merely its army.[101] In the autocrat's view, there ought not be any checking forces against extermination.

Does the trilogy sanction such a vision of divine unanimity and lack of restraint in warfare? The Chorus of Elders show there is no consensus even in Agamemnon's own city. They emphasize citizen critique and their own disagreement (Chapter 2). They claim that the gods and Erinyes punish blood on men's hands, especially the killers of many. The Erinyes, too, warn against a loss of checks against violence, total unity, and acting outside of the mean. Yet the tyrant boasts of unconditional destruction, on account of divine unanimity.

How different, then, is Athena's vision for Athens from Agamemnon's justification of total war? On whatever grounds one might separate the two, the language is analogous. Surprisingly, although it is so often cited as a key democratic work, the *Oresteia* never mentions political decision-making through voting. The Areopagus, moreover, despite Athena instituting it as a guide and a checking force, is not a decision-making body either within the play or in contemporary Athens.[102] Within the play, the criteria for civic welfare are only unity and warfare. Athena's blessings are framed in terms of a beneficial outlet for inherent human violence, praising "victory without evil," "gain upon victory," and "foreign war and plenty of it."

---

[101] The Herald relates that Troy and its seed have been destroyed, uprooted by Agamemnon with the "mattock of Zeus the Bearer of Justice" (*Ag.* 525–6). This depiction of annihilation stands as the ultimate violence, regardless of whether one accepts the following disputed line concerning the desecration of the temples as well (527), on which see Chapter 1.

[102] On the history of the Areopagus and questions surrounding its political role and reform, see the Introduction. Sommerstein (1989), 13–17, notes that its members are only ever called δικασταί, "jurors," in the play, not addressed as the βουλή, "assembly," which they always are in surviving speeches. For the construction of the Areopagus' authority and its difference from the Erinyes, see Allen (2000), 21–3.

Her language evades the earlier dramatizations of war sweeping up innocents and the blood pollution that violence brings. Athena's insistence on divine unanimity, when contrasted to the subsisting justice of Hades, draws attention to the problems of her militarism.[103] Under Athena's law, despite the vocabulary of release, eternity, and light, individuals are sacrificed on a grand scale – in the name of civic harmony.

Hades' independence as judge contrasts with the solutions of Athena and with the claims of divine unity. He is never assimilated into the *polis*. His law seems to offer no consideration whatsoever of position, mitigating circumstances, or political gain. The implication of his universality is that humans who participate in warfare's violations (especially transgressions against the gods) would come under his purview, even if they are Athenians. Within the *Oresteia*'s divine world and vocabulary of justice, only the possibility of judgment in the afterlife enables continuing the critique of the individual *qua* individual. Even after the promise of eternal victory without evil, the contrast of Athena and Hades evokes an undecided struggle between politics and ethics.

---

[103] The theme of unanimity as a solution contradicts the thesis of Griffith (1995), esp. 107–24, that tragedies in general and the *Oresteia* in particular attempt to produce "solidarity without consensus."

# *Conclusions*

In this world
we walk on the roof of hell,
gazing at flowers.

Kobayashi Issa[1]

> We must agree with Freud, to whom our culture and civilization were merely a thin layer liable at any moment to be pierced by the destructive forces of the "underworld." We have had to accustom ourselves gradually to living without the ground beneath our feet, without justice, without freedom, without security.
>
> Stefan Zweig[2]

> The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals . . . A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors.
>
> Chinua Achebe[3]

Poetic, religious, and philosophical engagement with the beyond transcends cultures and time periods. The notion of the afterlife has always operated both literally and as a metaphor. Issa evokes the thin crust separating everyday life from the cavernous domain of death, ever present but disregarded. Zweig incites us, through Freud's continuing influence, to examine unconscious, violent forces, both in our individual psyches and on a global level. Achebe narrates the rituals surrounding dead ancestors and the role that their masked impersonators play in traditional life, including the active mediation of quarrels for the sake of the community.

The emphasis on the afterlife is among the most significant legacies of Greek thought, a legacy that must continue to be questioned on its home turf. The depictions of diverse afterlives in Greek literature and religion substantiate anxieties over the aftereffects of one's own deeds, one's status at death, and the actions of one's survivors. Plato's dialogues influentially propose that ethical scrutiny ought to transcend the living consequences of our actions. Yet in Greek thought until Plato, there seems to be no *structured* connection between what may happen beyond death and challenges to ethical and political values. The *Oresteia* – as the preceding chapters have argued – is the exception. Its intricate network of disparate afterlives profoundly challenges the very claims of justice it dramatizes.

---

[1] Robert Haas (tr.), *The Essential Haiku* (Hopewell, NJ, 1984), 158.

[2] *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln, NE, 1964), 4.

[3] *Things Fall Apart* (New York, 1983), 115.

Human existence beyond death is never given a single, dogmatic expression in the *Oresteia*. The trilogy dramatizes a full range of conceptions: from oblivion to glorious praise, to ghostly returns, to pacific or agitated underworld existence, to divine punishment for ethical transgressions. Aeschylus presents deliberate ideational conflicts across the trilogy and, in scenes like the *kommos*, alternates in quick succession incommensurate perspectives. Moreover, the claim that humans are subject to ethical judgment and punishment in the afterlife for specific crimes ventures beyond the practices of mainstream Greek religion and the intimations of previous literature. Drawing together the insights from each chapter within the frameworks sketched out in the Introduction demonstrates how the poetics of afterlife possibilities affects individual perspectives and outcomes, as well as notions of personal and political justice.

## Afterlife Poetics and Ethics

Each character's interaction with the beyond unearths a previously unexamined subset of ethical concerns. When grouped together, new patterns in the trilogy emerge. By transforming the understood endpoint of life, every reference to the afterlife changes the ethical calculus. The specifics of afterlife existence, especially underworld punishment, compel rethinking of character actions and claims to justice, of Athena's new law, and even of the lives of the spectators.

Toward the beginning of the trilogy, several characters refer to their own death as oblivion. The Herald and the Elders several times rhetorically exclaim their desire for such an escape from life. Each instance heightens the underlying psychological pressures, for the former from the just-completed war and for the latter from the bloody coup. Their appeals to death as utter nullity and their suppressed allusions to the afterlife are indications of emotional trauma and powerlessness over the surrounding world. The thirst for oblivion is far more prominent with

Cassandra, who is facing her foreknown murder. Her appeals to death as insensibility directly respond to her violent past, current human enslavement, and continuing divine curse. As the trilogy progresses, the characters whose bloody deeds propel the plot also rhetorically wish for peace through death. Aegisthus claims he could die happy after vengeance, whereas Orestes hints that his existence will be entirely expended in the matricide. A pattern emerges that the desire for nullity is prominent in the mouths of characters who have less control over their lives but is subordinate for those who act most aggressively. It represents a little-studied aspect of the ethos of these characters. Taken together, these instances constitute an original theme in the study of the *Oresteia*, namely closure-focused relationships to death.

There are ethical repercussions for regarding death as a total ending of the self. It involves abdicating responsibility in two ways. First, it rhetorically negates a character's ability to mitigate their situation, thus loosening their imperative to act in life. Each such exclamation of surrender, however, contains nuances and leads to reversals. The Chorus of Elders, despite their stated need to escape from life, also attempt to resist tyranny at Argos. For Cassandra, courage in confronting the unchangeable moment of doom leads to praise in the language of glory.

The second problem of responsibility concerns ethical desert. For the characters who participate in kin-murder, a peaceful death means liberation from both guilt and overtly threatened punishments. Aegisthus and Orestes desire death to come only after they accomplish their vengeance. Their wishes thus resonate with Clytemnestra's desire to avoid punishment by buying off the curse of the house and enervating Agamemnon's spirit. In keeping with the *Oresteia*'s deep concern with repercussions, the attempt at avoidance of ethical desert through a peaceful death points to a structural lack within life. It is only through divine afterlife punishment that consequences for wrongdoing seem to be guaranteed.

A similar interplay between consequences and the need for closure occurs in the competing representations of the Trojan War dead. Each family's sorrow at receiving the ashes of their fallen soldiers threatens to activate a civic curse on Agamemnon. The citizens do not see death as a peaceful closure for their own loved ones; nor is the problem of adequate recompense ever addressed. Yet the Herald glosses his comrades' deaths as peaceful rest, claiming that the benefit of victory so thoroughly compensates for their loss that they do not even wish to return. Already in this instance, death exceeds the limit of life in the Herald's speech, as he suggests (in the negative) that the war dead might rise. He subsequently strains to exclude these same casualties from glory, only applying it to those currently living. Carefully attended, his manipulations of the legacy of the dead as an inadequate response to citizen anger insinuate doubts about positive assessments of the war.

The fate of Agamemnon reinforces these doubts, through dramatizing the incompleteness of his life and the horrors of its end. The returning conqueror is cut down for destroying his family to prosecute the war. Applying Agamemnon's claim that one can only tell the worth of a life at its close would mean that his ignominious death retrospectively contaminates his life. The depiction of a dishonored burial for the great king and father in the *Choephoroi* creates an emotional need for some postmortem transformation of his fate. Ritual is not enough; closure and peaceful oblivion are not even mentioned. Tragic pity structures the desire for a continuity of the dead.

The needs for closure and for continuity diverge ever further as the afterlife becomes more prominent in the trilogy. The haunting of the dead is central to the dramatic arc: Aegisthus justifies killing Agamemnon through his dead siblings, who reappear to Cassandra; Clytemnestra, as part of her justification, depicts Iphigeneia meeting her father in the underworld; the mourners seek the power of Agamemnon's spirit; and finally Clytemnestra's Ghost returns to demand vengeance and depicts the dead harassing her in the underworld. In diverse ways, these appeals to the dead and ghostly returns extend the bases for ethical consequences.

The revenant dead of the *Oresteia* give spectral form to the abstract notion of accountability. Cassandra's vision of the murdered Children of Thyestes belies the theme of death providing an escape from violence. The silent Children's exposed innards are a symbol of unfulfilled vengeance. Their infiltration into the present undoes the Elders' attempts to shutter the violent history of the house. The Children thus instantiate the theme that the past affects the future in the trilogy precisely through the continuation of ethical obligations to dead individuals. Yet there is a paradox inherent in the undead presaging the murder of Agamemnon: His punishment occurs exclusively in life. In Cassandra's words, the conqueror of Troy is subject to "the judgment of the gods." Although the message is delivered by afterlife figures, ethical desert is understood in her scene only as a violent death, with no mention of further punishment in the beyond. This is in line with the restriction of references to afterlife judgment to only the Choruses. The rest of the trilogy (until the last third of the *Eumenides*) by turns focuses on vengeance in life and alternate afterlives.

Another aspect of Cassandra's scene introduces uncertainty into the continuation of individuals after death. Cassandra's couplet about singing prophecies in Hades opens up counterpoints to the themes of doom, closure at death, and glory in the usual interpretations of her scene. The suggestive language of the couplet is integral to transforming the overtones of determinism with which Aeschylus has surrounded her. Her potential afterlife thus points to an ethics of indeterminacy: Reevaluation of her living suffering, continuing punishment, and resistance remains feasible. In a similar way to modern reimaginings of Cassandra – such as Christa Wolf's and Anne Carson's – considering the merest possibility of her afterlife allows audiences and readers of the original to reengage Cassandra with a renewed sense of contingency and humanity.

