'HORSE RACE, RICH IN WOES': ORESTES' CHARIOT RACE AND THE ERINYES IN SOPHOCLES' *ELECTRA*

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Abstract: This article offers a new, ironic reading of the false narrative of Orestes' chariot accident in Sophocles' *Electra* (680–763). It argues that the speech exploits an established connection between the ancestral evils of the Atreids and the thematic nexus of horses, chariot racing and disaster to evoke Orestes' flight from the Erinyes following the matricide. Focusing on the language and structure of the narrative as well as drawing on other versions of the story (notably the surviving plays by Aeschylus and Euripides), the article demonstrates, in contrast to previous readings, that the speech is much more than an over-elaborate means to an end. Instead, in an ominous and profoundly ironic twist, the Paedagogus' fictional narrative of the chariot race offers a possible vision of the trials awaiting the real Orestes. The matricide and murder, far from ending the ancestral woes of the Atreids, may well bring about Orestes' pursuit by the Erinyes.

Keywords: Sophocles, Orestes, chariot, Erinyes, Electra

I. Introduction

The central section of Sophocles' *Electra* is taken up by a remarkable speech (680–763), in which the Paedagogus narrates Orestes' fictional death in a chariot race at the Pythian games, with the aim of deceiving Clytemnestra and allowing the real Orestes to enter the palace and murder his mother and Aegisthus. The longest continuous speech in extant Sophocles (in marked contrast to Orestes' announcement of his own death in Aeschylus *Choephori* 674–90), it has long been a source of puzzlement to the play's interpreters. Ancient critics pointed out that it was anachronistic (since the Pythian games did not exist at the time of Orestes) and incoherent;[1] modern scholars have variously dismissed it as too lengthy, purely ornamental and dramatically irrelevant, or relevant only in the impact it has on Electra.[2] Although Patrick Finglass' statement, in 2007, that the speech 'is often passed over' and 'largely ignored' remains largely accurate,[3] it has attracted some interest in recent decades, notably from scholars emphasizing its metatheatrical implications. Thus, it has been read as a particular *locus* in which the playwright is able to reflect self-consciously on the tragedy's theatricality, on the nature of fact and fiction or on the genre or device of the messenger speech itself.[4] Such readings have yielded important insights and helped to draw out the artistry and importance of the passage; yet they do not, I think, go far enough in providing an interpretation of the speech that integrates it within the intellectual and literary fabric of the tragedy and its dramatic momentum, while also doing justice to its complex ambiguity and the wealth of interpretative possibilities it offers.[5]

[1] See Σ 47a, 49, 682; Arist. *Poet.* 24, 1460a31; with Easterling (1985) 7–8 on anachronism.

[2] Doxography in MacLeod (2001) 107–10; more recently, Schmitz (2016) 133–35. One of the more convincing readings focusing on the speech's impact on Electra is Masaracchia (1978); see also Finglass (2007) 300–01; most recently, Dunn et al. (2019) xv, 252.

[3] Finglass (2007) 300.

[4] See Batchelder (1995) 87–110; Ringer (1998) 161–72; Barrett (2002) 132–67; Marshall (2006).

[5] As Goward (1999) 114 puts it, the speech 'positively crackles with a range of possible interpretations'. Carroll (2020), which appeared only after this article was completed and accepted for publication, offers a reading of the speech that overlaps with mine in a number of ways. I have added references to this article where most

The present article contributes to this task. It offers a reading of the messenger speech that focuses on the ironic and allusive potential of the Paedagogus' language and, more specifically, on the connections between the bloody family history of the Atreids and the thematic nexus of horses and chariot racing, both in Sophocles' tragedy and in the relevant surviving plays by Aeschylus and Euripides. Recognizing the importance of these connections yields a radically different view of the speech. Far from existing merely as an over-elaborate means to an end, the lengthy narrative of the chariot race can be shown, not unlike a choral ode, to comment simultaneously, and in profoundly ironic ways, on key events of the play and its aftermath.[6] Crucially, I argue that the speech evokes Orestes' pursuit by the Erinyes, a central feature of the tradition which many have argued is absent from the Sophoclean version. This is not to say that the allusion forces the audience to accept the imminent arrival of the Erinyes as an unquestionable fact (although, as we shall see, such an interpretation is left open); rather, the messenger speech, together with other elements scattered throughout the play, opens up a striking, but uncertain window into one potential future, inviting the spectators to reflect on the question of whether matricide and murder will indeed end the sufferings of 'Atreus' seed' (1508) and on the possibility and limits of human knowledge. The reading offered here thus has far-reaching implications both for our overall interpretation of the tragedy, and particularly of the central question of Orestes' matricide and its aftermath,[7] but also, more broadly, for our understanding of the issues of irony and allusion in Sophoclean tragedy.

In particular, it brings into focus the intricacy of Sophocles' deployment of dramatic irony, an aspect of his theatre that is well acknowledged, but often taken for granted and rarely analysed in great depth or in its wealth of individual manifestations.[8] In the case of the messenger speech of *Electra*, most interpreters posit a straightforward ironic relation between those who share knowledge of what is really going on (the Paedagogus and the audience) and those who do not (Clytemnestra, Electra and the Chorus), and study the effects of the gap between the knowing manipulator and his ignorant victims. In contrast, I argue that the messenger speech creates multiple ironic relations between the Paedagogus, the other characters on stage and the audience, which fluctuate according to the varying degrees of knowledge available (and afforded by the poet) to each. While the Paedagogus and the audience do on the surface occupy positions of epistemic superiority stemming from their shared awareness of the conspiracy, we shall see that their respective knowledge of and control over events are constantly undermined by the instability and complex referentiality of the language used by Sophocles in the speech.[9] The article thus shows

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relevant. Our focus and conclusions are different but complement each other well.

[6] The concept of 'choral mediation' developed by Gagné and Hopman (2013) can usefully be applied to our speech; *cf.* their description of the choral odes of tragedy as mediating 'between genres … between authorities … between the conventions of drama and ritual … between the many spaces and temporalities of story, tradition, and performance. All these levels of reference are intertwined with one another, and their integration into one poem makes for language of remarkable density' (2–3). Even though there are obvious differences, I would argue that the messenger speech of *Electra* can be analysed in similar terms, partly because of its length and the care with which it constructs its own fictional world and, as we shall see, its complex referentiality.

[7] A question that has sometimes been marginalized in recent scholarship, as for instance in Dunn et al. (2019).

[8] Exceptions include Lowe (1996) especially 526–28; Goldhill (2012); Lloyd (2012). For a recent treatment of irony in Greek tragedy, see Rutherford (2012) 323–64.

