Journal of Hellenic Studies 134 (2014) 23–40 doi:10.1017/S0075426914000032
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CLOSURE OR INDETERMINACY IN *SEPTEM* AND OTHER PLAYS?

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Abstract: I accept the general consensus that the transmitted end of *Septem* is not by Aeschylus; his play, as he wrote it, ends by giving an overwhelming impresssion that, while the brothers have killed each other, the city of Thebes has been saved. There are, however, three passages which seem to contradict that impression, by alluding to the usual version of the story in which the city will be destroyed by the Successors of the Seven in the next generation. I argue that all attempts by scholars to explain away this contradiction have been unsuccesssful. Aeschylus deliberately reminded his audience of the alternative version, and the question to be considered is why he did so.

Keywords: Endings, audience expectation, allusions in Greek tragedy

Most modern scholars agree that the end of *Septem* as it has come down to us is not by Aeschylus; the likeliest view is that 861–74, 996–97 and 1005 to the end are to be deleted, and that the play originally terminated at 1004 or soon after it with a brief development of the question, ‘Where are we to bury [the corpses of Eteocles and Polynices]?’[1] There is no place for Antigone and Ismene, and the lament at 875–1004 is to be shared between the two semi-choruses. I have no wish to challenge this consensus, and I am happy to accept that at the end of the play there is a strong feeling that the Curse has been fulfilled; with the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices the family has been totally destroyed, but the city has been saved.[2] The Messenger in his brief report, despite its textual problems, makes this clear, and the Chorus declares at 957–60

ἕστακε δ’ Ἄτας τρόπαιον ἐν πύλαις
ἐν αἷς ἐθείνοντο, καὶ
δυοῖν κρατήσας ἔληξε δαίμων

Ate’s trophy stands in the gates at which
they were struck down, and having conquered
them both the daemon has ceased

Compare also 689–91, 720–21 τὰν ὠλεσίοικον θεόν, 877–78 δόμων ἐπὶ λύμηι, 881–82, 955 παντρόπωι φυγᾶι γένους. When at 828 the Chorus describes the brothers as ἄτεκνοι (‘childless’), it

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[1] The most recent discussion of the interpolation is that of P. Judet de La Combe, ‘Sur la poètique de la scène finale des *Sept contre Thèbes*’, in M. Taufer (ed.), *Contributi critici sul testo di Eschilo: Ecdotica ed esegesi* (Tübingen 2011) 61–77.

[2] The funeral procession with which the play, like many others, probably ends provides at least a formal sense of closure; see P. Fowler, ‘Lucretian conclusions’, in D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn and D. Fowler (eds), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton 1997) 112–38, at 129–31; also D.H. Roberts, ‘The frustrated mourner: strategies of closure in Greek tragedy’, in R.M. Rosen and J. Farrell (eds), *Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald* (Ann Arbor 1993) 573–89; D.H. Roberts, ‘Beginnings and endings’, in J. Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Malden MA, Oxford and Carlton Victoria 2005) 136–48, at 143, on the modification to this form of closure when a character is for any reason excluded from the ritual. C. Segal, ‘Catharsis, audience, and closure in Greek tragedy’, in M.S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond* (Oxford 1996) 149–72, at 161, remarks, on Sophocles’ *Ajax*, that ‘ritual closure does not necessarily mean complete resolution of the conflicts raised by the play’.

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can mean only that they have no children to be involved in a second Argive attack on Thebes in the next generation. However, there are three weak points in the case for deletion. I have never seen them satisfactorily explained, and in this paper I suggest a modification to the usual interpretation of the ending of the play, one which has a bearing on our approach to tragedy in general. More particularly, it raises the question of whether we should expect every Aeschylean tragedy to end with complete closure. I take the three problematic passages in the order in which they occur in the play.

(1) 742–49

παλαιγενῆ γὰρ λέγω
παρβασίαν ὠκύποινον, αἰῶνα δ' εἰς τρίτον
μένειν, Ἀπόλλωνος εὖτε Λάϊος
βίαι, τρὶς εἰπόντος ἐν
μεσομφάλοις Πυθικοῖς χρηστηρίοις
θνάισκοντα γέννας ἄτερ σώιζειν πόλιν, ...[3]

For I speak of the ancient swiftly-avenged
transgression, that it remains into the
third generation, ever since Laius, in defiance
of Apollo, who at the Pythian oracle at the central
navel-stone three times told him to keep the city
safe by dying without issue …

One might translate more simply 'to save the city', but 'to keep the city safe' is more appropriate, since, if Laius had obeyed the oracle, there would have been no danger to the city which would have required it to be saved.[4] With this translation σώιζειν is probably the infinitive as after a verb of commanding, but it could be the indirect form of the prophetic present tense, 'that if he died without issue he would keep the city safe'. With the former Laius' disobedience is more strongly defined, while with the latter he merely ignored the warning. These minor uncertainties, however, do not seriously affect the meaning of the oracle. It would be perverse to interpret it as saying that one, but not of course the only, way for Laius to keep the city safe, was to die without issue. The clear implication of the oracle was that the safety of Thebes depended on it. In other words, since Laius did in fact procreate Oedipus before he died, the destruction of the city was inevitable;[5] in tragedy one can expect oracles to be fulfilled (*cf.* 844). But by the end of the play there is a general assumption that Thebes has in fact been saved. Those members of the audience, therefore, who look back then to the statement of the oracle in the present passage are faced with a choice: they must accept either that for some reason, and quite exceptionally, it never will be fulfilled[6] or that the danger of the city's destruction remains a real one at the end.

[3] The text is that of M.L. West (ed.), *Aeschyli Tragoediae* (Stuttgart and Leipzig 1990). G.O. Hutchinson (ed.), *Septem contra Thebas* (Oxford 1985) suggests emending to πάρβασιν οὐκ ὠκύποινον because the punishment cannot be described as swift 'when set against the span of three generations'. The sentence continues into the next stanza, with Laius' foolish procreation of Oedipus.

[4] We do not hear that there was already any danger to the city, which, as H.D. Cameron, *Studies on the* Seven against Thebes *of Aeschylus* (The Hague and Paris 1971) 19, speculates, might have been the reason for Laius' consultation of the oracle.

[5] So U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Aischylos Interpretationen* (Berlin 1914) 80.

[6] E. Flintoff, 'The ending of the *Seven against Thebes*', *Mnemosyne* 33 (1980) 244–71, at 257–63, rightly declines to believe that Aeschylus was prepared to let oracles be falsified, 'for no clear purpose' (259); *cf.* also 262–63. R. Parker, 'Aeschylus' gods: drama, cult, theology', in J. Jouanna and F. Montanari (eds), *Eschyle à l'aube du théâtre occidental: neuf exposés suivis de discussions: Vandoeuvres–Genève, 25–29 août 2008* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 55) (Geneva 2008) 127–64, at 129, correctly remarks that 'Apollo's warning to Laius not to beget children and Oedipus' curse upon his sons are uncontested facts which are certain, given the authority of an oracular god and a father's curse, to have disastrous consequences', but he makes no attempt to reconcile this statement with the apparent fact (p. 145) that the city will be saved.

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Modern scholars, for whom neither of these alternatives is palatable, are confident that they have found a way out of the impasse by inventing a qualification in the terms of the oracle. They are in general agreement that when Apollo said that if Laius had a son Thebes would be destroyed, what he really meant was that the city would be destroyed *unless the family which he founded died out in the third generation* (i.e. by the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices). '[Eteocles'] death is decreed by the gods – not merely by the paternal Erinys – as the very condition of the city's safety', and 'the gods' design was to save the city by destroying the family'.[7] 'It might … be expected that if the descendants of Laius were wiped out by mutual destruction the state would cease to be in danger, since the begetting of a son by Laius would be cancelled out and his act of disobedience atoned for by his descendants'.[8] 'Either the city must be ruined or the condition imposed on Laius must be met in a more roundabout fashion. The latter is what happens. The stipulation of the oracle is thus satisfied in a manner which would not have been immediately apparent from its wording but which is not incompatible with those terms'.[9] 'Oracles are traditionally ambiguous. This oracle might mean that the city would certainly be destroyed, if Laius had offspring: it was not excluded, however, that, if the family that should never have come into being were to perish, the city would be saved'.[10] 'The oracle is fulfilled and accomplished by the extinction of the house. This suggests a different form of the oracle from that given in 748f., a form which actually connects the death of the brothers with the warning of Apollo'.[11] 'Disregarding [the oracle given to Laius] means either of two things: the *polis* must be destroyed for the descendants to survive or the descendants must die for the *polis* to remain in existence'.[12]

Certainly it cannot be proved that the terms of the oracle in the present passage corresponded exactly with the account that was presumably given in the lost first play of the trilogy. But there is no positive reason to suppose that there was any significant difference between them, and in any case it is to the present, much more recent, account that the audience may look back later in this play. None of the statements in the preceding paragraph can be extracted from this passage or is even hinted at.[13] Unlike many oracles, it contains no significant ambiguity. Or rather, the only

[7] B. Otis, 'The unity of the *Seven against Thebes*', *GRBS* 3 (1960) 153–74, at 166, 169.

[8] G.R. Manton, 'The second stasimon of the *Seven against Thebes*', *BICS* 8 (1961) 77–84, at 79–80, quoted with approval by R.D. Dawe, 'Inconsistency of plot and character in Aeschylus', *PCPhS* 9 (1963) 21–62, at 41.

[9] W.G. Thalmann, *Dramatic Art in Aeschylus's* Seven against Thebes (New Haven and London 1978) 23.

[10] R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983) 20. But, when an oracle declares that if x happens y is certain to be the result, that surely does exclude the possibility that y may not be the result.

[11] Hutchinson (n.3) on 801–02. Also on 749, 'it appears that the oracle has been fulfilled with the death of the two brothers', and on 842, but less confidently at p. xxix, 'it is not quite unreasonable to infer that Apollo's prediction in the first play was not absolute, but conditional'.