The poetics of multiplicity manifests more patently in the central scene of mourning for Agamemnon than anywhere else. The rituals of lament in the *kommos* are intended to restore a modicum of honor to the king after his slaughter and dishonored burial. Yet his mourners deemphasize closure. Instead, they depict Agamemnon as a vengeful spirit rising from the dead, a superhuman being sending power from the beyond, a king possibly receiving honor in the underworld, and a father gaining continuity through children and burial ritual *only* if vengeance occurs. His mourners' positions contradict one another in direct succession. After the elaborate prayers fail to garner any response, Orestes declares that Agamemnon's spirit is bereft of understanding. Once Orestes hears about a possible sign in the dream of Clytemnestra (deeply connected with chthonic forces and the dead), he again reverses himself. Orestes prays to his father's tomb for fulfillment of the promised vengeance. Lastly, when Orestes appeals to his father's spirit in the *Eumenides*, it is to no avail; the Erinyes scoff at him. As a result of these speculated possibilities and reversals, Agamemnon's postmortem state remains subject to deep uncertainty, for both the characters and the spectators.

Each of the possible afterlives in the *kommos* reopens ethical contingency, both for the dead and for the living. Some concern the dead supernaturally affecting life; others indicate a transformation of status after death, dependent on events in life. Through ritual and emotional expression, the mourning reconstructs a community around the loss of the father-king and the obligations to him. The emphasis on Agamemnon's dishonored burial and the vision of Agamemnon as he should be honored in Hades both build social pressure for vengeance. Regardless of how uncertain they may be, the perspectives of the living on the afterlife motivate (in part, for Orestes also has other reasons) decisive action.

The counterpart to the requirement for vengeance has rarely been discussed: The postmortem state of characters in the trilogy *inverts* certain of their living characteristics. Cassandra, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes each potentially undergoes a radical transformation after death. Both alternatives for Cassandra's underworld existence are far from the powerless state in which her life ends: Either she is ensconced as a prophet (which her own words suggest) or participates in the pursuit of Clytemnestra's Ghost (as implied in that character's speech), or neither. Agamemnon is subject to a full rewriting of his legacy. Whereas Clytemnestra imagines him greeted in the underworld by the daughter he killed, Agamemnon's children go to great lengths to whitewash his crime. As they reconstruct his honors from the abased burial he was given, they characterize Agamemnon as merely an ancestor figure and promise him only familial honors. They make no mention of the glorious war exploits that were foremost in the Elders' concern with his lack of kingly funeral. This reversal also radically transmutes the familial and political dynamics of the living. Instead of ruling in the shadow of the kingliest of the Greeks, Orestes may more easily take Agamemnon's place. Orestes subsequently transmutes from a powerless son whose only accomplishment is killing his own mother to an eternally powerful civic hero. These reversals are of major ethical importance, as they demonstrate both the contingency of living reputation and the potential for radical, posthumous transformation.

The ethical claims of the dead are spectrally embodied in Clytemnestra's Ghost. She is self-moving; the Ghost has not been summoned. Instead of having others speak for her, as Agamemnon's children do for him, or having the support of Olympians, as Orestes has, Clytemnestra's Ghost is fundamentally reliant on her own rhetoric. She therefore paints a picture of afterlife dishonor to rouse the Erinyes. In her depiction, the afterlife is an "elsewhere," beyond the political world of Argos but maintaining the interpersonal dynamics of honor. The Ghost draws on all the resources of language to describe a suffering below. Although interpreters have generally claimed that Clytemnestra is paying for her crimes after death, her Ghost carefully avoids the issue of ethical punishment from divine forces. It is those she killed whom she blames for her persecution, and her Ghost treats the situation as *contingent*. The dead queen desires the Erinyes to intervene in the living world in order to return her honor and save her from this harassment. That is, the Ghost projects the values of life into the underworld and actively works to change her fate.

When the Ghost of Clytemnestra shrieks of being a murdered mother, her ethical reference is twofold: Not only has Orestes killed his parent, but

Clytemnestra's vengeance on Agamemnon was for her daughter. As much as the Ghost focuses her claims on herself, the Erinyes assimilate them to universal ethical rules. Although Clytemnestra's character is compromised by her living acts and deception, the chthonic demons at first uphold her allegations as both locally and globally valid, expanding her claims to a general obligation to avenge the murder of family. It is only when they are pressed that they narrow their purview to avenging transgressions against blood kin, excluding other sacred relationships. The trial then sweeps away the Ghost of Clytemnestra's ethical claims. Within the play, the vote overseen by Athena vindicates the matricide for gendered and political reasons. The dominant figure in earlier stages of the trilogy, Clytemnestra recedes into a vaguely monstrous representative of the old law. The positive, divine, civic persuasion of Athena seems to correct the vengeful, human, selfish persuasion of Clytemnestra. Putting the Ghost to bed adds to the dramatic satisfaction of the ending.

Yet the Ghost's challenge is multivalenced. Just as Clytemnestra's reappearance amplifies the claims of the dead, so her speech and costume metatheatrically draw attention to representational issues and their ethical effects. Clytemnestra, living and dead, is a verbally compelling figure, weaving fictions and challenging her society by force of personality. The insubstantial figure dreamt by the previously invisible Erinyes points to her spectral body as proof of her claims. In some ways, the Ghost is symbolic of the layers of tragedy itself. She is seen but untouchable, costumed in symbolic blood, present but absent. Although living Clytemnestra was condemned for her vengeance, the staging of the Ghost ethically problematizes seeing her own murder as simply just. Not only is the trial about her murder, the same actor would also have played Athena. It illustrates that Athena's new law subdues not just the personal aspect of vengeance, but the claims of the individual in contrast to political forces. However, whereas Agamemnon, Orestes, and even the Erinyes are purified of their bloody deeds, Clytemnestra never achieves a postmortem reversal of reputation. Unredeemed, the Ghost of Clytemnestra may continue to haunt the spectators and readers of the *Oresteia*. Will they allow themselves to be moved by her ethical claims as a human being despite all her crimes, despite her deceptions, despite her lack of rehabilitation?

Lastly, both in order and eschatologically speaking, the *Oresteia* decisively links ethical concerns and the afterlife with a rare reference to punishment in Hades for all mortals. The human Choruses of the first two plays hint at retribution after death. The chthonic Erinyes, by contrast, concretely claim that Hades' punishment is part of the ethical structure of the universe. Their revelation diverges greatly from the numerous other outcomes for the dead described by human characters, but it interweaves with those of the other Choruses and is never contradicted by other divinities. The reference to Hades has been assimilated by some scholars to Sicilian or nonstate Greek religious ideas. Other scholars have merely taken note of it in passing, as an early intimation of the later Platonic and monotheistic focus on ethical postmortem judgment. Within the trilogy, however, ethical punishment by the Erinyes in life and Hades in the afterlife has no salvational aspect. Instead, it expands the suffering reserved for a few great sinners in the *Odyssey* to all humans who have transgressed. It also differentiates the *Oresteia* from earlier literature (including Pindar's *Olympian* 2), from contemporary mainland cultic practice (such as mystery cults), and from later philosophical and religious afterlife depictions. Punishment by Hades in the *Oresteia* draws attention to individual ethical transgression without reference to belief, ritual, or group identity.

Hades' judgment in the trilogy is unique in a number of other respects. These include the delineation of distinct transgressions and the use of Athenian legal vocabulary. The types of transgressions, procedural terms, and universality of his judgment draw attention to Hades' diremption from politically based judicial systems. His justice diverges from the workings of Athenian law, which has a split-authority structure, allows appeals to mutual benefit, and gives the possibility of release. The fact that Hades is the invisible, singular overseer removes him from being affected by personal overtures, suppliancy, political institutions, and even religious purification. Seeing all things and recording them permanently, Hades' purview is understood as unlimited and his judgment inexorable.

Attention to the justice of Hades allows for a new perspective on the previous ethical claims in the trilogy. The divine revelation of a universal code raises the possibility that the actions of characters have entirely different postmortem consequences than they themselves believed. Taking it seriously means one must reexamine Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's afterlives, among others: Can they really be rewritten after death? Did they, and Orestes, commit ethically unabsolvable crimes? The trilogy only hints at such questions, but thinking them through allows for a deeper engagement with the potential afterlives of each character and the ideas surrounding the afterlife more generally.

The set of relationships Hades governs are of paramount concern within the trilogy. The parent–child, guest–host, and human–divine relationships are presented as absolutes, whose violation must be scrupulously punished.

Yet in every part of the trilogy, they are transgressed by humans in the narrative, divinities in mythical times, and states in times of war. It is notable that within the trilogy not a single instance of these violations is ever described as having been punished by Hades. By the end, Athena's new law transforms each of these relationships for political reasons.

Athena deliberately separates the realm below in her benedictions for Athens. Her divine alliances with chthonic and Olympian powers are meant to keep it at bay. This puts the ethical justice of the underworld god and Athena's political justice in implicit conflict. In ethical terms, I argue that the trilogy is hinting at the irreconcilable divergence of the individual and the state. This conflict is at the forefront of many tragedies and connected to numerous other themes. Yet it is generally lost in the seemingly total focus on the Athenian *polis* in the *Oresteia*'s ending.

To sum up, through its contradictions, the afterlife in the *Oresteia* connects poetics and ethics in two ways. First, it literarily draws attention to numerous, divergent outcomes for human beings. The possibilities of continuation provide leverage for characters to challenge their own ethical situations and those of others. The afterlife overturns what seems to be a final accounting. Thus what I have termed the poetics of the beyond gives characters and spectators another set of tools to question absolute claims about values and justice. Secondly, the trilogy extends ethical uncertainty even after divine revelation. The poetics of multiplicity of conflicting but possibly valid views encourages continual ethical scrutiny.

## Human and Divine Politics

Continuity after death radically alters the *Oresteia*'s political structures and actions. Staged ghosts call for vengeance against the rulers of Argos, the debased prestige of its murdered monarchs requires avenging, and the casualties from the Trojan War weigh down on its citizenry. Conversely, Athena explicitly curtails chthonic powers and integrates them into the Athenian political system. The contrasting afterlives possible in the trilogy provide insights into representations of political choices, rulers, cities, warfare, and the Athenocentric ending as it redefines human–divine relationships.