[9] The distinction I am making here between a simple and a complex ironic reading of the messenger speech overlaps in many respects with that between 'stable' ironies, 'where the reader's or the audience's search for an ironic subtext terminates with a single, finite interpretation', and 'unstable' ones, 'whose ironic ripples spread out indefinitely to undercut everything, including the decipherability of the ironic message itself' (Lowe (1996) 521). On 'stable' and 'unstable' irony in general see Booth (1974); Colebrook (2004) 11–15, 29–34. The concepts are applied to Sophocles by Lloyd (2012) 569–77; see also Goldhill (2012) 13–37, who uses the comparable term 'flickering' irony, focusing on the ambiguities that lurk behind apparently mundane words and emphasizing the slipperiness of language and the audience's lack of control over it.

how Sophocles combines shifting epistemological configurations with allusion and intertext to generate evermore intricate ironies from an apparently straightforward dramatic situation, shedding doubt on the tragedy's outcome and the characters' future in a way that seems to jeopardize the very possibility of accurate human understanding. I begin by analysing some of the ironies and ambiguities of the speech, before turning to the theme of horses and chariot racing, and exploring its implications for the Atreids and for Orestes' matricide and murder.

II. Orestes' downfall: victory, heroism and reversal

The seeds of the chariot-race narrative are sown in the tragedy's prologue. At 23–66, Orestes sets out his plan for revenge, which is partly inspired by an oracle received from Apollo (32–37). The Paedagogus, disguised as a Phocian stranger, is to tell the inhabitants of the palace that Orestes has died in a chariot accident, putting them off their guard and clearing the way for the matricide and murder (23–66). This is exactly what happens. At 660, the Paedagogus enters and announces Orestes' death in such a way that his listeners, Clytemnestra, Electra and the Chorus, are completely convinced. The success of the lie even appears to be guaranteed by Apollo's discrete backing, betrayed perhaps by the perfect timing of the Paedagogus' arrival directly following Clytemnestra's prayer to the god (634–59)[10] and the choice of locale for Orestes' supposed demise, the Pythian Games at Delphi.[11] With Apollo's apparent support, the Paedagogus is able to manipulate Clytemnestra's and Electra's emotions, displaying the mechanisms of tragic irony to the audience in a kind of 'play-within-the-play' narrating Orestes' tragic reversal from glory and athletic triumph to disaster in the chariot race.[12]

Throughout all this, the Paedagogus appears to be tightly in control of his task and of his language. In keeping with his deceptive aims, he constructs a vivid, detailed and emotionally engaging story, painting a glorious picture of the Pythian games which draws on both the chariot race in *Iliad* 23 and epinician poetry.[13] Yet from the perspective of an audience that is aware of the plot and of the story's literary and mythical background, his narrative of Orestes' death repeatedly strikes false, ironic notes, perhaps signalling that everything is not quite as straightforward as the conspirators believe. For instance, after his initial victory in the footrace, the fictional Orestes is acclaimed as the true heir of Agamemnon, τοῦ τὸ κλεινὸν Ἑλλάδος / Ἀγαμέμνονος στράτευμ' ἀγείραντός ποτε (694–95), a phrase that echoes the old man's first address to his pupil (1–2) at the beginning of the play and is evidently intended as a badge of honour. Yet for those who have witnessed the first half of the play, it may be read as marking a contrast between the fictional Orestes of the speech and his 'real' counterpart: while the latter has yet to do anything (let alone prove himself worthy of his father's glory), the former has, ironically, achieved tangible athletic victory and glory (687), which in good Pindaric fashion are said to match his *phusis* (686).[14]

[10] So, for instance, Seale (1982) 64; also Segal (1966) 478; Masaracchia (1978) 1027; MacLeod (2001) 112.

[11] So, for example, Seale (1982) 64; Ringer (1998) 138; Finglass (2007) 302–03; Schmitz (2016) 133; see *contra* Dunn (2017) 163.

[12] For the speech as a 'play-within-the-play', see, for example, Ringer (1998) 162–63; Barrett (2002) 157–58; Schmitz (2016) 135.

[13] On the relationship between the Paedagogus' speech and the Iliadic chariot race, see below and, for different angles, Grossardt (1998) 325–29; Rousseau (2001); Barrett (2002) 137–67; see Davidson (1988) on the Homeric aspects of the play more generally. On epinician, see Finglass (2007) 302–03.

[14] In this sense, the fictional Orestes is not unlike the real Electra, who says, ironically, that she is not unworthy of her mother's *phusis* (608–09) and whom the Chorus consider as worthy of her father's lineage (1081). The Paedagogus' speech, like the prologue, implicitly questions the idea that the real Orestes (as opposed to his fictional counterpart in the speech) is worthy of his *phusis* as Agamemnon's son. Living up to one's inherited excellence is a central theme of epinician poetry, but the issue of generation and inheritance takes on a much darker colouring in a play about a family blighted by the effects of ancestral fault. On the meaning of φύσις (both inborn nature and appearance) here, see Sabiani (2018) 153.

Further, the real Orestes' deceitful plan, as set out in the prologue, and its location within the fraught setting of the Atreid palace are at odds with the 'Panhellenic, all-male, emotionally straight-forward context [of the Pythian games] where victory brings civic honor'.[15] Such elements contribute to what one might describe as a discrepancy, or *décalage*, between the heroic Orestes depicted in the speech and his actual character and task in the *Electra*.

This impression is intensified, and complicated, by Sophocles' deployment of the *Iliad* 23 inter-text. As scholars have noted, the closest point of contact between the Paedagogus' narrative and the Homeric chariot race is between the strategy adopted by the fictional Orestes (to keep close to the turning-post, 'grazing' it as he turns, 720–22) and Nestor's advice to Antilochus before the race, which similarly hinges on driving close to the turning-post (*Il.* 23.306–50).[16] As Barbara Goward notes, this striking similarity simultaneously points to an essential contrast between the two passages.[17] In the *Iliad*, Antilochus successfully finishes the race, coming second behind Diomedes, and the tensions created by the contest, notably the conflict between Antilochus and Menelaus, are (eventually) resolved.[18] Nestor is aware that his strategy is risky, because Antilochus might touch the turning-post and wreck his chariot (23.340–42); yet the possibility of an accident (*cf.* also 23.465–68) is never fulfilled, partly because Antilochus, despite his recklessness, remains 'wise and on his guard' (φρονέων πεφυλαγμένος, 343; contrast ἀφραδέως, 320). In Sophocles, the race ends with a fatal accident, which occurs precisely because Orestes gets too close the turning-post: trusting in the outcome of the race (τῷ τέλει πίστιν φέρων, 735; just as the thoughtless char-ioteer in Nestor's warning is 'trusting in his horses and chariot', ἵπποισι καὶ ἅρμασιν οἷσι πεποιθώς, *Il.* 23.319), he relaxes his left rein and strikes the post (741–45). Thus, what remains a theoretical danger in Homer is fully (and spectacularly) realized by the Paedagogus' speech, in a way that marks a gap between the world of the *Iliad* and that of *Electra*, and has potentially negative impli-cations for the 'real' Orestes in the play.[19] We might therefore see Sophocles' deployment of the Iliadic episode as undermining Orestes' heroism and casting doubt on his ability to bring his cunning plan to fruition, and, indeed, as raising the possibility (to which I return below) that Orestes will fail to turn the post and fall at the second hurdle in the events of the tragedy as well as in the Paedagogus' fiction.