[12] I. Torrance, *Aeschylus.* Seven Against Thebes (London 2007) 26. See also T. Rosenmeyer, '*Seven against Thebes*. The tragedy of war', *Arion* 1 (1962) 48–78, at 73–76 = M.H. McCall (ed.), *Aeschylus: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs 1972) 40–62, at 58–61; A. Burnett, 'Curse and dream in Aeschylus' *Septem*', *G&R* 14 (1973) 343–68, at 365, 368; E. Jackson, 'The argument of *Septem contra Thebas*', *Phoenix* 42 (1988) 287–303, at 301–02; R. Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis: The Social Construction of Space and Time in the Tragedies of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 2012) 166–68. (In 'Dionysus as destroyer of the household: Homer, tragedy, and the polis', in T.H. Carpenter and C.A. Faraone (eds), *Masks of Dionysus* (Ithaca and London 1993) 115–46, at 139 n.108 = *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (Oxford 1994) 347 n.60 Seaford himself admits that this logic is 'somewhat perverse, it is true'); F.G. Hermann, 'Eteocles' delusion in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*', in D. Cairns (ed.), *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought* (Swansea 2013) 39–80, at 63–70.

[13] A.J. Podlecki, 'The character of Eteocles in Aeschylus' *Septem*', *TAPhA* 95 (1964) 283–99, at 297, 299, in an appendix to his argument against the *Opfertod* theory (see n.95), rightly protests against the idea that Eteocles compensates for, or cancels out, Laius' disobedience in begetting Oedipus; see also Cameron (n.4) 45. O. Klotz, 'Zu Aischylos Thebanischer Tetralogie', *RhM* 72 (1917–1918) 616–25, at 617, and P. Groeneboom (ed.), *Aeschylus* Zeven tegen Thebe (Groningen 1938) on 746–49 (see also H.D. Cameron, '"Epigoni" and the law of inheritance in Aeschylus' *Septem*', *GRBS* 9 (1968) 247–57, at 250) have found little support in their attempt to interpret the oracle to mean that, if Laius has offspring, not he but Eteocles will be the saviour of the city.

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ambiguity concerns the meaning of 'into the third generation'.[14] If speculation were permitted, one might suppose that these words were part of the original oracle, which predicted that the city would be destroyed in the third generation.[15] This would explain the Chorus's anxiety at this stage of the play, before the announcement of the brothers' death and the city's salvation. But it is open to the objection that the oracle is in the end unfulfilled. More remote still is the possibility that according to the oracle the threat would not last beyond the third generation, so that, if by that time the city had somehow avoided destruction, it would be safe thereafter.[16] It is much more likely that the phrase is not part of the oracle, but merely the Chorus's comment on it. The Chorus reflects that it is now the third generation since the oracle was given; it has not yet been fulfilled, but, as 764–65 indicates (δέδοικα δὲ σὺν βασιλεῦσι μὴ πόλις δαμασθῆι), it looks horribly as if it is about to be fulfilled.[17] The audience is probably not intended to share that particular fear. The destruction of Thebes as an immediate result of the duel between Eteocles and Polynices would be too drastic an alteration to the traditional story, and at this stage the audience has not yet received the slightest hint that Aeschylus will innovate by excluding the fall of Thebes *in the next generation*. Rather, he deliberately encourages us here to expect that the later destruction of the city will play a role in Aeschylus' treatment of the myth,[18] partly perhaps for the sake of a surprise when the preparation turns out to have been false,[19] but, as we shall see, there may be more to it than that.

The surprise comes with the Messenger's arrival at 792 with the announcement that Eteocles and Polynices have killed each other but that the city has been saved. This is the first intimation to the audience that Aeschylus will depart from the usual version of the story. Since we learn, also for the first time, at 828 that the brothers have died without children (see above), it seems clear that for Aeschylus there can after all be no destruction of the city in the next generation. In the anapaestic prelude to the following *stasimon* the Chorus wonders whether it should rejoice at the salvation of the city or lament the death of the brothers (822–31), before concentrating, apparently exclusively, on the latter. What, then, are we to make of our second passage?

(2) 842–44

βουλαὶ δ' ἄπιστοι Λαΐου διήρκεσαν.
μέριμνα δ' ἀμφὶ πτόλιν·
θέσφατ' οὐκ ἀμβλύνεται

Laius' disobedient plans have endured.
There is anxiety for the city;
(the) oracles do not lose their edge

[14] This would be rather different from the ambiguity sometimes found in ἐς τόδ' ἡμέρας, when the phrase 'ominously leaves an opening for a change in the future (425n.)' (D.J. Mastronarde (ed.) *Euripides*, Phoenissae (Cambridge 1994) on 1085). Here the fear would be that the curse might *not* change.

[15] Torrance (n. 12) 56 compares Exodus 20.5 in which God visits 'the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation'.

[16] In Sophocles' *Ajax* the anger of Athena towards Ajax is predicted by the prophet Calchas to last for only a single day. L. Lupaş and Z. Petre, *Commentaire aux* Sept contre Thèbes *d'Eschyle* (Bucharest and Paris 1981) 237, remark that the number three traditionally implies finality.

[17] F. Solmsen, 'The Erinys in Aischylos *Septem*', *TAPhA* 68 (1937) 197–211, at 207, recognizes that at this stage there was still a chance that the city might be destroyed, but, if I understand him correctly, he supposes that Aeschylus later changed his mind, because 'it was repugnant to Aischylos' moral and religious feeling that the curse and the catastrophe should include the city'. Why did this repugnance emerge only after Aeschylus had written more than half of the play?

[18] For the (false) expectation, as early as the first stasimon, that the play will end with this threat, see K. Valakas, 'The first stasimon of the Chorus in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*', *SIFC* 11 (1993) 55–86, at 73. A. Hecht and H.H. Bacon (trs), Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* (Oxford 1974) 8, in their defence of the transmitted ending of the play, naturally find in the stasimon (their 362–451) a prophecy of Thebes' ultimate fate.

[19] For this essential element of Aeschylus' dramatic technique, see A.F. Garvie, 'Aeschylus' simple plots', in R.D. Dawe, J. Diggle and P.E. Easterling (eds), *Dionysiaca: Nine Studies in Greek Poetry by Former Pupils Presented to Sir Denys Page on his Seventieth Birthday* (Cambridge 1978) 63–86; A.F. Garvie (ed.), Aeschylus *Persae* (Oxford 2009) 229–30.

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The lines belong to the second stanza of the ode. It seems impossible that the Chorus can sing of its anxiety for the city when it has just been told that the danger is past. There is, therefore, a fairly general consensus among modern scholars that my translation of 843 must be wrong.[20] Most have followed Klotz (n.13) 619, who proposes instead to take ἀμφί in a local sense and to understand 'there is lamentation all round the city'. The reference, then, is to the city's reaction to the news of the brothers' death. Hutchinson (n.3) comments, 'I take it … that μέριμνα can refer to the expression of grief, as well as to the feeling itself',[21] while Sommerstein translates 'around the city there is lamentation' (but with the other interpretation in a footnote).[22] It seems to me that, if μέριμνα here means the feeling of 'grief', it is a very rare use of the word, and I can find almost no evidence at all for the idea that it can mean 'lamentation'.

Essentially μέριμνα (and its cognates) is 'anything that occupies the mind',[23] and it often 'stands very near to φροντίς in meaning'.[24] It first appears in Hesiod, and in Classical Greek it remains, apart from Xenophon, a largely poetic word. In most of its occurrences it can be translated by 'care, concern, worry, or anxiety'. Sometimes the anxieties are left unspecified,[25] as when someone prays or wishes that he or she may be released or relieved from them.[26] Since sorrow for some past event can obviously occupy the mind there is no reason in principle why the word should not be used in such a context, but in practice it almost always denotes anxiety for the future.[27] Of the eight occurrences, apart from the present one, in Aeschylus only once is the sense 'sorrow' remotely possible (see below). Atossa uses it to describe her double anxiety at *Persae* 165, the Chorus of *Agamemnon* in a context of foreboding at 99 and 460. At *Agamemnon* 1531 its accompanying adjective, εὐπάλαμος, 'resourceful', may be slightly less negative in tone, but the context is that of the coming ruination of the house. In *Septem* itself (289–90) it is the Chorus's fear that the *city* will be destroyed by the Argive invaders that has led it to sing γείτονες δὲ καρδιᾶς | μέριμναι ζωπυροῦσι τάρβος | τὸν ἀμφιτειχῆ λεῶν, 'close to my heart anxieties kindle dread at the host that surrounds the walls'.

Sometimes μέριμνα describes the care involved in being responsible for something or someone, as at Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1124, 1460; Euripides *Heracles* 343; *Andromache* 987–88 νυμφευμάτων μὲν τῶν ἐμῶν πατὴρ ἐμὸς | μέριμναν ἕξει, 'my father will have the care of my marriage'. At Bacchylides 3.57 it is used of the gods' care (for a human being). Compare probably Aeschylus *Eumenides* 132 and 360. To this category I would ascribe Euripides *Hecuba* 897, in the passage cited by Klotz (n.13) in support of his view that the word could be used of grief or lamentation; Hecuba, anxious that her two dead children should share the same funeral pyre, describes them as a δισσὴ μέριμνα μητρί. She means either that she had all the worry of bringing

[20] Podlecki (n.13) 298–99 is an exception. P. Mazon (ed.), *Eschyle* 1[6] (Paris 1953) translates (correctly) 'une angoisse étreint la ville', but comments (106) that Aeschylus cannot have noticed that this damages the general impression that he wants to give of the city's salvation at the end of the play.

[21] Klotz (n.13) 619 cites in his support Eur. *Hec.* 897 and *Rhes.* 550; while Hutchinson (n.3) cites Eur. *Hipp.* 1429 and *Rhes*. 550. On these passages, see below.

[22] A.H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus* 1 (Loeb Classical Library145) (Cambridge MA and London 2008). I take it that C. Collard (tr.), *Aeschylus: Persians and Other Plays* (Oxford 2008) intends more or less the same with his translation, 'around the city there is despair'. Flintoff (n.6) 261 finds a deliberate ambiguity.

[23] R.D. Dawe (ed.), Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Cambridge 1982) (2nd edition 1986) on *OT* 728.