In the arc of the mythical Argive monarchy, the invasions of afterlife figures undercut attempts to consolidate power after political coups. The Children of Thyestes haunt the ruling line of Atreus. Both Aegisthus, their sibling, and Clytemnestra, through her references to Iphigeneia in Hades, put themselves forward as avengers of the dead against

Agamemnon. Simultaneously with fulfilling the claims of the dead, Aegisthus recovers the rulership of Argos through regicide. What should be an honored, kingly tomb then becomes an inverse site of political symbolism. After Agamemnon's overthrow, Clytemnestra keeps the citizens and family from his funeral and mutilates his corpse to control his afterlife. "Let him not boast gloriously in Hades," Clytemnestra declares, gainsaying Agamemnon's claim to epic glory both in the political world and in the underworld. When vengeance comes for her, Clytemnestra immediately understands "the dead are killing the living," a phrase that encapsulates both the continuing influence of Agamemnon's spirit and the revival of the heir, Orestes, from his feigned death. Clytemnestra's Ghost, no longer able to affect the political world directly, nevertheless reappears from her dishonored afterlife to urge vengeance on Orestes, which threatens to extinguish the chain of succession. These extensions of personal claims and honor after death focus an Athenian audience on the structural issues with monarchy, a government – unlike theirs – dependent on the life of the ruler.

When considered on a civic scale, the afterlife plays a role in critiques of both violence and monarchy itself. Lament for the war dead is the basis of citizen anger against the rulers of Argos and a counterpoint to the Herald's and Agamemnon's narratives of heroic glory. The Chorus of Elders as collective in this case speak for and in some sense exemplify the citizenry. Through them, pity as a civic emotion accrues to the offstage citizens of Argos who have lost their sons. It is modeled onstage by pity for Cassandra, the victim of the war, who laments her lost kin and civilization. The Chorus of Slave Women reinforce this collective emotion concerning war in their laments for their own losses, intertwined with the laments for Agamemnon. Thus, the audience hears of losses to both the victors and the defeated. Threats against the leaders arising from the mass bloodshed do not stop at a civic curse, for, according to the Elders, the Erinyes come down on the "killers of many," and there is "no defense among the unseen." Even early in the trilogy, the possibility of punishment in the afterlife for bloodshed reinforces political critique.

The corollary to the static conception of the dead as focusing critiques of political acts is the possibility of a change of fate after death. One must here note the absence of an afterlife theme that is prominent in later world literature, religion, and history: political martyrdom for an improved afterlife. The Chorus of Elders, Aegisthus, and Orestes do rhetorically express desire for death in conjunction with their violent resistance to the current regime. Aegisthus and Orestes, however, only imply by this that their life would be fulfilled in taking vengeance, whereas the Chorus of Elders imply that death would demonstrate bravery in a fight against tyranny. No character in the *Oresteia* imagines that they would receive a positive afterlife through dying in the service of political change.

More central to the play is the metamorphosis of two rulers of Argos after their death. Orestes and the mourners pointedly never offer civic cult to Agamemnon. Their promised future honors are so limited as to reduce the great conqueror to an anodyne ancestor figure. Agamemnon's post-mortem fate also cuts against the historical reality of his Peloponnesian cult status. The character arc of this most powerful ruler demonstrates the theme of circumstances after death altering political legacy. The lesson one might draw from such a radical transformation is that, in the *Oresteia*, contingency is the essence of human politics.

The conversion of Orestes into a hero picks up on the issue of human contingency in the political ending of the trilogy. Ancestral heroes as chthonic semidivinities not only bless the ruling house in the *Oresteia*, they also oversee the expedition to Troy. Yet these two functions are later split between Agamemnon and Orestes. After his children minimize the role of the dead Agamemnon as a possible heroic protector of Argos, Orestes foretells his own direct influence upon Argive policy from the grave. The reconceptualization of Agamemnon as a family figure allows his son political freedom. The moment he gains unchallenged control over Argos, though, Orestes uses this freedom to link himself to a foreign city. Since he was released by Athens from his promised death and afterlife punishment, Orestes promises to personally curse any Argives who march on Athens. The historical alliance of Athens and Argos thus receives an afterlife, heroic aetiology. Crucially, no change of policy will ever be possible. Orestes' heroic protection of the treaty begins the *Eumenides*' supernatural assault on the problem of contingency in human politics.

As individual and political violence resounds throughout the trilogy, the chthonic Erinyes become ever more prominent. They have often been seen to embody the curse of the house, but from the start they are also called upon in the context of the Trojan War. When they arrive on stage, they depict themselves as restraining the dark forces internal to humans. The Erinyes punish acts based on *eris* as desire for vengeance and *erōs* as desire for gain. They claim that another emotion, fear, ought to keep humanity from transgressing on both personal and civic levels. The Erinyes' original separateness enables them to reject Olympian interference on the one hand

and deny that political power is a defense on the other. The nonpolitical aspects of the Erinyes' curse-law manifest in its overly personal nature. Their law is entwined with their own honor and excessive in its denial to an individual of any supplication or end to punishment. Its bloody, perpetual structure pollutes them and their claims to justice.

The new law uses the Erinyes as intermediaries against the pernicious influence of the underworld. The dark power they are meant to restrain below is, metaphorically, the brutal nature of humanity (its *eris* and *erōs*) and, literally, the claims of the dead for honor and vengeance. One may also interpret the underworld as the chthonic divinities' potential influence on the world through their nonpolitical justice. Athena, in her new law, denies all such chthonic claims through a rhetoric of mutuality, light, release, and eternity. This parallels the dramatic replacement of named figures in the first two plays by the anonymous, collective structure of Athens. Politically, checking the underworld means rejecting the focus on the individual.

Nevertheless, Athena's new law is not a template for either peaceful coexistence or democracy. Instead, the ending of the trilogy emphasizes the divinely chosen status of Athens, the piety of the Athenians, the need to fear the authority of the Areopagus (never the demos), and the need for total unity. More pointedly still, Athena and the Erinyes offer benedictions to Athens on two political conditions: absolute submission to civic authority and constant external conquest. These putatively lead to release from all harm and eternal civic profit, understood as flourishing combined with guiltless victory. In Athena's language, the city and the army are synonymous. Her calls for total unity negate plural perspectives. Where is the room for separate opinions and debates? After the trial, the united divinities sanction external territorial wars as the cure for civil strife. Rather than only occurring under the "old law" of vengeance, violence is the foundation and sustaining feature of the new law of Athena.

The political obligation to Athens is not just for local heroes or minor divinities: Zeus and the *Moirai*, previously common to all, now link themselves specifically to one city. The exorbitance of divinities lined up on behalf of Athens and the insistence on eternity bespeak apprehension concerning not only human choices but also the fickleness of the anthropomorphic pantheon. If the Erinyes can change, why not other divinities? Athena lines up blessings against contingency, both historical and divine.

The emphasis on total divine justification leads to a perilous theological politics. Divinities, when acting in the world, become subject to its circumstances. The Erinyes are now to judge with the interests of Athens foremost. For this reason, they are unable to punish Orestes; they are no longer free to act outside of a human social and political framework. Whereas previously the Erinyes set a law for all humanity, henceforth they are part of Athena's separation between Athenians and non-Athenians, the latter being the objects of conquest. This theme has its template in Orestes' promise as an afterlife hero to punish his own citizens from the grave if they break with Athens. Under the new law, not only Orestes and the Erinyes but even the most universal divinities justify total warfare.

It has not been recognized that Athena's new law is countered by one divine force within the play: Hades. The underworld seems to remain a separate realm to which humans still depart after death and in which the judgment of the divinity continues. The *Oresteia*'s representation of divinities tied to the city thus contains a deliberate reserve: Greek gods are not *all* constrained to support Athens or to sanction its political violence. Hades' judgment opposes centering value on political unity and warfare.

The use of Athenian legal vocabulary evokes the immense discrepancies between human judicial process and Hades' divine mind. Primary among these is Hades' distance from human law, which is based on multiplicity and contingency. The trilogy dramatizes an exemplary trial, with its adversarial forensic oratory, sly appeals to the judge, extraneous promises and threats to the city, a divided jury, and a blanket acquittal. Many members of the audience would have had experience in contemporary Athenian courts and assemblies, with their plural voices in debate, arguments over evidence and reliability, split votes, appeals for pity, arguments concerning political benefit, the influence of minority opinions, and the possibility of later reversal. The qualities of Hades' justice contradict these processes at every turn through divine knowledge, lack of debate, singular judgment, and eternal punishment without the possibility of mitigation. Hades is not only unbribable, he is exclusively concerned with individual action as opposed to civic good.

The profoundly political distinction between the law of Athena and that of Hades presents a challenge to every aspect of the Athenocentric ending. Whereas the goddess differentiates between humans based on their allegiance, Hades judges the actions of individuals without political relationships, justifications, or protections. The trial overseen by Athena acquits the one who transgressed both parent–child bonds and *xenia*, using arguments that undercut the validity of the bonds themselves. These are the human relationships Hades' law is said to protect. Killing in warfare is not immune from Hades' judgment. The descriptions of the Trojan War, for instance, emphasize its violations of *xenia* and its transgressions against the gods. Humans who participate in such total destruction are said to be subject to afterlife requital. Moreover, the ethical system that Hades represents is never assimilated to what would be a single-voiced jingoistic "message." Once the Erinyes join Athens, Hades provides the sole continuation of the old law, of total punishment. Just as Athena's Areopagus and *Semnai Theai* restrain civic misdeeds through fear, the *Oresteia* implies that Hades' justice presents a *competing* fear. This parallel divine law denaturalizes the collective, bellicose, eternally blessed future of Athens.

No single facet of any theme in the *Oresteia*, including afterlife judgment, is straightforward. The dramatic use of gods particularizes the law represented by each: Athena puts her justice in gendered terms; the Erinyes depict Hades in their violent, curse-like songs. As a continuation of their terrifying punishments, they designate Hades a *miastōr*. That is, instead of his law being unproblematically court-like, the Erinyes implicate him in the pollution of violence. His implacability – previously the Erinyes' quality – means he himself ignores a sacred Greek law, the right of suppliants. Eternal violence thus stains both the Athenocentric ending and judgment in the underworld.

If the *Eumenides* offers revelation, it also provides no plenary, singular imperative; its divine world remains manifold. The inconcinnity between gods bound to a particular state and the universal judgment of individuals below maintains multiplicity. It suggests an excess that subverts the promised unanimity of the divine in favor of Athens. There is never an explicit contrast between Hades' law and Athena's. Yet their diverging demands on humanity enjoin audiences to reapply the assumptions, character, and consequences of Hades to Athena and vice versa. One may imagine mirrors, an echo chamber, or even mutually revenant concepts – each eternally haunting the other. All are possible metaphors for this interplay. By describing the law of Hades and that of Athena, the *Eumenides* makes ethics and politics reciprocally critical.

This book has examined how diverse representations of human possibilities beyond death transform values within the *Oresteia*. In the trilogy, as in the world more generally, ethical claims and political promises look toward a *telos*. Both justify significant, often violent acts with a pledge of resolution. Yet, as we have seen, divergent potential continuations after death intrinsically evoke questions about endings. On an individual scale, the death of characters does not efface elements of their value as a person. Their ethical claims may and should continue to affect the world. On a political scale, references to afterlife ethical punishment invite audiences and readers to think past the ostensible closure of the bellicose finale. Hades' realm implicitly challenges Athena's new order. The multiplicities in the poetry and polytheism of the trilogy thus foster reconsideration of its major themes. This efflorescence of possibilities is widely applicable to the world outside tragedy as well. The plural poetics of the beyond suggests an ethically and politically responsible pathway for considering the run of history, the eternal tomorrow.