That this might be the case is further suggested by the Paedagogus' framing of Orestes' accident within a traditional ethical and theological framework. The speech narrates a reversal of fortune from good (Orestes' glorious victory in the footrace) to bad (his death in the chariot race). The two episodes are separated by a *gnōmē* (696–97):

ὅταν δέ τις θεῶν
βλάπτῃ, δύναιτ' ἂν οὐδ' ἂν ἰσχύων φυγεῖν.

When one of the gods does harm, not even a mighty one can escape.

The content of this sentence and its position in the narrative, both of which have been compared to epinician poetry,[20] effectively locate Orestes' fictional story in a familiar paradigm of great

[15] Kitzinger (1991) 318. See also Seale (1982) 66; Di Benedetto (1983) 161–63; Blundell (1989) 174–75; Susanetti (2011) 94–95; Van Nortwick (2015) 23.
[16] See, for instance, Rousseau (2001) 399; Barrett (2002) 138–40. Davidson (1988) 65–67 analyses the allusions to the Homeric passage at the level of individual words or phrases.
[17] Goward (1999) 118.
[18] On the various conflicts arising during and after the race and their resolution, see Kelly (2017) 92–102.

[19] I would, therefore, see the relationship between the two chariot races as approximating the kind of 'generic interaction' explored by Swift (2010) for tragedy and lyric poetry: this allusion of course relates to a specific, relevant passage (*Iliad* 23), but it also evokes, and subverts, certain 'norms and cultural expectations' associated with epic poetry more broadly (Swift (2010) 35).
[20] See Verde Castro (1982) 70; Finglass (2007) 310; Swift (2010) 167–68. Σ 696 quotes Pind. *Pyth.* 2.50–51.

happiness followed by god-sent disaster.[21] This is reinforced by the Paedagogus' use of ὀλβίζω a few lines previously (693), a verb that recalls the familiar adage that no one should be counted fortunate until s/he is dead,[22] adding weight to the idea that the fictional Orestes might be accounted a victim of divine *phthonos* or jealousy, as Aegisthus will suppose later on (1466–67).[23] Taken together with the conspicuous reference to Agamemnon just before (694–95), these two elements also suggest a more pointed reference to a passage in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in which the Argive king, having just entered the stage in a chariot,[24] cautions against counting any man prosperous (ὀλβίσαι) before he has died (928–29). Agamemnon, it is repeatedly suggested, is himself the target of divine *phthonos* (*Ag*. 904, 921, 947), and we might thus draw a parallel of sorts between the king and his son as presented by the Paedagogus.[25] Of course, given the 'real' Orestes' lack of heroic credentials, the parallel once again serves to undermine him: unlike Agamemnon, within the confines of the play at least, he has done nothing as yet that could attract the gods' jealousy. Yet the idea that the fictional Orestes' athletic success, just like his father's victory in the Trojan War,[26] will be followed by god-sent disaster gives a disturbing colouring to the Paedagogus' narrative, particularly for the audience, who know that the young man is still alive and will soon set foot inside the very house where his father was struck down.

III. Chariots and disaster: Pelops and Orestes

Alongside its ironic exploitation of Nestor's advice to Antilochus in *Iliad* 23, Sophocles' narrative of Orestes' fictional death draws on another tradition, well attested in fifth-century tragedy and elsewhere: the disastrous chariot race. In this section, I show how the messenger speech deploys, and plays on, this tradition, strengthening the sense that Orestes' fatal accident, although fictional, may reflect negatively on his 'real' character and the matricide.

The link between chariot racing and disaster is a recurrent feature of myth, and one that is regularly taken up by tragedians. One thinks, for instance, of the Messenger's account of Hippolytus' demise in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (1173–254),[27] of the deaths of Glaucus of Corinth, Phaethon and Amphiaraus[28] or of Euripides' depiction of the maddened Heracles imagining he is racing around on his chariot (*HF* 947–49, 1001; *cf.* Lyssa's chariot at 880–85).[29] Most significant for our purposes, however, is the race of Pelops and Oenomaus, and Pelops' murder of the charioteer Myrtilus, thrown from his chariot into the sea. This story, an important episode of the Atreid family's past, is told by Electra in Euripides' *Orestes* (988–96)[30] and, crucially, by the Chorus in the first *stasimon* of Sophocles' *Electra*, not long before the messenger speech. After announcing the imminent

[21] On the Paedagogus' narrative as following a 'tragic' pattern, see Verde Castro (1982) 76–78; MacLeod (2001) 111–18. The *gnōmē* can also be read as ironically anticipating Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' fall as a result of Orestes' plan, backed by Apollo; so, for instance, MacLeod (2001) 118; Sabiani (2018) 155–56.

[22] See, in addition to the Aeschylean passage discussed below, Alcm. 1.37–39 *PMG*; Thgn. 1013–17, Bacchyl. 5.50–55; Soph. *Trach*. 1–5; *OT* 1528–30; *fr*. 646R; Eur. *Andr*. 100–02; *Tro*. 509–10. Orestes is also called ὄλβιος by the Chorus at 160. Seaford (1994) 279 also sees 693 as an instance of *makarismos*, but connects it to his reading of the chariot contest in terms of the mysteries.

[23] See Garvie (2005) 60. Following the speech, Clytemnestra will associate Orestes' downfall with *nemesis* (792–93), a force that often occurs in tandem with divine *phthonos*, as it does in Aegisthus' speech at 1466–67; see Budelmann (2000) 84–85 on 792–93. On

nemesis and divine *phthonos*, see Ellis (2015) 93–96.

[24] *Cf*. Himmelhoch (2005) 276 with n.23.

[25] The parallel is heightened by the marked epinician and/or athletic colouring of Agamemnon's return to Argos in Aeschylus: see Steiner (2010); Carey (2012) 18–22.

[26] *Cf*. section IV, below.

[27] On the similarity of this passage to the Paedagogus' speech in *Electra*, see, for instance, Masaracchia (1978) 1042 n.14; Marshall (2006) 213.

[28] Glaucus: *cf*. Beaulieu (2013) 123–24, 126, 134–36 and the fragments of Aeschylus' *Glaucus of Potniae* with Wright (2019) 25–26; Phaethon: *cf*. Euripides' fragmentary play with Diggle (1970) and Wright (2019) 203–05, also Reckford (1972) on the chariot theme; Amphiaraus: *cf*. Pind. *Ol*. 6.13–14, *Nem*. 9.24–27, Stat. *Theb*. 7.760–823.