[24] E. Fraenkel (ed.) Aeschylus *Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950) on 1531.

[25] *Hom. Hy. Herm.* 44; Hes. *Op.* 178; Eur. *Hcld.* 594; Diphilus fr. 88 K-A; Apollod. Com. 3 K-A; Hp. *Insomn.* 89 (p. 648L); Pl. *Amat.* 134b.

[26] Hes. *Th.* 55; Mimn. 1.7 (the troubles of old age); Theogn. 343, 1323, 1325; Sapph. 1.26; Bacchyl. 5.7; Eur. *Ba.* 381.

[27] Apart from Aeschylus, see, for example, Stesich. *PMGF* 222 (b). 201–03 (the speaker is the mother of Eteocles and Polynices); Soph. *OT* 728; Eur. *Ion* 244; Matthew 6.25, 6.34, 13.22. Cairns, in D.L. Cairns and J.G. Howie, *Bacchylides: Five Epinikian Odes* (Cambridge 2010) 287–88 (on 11.85–86), following H. Maehler, *Die Lieder des Bakchylides* 1 (Leiden 1982) 232–33, observes that Pindar and Bacchylides 'use μέριμνα as if derived from μερμηρίζειν (to ponder or plan a course of action)'.

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them up, or, more probably, that she now accepts the responsibility for their joint funeral. At *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 160 Zeus is said to have begotten Hermes to be a μέριμνα, 'a worry', for mortal men and immortal gods. For worrying responsibilities more generally, compare Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 8.7.12; *Memorabilia* 3.5.23.

A more positive aspect of μέριμνα is seen in such passages as Pindar *Olympian* 2.54 (*cf. Pythian* 8.92, fr. 227.1), where it is the anxious thought that leads to great endeavours. Often in Pindar and Bacchylides it 'has an almost specialized sense … "anxious thought for distinction in the games"'.[28] In this sense it comes close to 'ambition'.[29] It can describe also the intellectual effort employed in poetic composition, as at Bacchylides 19.11 Κηΐα μέριμνα.[30] At Euripides *Hippolytus* 1428–29, where Artemis promises Hippolytus a cult at Trozen, ἀεὶ δὲ μουσοποιὸς ἐς σὲ παρθένων | ἔσται μέριμνα,[31] the reference is not to the performance (as Hutchinson (n. 3) takes it) but to the composition of the mourning songs. And the same may be true of the nightingale's μελοποιὸς μέριμνα, which I take to mean 'care for making song', at *Rhesus* 550, the other passage cited by Hutchinson, where, however, the text is uncertain. Sometimes it becomes almost a technical term for philosophical thinking.[32]

It is hard to find any certain instance of μέριμνα or its cognates used of a concern for a specific past event. At Euripides *Hippolytus* 1157 the Messenger introduces his report of Hippolytus' death with the words Θησεῦ, μερίμνης ἄξιον φέρω λόγον, 'Theseus, I bring you news that merits your concern'. This is not a matter that will cause Theseus to be anxious for the future. Nevertheless it would be an odd way of saying '… that will cause you to grieve over what has happened'. The Messenger probably means only that it is important enough for Theseus to put his mind to it. Another possibility is Sophocles *Antigone* 857–58 where Antigone says that the Chorus, in the context of her father's and her family's unhappy history, has touched on her ἀλγεινοτάτας μερίμνας. She may mean that the Chorus has made her think about the painful past. However, the syntax and meaning are uncertain, and it may be rather that the 'care' is for the composition of the repeated lament (οἶκτον 959) which that painful past has forced her to utter. The passage would, then, belong to the category discussed in the previous paragraph.

Of the other eight occurrences of μέριμνα in Aeschylus the only one that might seem to require the translation 'sorrow' is in the very next stanza of *Septem* at 849, where, despite the textual uncertainties (μερίμναιν διδύμαιν Page or διπλᾶι μερίμναι Hutchinson or διπλαῖν μερίμναιν West),[33] it does look as if the Chorus is referring to its double *sorrow* at the sight of the two corpses which have just been brought on to the stage. If so, it is the surrounding language that defines the highly exceptional meaning there, whereas at 843 the audience, having heard 289–90 and not yet having heard 849, will surely, in the light of the oracle as it is described in our first passage, associate μέριμνα with πόλιν in the normal sense, 'anxiety for the city'. At 900, later in the ode, Aeschylus expresses very simply the idea that the city is filled with lamentation: διήκει δὲ καὶ

[28] Pind. *Ol.* 1.108; *Nem.* 3.69; Bacchyl. 1.179; R.W.B. Burton, *Pindar's Pythian Odes: An Essay in Interpretation* (Oxford 1962) 190 on *Py.* 8.92; see also Mastronarde (n.14) on *Phoen.* 1063 Καδμείαν μέριμναν. H. Maehler *Die Lieder des Bakchylides* 2 (Leiden and New York 1997) 252 (on Bacchyl. 19.11) defines it as 'das planende, auf ein Ziel gerichtete Denken', also 259 (on 19.33–34) and Maehler (n.27) 24–25 (on 1.178–79), 232–33 (on 11.85–86).

[29] So W.J. Slater, *Lexicon to Pindar* (Berlin 1969) *s.v.*

[30] F.G. Kenyon, *The Poems of Bacchylides* (London 1898) 186 comments that Pindar 'uses μέριμνα of the care taken by athletes in the preparation for their contests; here it is of the poet's care in the preparation of his poems'.

[31] W.S. Barrett (ed.), Euripides *Hippolytus* (Oxford 1964) remarks, 'μέριμνα as if the girls composed their own songs: perhaps they did, but it is a common fiction of lyric poetry that it is extemporized by the singer'. M. Wright, 'The tragedian as critic: Euripides and early Greek poetics', *JHS* 130 (2010) 165–84, at 169–70, understands it differently, 'the virgins' care for you will be the subject of poetry'.

[32] See D.L. Page (ed.), Euripides *Medea* (Oxford 1938) on 1226; K.J. Dover (ed.), Aristophanes *Clouds* (Oxford 1968) on 101 (*cf.* 1404; Soph. *OT* 1124; Xen. *Mem.* 4.7.6; Pl. *Rep.* 10.607b), LSJ *s.v.* 5.

[33] D.L. Page (ed.), *Aeschylus* (Oxford 1972); Hutchinson (n.3); West (n.3).

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πόλιν στόνος. Why did he prefer to use μέριμνα with such an obscure sense here? The audience may perhaps sense an ambiguity, but I do not think that even that is likely, or that at 849 it can be expected to go back and revise its understanding of 843.

For the use of ἀμφί = 'about', 'concerning' in the context of fear or anxiety, compare *Persians* 8, 168 ἀμφὶ δ' ὀφθαλμῶι φόβος, *Prometheus Bound* 182 δέδια δ' ἀμφὶ σαῖς τύχαις. In these occurrences ἀμφί governs a dative, and the accusative when it means 'concerning' is rare in tragedy,[34] but compare Pindar *Nemean* 1.54 ἀπήμων κραδία κᾶδος ἀμφ' ἀλλότριον, Sophocles *Trachiniae* 937 ἀμφί νιν γοώμενος, *Antigone* 168, *Electra* 846, Euripides *Trojan Women* 511, 937, *Orestes* 1538. In early poetry it often expresses what an ode is 'about'.[35] Were it not for the inconsistency with the sense of closure at the end of the play, I suspect that no one would ever have questioned the translation, 'there is anxiety for the city'.

That, with my translation of 843, the passage interrupts the course of the ode as a whole is undeniable. It seems also to be an awkward interruption within its own stanza, which begins with the fulfilment of Oedipus' curse and ends at 845–47 with the brothers' death. Hutchinson (n.3) understandably complains (843n.) that 'this arrangement is stylistically disconcerting. It would be more satisfying to have the whole stanza devoted to the sons, after the elaborate preamble (822–31) and the emphatic announcement (835–8) of the lament'. However, with Hutchinson's interpretation, no less confusing in the light of the anapaestic prelude would be the use of *polis* language here to refer to grief for the *family*.

More important is the fact that the 'interruption' encourages us to think about the relationship between the oracle given to Laius and the curse which Oedipus laid on his sons. At 840–41 (as at 819) it is the latter that is held responsible for their deaths (οὐδ' ἄπειπεν πατρόθεν εὐκταία φάτις). But at 842 the Chorus, in a sentence linked to the preceding by δέ, refers to Laius' failure to obey Apollo's oracle. According to Hutchinson 'the curse of Oedipus and the disobedience of Laius are here set together. Both have endured down to their fulfilment in the death of Eteocles and Polynices'. It is true that in the final part of the play the distinction between the oracle, which threatened the city with destruction, and the later curse, which led to the brothers' death, seems to be somewhat blurred (689–91,705–09, 766, 801–02, 812, 960). As West says,[36] Aeschylus tries to present the whole saga as flowing from one original ἀρχὴ κακῶν. Here, however, where the two kinds of responsibility are so carefully set out side by side, it seems more likely that Aeschylus does have the distinction in mind. If so, the 'interruption' perhaps begins at 842, not 843, and we should punctuate with a full-stop after 841 and a colon after 842; or, better, at 842 we glide almost imperceptibly from the fate of the brothers to the anxiety for the city. This interpretation is strengthened by the way in which the two references to the oracle frame 843. It is uncertain whether 844 is a *gnomê* confirming the present instance, 'oracles [in general] do not lose their edge', or, as I prefer to believe, quite specific, 'the oracles [given to Laius] are not losing their edge'. Even the present tense may be significant, if it suggests that they have still to be fulfilled.

[34] See H. Friis Johansen and E.W. Whittle (eds), Aeschylus *Suppliant Maidens* (Copenhagen 1980) on *Supp.* 246 (they take the present instance as local) and A.C. Moorhouse, *The Syntax of Sophocles* (Leiden 1982) 97.

[35] For example *Hom. Hy. Herm.* 57; *Hy.* 7.1; Pind. *Py.* 2.15.