# *References*

Albinus, L. 2000. *The House of Hades: Studies in Ancient Greek Eschatology*. Aarhus.

Alexiou, M. 2002. *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. 2nd ed. Lanham, MD.

Allen, D. S. 2000. *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens*. Princeton, NJ.

Altieri, C. 1998. "Lyrical Ethics and Literary Experience," *Style*, 32: 272–97.

Anderson, F. M. B. 1929. "The Character of Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus," *TAPA*, 60: 136–54.

1932. "The Character of Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroe* and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus," *AJP*, 53: 301–19.

Annas, J. 1982. "Plato's Myths of Judgement," *Phronesis*, 27: 119–43.

1992. "Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 6: 119–36.

Antonaccio, C. M. 1994. "Contesting the Past: Hero Cult, Tomb Cult, and Epic in Early Greece," *AJA*, 98: 389–410.

1998. "The Archaeology of Ancestors," in Dougherty, C., and Kurke, L. (eds.), *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics*. Oxford: 46–70.

Arrington, N. T. 2010. "Topographic Semantics: The Location of the Athenian Public Cemetery and Its Significance for the Nascent Democracy," *Hesperia*, 79: 499–539.

Azoulay, V. 2017. *The Tyrant-Slayers of Ancient Athens: A Tale of Two Statues*, tr. J. Lloyd. Oxford.

Bacon, H. H. 2001. "The Furies' Homecoming," *CP*, 96: 48–59.

Bakewell, G. W. 1997. "*Eumenides* 267–75: μέγας Ἅιδης εὔθυνος," *CQ*, 47: 298–9.

Bardel, R. 2005. "Spectral Traces: Ghosts in Tragic Fragments," in McHardy, F., Robson, J., and Harvey, D. (eds.), *Lost Dramas of Classical Athens: Greek Tragic Fragments*. Exeter: 83–112.

Barrett, J. 2002. *Staged Narrative: Poetics and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy*. Berkeley, CA.

Beekes, R. S. P. 1998. "Hades and Elysion," in Jasanoff, J. H., Melchert, H. C., Oliver, L., and Watkins, C. (eds.), *Mír Curad: Studies in Honor of Calvert Watkins*. Innsbruck: 17–28.

Bees, R. 2009. *Aischylos: Interpretationen zum Verständnis seiner Theologie*. Munich.

Belfiore, E. S. 2000. *Murder Among Friends: Violation of Philia in Greek Tragedy*. New York.

Bernabé, A., and Jiménez San Cristóbal, A. I. 2008. *Instructions for the Netherworld: The Orphic Gold Tablets*. Leiden.

Bernard-Donals, M. F. 2005. "'Difficult Freedom': Levinas, Language, and Politics," *Diacritics*, 35: 62–77.

Bernstein, M. A. 1994. *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History*. Berkeley, CA.

Betensky, A. 1978. "Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: The Power of Clytemnestra," *Ramus*, 7: 11–25.

Blanc, A. 2012. "Étymologies grecques: formes en -εικ- (ἀεικέλιος, μενοεικής, ἐπιεικτός)," *Glotta*, 82: 54–98.

Boedeker, D. 1998. "Hero Cult and Politics in Herodotus: The Bones of Orestes," in Dougherty, C., and Kurke, L. (eds.), *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics*. Oxford: 164–77.

Bollack, J., and Judet de La Combe, P. 1981. *L'Agamemnon d'Eschyle: le texte et ses interprétations*. 3 vols. Lille.

Bowie, A. M. 1993. "Religion and Politics in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *CQ*, 43: 10–31.

Bowman, L. M. 2007. "The Curse of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*," *Scholia*, 16: 15–25.

Brault, P.-A. 2009. "Playing the Cassandra: Prophecies of the Feminine in the *Polis* and Beyond," in McCoskey, D. E., and Zakin, E. (eds.), *Bound by the City: Greek Tragedy, Sexual Difference, and the Formation of the Polis*. Albany, NY.

Bremmer, J. N. 1983. *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*. Princeton, NJ.

2002. *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*. London.

2006. "The Rise of the Hero Cult and the New Simonides," *ZPE*, 158: 15–26.

2014. *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*. Berlin.

Brook, A. E. 2018. *Tragic Rites: Narrative and Ritual in Sophoclean Drama*. Madison, WI.

Brown, A. L. 1983. "The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*: Real Life, the Supernatural, and the Stage,"*JHS*, 103: 13–34.

1984. "Eumenides in Greek Tragedy," *CQ*, 34: 260–81.

2018. *Aeschylus: Libation Bearers*. Liverpool.

Budelmann, F., and Easterling, P. E. 2010. "Reading Minds in Greek Tragedy," *G&R*, 57: 289–303.

Burian, P. 1986. "Zeus Σωτὴρ Τρίτος and Some Triads in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *AJP*, 107: 332–42.

Burkert, W. 1985. *Greek Religion*. Cambridge, MA.

1986. *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, tr. P. Bing. Berkeley, CA.

Buxton, R. G. A. 1982. *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Peitho*. Cambridge and New York.

Cairns, D. L. 1993. *Aidōs: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*. Oxford.

Cairns, D. L. (ed.). 2013. *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought*. Swansea.

Calder, W. M. 1988. "*Vita Aeschyli* 9: Miscarriages in the Theatre of Dionysos," *CQ*, 38: 554–5.

Carter, D. M. 2007. *The Politics of Greek Tragedy*. Exeter.

Cartledge, P. 2016. *Democracy: A Life*. New York.
Casey, J. 2009. *After Lives: A Guide to Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*. Oxford.
Castelli, E. A. 2004. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. New York.
Catenaccio, C. 2011. "Dream as Image and Action in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *GRBS*, 51: 202–31.
Cavanaugh, M. B. 1996. *Eleusis and Athens: Documents in Finance, Religion and Politics in the Fifth Century* B.C. Atlanta.
Cawthorn, K. 2008. *Becoming Female: The Male Body in Greek Tragedy*. London.
Chiasson, C. C. 1999. "Σωφρονοῦντες ἐν χρόνωι: The Athenians and Time in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*," *CJ*, 95: 139–61.
Clairmont, C. W. 1983. *Patrios Nomos: Public Burial in Athens During the Fifth and Fourth Centuries* B.C. Oxford.
Clay, D. 1969. "Aeschylus' Trigeron Mythos," *Hermes*, 97: 1–9.
Clay, J. S. 2003. *Hesiod's Cosmos*. Cambridge.
Cohen, D. 1986. "The Theodicy of Aeschylus: Justice and Tyranny in the *Oresteia*," *G&R*, 33: 129–41.
Collard, C. 2002. *Aeschylus: Oresteia*. Oxford.
Conacher, D. J. 1987. *Aeschylus' Oresteia: A Literary Commentary*. Toronto.
Conington, J. 1848. *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus*. London.
Cousin, C. 2005. "La *Nékyia* homérique et les fragments des *Évocateurs d'âmes* d'Eschyle," *Gaia: revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce archaïque*, 9: 137–52.
Coward, H. (ed.). 1997. *Life After Death in World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY.
Cozzo, A. 1988. *Kerdos: semantica, ideologie e società nella Grecia antica*. Rome.
Currie, B. 2005. *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes*. Oxford.
D'Arms, E. F., and Hulley, K. K. 1946. "The Oresteia-Story in the *Odyssey*," *TAPA*, 77: 207–13.
Daube, B. 1939. *Zu den Rechtsproblemen in Aischylos' Agamemnon*. Zurich.
de Jong, I. J. F. 2001. *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*. Cambridge.
Debnar, P. 2010. "The Sexual Status of Aeschylus' Cassandra," *CP*, 105: 129–45.
Deforge, B. 1986. *Eschyle, poète cosmique*. Paris.
Denniston, J. D., and Page, D. L. (eds.). 1957. *Agamemnon*. Oxford.
Devji, F. 2005. *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity*. Ithaca, NY.
Dhuga, U. S. 2011. *Choral Identity and the Chorus of Elders in Greek Tragedy*. Lanham, MD.
Dobrov, G. W. 2001. *Figures of Play: Greek Drama and Metafictional Poetics*. Oxford.
Dova, S. 2012. *Greek Heroes in and out of Hades*. Lanham, MD.
Dover, K. J. 1973. "Some Neglected Aspects of Agamemnon's Dilemma," *JHS*, 93: 58–69.
1974. *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*. Berkeley, CA.
Doyle, A. 2008. "Cassandra – Feminine Corrective in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*," *AClass*, 51: 57–75.
Dué, C. 2006. *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*. Austin, TX.

Dunn, F. M. 1997. “Ends and Means in Euripides’ *Heracles*,” in Roberts, D. H., Dunn, F. M., and Fowler, D. (eds.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*. Princeton, NJ: 83–111.

2010. “Metatheatre and Metaphysics in Two Late Greek Tragedies,” in Gounaridou, K. (ed.), *Text & Presentation*. Jefferson, NC: 5–17.

Easterling, P. E. 1973. “Presentation of Character in Aeschylus,” *G&R*, 20: 3–19.

1990. “Constructing Character in Greek Tragedy,” in Pelling, C. (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*. Oxford: 83–99.

1996. “Weeping, Witnessing, and the Tragic Audience: Response to Segal,” in Silk 1996: 173–82.

Edmonds, R. G. 2004. *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the “Orphic” Gold Tablets*. New York.

2011. *The “Orphic” Gold Tablets and Greek Religion: Further Along the Path*. Cambridge.

Edmunds, L. 1975. “Thucydides’ Ethics as Reflected in the Description of *Stasis* (3.82–83),” *HSPh*, 79: 73–92.

Edwards, M. W. 1977. “Agamemnon’s Decision: Freedom and Folly in Aeschylus,” *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 10: 17–38.

Euben, J. P. 1982. “Justice and the *Oresteia*,” *The American Political Science Review*, 76: 22–33.

Evelyn-White, H. G. (ed.). 1914. *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, and Homerica*. London.

Farnell, L. R. 1921. *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*. Oxford.

Felson, N. 2004. “Introduction: The Poetics of Deixis in Alcman, Pindar, and Other Lyric,” *Arethusa*, 37: 253–66.

Fischer, U. 1965. *Der Telosgedanke in den Dramen des Aischylos: Ende, Ziel, Erfüllung, Machtvollkommenheit*. Hildesheim.

Fletcher, J. 1999. “Choral Voice and Narrative in the First Stasimon of Aeschylus ‘Agamemnon’,” *Phoenix*, 53: 29–49.

2008. “Citing the Law in Sophocles’s *Antigone*,” *Mosaic*, 41: 79–96.

2014. “Polyphony to Silence: The Jurors of the *Oresteia*,” *College Literature*, 41: 56–75.

Foley, H. 1996. “Antigone as Moral Agent,” in Silk 1996: 49–73.

2001. *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*. Princeton, NJ.

2003. “Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy,” *CP*, 98: 1–30.

Fontenrose, J. 1971. “Gods and Men in the *Oresteia*,” *TAPA*, 102: 71–109.