[29] *Cf*. Bond (1981) 299–300; Swift (2010) 143–44.

[30] *Cf*. section V and Myrick (1994) 135–37.

arrival of Justice and Agamemnon's Erinyes (473–503) following Clytemnestra's dream (410–27), the Chorus claim that the origin of the Atreids' woes lies with Pelops' 'horse race rich in woes' (πολύπονος ἱππεία, 505) and his murder of Myrtilus (504–15). Since that fateful moment, violent outrage (αἰκεία, 511, 515; *cf.* 487) has never left the house of Atreus, from Agamemnon's murder to the current sufferings of Electra. The Chorus initially appear to say that the coming of Orestes will bring release from this cycle of violence, but the song ends on a bleak note, with the correspondence of πολύπονος ἱππεία and πολύπονος αἰκεία (505, 515) suggesting, perhaps ironically, that more suffering is to come.[31] The messenger speech, with its announcement of Orestes' death, comes as a confirmation of the pessimism implicit in the song's second half: immediately after the end of the speech, the Chorus lament the destruction of the entire *genos* (764–65), with the repetition of πρόρριζος, '[destroyed] root and branch', from the *stasimon* (512 ~ 765) suggesting a connection between the deaths of Myrtilus and Orestes, both of whom were thrown out of moving chariots and figuratively 'shipwrecked' (510–12 ~ 730, 745–46, *cf.* also 49–50 and 1444).[32]

In the aftermath of the messenger speech, then, the Chorus count Orestes as the latest victim of a cycle of ancestral evils, in accordance with the end of the first *stasimon*. To the audience, however, the connection between the chariot races of Pelops and Myrtilus will have taken a rather different colouring. They are aware that Orestes is alive, and might therefore take the fact that he has died 'in words only' as evidence that he has in fact 'broken free from his family's troubled history';[33] yet they might also reflect at this point that Orestes has more in common with his ancestor Pelops, who used deceit and caused two deaths to acquire his prize, than with his victim Myrtilus.[34] By means of trickery, and in pursuit of profit, power and status, Orestes will commit two murders.[35] On this second reading, one might argue with Laura Swift and others that Orestes' revenge will in fact constitute 'simply another step in a cycle of deceit and bloodshed'.[36] More than a mere victim of the Atreids' ancestral evils, Orestes becomes their continuator; and one might well wonder whether the lurking Erinys announced by the Chorus in the song's antistrophe will hound the matricide Orestes as well as his mother Clytemnestra, continuing the 'curse fraught with groans' (ἀρὰ πολύστονος, *Or.* 997) begun long ago by Pelops. Thus, for the audience who have witnessed the first *stasimon*, Orestes' fictional chariot race and the Paedagogus' deception are dragged into the orbit of the cycle of corruption and violence that has afflicted the Atreid family for generations, and which shows no sign of abating.

IV. 'Driving off the track': Orestes and horse racing

The sense that the Paedagogus' speech ironically announces future suffering for Orestes is reinforced by the existence, in Aeschylus and Euripides, of a recurrent link between the Atreids and the thematic nexus of horses and chariot racing, losing control and the passage from triumph to reversal.[37] Horses and chariots are a constant presence, both literally and metaphorically, in the

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[31] See, for instance, Goward (1999) 110–11.

[32] See Thomson (1941) 357; McDevitt (1983) 9–10. Stinton (1990) 471 denies the possibility of a relationship between the two chariot races, but see the sensible rebuttal of Finglass (2007) 302.

[33] Finglass (2007) 302; thus also, for example, Grossardt (1998) 327–28, March (2001) 172, Sabiani (2018) 155, Dunn et al. (2019) 252.

[34] See Goward (1999) 111: 'The *underlying* connection between Pelops' horse-race, Myrtilus' death and the forthcoming narrative about Orestes is *deceit*. Deceit is the characteristic means by which the house of Pelops, generation by generation, has carried out its outrages' (Goward's italics).

[35] On Orestes' motivations, see especially the prologue, where he declares himself the legitimate 'ruler' of the Atreid palace's wealth (ἀρχέπλουτον, 72) and equates the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to a monetary 'benefit' (κέρδος, 61); see further Blundell (1989) 173.

[36] Swift (2010) 168; see also Segal (1981) 267–68; Schein (1982) 76; McDevitt (1983) 6–11; Wilson (2012) 562; and now Brook (2018) 88.

[37] Myrick (1994) explores the ways in which Euripides reconfigures the horse and chariot imagery of the *Oresteia*; as will become clear below, her conclusions regarding Euripides overlap in important ways with my own reading of Sophocles' *Electra*.

Oresteia.[38] In *Agamemnon*, the Trojan War is compared to a chariot race: having won the first leg, the Greeks still need to compete in the second to ensure their safe return home (*Ag.* 341–47). In this passage, Clytemnestra strongly implies that the Greeks, like Orestes in our messenger speech, will fail to win this round, either because they have offended the gods or through an 'unexpected stroke of evil fate' (εἰ πρόσπαια μὴ τύχοι κακά, 347; compare *El.* 48, ἐξ ἀναγκαίας τύχης).[39] The image returns, again with ominous undertones, at 638–45, where the Herald speaks of warriors taken away from their households by 'the double whip that Ares loves, the two-pronged *atē*, the bloodstained pair of chariot-horses' (διπλῇ μάστιγι, τὴν Ἄρης φιλεῖ, δίλογχον ἄτην, φοινίαν ξυνωρίδα, *Ag.* 642–43).[40] Leah Himmelhoch argues that the pair of bloody horses can be identified ironically as Agamemnon and Menelaus (echoing the yoked pair of *Ag.* 44; *cf.* 841–42 of Agamemnon and Odysseus), continuing a thematic thread in which 'hippotrophic imagery – the image of the chariot race in particular – is consistently linked with acts of impiety, brutality and civic injury, either performed or led by Agamemnon'.[41] In the context of the tragedy's presentation of the Trojan War and Agamemnon's return, these passages also suggest that Agamemnon's warlike chariot race will be followed by a disaster that lies outside his control.