[36] M.L. West, 'Ancestral curses', in J. Griffin (ed.), *Sophocles Revisited: Essays Presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford 1999) 31–45, at 40. Rosenmeyer (n.12) 50, 72 (= 42, 56–57), suggests that Oedipus' curse serves to revitalize or re-evoke the curse on the royal house that was produced by Laius' flouting of the oracle. Some scholars believe that Aeschylus follows the version in which an original curse was pronounced on Laius by Pelops as a result of his crime against Chrysippus; for example Thalmann (n.9) 9–17 tentatively; T.C.W. Stinton, 'The scope and limits of allusion in Greek tragedy', in *Collected Papers in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1990) 454–92, at 461-3 = M. Cropp, E. Fantham and E. Scully (eds), *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays Presented to D.J. Conacher* (Calgary 1986) 67–102, at 72–73. West rightly denies that the earlier misfortunes of Laius and Oedipus had anything to do with a curse: 'what is highlighted as the common factor in the whole story is ill-judged, deluded behaviour, not an ancestral curse'.

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With this uncertainty unresolved, we move into the final part of the play, where it is almost entirely forgotten, as all the emphasis is placed on the salvation of the city. Our third passage, therefore, should come as a shock.

(3) 901–05

… μένει
κτέανα δ' ἐπιγόνοις,
δι' ὧν αἰνομόροις,
δι' ὧν νεῖκος ἔβα καὶ θανάτου τέλος (West's text)

… The property is left for their successors, the property through which strife came upon them, ill-fated as they are, with death as its end

The Epigoni are, from as early as the post-Homeric epic poem with that title,[37] the successors and sons of the Seven against Thebes, who, led by Thersander the son of Polynices, succeeded in sacking Thebes, whose defence was led by Laodamas the son of Eteocles (Pindar *Olympian* 2.43; Herodotus 4.147.1, 5.61). The story was already known to Homer, although he does not use the title.[38] Sommerstein states the problem concisely: 'any allusion to them here would clash with the assumption, basic to the last third of this play, that the house of Laius is now extinct'.[39] He himself obelises the word. But most scholars have had recourse to either of two explanations. For some, the word is used by Aeschylus, not as a title for the sons of the Seven, but more generally to mean any non-family or not direct family members who will succeed to the property, or more simply the next rulers of Thebes.[40] Cameron argues that the reference is to Eteocles and Polynices themselves as the younger brothers of Oedipus.[41] This general approach can hardly be correct. The *verb* ἐπιγίγνομαι can be used in general of 'successors' (Homer *Iliad* 6.148; Herodotus 7.2.2, 7.3.3, 9.85.3). However, in the fifth century, as Hutchinson demonstrates,[42] the rare *noun* ἐπίγονοι is used almost exclusively of the sons of the Seven (at Pindar *Pythian* 8.42; Euripides *Suppliants* 1224; *cf*. later Diodorus Siculus 4.66 etc). Plays with that title were composed by both Aeschylus himself and Sophocles. The only occurrences of the word with a more general reference are at Hecataeus, *FGrHist* 1 F30 (of the sons of Heracles, probably by analogy with the sons of the Seven; Hutchinson deletes the word there), Hippocrates Περὶ διαίτης 1.31 (probably late in the century) and Xenophon *Oeconomicus* 7.34 (of bees), where the text is uncertain. In the fourth century Plato uses it of children who are not chosen as their father's heir (*Laws* 740c, 929d). Later

[37] Hdt. 4.32 doubts whether its author was Homer. A scholion on Ar. *Peace* 1270 attributes it to a certain Antimachus, who is said (Plut. *Rom*. 12) to have come from Teos and to have worked in the mid-eighth century; see G.L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry* (London 1969) 46–50; A. Bernabé, *Poetarum epicorum Graecorum testimonia et fragmenta* (Leipzig 1987) 29–30; S.D. Olson (ed.), *Aristophanes* Peace (Oxford 1998) on 1270.

[38] *Il.* 4.406–10. That Aeschylus was the first to employ the title as a proper name, and that even well-informed members of the audience may not have known the story (Thalmann (n. 9) 138–39, following G.M. Kirkwood, 'Eteocles Oiakostrophos', *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 9–25, at 25 n.25), is scarcely credible.

[39] Sommerstein (n.22) 249 n.135.

[40] For example Klotz (n.13) 617; H. Erbse, 'Zur Exodos der *Sieben* (Aisch. *Sept.* 1005–78)', in J.L. Heller (ed.), *Serta Turyniana: Studies in Greek Literature and Palaeography in Honor of Alexander Turyn* (Urbana, Chicago and London 1974) 169–98, at 188; Dawe (n.8) 42 n.1; Kirkwood (n.38) 24–25; Thalmann (n.9) 139; Lupaş and Petre (n.16) 268; Collard (n.22) 197, 'loose in reference, the next rulers of Thebes'. F.W. Schneidewin, 'Die Didaskalie der Sieben gegen Theben', *Philologus* 3 (1848) 348–71, at 360–61 n.14, finds bitter irony: the property is left for those who come later, but there is in fact no one who *will* come later.

[41] Cameron (n.13) esp. 255–57; (n. 4) 14, 52–57, basing his argument on a supposed system of primogeniture in early Greece; see also A. Burnett, 'Curse and dream in Aeschylus' *Septem*', *GRBS* 14 (1971) 343–68, at 368 n.39, 'for men other than the presumptive heirs' (citing the Plato passages mentioned below); *contra* Thalmann (n.9) 67–69; Hutchinson (n.3) 196.

[42] Hutchinson (n.3). Earlier H. Lloyd-Jones, 'The end of the *Seven against Thebes*', *CQ* 9 (1959) 80–115, at 87–92; Flintoff (n.6) 249–51.

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still it could denote the successors of Alexander the Great (*Suda s.v.* Νύμφις etc.). It is highly unlikely that when Aeschylus used the word here he himself was not thinking of the sons of the Seven or that he did not expect his audience to do so.[43]

The second approach is that of scholars who, accepting that the word must refer to the sons of the Seven, explain its occurrence in terms of Aeschylus' incompetence or absentmindedness. Wilamowitz blames it on Aeschylus' clumsy attempt to combine the epic tradition of the Seven against Thebes with a tragic story of the house of Labdacus.[44] For other scholars· Aeschylus, despite his decision to end his play with the closure provided by the total annihilation of the family and the saving of the city, momentarily forgot himself, when he used a word that pointed clearly to the familiar version of the story that he himself rejected.[45] It is hard to believe that he could have been so incompetent, and that no one at a rehearsal pointed out to him his blunder.

The very different solution of Hutchinson is not without its attractions. He simply removes the problem altogether by deleting κτέανα δ' ἐπιγόνοις as a two-stage interpolation.[46] It is true that δ' appears only in Lh and that in the transmitted text there is the additional difficulty of strophic responsion; a choice has to be made between deletion here and positing a lacuna in the strophe. Hutchinson argues that the subject of the verb μένει, the antecedent of the double relative clause δι' ὧν, is suppressed. Such a suppression is indeed common enough in itself. The problem in this particular case is that its omission would produce an even less intelligible sentence than the one which in its transmitted form is already difficult enough.[47] So the contradiction between 'epigoni' and the brothers' childlessness remains, and it is I think, irreconcilable. I do not believe that Aeschylus was a careless writer. The only option left to us, therefore, is to conclude that Aeschylus must have intended in all three passages to exploit, and not to suppress, the tension between the traditional and his own new version of the story, and to ask *why* the closure is not quite complete.

The reluctance to consider this possibility is a relic of an old assumption that Greek tragedy always did aim at complete closure;[48] there should be no unfinished business at the end and no unanswered questions, so that it is methodologically wrong to speculate about what happens to the characters thereafter, unless the dramatist specifically encourages us to do so, as, for example, by means of a generally perfunctory Euripidean *deus ex machina*; what happens ἔξω τοῦ δράματος[49] should not be our concern. Allied to this is the further assumption that we should put out of our minds *any* elements of the traditional story that the dramatist has chosen not to mention. 'It must', declares Fraenkel, 'be regarded as an established and indeed a guiding principle for any interpretation of Aeschylus that the poet does not want us to take into account any feature of a tradition which he does not mention'.[50]

[43] At Bacchyl. 9.50–52 the surprising description of the streets of Thebes as 'unsacked' (ἀπόρθητοι) seems to whitewash the Epigoni out of the story, possibly for political reasons; see D. Fearn, 'Mapping Phleious: politics and myth-making in Bacchylides 9', *CQ* 53 (2003) 347–67, at 360–61; but also Cairns (n.27) 261.

[44] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 'Die Perser des Aischylos', *Hermes* 32 (1897) 382–98, at 390; (1914) (n.5) 67–68; *Griechische Verskunst* (Berlin 1921) 199; for similar criticism of the play, see Cameron (n. 4) 100.

[45] Groeneboom (n.13) on 901–06; Mazon (n.20) 105–06; Dawe (n.8) 42 n.1.

[46] The deletion was first made by A.W. Verrall (ed.), Aeschylus *Septem* (London and New York 1887), who, however, took μένει as a causal dative of the noun μένος. I find it difficult to follow his interpretation of the lines.

[47] That, no doubt, is why most editors and commentators have preferred, often without question, to adopt a lacuna in the strophe, despite the problem that they find with ἐπίγονοι. It may be significant that Hutchinson does not provide a translation of his text.

[48] So, for example, Cameron (n.4) 56, 'I expect to find at the end of a play – and especially at the end of a trilogy – that all questions have been resolved'; D.A. Hester, 'The banishment of Oedipus', *Antichthon* 18 (1984) 13–23, at 13, 'It is not characteristic of Greek tragedy in general or of Sophoclean tragedy in particular to end on a dramatic high-point; loose ends must be tied up and the tension must be eased'.

[49] For Aristotle's use of that expression, see D.H. Roberts, 'Outside the drama: the limits of tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics*', in A.O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics* (Princeton 1992) 133–53.