Fraenkel, E. (ed.). 1950. *Agamemnon*. 3 vols. Oxford.

Frontisi-Ducroux, F. 2007. “The Invention of the Erinyes,” in Kraus, C., Goldhill, S., Foley, H. P., and Elsner, J. (eds.), *Visualizing the Tragic: Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature: Essays in Honour of Froma Zeitlin*. Oxford: 165–76.

Gagarin, M. 1976. *Æschylean Drama*. Berkeley, CA.

Gantz, T. 1982. “Inherited Guilt in Aischylos,” *CJ*, 78: 1–23.

2007. “The Aischylean Tetralogy: Attested and Conjectured,” in Lloyd, M. (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Aeschylus*. Oxford: 40–70.

Garland, R. S. J. 1984. "Γέρας Θανόντων: An Investigation into the Claims of the Homeric Dead," *AncSoc*, 15/17: 5–22.

1985. *The Greek Way of Death*. Ithaca, NY.

Garner, R. 1990. *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry*. New York.

Garvie, A. F. 1970. "The Opening of the *Choephori*," *BICS*, 17: 79–91.

Garvie, A. F. (ed.). 1986. *Aeschylus: Choephori*. Oxford.

Garvie, A. F. (ed.). 2009. *Aeschylus: Persae*. Oxford.

Gazis, G. A. 2018. *Homer and the Poetics of Hades*. Oxford.

Geisser, F. 2002. *Götter, Geister und Dämonen: Unheilsmächte bei Aischylos – Zwischen Aberglauben und Theatralik*. Munich.

Georgantzoglou, N. 2002. "A Note on μιάστωρ (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 177)," *Mnemosyne*, 55: 719–20.

Gill, C. 1990. *The Person and the Human Mind: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. Oxford.

1996. *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue*. Oxford.

Goldhill, S. 1984a. *Language, Sexuality, Narrative, the Oresteia*. Cambridge.

1984b. "Two Notes on τέλος and Related Words in the *Oresteia*," *JHS*, 104: 169–76.

1986. *Reading Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge.

1987. "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology," *JHS*, 107: 58–76.

1988. "Battle Narrative and Politics in Aeschylus' *Persae*," *JHS*, 108: 189–93.

1990a. "Character and Action, Representation and Reading: Greek Tragedy and Its Critics," in Pelling, C. (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*. Oxford.

1990b. "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology," in Winkler and Zeitlin 1990: 97–129.

1996. "Collectivity and Otherness – The Authority of the Tragic Chorus: Response to Gould," in Silk 1996: 244–56.

2000. "Civic Ideology and the Problem of Difference: The Politics of Aeschylean Tragedy, Once Again," *JHS*, 120: 34–56.

2012. *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy*. Oxford.

Gould, J. 1973. "Hiketeia," *JHS*, 93: 74–103.

1996. "Tragedy and Collective Experience," in Silk 1996: 217–43.

Goward, B. 2004. *Telling Tragedy: Narrative Technique in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides*. London.

Graf, F. 1974. *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit*. Berlin.

1993. "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology," in Carpenter, T., and Faraone, C. (eds.), *Masks of Dionysus*. Ithaca, NY: 239–58.

Graf, F., and Johnston, S. I. 2007. *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*. London.

Greene, W. C. 1943. "Dramatic and Ethical Motives in the *Agamemnon*," *HSPh*, 54: 25–33.

Greenhalgh, P. A. L. 1969. “Cassandra and the Chorus in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon.” *RSC* 17: 253–8.

Grethlein, J. 2013. “Choral Intertemporality in the *Oresteia*,” in Gagné, R., and Hopman, M. G. (eds.), *Choral Mediations in Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge.

Griffin, J. 1998. “The Social Function of Attic Tragedy,” *CQ*, 48: 39–61.

Griffith, M. 1987. “Aeschylus *Choephori* 3a-3b (Or 9A-9B?),” *AJP*, 108: 377–82.

1995. “Brilliant Dynasts: Power and Politics in the Oresteia,” *CA*, 14: 62–129.

Griffith, M. (ed.). 1999. *Sophocles: Antigone*. Cambridge.

Griffith, R. D. 1988. “Disrobing in the *Oresteia*,” *CQ*, 38: 552–4.

1991. “Πῶς λιπόναυς γένωμαι . . .; (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 212),” *AJP*, 112: 173–7.

Grube, G. M. A. 1970. “Zeus in Aeschylus,” *AJP*, 91: 43–51.

Hall, E. 1989. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*. Oxford.

1997. “The Sociology of Athenian Tragedy,” in Easterling, P. E. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge.

2005. “Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra versus Her Senecan Tradition,” in Hall, E., Macintosh, F., Michelakis, P., and Taplin, O. (eds.), *Agamemnon in Performance 458* BC *to* AD *2004*. Oxford.

Halliwell, S. 1993. “The Function and Aesthetics of the Greek Tragic Mask,” *Drama*, 2: 195–211.

Hame, K. 2004. “All in the Family: Funeral Rites and the Health of the *Oikos* in Aeschylos’ *Oresteia*,” *AJP*, 125: 513–38.

Hammond, N. G. L. 1965. “Personal Freedom and Its Limitations in the *Oresteia*,” *JHS*, 85: 42–55.

Harpham, G. G. 1992. *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics*. Chicago.

Harris, E. M. 1992. “Pericles’ Praise of Athenian Democracy Thucydides 2.37.1,” *HSPh*, 94: 157–67.

Headlam, W. G., and Thomson, G. D. 1966. *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*. New rev. ed. 2 vols. Amsterdam.

Heath, J. 2005. “Blood for the Dead: Homeric Ghosts Speak Up,” *Hermes*, 133: 389–400.

Heath, M. 1987. *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy*. Stanford, CA.

Heiden, B. A. 1989. *Tragic Rhetoric: An Interpretation of Sophocles’ Trachiniae*. New York.

Heirman, L. J. 1975. “Kassandra’s Glossolalia,” *Mnemosyne*, 28: 257–67.

Helm, J. J. 2004. “Aeschylus’ Genealogy of Morals,” *TAPA*, 134: 23–54.

Henrichs, A. 1991. “Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus: Zur Ambivalenz der chthonischen Mächte im attischen Drama,” in Harder, A., and Hofmann, H. (eds.), *Fragmenta Dramatica: Beiträge zur Interpretation der griechischen Tragikerfragmente und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte*. Göttingen: 161–202.

Herington, J. 1988. “No-Man’s-Land of Dark and Light,” in Bloom, H. (ed.), *Aeschylus’s The Oresteia: Modern Critical Interpretations*. New York: 121–53.

Holmes, B. 2010. *The Symptom and the Subject: The Emergence of the Physical Body in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, NJ.

Hunt, P. 2011. “Slaves in Greek Literary Culture,” in Bradley, K., and Cartledge, P. (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*. Cambridge.

Huxley, G. 1979. “Bones for Orestes,” *GRBS*, 20: 145–8.

Johnston, S. I. 1992. “Xanthus, Hera and the Erinyes (*Iliad* 19.400–418),” *TAPA*, 122: 85–98.

1999. *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley, CA.

Jones, C. P. 2010. *New Heroes in Antiquity: From Achilles to Antinoos*. Cambridge, MA.

Jouanna, D. 2015. *Les Grecs aux Enfers: D’Homère à Épicure*. Paris.

Judet de La Combe, P. 2001. *L’Agamemnon d’Eschyle: commentaire des dialogues*. 2 vols. Paris.

Kagan, S. 2012. *Death*. New Haven, CT.

Kearns, E. 1989. *The Heroes of Attica*. London.

Kennedy, R. F. 2009. *Athena’s Justice: Athena, Athens and the Concept of Justice in Greek Tragedy*. New York.

Kitto, H. D. F. 1961. *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study*. 3rd ed. London.

Knox, B. 1972. “Aeschylus and the Third Actor,” *AJP*, 93: 104–24.

Komar, K. L. 2003. *Reclaiming Klytemnestra: Revenge or Reconciliation*. Urbana and Chicago.

Konishi, H. 1989. “Agamemnon’s Reasons for Yielding,” *AJP*, 110: 210–22.

Konstan, D. 1996. “Greek Friendship,” *AJP*, 117: 71–94.

1997. *Friendship in the Classical World*. Cambridge.

2001. “Murder among Friends: *Violation of ‘Philia’ in Greek Tragedy* by Elizabeth S. Belfiore,” *AJP*, 122: 270–4.

2006. *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*. Toronto.

Kovacs, D. 1987. “The Way of a God with a Maid in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*,” *CP*, 82: 326–34.

Kurke, L. 2013. “Pindar’s *Pythian* 11 and the *Oresteia*: Contestatory Ritual Poetics in the 5th c. BCE,” *CA*, 32: 101–75.

Larson, J. 2016. *Understanding Greek Religion: A Cognitive Approach*. London.

Lattimore, R. A. 1953. *Aeschylus 1: Oresteia*. Chicago.

Lawrence, S. 2013. *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy*. Oxford.

Lebeck, A. 1971. *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure*. Washington, DC.

1988. “The Commos in the *Libation-Bearers*,” in Bloom, H. (ed.), *Aeschylus’s The Oresteia: Modern Critical Interpretations*. New York: 31–45.

Lech, M. L. 2009. “Marching Choruses? Choral Performance in Athens,” *GRBS*, 49: 343–61.

Lesky, A. 1966. “Decision and Responsibility in the Tragedy of Aeschylus,” *JHS*, 86: 78–85.

1967. *Greek Tragedy*. 2nd ed. London

Levinas, E. 1969. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, tr. A. Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA.

1987. *Time and the Other*, tr. R. A. Cohen. Pittsburgh, PA.

Liapis, V. J. 2006. "*Ghosts, Wand'ring Here and There*: Orestes the *Revenant* in Athens," in Cairns, D. L., and Liapis, V. J. (eds.), *Dionysalexandros: Essays on Aeschylus and His Fellow Tragedians in Honour of Alexander F. Garvie*. Swansea: 201–31.

Linforth, I. M. 1973. *The Arts of Orpheus*. New York.

Lloyd-Jones, H. 1956. "Zeus in Aeschylus," *JHS*, 76: 55–67.

1962. "The Guilt of Agamemnon," *CQ*, 12: 187–99.

1971. *The Justice of Zeus*. Berkeley, CA.

1984. "Pindar and the After-Life," *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique*, 31: 245–83.

Long, A. G. 2019. *Death and Immortality in Ancient Philosophy*. New York.

Longo, O. 1990. "The Theater of the Po*lis*," in Winkler and Zeitlin 1990: 12–19.

Loraux, N. 1986. *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*. Cambridge, MA.

1987. *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. Cambridge, MA.

1993. *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes*. Princeton, NJ.

Lowe, N. J. 1996. "Tragic and Homeric Ironies: Response to Rosenmeyer," in Silk 1996: 520–33.

Mace, S. 2002. "Why the *Oresteia*'s Sleeping Dead Won't Lie, Part I: *Agamemnon*," *CJ*, 98: 35–56.