Horse and chariot imagery are similarly deployed in *Choephori*, with crucial implications for the story of Orestes and for Sophocles' messenger speech. The play depicts the murder and matricide as a 'contest' (ἀγών, 584) in which Orestes seeks victory (148, 499). In the second *stasimon*, Orestes' task is compared to a chariot race: he is a young colt (πῶλος) yoked to a chariot, engaged in a 'race of disasters' (πημάτων ἐν δρόμῳ, 796)[42] in which he will require Zeus' help to reach the finish line.[43] Orestes successfully completes his revenge, winning the first race (890, 1052), yet, as in the case of Agamemnon and the Greek army at *Agamemnon* 341–47, this is quickly followed by a second, disastrous contest. A new race begins at 1021; this time Orestes is the charioteer, and he has lost control of his horses (1021–25):

> ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἂν εἰδῆτ᾽, οὐ γὰρ οἶδ᾽ ὅπη τελεῖ,
> ὥσπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἡνιοστροφῶν δρόμου
> ἐξωτέρω. φέρουσι γὰρ νικώμενον
> φρένες δύσαρκτοι, πρὸς δὲ καρδίᾳ Φόβος
> ᾄδειν ἕτοιμος ἠδ᾽ ὑπορχεῖσθαι Κότῳ

> But, that you may know this – for I do not know where it will end as I drive, like a charioteer with his horses, outside the track – my wits, out of control, bear me to defeat and beside my heart Fear is ready to sing and dance to Wrath's tune …[44]

Here, towards the end of the play, the imagery of contests and chariot racing is turned against Orestes as he loses control of events and of his mind, which has vanquished him (νικώμενον). The

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[38] See especially Myrick (1994) 132–35; Himmelhoch (2005). *Cf.* more generally Dumortier (1935) 229–31; Petrounias (1976) 170–72, 191.

[39] Tr. Sommerstein (2008). *Cf.* Denniston and Page (1957) 100.

[40] Tr. Sommerstein (2008), modified.

[41] Himmelhoch (2005) 280, *cf.* 276–81.

[42] The text of the passage is corrupt and its interpretation controversial. πήματων is the ms. reading (some prefer the conjecture βημάτων), but it is unclear whether it should be taken with ἄρμασιν ('chariot of woes', as, for instance, Rose (1958) 197), with μέτρον (Garvie (1986) 259: 'the due measure (limit) of his troubles in the course') or with δρόμῳ, as argued by Brown (2018)

377. While all these readings are possible, the first and third seem to me to fit the context particularly well. I adopt the second of Brown's proposals: 'race (consisting) of Orestes' toils' (rather than 'toilsome race'); but the idea of a 'chariot of woes' would be an appropriate antecedent for Sophocles' narrative of Orestes' race in *Electra*.

[43] The comparison of Orestes to a colt is perhaps prepared ironically at *Ag.* 1639–42; *cf.* also Eur. *Or.* 44–45.

[44] Tr. Brown (2018), modified. Compare the Chorus in *Ag.* 1245, ἐκ δρόμου πεσὼν τρέχω, and the maddened Io in *PV* 883, ἔξω δὲ δρόμου φέρομαι λύσσης.

passage depicts the onset of Orestes' madness, but it also describes a striking reversal whereby he goes from being the glorious winner of an athletic contest to being defeated, losing control and being pursued by the Erinyes (ἐλαύνομαι, 1063).[45]

As Leslie Myrick has shown, this pattern and the parallel between the different stages of race and revenge are reproduced in Euripides' *Electra*;[46] I would argue that something similar occurs in Sophocles' narrative of the chariot accident. Like his counterpart in Aeschylus and Euripides, the Paedagogus' Orestes triumphs in the first contest (the footrace, 681–96), only to lose control and falter in the second (the chariot race, 698–763). Further, just as the chariot imagery in *Choephori* broadly follows the tragedy's plot (Orestes wins the first contest and loses control in the second ~ Orestes completes his revenge and is then pursued by the Erinyes), there are elements to suggest that the structure and content of Sophocles' messenger speech reflect that of the tragedy as a whole.[47] The footrace begins with Orestes entering the contest as a 'brilliant figure' (εἰσῆλθε λαμπρός, 685), just as the 'real' Orestes in the prologue imagines himself 'shining like a star' upon his victims (ἐχθροῖς ἄστρον ὣς λάμψειν ἔτι, 66; *cf.* also the parallel between 1–2 and 694–95 noted in section II).[48] Just before the matricide, the Chorus sing that Hermes is bringing Orestes to the *terma*, literally the turning-post (or the goal?) of a chariot race (1397, *cf.* 686);[49] and they later describe Aegisthus as rushing into a 'contest of justice' (ὡς ὀρούσῃ πρὸς δίκας ἀγῶνα, 1441; *cf. agōn* used of the footrace at 682). But what of the second contest, the chariot race that follows the footrace, and the aftermath of the 'real' Orestes' revenge? As I have argued above, there are reasons to believe that the Paedagogus' speech has ironic, ominous implications for the events of the play, notably through its framing of the chariot accident in a traditional pattern of reversal, its relationship with the Funeral Games in *Iliad* 23 and the Chorus' account of the disastrous race of Pelops and Oenomaus in the first *stasimon*.

The parallel with Aeschylus' *Choephori* suggests that this can be taken further. We have seen that in *Choephori* 1021–25, Orestes' imminent madness and pursuit by the Erinyes are announced in terms of a charioteer losing control of his horses. The Paedagogus' account of Orestes' accident in *Electra* (743–56), as well as exploiting the potential chariot accident of Nestor's warning in *Iliad* 23, vividly enacts the Aeschylean image:[50] by mistake, Orestes steers too close to the turning-post and falls off his wrecked chariot; entangled in his reins, he is dragged and whirled around as his horses scatter across the track. One might argue that Sophocles develops the image of *Choephori* 1021–25 only to subvert it: the fatal race is, after all, fictional, and the audience know that the real Orestes is manipulating events from outside the palace through his messenger. Yet spectators might also see something sinister in the Paedagogus' depiction of an Orestes who, though outwardly cunning, confident and composed, loses control and is caught in a fatal disaster. The chariot race is, in a sense, a metaphor for human control;[51] thus, one might read the narrative of Orestes' disaster as reflective of the conspirators' incapacity to control their plot and its consequences. In the prologue, Orestes tells his tutor to announce to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus that he has died through a 'chance [ordained by] necessity' (ἐξ ἀναγκαίας τύχης, 48);[52] from the start,

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[45] Swift (2010) 166: 'Far from being victorious, he is defeated … and the chariot becomes an image of lack of control rather than power.' As Garvie (1986) 337 shows, while the Erinyes are not yet visible at this stage, their presence, or imminent arrival, is implied.

[46] Myrick (1994) 138–41; *cf.* also Swift (2010) 156–66. I return to Euripides in section V, below.

[47] See especially Goward (1999) 114–18, who argues that the speech invites the audience to 'superimpose the horse race, focused on outcome, over the main plot as a predictive model of disaster' (116–17). *Cf.* also Segal (1966) 479 and (differently) MacLeod (2001) 118–

19 n.32.

[48] Thus, for instance, Marshall (2006) 214.

[49] On the ambiguity of τέρμα, *cf.* Myrick (1994) 141–42.

[50] Most (2013) 399 n.5 suggests that *Cho.* 1021–25 'may well have generated the false tale of Orestes' death in a charioteering accident in Sophocles' *Electra*'; *cf.* also Segal (1966) 482 n.14; Seaford (1994) 279; Wilson (2012) 561–62; and now Carroll (2020) 233–34.