[50] Fraenkel (n.24) 2.97. Gordon Williams, in his obituary of Fraenkel in *PBA* 56 (1970) 415–42, at 430, points out that Fraenkel did not always himself adhere to

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It may indeed be true that at the end of the *Oresteia* trilogy few members of the audience will worry about what will happen to Electra and not many may remember her promise to offer marriage-libations to her father at *Choephori* 486–87.[51] It might seem to ruin the tragedy of *Agamemnon* if we did not take seriously the sacrifice of Iphigenia, as we know that she did not really die, because traditionally Artemis substituted for her a deer or a phantom.[52] But it would be dangerous to derive from a few specific cases 'an established and indeed a guiding principle'.

In more recent years scholarship has moved on, and there has been an increasing recognition that many Greek and Latin literary genres are characterized by indeterminacy rather than closure. For Sophocles and Euripides, but not yet for Aeschylus, this view has indeed become mainstream.[53] Many Homeric scholars have come to insist on 'narrative indeterminacy' as a technique of epic poetry.[54] Slatkin shows (n.54, 226) how 'each performance-composition of a song must necessarily reflect, and participate in, the evolution of possible alternatives to the version it actually presents', while Steiner (n.54, 83–84) considers the possibility that the mysterious Theoclymenus was introduced by Homer 'so as to enrich his story and open up a variety of possible plot trajectories'. Similarly for Steiner (n.54, 27–28; see also Felson-Rubin n.54 *passim*) Homer in the earlier parts of the poem offers several models for Penelope's behaviour 'so as to keep his audience in doubt as to how exactly his familiar tale will be resolved'. As for lack of closure at

this principle (I owe this reference to M. Davies, 'The stasimon of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the limits of mythological allusion', *SIFC* 19 (2001) 53–58, at 57, and to a private communication).

[51] It seems unlikely that her marriage to Pylades was already part of the story, although U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 'Die beiden Elektren', *Hermes* 18 (1883) 214–63, at 221 n.1, thinks that it appeared in Stesichorus (see n.75 below). Xanthus, the predecessor of Stesichorus, derived her name from ἄλεκτρος ('unmarried'). If Aeschylus' audience was aware of this etymology, it may have felt a moment of pathos at *Cho*. 486–87; Electra would never be able to fulfil her promise. But at the end of the trilogy it is certainly not uppermost in the audience's mind.

[52] But even this is uncertain. Griffith suggests that the obvious evasion of the Chorus at *Ag.* 248, when it reaches the moment of the sacrifice, may have caused the audience to recall that version and speculates that in *Proteus*, the satyr-play, it may have been revealed that Iphigenia in fact remained safe and sound: M. Griffith, 'Slaves of Dionysus: satyrs, audience, and the ends of the *Oresteia*', *ClAnt* 21 (2002) 195–258, at 242–43; also 'Contest and contradiction in early Greek poetry', in M. Griffith and D.J. Mastronarde (eds), *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer* (Atlanta 1990) 185–207, at 200, n.53; and 'The poetry of Aeschylus', in Jouanna and Montanari (eds) (n.6) 1–55, at 43; earlier M. Cunningham, 'Thoughts on Aeschylus: the satyr play *Proteus* – the ending of the *Oresteia*', *LCM* 19 (1994) 67–68. According to the *Cypria* Iphigenia was brought to Aulis on the pretext that she was to be married to Achilles. Fraenkel rejects the view that there is a reference to this at *Ag.* 1523—24, but see also M.L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990) 222–23. There is also the wider question of the extent to which fifth-century audiences were familiar with the traditional myths.

[53] See, for example, Flintoff (n.6) 247–49; and the following papers in Silk (ed.) (n.2): Segal (n.2); O. Taplin, 'Comedy and the tragic' 188–216, at 196–99; P.E. Easterling, 'Weeping, witnessing, and the tragic audience: response to Segal' 173–81; R. Seaford (whose view is very different from the others), 'Something to do with Dionysus – tragedy and the Dionysiac' 284–94, esp. 290–93; see also S. West, 'Terminal problems', in P.J. Finglass, C. Collard and N.J. Richardson (eds), *Hesperos: Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry Presented to M.L. West on his Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford 2007) 3–21. In Roberts et al. (eds) (n. 2) the papers which are most relevant to Greek tragedy are by D. Fowler, 'Second thoughts on closure' 3–22; D.H. Roberts, 'Afterword: ending and aftermath, ancient and modern' 251–73; F.M. Dunn, 'Ends and means in Euripides' *Heracles*' 83–111; C. Pelling, 'Is death the end? Closure in Plutarch's *Lives*' 228–73, at 236–37. See further D.H. Roberts in Gregory (ed.) (n.2), esp. 142–48; M.S. Silk, 'The logic of the unexpected: semantic diversion in Sophocles, Yeats (and Virgil)', in S. Goldhill and E. Hall (eds), *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition* (Cambridge 2009) 134–57, at 155–57.

[54] For example, J. Peradotto, *Man in the Middle Voice: Name and Narration in the* Odyssey (Princeton 1990) 59–93, esp. 60; M.A. Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey* (Princeton 1991); N. Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics* (Princeton 1994); L.M. Slatkin, 'Composition by theme and the mētis of the *Odyssey*', in S.L. Schein (ed.), *Reading the* Odyssey*: Selected Interpretive Essays* (Princeton 1995) 223–37, esp. 226–28; J. Marks, 'Alternative Odysseys: the case of Thoas and Odysseus', *TAPhA* (2003) 209–26; D. Steiner (ed.), Homer *Odyssey* 17 and 18 (Cambridge 2010) ix–x, 27–28, 83–84.

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the end of the work, the *Iliad* clearly looks forward to the coming death of Achilles and the fall of Troy, while for Odysseus (*Odyssey* 11.121–37, 23.248-53 and 264-84) 'the finality of homecoming is deferred, and the ending of the story takes place instead under the sign of its indefinite continuity'.[55]

Aeschylus too (see above, n.19) likes to keep his audience in doubt as to how his story will develop. An almost certain instance is at *Choephori* 554–84, where Orestes' plan for dealing with Aegisthus when he finds him sitting on the throne will not in fact be fulfilled. The effect of the false preparation depends on the audience's familiarity with vase-paintings of the sixth and early fifth centuries which show this version of Aegisthus' death.[56] The frequency of mythological illustrations in the choral odes of Sophocles and Euripides points to a general knowledge of a wide range of stories.[57] In the first stasimon of *Choephori*, the only full-scale example of this technique in Aeschylus, so allusive is the treatment of three myths that they would have been scarcely intelligible to an audience that was unfamiliar with the details.[58] There is no good reason to suppose that the audience of *Septem* was any less aware of the traditional story of the Epigoni.

Our concern, however, is with the possible use of such knowledge to provide or to defer or to nullify closure at the end of a play. For Sophocles it has been claimed that at the end of every play there is an allusive reference to the future beyond the events of the play.[59] *Trachiniae* closes apparently with the death of the mortal Heracles as we look forward to his departure to Hades. Modern scholars, however, squabble about whether there is at the same time a contradictory allusive reference to the coming apotheosis which belongs to the traditional version of the story. Winnington-Ingram comments, 'it seems to be rather characteristic of Sophocles to introduce, without developing, such a hint towards the end of a play'.[60] If modern scholars are unable to agree, is there any good reason to suppose that an ancient audience found it easier? Equally enigmatic is the future of Oedipus at the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Recent studies have stressed how throughout the play we have expected that he will be sent, like a *pharmakos*, into exile at the end, so that it comes as a complete surprise when in the final lines that expectation is overturned as he and Creon

[55] Katz (n. 54) 187; see also Felson-Rubin (n.54) 5, 144 n.59, 179 n.15; M. Fusillo, 'How novels end: some patterns of closure in ancient narrative', in Roberts et al. (eds) (n.2) 209–27, at 213–14; D.H. Roberts, in Roberts et al. (eds) (n.2), 252–53.

[56] See A.F. Garvie (ed.), *Choephori* (Oxford 1986) xxii–xxiii, 174–75; M. Davies, 'Euripides' *Electra*: the recognition scene again', *CQ* 48 (1998) 389–403, at 395. For the same technique in Sophocles, see, for example, A.H. Sommerstein, 'Alternative scenarios in Sophocles' *Electra*', *Prometheus* 23 (1997) 193–214.

[57] Despite Aristotle's curious statement, *Po.* 1451b25–26, that 'even the well-known stories are familiar only to a few'; the comic poet Antiphanes was of a different opinion (fr. 189 K-A). For audience knowledge in general, see, for example, H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1971) 124–28.

[58] See Garvie (n.56) 202, 209. Stinton (n.36) 454 (= 67) maintains that 'in so far as an allusion was dramatically important the poet made it readily understandable, obscure or oblique allusions being correspondingly of little or no importance for the understanding of the play as a play'. One wonders why, then, the poet included them at all, if 'it is no great matter if the audience misses them' (460 (= 71)).

[59] D.H. Roberts, 'Sophoclean endings: another story', *Arethusa* 21 (1988) 177–96; see also M. Davies, 'The end of Sophocles' *O.T.* revisited', *Prometheus* 17 (1991) 1–18; P.E. Easterling, 'Sophoclean journeys', in J. Parker and T. Mathews (eds), *Tradition, Translation, Trauma: the Classic and the Modern* (Oxford 2011) 73–89, esp. 75–76.

[60] R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1980) 215 n.33; similarly P.E. Easterling (ed.), Sophocles *Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982) 10–11 and on 1270; Roberts (n.59) 182–83; R.B. Rutherford, *Greek Tragic Style: Form, Language and Interpretation* (Cambridge 2012) 377; more confidently T.F. Hoey, 'Ambiguity in the exodus of Sophocles' Trachiniae', *Arethusa* 10 (1977) 269–94; P. Holt, 'The end of *Trachiniai* and the fate of Herakles', *JHS* 109 (1989) 69–80; M. Davies (ed.), Sophocles *Trachiniae* (Oxford 1991) xx–xxii; C.S. Kraus, 'ΛΟΓΟΣ ΜΕΝ ΕΣΤ'ΑΡΧΑΙΟΣ: stories and story-telling in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*', *TAPhA* 121 (1991) 75–98, esp. 77, 95–98. Stinton (n.36) 479–90 (= 84–90) argues strongly against it; also F.M. Dunn, *Tragedy's End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama* (New York and London 1996) 5–6. A hint of a happy ending for Heracles would be the reverse of the kind of contradiction that I have tried to justify in *Septem*.