2004. "Why the *Oresteia*'s Sleeping Dead Won't Lie, Part II: *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*," *CJ*, 100: 39–60.

MacEwen, S. (ed.). 1990. *Views of Clytemnestra, Ancient and Modern*. Lewiston, NY.

Mackie, C. J. 1999. "Scamander and the Rivers of Hades in Homer," *AJP*, 120: 485–501.

MacLeod, C. W. 1982. "Politics and the *Oresteia*," *JHS*, 102: 124–44.

Marks, J. 2008. *Zeus in the Odyssey*. Washington, DC.

Martin, B. 2020. *Harmful Interaction between the Living and the Dead in Greek Tragedy*. Liverpool.

Marx, W. 2012. *Le tombeau d'Œdipe: pour une tragédie sans tragique*. Paris.

Mazzoldi, S. 2001. *Cassandra, la vergine e l'indovina: Identità di un personaggio da Omero all'Ellenismo*. Pisa.

McCall, M. 1990. "The Chorus of Aeschylus' *Choephori*," in Griffith, M., and Mastronarde, D. (eds.), *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*. Atlanta: 17–30.

McClure, L. 1996. "Clytemnestra's Binding Spell (*Ag*. 958–974)," *CJ*, 92: 123–40.

1999. *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama*. Princeton, NJ.

Medda, E. (ed.). 2017. *Eschilo, Agamennone*. 3 vols. Rome.

Meier, C. 1990. *The Greek Discovery of Politics*. Cambridge, MA.

1993. *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*. Baltimore, MD.

Meineck, P. 1998. *Aeschylus: Oresteia*. Indianapolis, IN.

2011. "The Neuroscience of the Tragic Mask," *Arion*, 19: 113–58.

Meinel, F. 2015. *Pollution and Crisis in Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge.

Meyer, E. 1993. "Epitaphs and Citizenship in Classical Athens," *JHS*, 113: 99–121.

Middleton, P. 2011. *Martyrdom: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York.

Mirto, M. S. 2012. *Death in the Greek World: From Homer to the Classical Age*. Norman, OK.

Mitchell-Boyask, R. 2006. "The Marriage of Cassandra and the *Oresteia*: Text, Image, Performance," *TAPA*, 136: 269–97.

Montiglio, S. 2000. *Silence in the Land of Logos*. Princeton, NJ.

Moore, B. N. 1981. *The Philosophical Possibilities Beyond Death*. Springfield, IL.

Moreno, M. L. 2004. "TrGF 2 Adesp. fr. 370 K.-Sn.: *Aeschylus' Psychagogoi*?" *Exemplaria Classica*, 8: 7–29.

Morgan, K. A. 1994. "Apollo's Favorites," *GRBS*, 35: 121–43.

Morrell, K. S. 1996. "The Fabric of Persuasion: Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon, and the Sea of Garments," *CJ*, 92: 141–65.

Morris, I. 1992. *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge.

Mueller, M. 2016. *Objects as Actors: Props and the Poetics of Performance in Greek Tragedy*. Chicago.

Muntz, C. E. 2011. "The Invocation of Darius in Aeschylus' *Persae*," *CJ*, 106: 257–71.

Mylonas, G. E. 1961. *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Princeton, NJ.

Nagy, G. 1999. *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*. Rev. ed. Baltimore.

2010. "The Subjectivity of Fear as Reflected in Ancient Greek Wording," *Dialogues*, 5: 29–45.

Narveson, J. 2010. *This Is Ethical Theory*. Peru, IL.

Neblung, D. 1997. *Die Gestalt der Kassandra in der antiken Literatur*. Stuttgart and Leipzig.

Neitzel, H. 1979. "ΦΕΡΕΙ ΦΕΡΟΝΤ': Ein aischyleisches Orakel (*Ag.* 1562)," *Hermes*, 107: 133–46.

Neuburg, M. 1991. "Clytemnestra and the Alastor (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1497ff)," *QUCC*, 38: 37–68.

Nisetich, F. J. 1988. "Immortality in Acragas: Poetry and Religion in Pindar's Second Olympian Ode," *CP*, 83: 1–19.

Nooter, S. 2017. *The Mortal Voice in the Tragedies of Aeschylus*. Cambridge.

North, H. F. 1992. "Death and Afterlife in Greek Tragedy and Plato," in Obayashi 1992: 49–64.

Nussbaum, M. C. 1986. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge.

Oakley, J. H. 2004. *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Lekythoi*. Cambridge.

Obayashi, H. (ed.). 1992. *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*. New York.

Ormand, K. 1999. *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy*. Austin, TX.

Orwin, C. 1988. "*Stasis* and Plague: Thucydides on the Dissolution of Society," *The Journal of Politics*, 50: 831–47.

Parker, R. 1983. *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*. Oxford.

1997. "Gods Cruel and Kind: Tragic and Civic Theology," in Pelling 1997: 143–60.

2005a. "Law and Religion," in Gagarin, M., and Cohen, D. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Law*. Cambridge: 61–81.

2005b. *Polytheism and Society at Athens*. Oxford.

2009. "Aeschylus' Gods: Drama, Cult, Theology," in Jouanna, J., and Montanari, F. (eds.), *Eschyle à l'aube du théâtre occidental*. Geneva.

2011. *On Greek Religion*. Ithaca, NY.

Parry, H. 1978. *The Lyric Poems of Greek Tragedy*. Toronto.

Paterson, R. W. K. 1995. *Philosophy and the Belief in a Life After Death*. New York.

Patterson, O. 1991. *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*. New York.

Pelling, C. (ed.). 1997. *Greek Tragedy and the Historian*. Oxford.

Peradotto, J. J. 1969. "The Omen of the Eagles and the ΗΘΟΣ of Agamemnon," *Phoenix*, 23: 237–63.

Podlecki, A. J. 1989. *Aeschylus: Eumenides*. Warminster.

Porter, J. 1990. "Patterns of Perception in Aeschylus," in Griffith, M., and Mastronarde, D. J. (eds.), *The Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*. Atlanta: 31–56.

Pucci, P. 1987. *Odysseus Polutropos: Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and the Iliad*. Ithaca, NY.

1998. *The Song of the Sirens: Essays on Homer*. Lanham, MD.

Rabinowitz, N. S. 1981. "From Force to Persuasion: Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as Cosmogonic Myth," *Ramus*, 10: 159–91.

Rachels, J. 2009. "Modern Ethical Theory: Introduction," in Cahn, S. M., and Markie, P. (eds.), *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*. 4th ed. Oxford: 413–22.

Rehm, R. 1994. *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy*. Princeton, NJ.

2003. *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*. London.

2005. "Epilogue: Cassandra – The Prophet Unveiled," in Macintosh, F., Michaelakis, P., Hall, E., and Taplin, O. (eds.), *Agamemnon in Performance 458* BC *to* AD *2004*. Oxford: 343–58.

Richardson, N. (ed.). 1990. *The Iliad: A Commentary. Volume VI: Books 21–24*. Cambridge.

Ringer, M. 1998. *Electra and the Empty Urn: Metatheater and Role Playing in Sophocles*. Chapel Hill, NC.

Roberts, D. H. 1984. *Apollo and His Oracle in the Oresteia*. Göttingen.

1985. "Orestes as Fulfillment, *Teraskopos*, and *Teras* in the *Oresteia*," *AJP*, 106: 283–97.

Rohde, E. 1925. *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks*, tr. W. B. Hillis. 8th ed. London.

Rose, H. J. 1946. “Theology and Mythology in Aeschylus,” *HThR*, 39: 1–24.

Roselli, D. K. 2011. *Theater of the People: Spectators and Society in Ancient Athens*. Austin.

Rosenbloom, D. 2012. “Athenian Drama and Democratic Political Culture,” in Rosenbloom, D., and Davidson, J. (eds.), *Greek Drama* IV*: Texts, Contexts, Performance*. Oxford.

Rosenmeyer, T. G. 1982. *The Art of Aeschylus*. Berkeley, CA.

1996. “Ironies in Serious Drama,” in Silk 1996: 497–519.

2002. “‘Metatheater’: An Essay on Overload,” *Arion*, 10: 87–119.

Roth, P. 1993. “The Theme of Corrupted *Xenia* in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” *Mnemosyne*, 46: 1–17.

Rousseau, G. S. 1963. “Dream and Vision in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” *Arion*, 2: 101–36.

Rynearson, N. 2013. “Courting the Erinyes: Persuasion, Sacrifice, and Seduction in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*,” *TAPA*, 143: 1–22.

Salapata, G. 2011. “The Heroic Cult of Agamemnon,” *Electra* [Online], 1: The Atreids. https://pasithee.library.upatras.gr/electra/issue/view/10 [Accessed April 28, 2022].

2014. *Heroic Offerings: The Terracotta Plaques from the Spartan Sanctuary of Agamemnon and Kassandra*. Ann Arbor, MI.

Schein, S. L. 1982. “The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*,” *G&R*, 29: 11–16.

1984. *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer’s Iliad*. Berkeley, CA.

Schenker, D. J. 1991. “A Study in Choral Character: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 489–502,” *TAPA*, 121: 63–73.

Schlatter, E. 2018. *Der Tod auf der Bühne: Jenseitsmächte in der antiken Tragödie*. Berlin.

Schmidt, D. J. 2001. *On Germans & Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life*. Bloomington, IN.

Schmiel, R. 1987. “Achilles in Hades,” *CP*, 82: 35–7.

Scodel, R. 2006. “Social Memory in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*,” in Mackay, E. A. (ed.), *Orality, Literacy, Memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman World*. Leiden and Boston: 115–41.

Scullion, S. 1994. “Olympian and Chthonian,” *CA*, 13: 75–119.

Seaford, R. 1984. “The Last Bath of Agamemnon,” *CQ*, 34: 247–54.

1987. “The Tragic Wedding,” *JHS*, 107: 106–30.

1998. “Tragic Money,” *JHS*, 118: 119–39.

2003. “Dionysos, Money, and Drama,” *Arion*, 11: 1–19.

2012. *Cosmology and the Polis*. Cambridge.

Segal, A. F. 2004. *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West*. New York.

Segal, C. 1962. “The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus’ Return,” *Arion*, 1: 17–64.

1967. “Transition and Ritual in Odysseus’ Return,” *PP*, 116: 321–42.

1996. “Catharsis, Audience, and Closure in Greek Tragedy,” in Silk 1996: 149–72.

Sewell-Rutter, N. J. 2007. *Guilt by Descent: Moral Inheritance and Decision Making in Greek Tragedy*. Oxford.

Shapiro, H. A. 1991. "The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art," *AJA*, 95: 629–56.

Shear, J. L. 2012. "The Tyrannicides, Their Cult and the Panathenaia: A Note," *JHS*, 132: 107–19.

Shilo, A. 2013. "From Oblivion to Judgment: Afterlives, Ethics, and Unbeliefs in Greek Tragedy and Plato," *ThéoRèmes*, 5: 1–28.

Sicking, C. M. J. 1995. "The General Purport of Pericles' Funeral Oration and Last Speech," *Hermes*, 123: 404–25.