[51] See Verde Castro (1982) 75–76; Segal (1981) 267.

[52] *Cf.* the paraphrase of Jebb (1894) 14. See also *Aj.* 485–86 with Finglass (2011) 280.

he thus appropriates, and asserts his control over, the tragedy's plot and the action of chance or necessity. The Paedagogus' narrative, though fictional, rather suggests that it is fortune, or a hostile god (696–97), who governs his fate, perhaps signalling that events will at some point unexpectedly turn against him as he 'drives off the track' like Aeschylus' charioteer. Of course, *Electra*, unlike *Choephori*, does not end with a clear vision of the aftermath of the murder and matricide; yet, as we shall see, Sophocles' development of the chariot-race motif in the messenger speech does in fact offer one plausible, if uncertain, window into the future.

V. Orestes and the Erinyes

The Erinyes are attested in the myth of Orestes as early as Stesichorus,[53] and played an essential role in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides' *Electra*, *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. It is thus probable that a broadly contemporary[54] audience attending Sophocles' *Electra* would have been aware of them, indeed expected them as part of an established version of the myth. Given the absence of explicit references to Orestes' pursuit by the Erinyes in the play, there has been a long-standing debate in scholarship over what role (if any) this episode plays in Sophocles' version of the story.[55] As most scholars recognize, it is misleading to state, as Cedric Whitman does, that he has 'omitted the Furies':[56] there are four mentions of Agamemnon's Erinyes in the play (112, 276, 491, 1080, *cf.* also 1388).[57] These passages, of course, announce the arrival of the conspirators and the forthcoming revenge of Agamemnon's murder. Yet they also alert the audience to the presence of Erinyes in general and may be seen, in a more ambiguous sense, as pointing to a connection between them and the mythical figure with whom they are most notoriously linked: the matricide Orestes.[58] In what follows, I build on this connection to suggest that *Electra* goes much further than has been previously acknowledged in its evocation of Orestes' Erinyes,[59] and that it does so primarily through the Paedagogus' narrative of the chariot accident, by exploiting thematic and literary-historical associations between chariot racing, the Erinyes and the aftermath of Orestes' revenge.

This nexus of ideas is already in evidence in the first *stasimon*, which, as we have seen, combines the ancestral evils of the Atreids and the ominous ἱππεία of Pelops with the announcement of the Erinyes' imminent arrival (489–91). Yet the connection between chariot racing, Orestes and the Erinyes emerges much more clearly through comparison with other tragedies. I have already discussed Aeschylus' evocation of the onset of Orestes' madness and the arrival of the Erinyes as a charioteer losing control at *Choephori* 1021–25; this is reversed in *Eumenides* as the Erinyes 'drive' and 'pursue' Orestes (ἐλαύνω: 75, 210, 421; διώκω: 131, 226, 251; *cf. El.* 734,

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[53] See, for example, Davies and Finglass (2014) 489–91, 509–10; Swift (2015) 129–32. The arrival in Athens of the polluted Orestes was also a feature of the city's cult: see Burkert (1991) 236–42; Liapis (2006).

[54] There is no evidence for the date of Soph. *El.*, but most scholars place it roughly between 430 and 410, potentially around the same time as Eur. *El.* and/or *IT* (see, for example, Finglass (2007) 1–4). On the audience's assumed familiarity with Aeschylus, see, for example, Schmitz (2016) 10–11 with bibliography; on reperformances of the *Oresteia*, see Finglass (2015) 210–11.

[55] See, for example (on both sides of the debate), Winnington-Ingram (1980) 217–47; Stinton (1990) 465–79; Lloyd (2005) 104–05; Finglass (2007) 526–27; Sewell-Rutter (2007) 102–04, 130–34; and now Carroll (2020) 226–29.

[56] Whitman (1951) 161; *cf.* Winnington-Ingram (1980) 218.

[57] For a general discussion of these passages, see, for instance, Zerhoch (2015) 49–53, 156–61, 210–12.

[58] Thus Winnington-Ingram (1980) 218; Swift (2010) 168 n.146; Garvie (2014) 35; *contra* Stinton (1990) 470–73. Seaford (2003) 131 argues that Aeschylus in *Choephori* encourages us to identify Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's Erinyes: 'the same agents … both impel Orestes to kill his mother and punish him for killing her … the same Erinys is actively involved in the whole chain of revenge'.

[59] On this general point I am anticipated by Carroll (2020), who also argues that the Paedagogus' speech foreshadows Orestes' pursuit by the Erinyes, but reads its proleptic character rather differently, as a prophecy or omen.

738–39). Strikingly, at *Eumenides* 155–59 the Erinyes are assimilated to a 'team of careening horses' 'being driven by an ὄνειδος as if by a charioteer'.[60]

Most significant, however, is Euripides' development of this theme in *Electra*, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Orestes*, notably in the following passages:

οὐ γὰρ ἔστι σοὶ πόλιν
τήνδ᾿ ἐμβατεύειν, μητέρα κτείναντα σήν.
δειναὶ δὲ Κῆρές <σ᾿> αἱ κυνώπιδες θεαὶ
τροχηλατήσουσ᾿ ἐμμανῆ πλανώμενον.

You cannot set foot in this city after killing your mother. The dreadful Keres, hound-eyed goddesses, will drive you wheeling and wandering in frenzy. (Eur. *El.* 1250–53)[61]

διαδοχαῖς δ᾿ Ἐρινύων
ἠλαυνόμεσθα φυγάδες ἔξεδροι χθονὸς
δρόμους τε πολλοὺς ἐξέπλησα καμπίμους·
ἐλθὼν δέ σ᾿ ἠρώτησα πῶς τροχηλάτου
μανίας ἂν ἔλθοιμ᾿ ἐς τέλος πόνων τ᾿ ἐμῶν

I was driven from my country as an exile by successive attacks of Erinyes, and many are the circling laps in the race I have run. When I came and asked you [Apollo] how I might reach the end of this whirling madness and my labours … (*IT* 79–83)[62]

ΟΡ. οὔκ, ἀλλ᾿ Ἐρινύων δεῖμά μ᾿ ἐκβάλλει χθονός.
ΙΦ. ἔγνωκα· μητρός <σ᾿> οὕνεκ᾿ ἠλάστρουν θεαί.
ΟΡ. ὥσθ᾿ αἱματηρὰ στόμι᾿ ἐπεμβαλεῖν ἐμοί.

Or. No: it was fear of the Erinyes that exiled me.
Iph. I understand: the goddesses drove you out because of our mother.
Or. Yes, and they forced their bloody bit into my mouth. (*IT* 931–35; *cf.* 941–42, 970–71)[63]

ἐντεῦθεν ἀγρίᾳ συντακεὶς †νόσῳ νοσεῖ
τλήμων Ὀρέστης ὅδε πεσὼν ἐν δεμνίοις†
κεῖται, τὸ μητρὸς δ᾿ αἷμά νιν τροχηλατεῖ
μανίαισιν· ὀνομάζειν γὰρ αἰδοῦμαι θεὰς
Εὐμενίδας, αἳ τόνδ᾿ ἐξαμιλλῶνται φόβον.