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depart into the palace.[61] 'Perhaps we should read the refusal of exile as in the first instance a refusal of closure'.[62] Even if, as some suppose, we are to think that the exile is only delayed, the play still does not end with closure. Oedipus himself prophesies (1455–57) concerning his own fate: 'and yet so much at least I know, that neither sickness nor anything else could destroy me; for I should never have been saved from death, were it not for me to meet with some strange (or 'terrible') misfortune (μὴ 'πί τωι δεινῶι κακῶι). That scholars are sharply divided as to what misfortune Sophocles has in mind is a strong indication that the closure at the end is not complete.[63] By the end of *Oedipus Coloneus* the troubles of the family have not found closure, and even the passing away of Oedipus has involved the exclusion of Antigone from the ritual of her father's burial.[64]

The end of *Philoctetes*, in terms of its plot construction, comes as a complete contrast to all that has gone before. Everything has led to the great climax in which Neoptolemus comes to his true self and refuses to cooperate any further with Odysseus' plan to bring Philoctetes to Troy. Instead, he agrees to take him home to Greece. Line 1408 with his imperative 'go' should mark the end, and it is not surprising that some have felt this to be 'the real ending' of the play.[65] Of course everyone in the audience knew that according to the traditional story Philoctetes did in fact go to Troy. However, as the audience is caught up in the logic of the plot, it almost forgets what it knew at the beginning, so that the 'second ending' somehow comes as a surprise. The appearance of Heracles, the only *deus ex machina* in Sophocles' surviving plays, restores the traditional story. Heracles commands Philoctetes to go to Troy where he will be healed and will share with Neoptolemus the glory of capturing the city, and Philoctetes obeys. In a sense the play ends happily. If

[61] P. Burian, 'Inconclusive conclusion: the ending(s) of *Oedipus Tyrannus*', in Goldhill and Hall (eds) (n.53) 99–118; also Roberts (n.59) 183; Davies (n.59) 9 ('the play ends … with a carefully contrived uncertainty and suspension'). See also in Rosen and Farrell (eds) (n.2): H.P. Foley, 'Oedipus as *pharmakos*', 525–38; R. Kitzinger, 'What do you know? The end of Oedipus', 548–56; D.H. Roberts (n.2 2005) 143. See further Fowler (n.53); F. Budelmann, 'The mediated ending of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*', *MD* 57 (2006) 43–61. For O. Taplin, 'Sophocles in his theatre', in B. Knox and J. de Romilly (eds), *Sophocle: sept exposés suivis de discussions: Vandœuvres–Genève 23–28 août 1982* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 29) (Geneva 1982) 155–74, at 169–74, on the other hand, there is indeed closure at the end: Oedipus does not obtain the exile that he wants, but has to go on living in the palace. J.R. March, *The Creative Poet: Studies on the Treatment of Myths in Greek Poetry* (BICS Supplement 49) (London 1987) 148–54, argues that the original play did end with Oedipus' exile; see also D.A. Hester, 'The banishment of Oedipus again', *Prometheus* 18 (1992) 97–101. The most recent contributions to the debate on the extent of interpolation (if any) at the end of the play concentrate mainly on the linguistic arguments: P.J. Finglass, 'The ending of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*', *Philologus* 153 (2009) 42–62; D. Kovacs, 'Do we have the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*?', *JHS* 129 (2009) 54–70; A.H. Sommerstein, 'Once more the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*', *JHS* 131 (2011) 85–93; Kovacs, 'The end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*: the sceptical case restated', *JHS* 134 (2014) 56–65.

[62] Burian (n.61) 107.

[63] For their different views, see R.C. Jebb (ed.), Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* (2nd edition) (Cambridge 1887) on 1455; J.C. Kamerbeek (ed.), *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Leiden 1967) on 1455–57; (ed.), *Oedipus Coloneus* (Leiden 1984) 3–4; Dawe (n.23) ad loc. (with a change of mind in 'On interpolations in the two Oedipus plays of Sophocles', *RhM* 144 (2001) 1–21, at 4–6; and in his 2nd edition (2006) of the play); Roberts (n.59); Davies (n.59); Burian (n.61); Budelmann (n.61) 51–52; Finglass (n.61) 45: Kovacs (n.61 2009) 66–68.

[64] See D.H. Roberts in Rosen and Farrell (n.2) 581–83. For indeterminacy at the end of *OC*, see especially P.E. Easterling, 'The death of Oedipus and what happened next', in D.L. Cairns and V. Liapis (eds), *Dionysalexandros: Essays on Aeschylus and his Fellow Tragedians in Honour of Alexander F. Garvie* (Swansea 2006) 133–50.

[65] For the two endings, see especially D.B. Robinson, 'Topics in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', *CQ* 19 (1969) 34–56, at 51–56; O. Taplin, 'Significant actions in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', *GRBS* 12 (1971) 25–44, at 35–36; M.C. Hoppin, 'Metrical effects, dramatic illusion, and the two endings of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', *Arethusa* 23 (1990) 141–82; Dunn (n.60) 38; Roberts in Gregory (ed.) (n.2) 144; most recently, A. Taousiani, 'Οὐ μὴ πίθηται: persuasion versus deception in the prologue of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', *CQ* 61 (2011) 426–44, esp. 442–44. In one sense, the 'second' end is the one anticipated by the audience from the beginning (Roberts (n. 59) 186–87; Dunn (n.60) 81–82), but that does not mean that 'the action has had a single goal, bringing Philoctetes and his bow to Troy, and thus ensuring that the city will be taken' (Dunn (n.60) 82). Sommerstein (n.56), 194–95, is therefore right to argue that 'the effectiveness of the device requires that the audience *should* be deceived'.

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Philoctetes had gone home, his foot would never have been healed and he would never have won glory at Troy. However, his enemies have got what they wanted and Philoctetes has not received the justice that he desired. More unsettling, as the writer of the scholion saw, is the injunction with which Heracles ends his speech (1440–44): ‘keep this in mind, when you ravage the land, to show piety towards the gods; for everything else Zeus considers to be secondary. For piety does not die with mortals; whether they live or die, *it* does not die’. This may be no more than a conventional moral platitude; but some at least of the audience may, like the scholiast, see in it a reference to the story, as old as the Epic Cycle, of how Neoptolemus killed Priam at the altar of Zeus and suffered later for his impiety. The audience, as Hoppin says, is perhaps invited to choose between the two endings.[66] Would it have been better for both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus if they had not gone to Troy?

In *Electra* everything has built up to the long-delayed joyous recognition-scene, during which we almost forget what is to follow it.[67] With the end of the recognition-scene at 1383 the mood changes dramatically, and by 1510 Clytaemestra has been killed offstage by Orestes and the play ends abruptly with Aegisthus being led into the palace to his death. There is no *deus ex machina* to remind us that Orestes will be pursued by the Erinyes for his matricide. Some of the older critics explain that it all happens so quickly because Sophocles wanted a happy ending, and we are not to linger too long on any unpleasantness or to question the justification of the killings.[68] Most recent scholars would probably agree that the change of mood comes as a shock to the audience, and that the ending, with Electra standing outside the door and screaming to her brother ‘strike her a second time, if you have the strength’ (1415), is one of the nastiest in all Greek tragedy.[69] It makes it all the worse that Aegisthus’ death is technically ἔξω τοῦ δράματος.[70] Sophocles makes the horror run over beyond what is technically the end. For a similar technique in *Persae*, see below, but in *Electra* we know that the fulfilment will be immediate. Even if there were no hints at all of what was to happen in the future, the mood at the end would still be one of horror; but in fact there have been hints throughout the play. If Sophocles had wanted us to close our minds to it, why did he mention the Erinyes at 112, 276, 491, 1080 and 1388?[71] Electra herself has described

[66] Hoppin (n.65). See also S.L. Schein, ‘Herakles and the ending of Sophokles’ *Philoctetes*’, *SIFC* 19 (2001) 38–52, at 52, ‘presumably every viewer and reader of the play, from its first production to the present day, must decide for himself or herself which ending would be more compelling and satisfying’; Rutherford (n.60) 363.

[67] See P.J. Finglass (ed.), Sophocles *Electra* (Cambridge 2007) on 1442–504, 1483–90. On p. 10 he rightly remarks, ‘Sophocles has deliberately eschewed any attempts at a satisfactory conclusion which ties up all loose ends’; so also Taplin (n.61) 163–64. S. Goldhill, ‘The audience on stage, rhetoric, emotion, and judgement in Sophoclean theatre’, in Goldhill and Hall (eds) (n.53) 40–42, asks, ‘What happens to Electra at the end of the play? What release can she hope for once her hatred no longer has an object?’ E. Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun* (Oxford 2010) 312–13, rightly judges that Sophocles ‘ironically undermines the apparently complacent closure of this familiar myth’. M. Wright, ‘The joy of Sophocles’ *Electra*’, *G&R* 52 (2005) 172–94, loses the effect of the sudden surprise by arguing that the recognition-scene has already been ‘undermined and made to appear somewhat sinister’ (188); see also R. Seaford, ‘The destruction of limits in Sophokles’ *Electra*’, *CQ* 35 (1985) 315–23.

[68] ‘The horizon is free of all clouds’, says A.J.A. Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge 1951) 174. J.R. March (ed.), Sophocles *Electra* (Warminster 2001) esp. 15–20 and ‘Introduction’ to the reprint of Jebb’s (Cambridge 1894) edition of Sophocles *Electra* (London 2004) 35–56, still favours the positive rather than the ‘darker’ reading of the play.

[69] For a different opinion, that the original audience would simply have endorsed Electra’s words here, see March (n.68) (2001) ad loc.

[70] For the expression, see n.49 above.

[71] The question is asked by Winnington-Ingram (n.60) 218, whose basic interpretation of the play is not, I think, invalidated by the arguments of Stinton (n.36) 465–79 (= 75–84) and March (n.68) (2001; 2004). Stinton says that the unhappy effect is given, ‘not by any allusion to events outside the play, but by the terms of the action itself’. Rather the allusions and the terms of the action reinforce each other. As for the Erinyes, it is true that none of the five passages refers explicitly to their pursuit of Orestes, but they are all in the context of the family. For ‘the difficulty of determining what constitutes an allusion’, in the context of this play, see Roberts, ‘Afterword’ (n.53) 259.