Sider, D. 1978. "Stagecraft in the *Oresteia*," *AJP*, 99: 12–27.

Sidwell, K. 1996. "Purification and Pollution in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*," *CQ*, 46: 44–57.

Sier, K. 1988. *Die lyrischen Partien der Choephoren des Aischylos*. Stuttgart.

Silk, M. S. (ed.). 1996. *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*. Oxford.

Slater, W. 2007. "Deconstructing Festivals," in Wilson, P. (ed.), *The Greek Theatre and Festivals: Documentary Studies*. Oxford: 21–47.

Smith, J. E. 1985. "Plato's Use of Myth in the Education of Philosophic Man," *Phoenix*, 40: 20–34.

Smith, M. S. 2009. *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt*. Oxford.

Smith, O. L. (ed.). 1976. *Scholia Graeca in Aeschylum quae exstant omnia*. Leipzig.

Smyth, H. W. (ed.). 1926. *Aeschylus*. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA.

Solmsen, F. 1947. "Strata of Greek Religion in Aeschylus," *HThR*, 40: 211–26.

1982. "Achilles on the Islands of the Blessed: Pindar vs. Homer and Hesiod," *AJP*, 103: 19–24.

1995. *Hesiod and Aeschylus*. Ithaca, NY.

Sommerstein, A. H. 1987. "The Theatre Audience, the Demos, and the Suppliants of *Aeschylus*," in Pelling 1997: 63-79.

Sommerstein, A. H. (ed.). 1989. *Aeschylus: Eumenides*. Cambridge.

Sommerstein, A. H. (ed.). 2008a. *Aeschylus* I*: Persians. Seven Against Thebes. The Suppliants. Prometheus Bound*. Cambridge, MA.

Sommerstein, A. H. (ed.). 2008b. *Aeschylus* II*: Oresteia: Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides*. Cambridge, MA.

Sommerstein, A. H. (ed.). 2008c. *Aeschylus* III*: Fragments*. Cambridge, MA.

Sommerstein, A. H. 2010a. *Aeschylean Tragedy*. 2nd ed. London.

2010b. "Orestes' Trial and Athenian Homicide Law," in Harris, E. M., Leão, D. F., and Rhodes, P. J. (eds.), *Law and Drama in Ancient Greece*. London: 25–38.

2010c. "Sleeping Safe in Our Beds: *Stasis*, Assassination and the *Oresteia*," in Sommerstein 2010e: 143–63.

2010d. "The Tangled Ways of Zeus," in Sommerstein 2010e: 164–70.

Sommerstein, A. H. (ed.). 2010e. *The Tangled Ways of Zeus and Other Studies in and Around Greek Tragedy*. Oxford.

Sommerstein, A. H., and Torrance, I. C. (eds.). 2014. *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece*. Berlin and Boston.

Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 1986. "Crime and Punishment: Tityos, Tantalos and Sisyphos in *Odyssey* 11," *BICS*, 33: 37–58.

1995. *"Reading" Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period*. Oxford.

2000. "What Is *Polis* Religion?" in Buxton, R. G. A. (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*. Oxford: 13–37.

2003. *Tragedy and Athenian Religion*. Lanham, MD.

Stuppenrich, R. 1994. "The Iconography of Athenian State Burials in the Classical Period," in Coulson, W. D. E., Palagia, O., Shear, T. L., Jr., Shapiro, H. A., and Frost, F. J. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Athens and Attica under the Democracy*. Oxford: 93–103.

Sullivan, S. D. 1997. *Aeschylus' Use of Psychological Terminology: Traditional and New*. Montreal.

Szondi, P. 2002. *An Essay on the Tragic*. Stanford.

Taplin, O. 1977. *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy*. Oxford.

Tasso, A. 2016. *Pylai Aidao: Un percorso iconografico e letterario sulla diffusione del tema delle Porte dell'Ade da Oriente a Occidente*. Oxford.

Thalmann, W. G. 1985a. "Speech and Silence in the *Oresteia* 1: *Agamemnon* 1025–1029," *Phoenix*, 39: 99–118.

1985b. "Speech and Silence in the *Oresteia* 2," *Phoenix*, 39: 221–37.

2004. "'The Most Divinely Approved and Political Discord': Thinking about Conflict in the Developing Polis," *CA*, 23: 359–99.

Thomson, G. 1935. "Mystical Allusions in the *Oresteia*," *JHS*, 55: 20–34.

1946. *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*. 2nd ed. London.

Thumiger, C. 2009. "On Ancient and Modern (Meta)Theatres: Definitions and Practices," *MD*, 63: 9–58.

Tierney, M. 1937. "The Mysteries and the *Oresteia*," *JHS*, 57: 11–21.

Toher, M. 1999. "On "Thucydides' Blunder": 2.34.5," *Hermes*, 127: 497–501.

Tsagarakis, O. 2000. *Studies in Odyssey 11*. Stuttgart.

Turner, C. 2001. "Perverted Supplication and Other Inversions in Aeschylus' Danaid Trilogy," *CJ*, 97: 27–50.

van Henten, J. W., and Avemarie, F. 2002. *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity*. London.

Vellacott, P. 1977. "Has Good Prevailed? A Further Study of the *Oresteia*," *HSPh*, 81: 113–22.

1984a. "Aeschylus' Orestes," *CW*, 77: 145–57.

1984b. *The Logic of Tragedy: Morals and Integrity in Aeschylus' Oresteia*. Durham, NC.

Vermeule, E. 1979. *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*. Berkeley, CA.

Vernant, J.-P. 1989. *L'Individu, la mort, l'amour: Soi-même et l'autre en Grèce ancienne*. Paris.

1991. *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*. Princeton, NJ.

2001. *La Mort héroïque chez les Grecs*. Nantes.

Vernant, J.-P., and Vidal-Naquet, P. 1990. *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, tr. J. Lloyd. New York.

Verrall, A. W. 1904. *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus*. 2nd ed. London.

1908. *The Eumenides of Aeschylus*. London.

Vogel-Ehrensperger, V. 2012. *Die übelste aller Frauen? Klytaimestra in Texten von Homer bis Aischylos und Pindar*. Basel.

Wade-Gery, H. T. 1933. "Classical Epigrams and Epitaphs: A Study of the Kimonian Age," *JHS*, 53: 71–104.

Wallace, R. W. 2007. "Revolutions and a New Order in Solonian Athens and Archaic Greece," in Raaflaub, K. A., Ober, J., and Wallace, R. W. (eds.), *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley, CA: 49–82.

Weil, H. 1908. *Études sur le drame antique*. 2nd ed. Paris.

Wellenbach, M. C. 2015. "The Iconography of Dionysiac Choroi: Dithyramb, Tragedy, and the Basel Krater," *GRBS*, 55: 72–103.

West, M. L. 1983. *The Orphic Poems*. Oxford.

1990. *Studies in Aeschylus*. Stuttgart.

Whallon, W. 1958. "The Serpent at the Breast," *TAPA*, 89: 271–75.

Widzisz, M. A. 2012. *Chronos on the Threshold: Time, Ritual, and Agency in the Oresteia*. Lanham, MD.

Willcock, M. M. (ed.). 1995. *Pindar Victory Odes*. Cambridge.

Williams, B. A. O. 1993. *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley, CA.

Wilson, P. 1997. "Leading the Tragic *Khoros*: Tragic Prestige in the Democratic City," in Pelling 1997: 81–108.

Winkler, J. 1990. "The Ephebes' Song: Tragoidia and Polis," in Winkler and Zeitlin 1990: 20–62.

Winkler, J., and Zeitlin, F. (eds.). 1990. *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*. Princeton, NJ.

Winnington-Ingram, R. P. 1948. "Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena," *JHS*, 68: 130–47.

1983. *Studies in Aeschylus*. Cambridge.

Wohl, V. 1998. *Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender, and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy*. Austin, TX.

Wyles, R. 2011. *Costume in Greek Tragedy*. London.

Yoon, F. 2012. *The Use of Anonymous Characters in Greek Tragedy: The Shaping of Heroes*. Boston.

Young, J. 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy: From Plato to Žižek*. Cambridge.

Zak, W. F. 1995. *The Polis and the Divine Order: The Oresteia, Sophocles, and the Defense of Democracy*. Lewisburg, PA.

Zeitlin, F. 1965. "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA*, 96: 463–508.

1966. "Postscript to Sacrificial Imagery in the *Oresteia* (*Ag*. 1235–37)," *TAPA*, 97: 645–53.

1978. "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*," *Arethusa*, 11: 149–84.

1990. “Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama,” in Winkler and Zeitlin 1990: 130–67.

1996. *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*. Chicago.

2010. “The Lady Vanishes: Helen and Her Phantom in Euripidean Drama,” in Mitsis, P., and Tsagalis, C. (eds.), *Allusion, Authority, and Truth: Critical Perspectives on Greek Poetic and Rhetorical Praxis*. Berlin: 263–82.

Zelnik-Abramovitz, R. 2011. “The Guardian of the Land: The Areopagus Council as a Symbol of Stability,” in Herman, G. (ed.), *Stability and Crisis in the Athenian Democracy*. Stuttgart.

# General Index

Acheron, 70, 72, 75, 181
Achilles, in Hades, 20, 101
Aegisthus, 33, 93, 123, 214–15, 216, 221
aetiology, 223
afterlife
  in material culture, 5–6
  motivating political action, 112
  separating body and soul, 6
Agamemnon, 53, 59, 70, 80, 85, 91–113, 164, 170, 210–11, 215–18, 222–3
  as ancestor figure, 119–32, 222–3
  as angry spirit, 99
  as hero, 96, 119–27
  glory for, 93
  in Hades, 100–4, 129, 130
  in the *Odyssey*, 101, 162
  inhabiting Orestes, 107
  mutilation of, 96, 104, 106, 123, 129, 171
  raising of, 95–6, 98, 104–8, 109
  tomb of, 92, 96, 107, 108, 116, 124–7, 131
ancestors, 5, 63, 93
Apollo, 73, 80, 85, 88–9, 94, 95, 117, 124, 136, 196–8, 200, 201, 202, 206
Areopagus, 24, 211, 224, 226
Argos, 6, 24, 25, 44, 52, 70, 117, 119–22, 126, 127, 132, 134, 136–41, 143, 168, 205, 215, 218, 223
*asebeia*, 73, 185, 193
Athena, 23, 24, 118, 136, 138–40, 168, 173, 177, 189, 194, 198, 219–27
Athens
  and heroes, 115
  and Orestes, 116
  as army, *stratos*, 205–8, 224
  courts, 225
  historical background, 21–6
  need for unity, 205, 224
  war dead of, 6, 58