Ever since then, that poor Orestes here is sick, wasted with a savage sickness, and has taken to his bed: his mother's blood whirls him along in madness. I shrink from naming the goddesses, the Eumenides, who are competing to create this fear. (*Or.* 34–38; *cf.* 412)[64]

All four passages form part of a broader strand of chariot imagery, within each play, which likens Orestes' flight from the Erinyes to a chariot race. In *Electra*, Castor's proleptic account of the pursuit represents a decisive reversal of the tragedy's athletic imagery: whereas Orestes'

[60] Myrick (1994) 134–35. There is a (sparsely attested) connection between the Erinyes and horses, which may be reflected in passages such as this and Eur. *Or*. 321–22 (see Dietrich (1962) 141–42; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 207 n.7; Sansone (1988) 11–12; Heath (1999) 33).
[61] Tr. Cropp (1988).
[62] Tr. Kovacs (1999).

[63] Tr. Kovacs (1999), accepting Monk's (1857) transposition of 934–35 after 931.
[64] The text and meaning of the passage are uncertain (without affecting my argument here). I have followed Diggle's (1994) text and combined West's (1987) and Kovacs's (2002) translations in a way that seemed to me to make the most sense of what we have. *Cf.* the lengthy discussion at Willink (1986) 86–89.

revenge had previously been assimilated to a successful *agōn*, with his murder of Aegisthus celebrated like an Olympic victory,[65] he now becomes a maddened horse, mercilessly 'charioteered' by the whip-wielding Erinyes.[66] As Myrick notes, 'even [after the matricide], … his race will not have been entirely run … Beside the double murder we may thus set a second type of δισσὸς δίαυλος in the *dromos* the wanderer Orestes must run in this second exile.'[67] Similarly, the audience of *Iphigenia in Tauris* is told how the young man has been 'driven' like a frenzied horse in a never-ending race, his mouth bloodied by the bit.[68] In *Orestes*, Euripides represents the Erinyes as a 'galloping chariot-team'[69] pursuing Orestes, an image that is developed at greater length in the first *stasimon* (316–21).[70] Significantly, this play, like Sophocles' *Electra*, gives a prominent role to the race of Pelops and Oenomaus: in a lament sung as she and her brother believe they are about to die, Electra traces her family's woes back to the murder of Myrtilus, thrown out of his moving chariot (988–96; *cf.* also 1547–48). She calls the fateful race a 'pursuit' or 'chase', δίωγμα (988), a word earlier used by Orestes to refer to his pursuit by the Erinyes (οἴμοι διωγμῶν οἷς ἐλαύνομαι τάλας, *Or.* 412; *cf.* also Aesch. *Eum.* 139; Eur. *IT* 1175).

It is striking that in three of the passages quoted above, Euripides uses the rare verb τροχηλατέω or the cognate adjective τροχήλατος, evoking the idea of a whirling, frenzied race. The adjective occurs at the beginning of our play (48–50):

> τέθνηκ' Ὀρέστης ἐξ ἀναγκαίας τύχης
> ἄθλοισι Πυθικοῖσιν ἐκ τροχηλάτων
> δίφρων κυλισθείς·

> [tell them that] Orestes has perished by a fatal chance, hurled, at the Pythian games, from his rapid chariot …[71]

Here we have a similar web of ideas as in the Euripides passages (Orestes, chariot racing, whirling, Delphi and Apollo), with the notable exception of the Erinyes. Yet if we accept that these connections formed part of a tradition surrounding the figure of Orestes, as is suggested by Euripides' and Aeschylus' plays, it is surely possible to suggest that at least some members of the audience could have supplied the Erinyes, or imagined them hiding, unseen, behind Orestes' fictional race and accident; such a suspicion would have been strengthened when the chariot theme

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[65] *Cf.* Swift (2010) 159–60.

[66] *Cf.* Cropp (1988) 184.

[67] Myrick (1994) 140, who also notes that Orestes' race against the Erinyes is ironically prepared by Electra's comment on the dead Aegisthus at 953–56: ὧδέ τις κακοῦργος ὢν / μή μοι τὸ πρῶτον βῆμ' ἐὰν δράμῃ καλῶς / νικᾶν δοκείτω τὴν Δίκην, πρὶν ἂν πέρας / γραμμῆς ἵκηται καὶ τέλος κάμψῃ βίου ('so let any malefactor, though he may run the first leg well enough, not think he is beating Justice till he reaches the finish-line, completing his life's race', tr. Cropp (1988)). Note also, in the description of Achilles' arms in the first *stasimon*, the presence of galloping horses surrounded with dust blackened by blood (476–77). Given the epithet used of the dust (κελαινός, often associated with the Erinyes: *cf.* Csapo (2009) 103 n.20) and the chariot imagery discussed above, the horses could be read as representing the Erinyes pursuing Orestes after the matricide, as argued by Morin (2004) 122–23.

[68] See Parker (2016) 73 on *IT* 79–83: Orestes is a horse 'which has been driven round and round a race-course with a turn … at each end'. On the 'bloody bit', *cf.* Kyriakou (2006) 301. Cropp (2000) 229, followed by Parker (2016), suggests that Euripides exploits the similarity between the rare verb ἐλαστρέω ('drive', also used at 971 in the same context) and ἀλάστορες ('avengers').

[69] Willink (1986) 87, who points out that equine imagery is similarly used of the Erinyes at 255 and 319–21.

[70] It may well be significant that at *Or.* 317–18, the Erinyes are δρομάδες … ποτνιάδες, which the scholiast (Σ 318) and subsequent commentators have taken as a reference to the mares of Glaucus of Potniae (whose disastrous chariot race is mentioned at n.28 above); more specifically, West (1987) 204 thinks this is an echo of *Phoen.* 1124–25, where Euripides describes Glaucus' 'mad flesh-eating horses' (Mastronarde (1994) 466) as Ποτνιάδες ... πῶλοι δρομάδες. All this would further strengthen the dense network of connections between horses, madness and the Erinyes.