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how she has been forced to behave 'shamefully' (621; *cf.* 254–57, 307—09, 608–09). When Orestes emerges from the palace having killed his mother and is asked by Electra how things went, he replies (1424–25), 'things went well inside the house, if Apollo prophesied well'. We may note the conditional clause and the use of καλῶς rather than δικαίως ('justly').[72] Finally, in almost his last words (1497–98) Aegisthus prophesies that 'this house has to see the future as well as the present troubles of the Pelopidae'.[73] It is hard to see how Sophocles could have prevented at least some members of his audience from finding here an allusion to Orestes' pursuit by the Erinyes.[74] I am not attracted by Sommerstein's speculation about a possible allusion to the obscure story of Orestes' killing of Aletes, the son of Aegisthus, a mere usurper of the house, or his near-killing of his daughter Erigone. Finglass (n.67) 527, may well be right to argue that there is no specific reference at all: 'the prospect of μέλλοντα κακά is just one of the factors which make this conclusion so uneasy'. If Orestes is not pursued by the Erinyes from the stage, that is because in the traditional story they do not concern Electra, and this is her play. Nor does the tradition know of any other specifically unhappy consequences for her. But we are not encouraged at the end to think that either she or Orestes may look forward to a happy future. If Electra's marriage to Pylades was already a feature of the story,[75] there is certainly no hint of it here. Her complaint (962; *cf.* 165, 187–88) that she is growing old 'unmarried' (ἄλεκτρα) implies the same etymology of her name that goes back to Xanthus, the lyric predecessor of Stesichorus (Aelian *Varia Historia* 4.26), which itself surely implies that she was fated never to marry. We know now that the murders were horrible, but we are left to wonder whether they were justified.

Euripides, like Aeschylus, sometimes uses the audience's knowledge of a myth in order to provide false preparation for the way in which his plot will develop.[76] Moreover, in many passages he explicitly shows 'a self-conscious awareness of his poetic models, appealing to the audience's own knowledge of previous drama and myth, and implying that he is going one better than his famous predecessor'.[77] Our main concern is with the endings of his plays, and particularly with his preference for the *deus ex machina*, who tidies up the loose ends, and in some cases 'reintegrates Eur.'s version of myth with some aspect of myth or ritual whose validity is secured outside of Eur.'s dramatic world'.[78] We are thus invited to consider what will happen in the aftermath of the play, in the near or the more remote future. This is most obvious in those plays which explain the foundation of a cult[79] or which announce an apotheosis (*Andromache*, *Helen*). There is rarely, however, any sense that this kind of closure is part of the plot itself. Indeed there is no single pattern, and in some cases not all the loose ends are tidied and the mood at the end is not entirely happy.[80] Mastronarde (n. 14) 3 maintains that it is especially the late plays of Euripides that tend towards an 'open' and away from a 'closed' form of composition; 'the open structure is not to be viewed as a failed effort at closed structure, but rather as a divergent choice that consciously plays against the world-view of closure and simple order'. In *Orestes* everything has built up to a violent

[72] Those who, like March (n.68) (2001) ad loc and (2004) 36 favour an optimistic reading of the play have to take the εἰ clause to mean 'assuming (as of course we do) that Apollo prophesied well'.

[73] The Chorus sang of the earlier troubles of the family at 503–15.

[74] Sommerstein (n.56) 214 n.75 perhaps takes too literally Aegisthus' statement that the house will be an eyewitness of these troubles.

[75] Wilamowitz (n.51) 221 n.1 argues that, since Hellanicus knew the names of their children (see n.85 below), the marriage was probably the invention of genealogical poets, and was used by Stesichorus. If this were the case, one would expect to find traces of it in the tradition.

[76] See Davies (n.56) esp. 390, 395, 400–02.

[77] Wright (n.31) 181.

[78] Mastronarde (n.14) on *Phoen.* 1703–07; see also Barrett (n.31) on *Hipp.* 1423–30; P.T. Stevens (ed.), Euripides *Andromache* (Oxford 1971) on 242; Roberts (n.59) 192; Dunn (n.60) 26–44.

[79] See, for example, Barrett (n.31) 3–6; G.W. Bond (ed.), Euripides *Heracles* (Oxford 1981) on 1326–33, 1331–33; Seaford (n.12 1994) 385; (n.53).

[80] J.D. Denniston (ed.), Euripides *Electra* (Oxford 1939) on 1233–37, goes too far in saying that 'Euripides was not much interested in these epiphanies, regarding them as little more than a dramatic convenience, and was not much concerned to invest them with any excitement or sense of mystery'.

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ending, with the deaths of Hermione and Helen carefully prepared. With Helen's ὄλλυμαι (1296) and θνήισκω (1301) the audience is deceived into supposing that we are listening to her death cry. But the unexpected appearance of Apollo, like that of Heracles in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, suddenly produces a total reversal of fortunes, as a blissful future is predicted for all the characters;[81] Helen is to become a goddess. Some members of the audience may feel that the violent ending is the real one, and the natural conclusion to this exciting tragedy.[82] Surprising too is *Heraclidae*, which ends with Eurystheus, like Aegisthus in Sophocles' *Electra*, being led off to be killed behind the scenes, but not before he has predicted (1026–44) that after his death he will become a protecting cult-hero for Athens – a remarkable turnaround for one who throughout the play has appeared to the Athenian audience as a villain. At the same time Alcmena loses some of our sympathy.[83]

Other plays end without any cult aetiology but with prophecies which depend on the audience's knowledge of the traditional story. In *Hecuba* Polymestor's prediction of the manner of Hecuba's death may be Euripides' own invention, but the audience would certainly know that Cassandra and Agamemnon were to be murdered by Clytaemestra, Agamemnon in his bath (1259–81). There is, then, pathos when in the last words that we hear him speak he wishes for a good voyage back to Greece and that he 'may find things at home in a good state, now that he has been released from these troubles' (τῶνδ' ἀφειμένοι πόνων 1291–92). Perhaps even Polyphemus in the satyric *Cyclops* deserves some sympathy when he mistakenly declares at the end of the play that he will crush Odysseus' ship with a rock and thus prevent him from getting home to Ithaca.

If Sophocles' *Electra* ended with little sense of closure, in Euripides' version Castor, as *deus ex machina*, seems to do a particularly thorough job of tying up all the loose ends (1237–91).[84] Since in this play the central role is rather more equally divided between Electra and Orestes than it is in Sophocles' version, it is reasonable that we should be given an account of the latter's pursuit by the Erinyes, ending with his acquittal before the Areopagus, and the promise that he will live happily ever afterwards 'having been released from these troubles' (εὐδαιμονήσεις τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαχθεὶς πόνων; cf. *Hec.* 1292, cited above), the last line of Castor's speech. More interesting is the future that is, for the first time, predicted for Electra: she is to marry Pylades and go to live with him in Phocis. We cannot be certain that this development had not already occurred in earlier tradition (see n.75), but there is no trace of it in Aeschylus or Sophocles, and it is much likelier that it was Euripides himself who first sought to satisfy his audience's curiosity as to her future fate.[85] He will use it again in the probably later *Iphigenia in Tauris* (682–715, 913–23) and in the certainly later *Orestes* (1658–59). Castor's prediction, however, does not quite end the play. It is followed by a dialogue among Electra, Orestes and Castor, in which she accepts her part in her mother's killing, and Castor agrees (1305 κοιναὶ πράξεις, κοινοὶ δὲ πότμοι, 'you shared your deeds, you share your fates'). She shows no pleasure in the thought of her marriage to Pylades. Like her brother, she is more concerned about her exile from her homeland and her separation from her

[81] See C.W. Willink (ed.), Euripides *Orestes* (Oxford 1986) xxxvii–xxxviii and on 1286–310. The murder of Helen is almost certainly Euripides' own invention, and not an element known to his audience from inherited tradition. The technique here is therefore different from that of Aeschylus in, for example, *Cho.* (nn.18, 19, 56).

[82] See Davies (n.56) 401 n.54. If *IA* originally ended with the prediction of Iphigenia's rescue and of her transportation to the land of the Tauri, the admirable heroism with which we saw her going off to her death turns out to be unnecessary and absurd, and the contradiction is similar to that in *Or.*; see W. Stockert (ed.) Euripides *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Vienna 1992) 61–62; and earlier M.L. West, 'Tragica V', *BICS* 28 (1981) 61–78, at 73–76.

[83] See R.R. Rutherford, in J. Davie and R.R. Rutherford (trs), *Euripides* Alcestis *and Other Plays* (Harmondsworth 1996) 177.

[84] For the vexed question of whether Sophocles' *Electra* preceded Euripides' play or *vice versa*, see most recently Finglass (n.67) 1–4.

[85] The marriage is mentioned by Hellanicus, *FGrHist* 4 F155 (= Paus. 2.16.6), who reports the names of Electra's children, Medon and Strophius (*cf.* also Paus. 3.1.6, 9.40.12). Hellanicus' dates are very uncertain, but he seems to have been still active in the last decade of the fifth century. The invention is more likely to have been made by a tragedian than by a historian, but Hellanicus may have had an earlier source.

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brother (1308–10, 1321–22, 1331–33).[86] We may even spare a thought for the humble farmer to whom Electra was married at the beginning of the play, who treated her well, and who is, strangely, to accompany Electra and Pylades to Phocis at the end.

Troades has no *deus ex machina*. It ends with Hecuba and the Chorus preparing to depart from Troy to begin their new lives as slaves. There is little sense of closure. When at the end Menelaus weakly postpones Helen's execution until they are back in Greece, the audience, from its familiarity with the tradition, understands the irony, that the execution will never take place.[87] Often a sense of pathos detracts from complete closure. So at the end of *Heracles* 'there is much pathos in what may appear in a bald summary to be a tidying-up of loose ends'.[88] *Medea* ends with Medea enjoying her triumph over Jason and refusing to let him come near the bodies of their children whom she has murdered. He, however, points out that she too will suffer pain for killing them, and Medea herself agrees (1361, 1368, 1397). There is no real comfort for Medea in the knowledge that a festival will be established at Corinth to commemorate the children (1381–83) and that a refuge awaits herself in Athens.