Cassandra, 54, 69–90, 165, 181, 214–18, 222
  as "bride of Hades," 80
  curse of, 69, 72, 73, 81–3, 88, 181
  fate of, 69–71, 74–5, 81–3, 85–90
  glory of, 55, 86–8
  her death as closure, 82–5, 88–90
*kharis*, 32, 52, 55, 63, 98, 107
Children of Thyestes, 45, 62, 79, 83, 160, 162, 187, 216, 221
Chorus of Elders, 32, 51–68, 70, 77, 86–7, 122, 165, 170, 182–3, 211, 222
Chorus of Slave Women, 2–3, 61, 91–113, 123, 171, 183–5, 222
Clytemnestra, 29, 53, 61, 66, 70, 85, 93–5, 102, 106, 121–4, 127, 129, 131, 142, 165, 180–1, 187, 196, 197, 199, 207, 215, 218–19, 221
  as "mother of Hades," 72, 82, 165
  dream of, 95, 106, 108–9, 131
  ghost of. *See* Ghost of Clytemnestra
curse, 10–11, 58, 59, 61, 69, 72, 73, 81–3, 88, 96, 111, 165, 181, 201, 205, 215, 223, 224, 226

death as closure, 48, 51–4, 56, 69, 82–5, 88, 94, 107
*drasanti pathein*, 81

*eidōlon*, 7, 147–8
Electra, 91–113, 122–3, 124–6, 170
Eleusinian Mysteries. *See* salvation cults
Elpenor, 37
  ghost of, 158
*eoika*, 76–9
Erinyes, 9–11, 23, 59–62, 73, 118, 123, 126, 130, 138, 177–9, 182–91, 194–5, 202–11, 223–6
  and Clytemnestra, 145–6, 148–56, 158–9, 163, 166–8, 171–4
  and curse, 10–11, 61, 224, 226
  and the middle path, 155
  before the *Oresteia*, 9–11
  political effects of, 222–5
*eris*, 207, 223–4
*erōs*, 41, 206–7, 223–4
Eteocles, 87
ethics
  and divine influences, 19

ethics (cont.)
  and literature, 19
  and the afterlife, 19
  definition of, 14
  normative, 18–19, 171–5

fate, 34, 53, 55, 60, 69–71, 74–5, 81–3, 85–90
fear, 186, 188, 204
festival of Dionysus, 22–3

Ghost of Clytemnestra, 72, 130, 145–75, 181, 186, 218–19, 222
  and blame, dishonor, shame, 149, 155, 166–8, 172
  and metatheater, 163, 173, 219
  as dream, *onar*, 148, 151, 154, 156–64
  as image, *eidōlon*, 147–8
  ethical claims of, 146, 151, 153, 156, 160, 162, 164, 171–5
  *psukhē* of, 151, 168–71
  rhetorical inventiveness of, 145, 146, 164–8, 172–3
  wounds of, 149, 158, 160–3, 187
Ghost of Darius, 101, 106, 170, 192
ghosts
  in Greek culture, 8
  in previous literature, 8
glory, 36, 54–6, 66, 86–8, 89, 93, 98, 99, 222

Hades, 176–204
  as double of Zeus, 94–5, 179–81
  as *euthunos*, 166, 191–2
  as invisible, 61
  as metaphor for death, 8, 82
  as realm, 90, 100–4
  before the *Oresteia*, 11
  ethical code of, 73, 193–4, 195–8
  etymology of, 7
  gates of, 83
  judgment of, 12–13, 60–1, 83, 176–7, 212, 219–21, 225–6
  legal process, 191–3, 200, 202–4
  *miastōr*, 185–6, 198–200, 203, 226
  no worship of, 11
  polluted, 198–200
  punishing the bloodless, 187
  realm of, 7–8, 61, 70, 73–5, 83, 164–8, 181
  rivers of. *See* Acheron
  vision of, 177–9
Helen, 60, 116
Herald, 52, 128, 214–15
  and heroes, 44, 117–19
  and silence, 29
  closing off the dead, 58
Hermes, 45, 95, 117, 120
heroes, 114–44
  cult of, 9, 114–16, 118, 141
  in the *Agamemnon*, 117–19
  war dead as, 58
Hesiod, 12
*Hymn to Demeter*, 13

*Iliad*, 7, 12, 20, 42, 162, 201
Iphigeneia, 66, 72, 102, 121, 129, 164, 181, 216
Islands of the Blessed, 13

justice, 14, 19, 59, 94, 96, 100, 117, 133, 145, 161, 167, 171, 173, 176–9, 182, 187, 189–90, 209, 214, 219–21, 225–6
  as goddess, 10, 96, 100, 120, 183–5, 209

*kerdos*, 40–2, 49, 86–8, 207, 208, 224
kinship, 193, 196–7
*kleos*. *See* glory
*kommos*, 91–113, 119–22, 170, 214, 217
*kratos*, 119–21

*lex talionis*, 191

martyrdom, absence of, 222
Menelaus, 47
Minos, 101
*Moira* or *Moirai*, 10, 11, 68, 210, 224

Odysseus, 34, 158, 163
*Odyssey*, 7, 12, 20, 101
Oedipus, 11, 116
Orestes, 33, 91–113, 115–44, 153, 170, 187–90, 206, 214–15, 222–3
  afterlife punishment of, 177–9
  and desire for death, 94
  as afterlife hero, 115–17, 136–44, 208, 223, 225
  as harmful spirit, 116
  at *Choes*, 116
  purity of, 116
  trial of, 123, 136, 139, 141, 146, 171, 177, 196–8, 202–4, 209, 219, 225

Patroclus, ghost of, 157–8, 162, 166
*Persians*, Aeschylus, 192
*philia*, 193
phrēn, 188–9, 195, 205
Pindar, 116
  *Olympian* 2, 13, 220
Plato, 12, 214
poetics
  definition of, 15
  of multiplicity, 90, 109, 112, 227
  of the beyond, 3, 227

politics
  and Athenian democracy, 22
  definition of, 21
profit. *See kerdos*
*psukhē*, 7, 63–4, 66, 151, 157, 158, 162, 168–71

reincarnation, 13
resurrection, 61–2, 65, 95–6, 98, 109

salvation cults, 11–13
*Semnai Theai*, 23, 226
Simonides, 116
snake motif, 94, 115, 126, 141, 153
soul. *See psukhē*
*stasis*, 24, 206, 224
Stesichorus, 116
*stratos*. *See* Athens as army
*Suppliants*, Aeschylus, 179–80
supplication, 23, 191, 200, 226
*telos*, 209, 226
*terma*, 208–9
*timē*, 204
tragedy
  and ethics, 21, 156
  and politics, 25
  Athenian background of, 23
Trojan War, 57–9, 71, 99, 117, 123, 128, 143, 215, 221–2, 223
tyranny, 23, 49, 52, 55–6, 67, 123, 134, 141, 143, 206, 211, 215, 223

victory, 40, 49, 58–9, 128, 140, 144, 207–8, 210–12, 224
voting, 22, 24, 49, 201, 210–11, 225

*xenia*, 193, 197, 225

Zeus, 11, 62, 66, 68, 94–5, 106, 117, 120, 122, 136, 179–81, 192–3, 197, 210, 224

# Index Locorum

Aeschylus
  *Agamemnon*
    273–6, 159
    383–4, 47
    341–2, 41, 207
    420–1, 159
    438, 58
    441–3, 58, 65
    452–5, 57–9, 64–5, 98
    457–60, 58–9
    461–8, 59–61, 65, 165, 182–3, 194
    491, 159
    506–7, 31–7
    513–17, 117–19
    516, 44, 114, 138
    522, 45
    527, 46–8
    529–32, 128
    539, 31–7
    550, 32–7, 52–3
    567–73, 38–44, 98
    572, 49
    574–81, 42–4
    645, 45
    648–73, 35
    676–7, 47
    781, 209
    813–17, 210–11
    816, 49
    839, 159
    889–94, 159
    927–9, 128
    1019–24, 61–2, 65–6, 106, 181
    1118–19, 206
    1136–9, 74–5
    1156–61, 70–90, 181
    1217–18, 72, 79, 161
    1235, 72, 82
    1288–9, 83–4
    1291, 83
    1292–4, 84
    1300–4, 54–5, 86–8
    1362–5, 55–6, 133
    1386–7, 180
    1409–11, 197
    1433, 196
    1440–7, 85
    1448–51, 53
    1462–3, 53
    1525–9, 102, 129, 181
    1538–40, 54
    1543–50, 50, 63–4, 66, 170
    1551, 122
    1554, 122
    1555–9, 72, 129, 164–5, 181
    1610–11, 33, 133–4
    1652, 55–6
  *Choephoroi*
    1–2, 119–21
    59–65, 61, 96, 183–5
    84–105, 124
    106, 124–5
    114, 206
    212–13, 108
    235–42, 129, 130
    244–5, 120–1, 171
    260–7, 122, 125
    269–304, 123
    306–14, 96, 170
    315–18, 97–8, 171
    320–2, 98–9, 119, 125
    324–31, 99–100, 107
    345–53, 50, 93, 99
    354–62, 1–3, 96, 100–4, 171, 181
    363–71, 96, 103
    372–4, 96
    382–5, 180
    294–9, 180
    400–2, 104
    429–33, 122–3
    438, 33, 94, 132–4
    439–43, 104

456–65, 105
479–80, 120–1
483–8, 125–6, 171
489–96, 105–6, 120–1
510–11, 97, 107
517–18, 107
540, 108, 126
551–2, 108
554–9, 94, 139
886, 135
928–9, 160
944, 199
973–4, 123, 141, 161
1024, 189
1046–7, 141

*Eumenides*
94–103, 147–9, 158–68
96–7, 130, 181
106–16, 149–52, 158–9, 167, 169–71
117–28, 152–3, 158–9, 166–8
129–39, 154–6, 159
155–61, 155, 168, 194
163–72, 199
175–7, 185–6, 191, 198–200
230, 177
232–4, 200
257–67, 177
264–72, 11, 187
267–75, 61, 73, 139, 166, 176–204
311, 206
312–20, 190–1
330–2, 189
339–40, 186
350–66, 194
377, 189
385, 199
422–3, 186, 209
482–84, 24
517–28, 204
526–30, 156
538–48, 193
598–9, 126–7
600–2, 123–4
603, 166, 197
604, 196
607–8, 199
620, 198
641–2, 197
644–51, 198
660, 197
662–6, 196
690–708, 24
736, 196
746, 135, 209
762–77, 136–41
774, 118
850, 189
864, 207
865, 207
893, 189
898–9, 209
903, 207
913–15, 207
970, 210
973, 210
974–5, 207
977–8, 206
984–7, 205
988–92, 189
1002, 210
1007–8, 198, 208
1045, 192, 210

*Persians*
213, 192
261, 31
607–842, 170
686–92, 101
827–8, 192

*Septem*
683–5, 87–8

*Suppliants*
158–8, 179
228–31, 179

*Prometheus Bound*
515–18, 10

Hesiod
*Works and Days*
109–201, 12–13

Homer
*Iliad*
9: 412–16, 20
18: 97–126, 20
23: 62–107, 7, 162, 166

*Odyssey*
5: 400–50, 35
7: 222–5, 34
11: 40–1, 162
71–2, 37, 158
387–466, 101
397–403, 36, 163
488–91, 20
492–3, 20
568–71, 101
12: 417–19, 35
24: 1–204, 7
19–97, 101

Pindar
*Olympian* 2
56–80, 13

Thucydides
2.35–46, 5–6
3.58.4, 6