I have tried to show that both Sophocles and Euripides are happy to leave their audiences with unanswered questions at the end of their plays, inviting them, sometimes with tantalizing hints, to speculate about the future on the basis of their knowledge of other treatments of the story, or at least not trying too hard to discourage them from doing so, and sometimes positively encouraging them to choose between two quite different endings. In some of the cases that we have considered a very small hint may be sufficient to alert the audience to the existence of alternative possibilities. Whether or not Stinton is right (n.60 above) to deny any allusion to the apotheosis of Heracles at the end of *Trachiniae*, I cannot follow him when he goes on (489–90 (= 91)) to generalize about audience confusion: 'to risk blurring the tragic effect by allowing or even creating such an ambiguity is the mark of an incompetent dramatist, and I do not believe that Sophocles would have taken that risk'. Indeterminacy and confusion are not necessarily the same thing.[89]

If Aeschylus has hardly, if at all, been studied from this point of view it is no doubt because the evidence is unfortunately meagre. It would be wrong to adduce *Agamemnon*, which, as the first play of a connected trilogy, not surprisingly ends with preparation for the vengeance of Orestes in the second play (1646–48, 1667; *cf*. 1279–83, 1318–19), while *Choephori* ends with the departure of Orestes, pursued by the Erinyes, for Delphi, where we shall meet him again at the beginning of *Eumenides*. It is highly likely that Aeschylus used the same kind of preparation in *Supplices*, which looks forward to a war between Argos and the sons of Aegyptus in the following play of the trilogy and ends ominously with a reminder of the power of Aphrodite. *Prometheus*, whether or (probably) not by Aeschylus, is usually thought also to have been a member of a connected trilogy. For a fair comparison that leaves us only with *Persae*, not a member of a connected trilogy,[90] and *Eumenides*, like *Septem* the final play of a trilogy. *Persae*, the subject of which is not mythological but drawn from very recent history, ends with a protracted ritual antiphonal lament shared between the Chorus

[86] 'The real mourning is metaphorical, grief for a separation felt to be worse than death' (Roberts in Rosen and Farrell (eds) (n.2) 588); see also Dunn (n 60) 16, 36, 69–70; Roberts in Gregory (ed.) (n.2) 146. Similarly, at the end of *Ba.* the main thought of Cadmus and Agave is that they are to be separated from each other. The predictions of the *deus ex machina* provide no comfort to the human characters. Even the consolation which they receive from one another (see Bond (n.79) xxii–xxiii and on 1424, 1425–26; *cf*. the mutual sympathy of Oedipus and Antigone at the end of *Phoen.*) is to be taken from them when they have to separate.

[87] See S. Barlow (ed.), Euripides *Trojan Women* (Warminster 1986) 208.

[88] Bond (n.79) on 1340–93. For this play and the uncertainties of its ending, see especially Dunn (n.60) 115–29; (n. 53).

[89] For a fine discussion of the complexity involved in assessing the reader's role in constructing 'endings beyond the ending' in the light of his/her knowledge of other versions of the story, see Roberts, 'Afterword' (n.53) with quotation at 251–52.

[90] From time to time attempts have been made to find thematic links between *Persae* and the lost plays that were presented along with it; the most successful is that of Sommerstein (n.22) 7–9; *Aeschylus* 3 (Loeb Classical Library 505) (Cambridge MA and London 2009) 32–39, 256–59.

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and Xerxes. In the final part of the lament Xerxes takes the lead and issues orders to the Chorus, and they leave the stage together in procession. In other plays a ritual procession may confer some kind of closure (see n.2). And some have detected it here, along with signs of rehabilitation for Xerxes. But that cannot be correct.[91] In *Persae* no uncertainty arises as to an audience's familiarity with *myth*. We can be *sure* that in 472 BC, only eight years after the battle, every single member of this audience knew that in 479 BC the Persians suffered a further defeat at Plataea. If Aeschylus had wanted his audience to forget its knowledge, he should have been very careful to avoid any mention of that defeat.[92] Instead, he emphasizes it; at the climax of the Ghost-scene, the dead Darius prophesies that, with Plataea still to come, the troubles of the Persians have hardly yet begun (814–15), and it is clear that there will be further and even greater humiliation for Xerxes. If, therefore, there is any sense of rehabilitation at the end of the play, we should have to take it as deeply ironical; Xerxes and the Chorus think that he can now resume his rule as if nothing has happened; the audience knows that their wishful thinking is not to be fulfilled. It is simpler to conclude that any sense of closure is illusory. Xerxes leaves the stage still in his rags, the symbol of his failure and humiliation. Indeed, the emphasis on Plataea is such that it is hardly appropriate to describe it as ἔξω τοῦ δράματος.[93] Just as the account of Iphigenia's sacrifice at Aulis, ten years before *Agamemnon* begins, is made part of that play through the Chorus's account in the *parodos*, so here the defeat at Plataea, still in the future as the play ends, becomes part of the action of *Persae*. Of course, the audience in 472 BC knew that the empire was not really destroyed and that Xerxes was still king. However, in terms of the logic of the plot, this is irrelevant.

In some ways *Eumenides* is more straightforward. There is no uncertainty at the end of the play about the future career of Orestes, no reference to any of the stories which tell of his purification in various places in the Peloponnese. All that we need to know is that after his death he, as a hero, will be a source of blessing to the Athenians (767–75), and Argos will be their ally. The end of the play is dominated by the founding of the new cult of the Eumenides and the promise of the blessings that it will bring to Athens, provided that the city behaves itself. For many of the original audience and for most modern scholars that is probably sufficient closure. Yet a slight note of uncertainty is raised by the conditional nature of the promise. Moreover, some at least of the audience may feel uneasiness about the events of the play itself, about the role of Apollo in the trial and about the significance of the voting; either the human voters were equally divided between condemnation and acquittal, or (as is, I think, more likely) a majority voted to condemn, with Athena's vote producing a tie.[94] For the fifth-century Athenian audience this of course provided the aetiology for the procedure of the courts in its own day; when a jury by its equal voting showed that it was unable to resolve the question of guilt or innocence, the accused was given the benefit of the doubt. Just as in Scots law the 'not-proven' verdict by definition indicates the impossibility of a proper resolution, so too in *Eumenides* the resolution is not really complete.

[91] See Garvie (n.19, 2009) 338–39, 342.

[92] Even more careful, perhaps, than to avoid any reference to Epigoni in *Septem.*

[93] For Aristotle's use of that expression, see n.49. The opposite case, for complete closure, is presented most recently by R. Seaford, 'Aeschylus, Herakleitos, and Pythagoreanism', in Cairns (ed.) (n.12) 17–38.

[94] For discussion of the voting, see especially A.H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Eumenides* (Cambridge 1989) 221–26; A.J. Podlecki (ed.), *Eumenides* (Warminster 1989) 211–13, C. Collard (tr.), Aesch*ylus Oresteia* (Oxford 2002) 220–21; R. Mitchell-Boyask, *Aeschylus: Eumenides* (London 2009) 78–87. At Orestes' trial at Argos in Eur. *Or.* a majority vote for condemnation. For doubts about closure in *Eum.*, see, for example, T. Rosenmeyer, *The art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1982) chapter 12; D.H. Roberts, *Apollo and his Oracle in the Oresteia* (Göttingen 1984) 95 ('the ending resolves a problem but leaves us with questions'); S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The* Oresteia (Cambridge 1984) 283, who in the final paragraph of his book writes, 'the telos of closure is resisted in the continuing play of difference. The final meaning remains undetermined'; A.F. Garvie, 'The tragedy of the *Oresteia*: response to van Erp Taalman Kip', in Silk (ed.) (n.2) 139–48, at 145–46; L. Hardwick, 'Negotiating translation for the stage', in E. Hall and S. Harrop (eds), *Theorising Performance: Greek Drama, Cultural History and Critical Practice* (London 2010) 200.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426914000032 Published online by Cambridge University Press

To return finally to *Septem*: if, as I have argued, Aeschylus deliberately drops three hints which indicate that the closure may be considered as not quite complete, we have to speculate about his possible reasons. Many scholars have noted that as the plot develops the interest gradually shifts from the city's danger to the fate of Eteocles and the family. In the first part of the play the danger to the city contributes to our appreciation of the magnitude of the decision that he, as the good king and general, will have to make. The old *Opfertod* theory, that he willingly sacrifices himself to save Thebes, is rightly discredited, but it remains true that it is because of his good generalship that the city is saved.[95] With the news of the brothers' death, Aeschylus wants us to concentrate on the tragedy of the family, without being distracted too much by the thought of what lies ahead for the city. So we receive an overwhelming sense that the city has indeed been saved, and it is much less obvious than in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* or Euripides' *Orestes* that we are being invited to choose between endings. The three hints which I discussed in the first part of this paper do no more than remind attentive members of his audience that there *is* another possible ending to the story. Those who have a taste for indeterminacy rather than closure may prefer to look ahead and some may even wonder whether the Messenger's and the Chorus's joy at the news of the city's salvation will be short-lived. The first two plays of the *Oresteia* trilogy are filled with the expression of hopes that will not be fulfilled. In *Septem* only three little hints point ahead beyond the end of the play to the possibility that for the city there is more trouble to come. Whether Aeschylus ever did anything similar in the lost plays we have of course no means of telling.

[95] See K. von Fritz, 'Die Gestalt des Eteokles in Aeschylus' "Sieben gegen Theben"', in *Antike und Moderne Tragödie* (Berlin 1962) 212; M. Giordano-Zecharya, 'Ritual appropriateness in *Seven against Thebes*', *Mnemosyne* 59 (2006) 53–74, at 56; S.E. Lawrence, 'Eteocles' moral awareness in Aeschylus' *Septem*', *CW* 100 (2007) 333–53, at 346, 349; also Winnington-Ingram (n.10) 49–51.

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