[71] Tr. Jebb (1894). On these verses, see the detailed analysis of Verde Castro (1982) 60–62.

makes an ominous return in the first *stasimon* and then in the Paedagogus' speech. An ironic reference to the Erinyes at this early stage in the play, activated by the rare word τροχήλατος, would accord well with the ambiguous juxtaposition of ἀναγκαίας τύχης and ἄθλοισι Πυθικοῖσιν at 48–49, referring of course to the Pythian contest, but also, potentially, to the 'ordeals [associated with] Apollo'.[72]

In the Paedagogus' narrative itself, Orestes is engaged in a whirling, breathless pursuit that recalls the passages from Aeschylus and Euripides discussed above. Here too, I would argue, Sophocles hints at the lurking, elusive presence of the Erinyes and of the old Atreid evils. The contest is assessed by 'appointed judges' (βραβῆς, 709; *cf.* 690) whose name evokes both Iphigenia's sacrifice at Aulis (Aesch. *Ag.* 230: the φιλόμαχοι βραβῆς preside over the sacrifice) and the divine trial awaiting Orestes in Euripides' *Orestes* (*Or.* 1650: θεοί ... βραβῆς).[73] The bronze trumpets (χαλκῆς ... σάλπιγγος, 711; *cf.* the bronze axe with which Agamemnon was struck, 195–96, 485),[74] the charioteers' goads (716) and the beast-like qualities of the horses – their snorting, foaming and breathing (φρυάγμαθ' ἱππικά, 717; ἤφριζον, εἰσέβαλλον ἱππικαὶ πνοαί, 719) – may all recall the Erinyes. Earlier in the play, the Chorus had called them 'bronze-footed' (491); Aeschylus in the *Eumenides* compares them to goaded horses (155–59; *cf.* 136) and describes them as snorting like horses (53–54).[75] At *Eumenides* 183, Apollo says the Erinyes would vomit black foam (μέλαν' ... ἀφρόν) from human blood if hit by his arrow (*cf.* also Aesch. *fr.* 372R: ἀφρὸς βορᾶς βροτείας ἐρρύη κατὰ στόμα, 'foam from their human food flowed over their jaws', plausibly of Glaucus' mares);[76] foaming is also repeatedly presented as a symptom of Orestes' divinely sent madness in Euripides (*Or.* 219–20; *IT* 301–10; *cf. HF* 934; *Bacch.* 1122–24). Finally, at *Eumenides* 137–38 Clytemnestra speaks of the Erinyes' 'bloody breath' (αἱματηρὸν πνεῦμ'; *cf.* Eur. *IT* 288, πῦρ πνέουσα καὶ φόνον), an idea that is echoed in the third *stasimon* of Sophocles' *Electra* (τὸ δυσέριστον αἷμα φυσῶν Ἄρης, 1385; *cf.* section VI).

These elements are complemented by the structure of the narrative, discussed above. As noted in section II, the Paedagogus frames the narrative of Orestes' accident in a traditional paradigm of triumph followed by reversal, signalled explicitly in the *gnōmē* at 696–97. The *gnōmē* itself, which I read as suggesting divine *phthonos*, may also be understood as alluding specifically to the Erinyes: the verb βλάπτειν, to harm, is cognate with βλάβη, a term used by Clytemnestra to depict Electra drinking her blood like an Erinys just after the speech (784–86; *cf.* Aesch. *Cho.* 577–78; *Eum.* 264–68).[77] Just as the Harms (βλάβαι) pursuing Creon towards the end of *Antigone* (1103–04) are swift-footed (ποδώκεις) and inescapable, so the harmful god of *Electra* 697 is impossible to escape (φυγεῖν). The *gnōmē* thus introduces the image of a god pursuing and outstripping a human, in much the same way that the Erinyes are able to trip a fast runner at *Eumenides* 372–76. Orestes' accident is related in detail at 742–60: he strikes the end of a pillar and, caught in the reins, is ejected from the moving chariot and trampled by his own horses. The scene, which rouses

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[72] For ἄθλος as 'ordeal', 'toil', see *Ant.* 856, πατρῷον δ'ἐκτίνεις τιν' ἄθλον (Campbell (1872) 527: 'a task or a burden imposed by some higher power'); [Aesch.] *PV* 752. One could also read the related word ἄθλον (literally, 'prize'), which in the plural is sometimes used to mean 'struggles' or 'ordeals': see *Phil.* 508; with Jebb (1898) 89. The adjective Πυθικός is most often used of the Delphic oracle (as in *El.* 32–33).

[73] See also Eur. *Or.* 1065, where Pylades is asked to be the arbitrator (βραβεύς) of Electra's and Orestes' slaughter. As Willink (1986) notes *ad Or.* 1065, a βραβεύς is 'one who presides over an ἀγών', either a literal or a metaphorical one, as in *Ag.* and *Or.* 1065. In the context of the Pythian games in Sophocles' play, the

word seems apposite, but it is arguably laden with new meaning in the light of the *Agamemnon* parallel and the ubiquitous presentation of Orestes' matricide and murder as an *agōn* in the three tragedians.

[74] On the bronze theme, *cf.* Segal (1981) 268.

[75] See Heath (1999) 33.

[76] Tr. Sommerstein (2009); *cf.* his note ((2009) 318) on the possible ascription to Glaucus of Potniae.

[77] On the relationship between βλάπτω, βλάβη and related terms in the context of the messenger speech and the future sufferings of the Atreids (including the Erinyes), see the detailed analysis of Goward (1999) 117–18. On *El.* 784–86, see Winnington-Ingram (1980) 233.

the imaginary audience at Delphi to pity (749–50),[78] leads the Paedagogus to reflect on Orestes' shocking reversal of fortune (751):

οἷ' ἔργα δράσας οἷα λαγχάνει κακά

What evils he received, having performed such deeds.

These words are fully appropriate to the fictional situation of Orestes' death;[79] yet they can also be applied ironically to the real Orestes' revenge and its aftermath. In the context of the cycle of violence characterizing the house of Atreus, and in a play where the category of action or 'doing' is primarily associated with the matricide or with violent retaliation of any kind (see, for example, 16, 22, 76, 212, 305, 320, 549, 1019–20, 1373, 1399, 1494), one might well read these lines as an ironic formulation of the principle that evil is inevitably followed by further evil. The Paedagogus ends his speech by remarking that this is the greatest of all the woes he has beheld (761–63), heightening the impression that the fictional chariot race evokes, and perhaps announces, the crowning disaster in the Atreids' sufferings: the terrible pursuit that will follow the murder and matricide.

VI. Matricide, murder and punishment

Is such a scenario confirmed by the rest of the play? Several elements, particularly in the latter half of the tragedy, lend support to the idea that the ancestral woes of the Atreids will not cease with the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and some may hint specifically at the Erinyes' pursuit. Of particular importance in this regard is the short third *stasimon* (1384–97), which plays a central role in shaping the audience's reaction to the murders. The song depicts the avengers as hounds (κύνες, 1388). This unmistakable reference to the Erinyes of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*[80] combines with other elements to recall the nexus of ideas that, I have argued, is deployed in the Paedagogus' speech. The avenging hounds are led by Ares, who is 'breathing blood born of strife'[81] (τὸ δυσέριστον αἷμα φυσῶν Ἄρης, 1385), with δυσέριστον evoking both the Atreids' familial strife and the *agōn* of the chariot race, and φυσῶν recalling the breath of the horses in the race. The fact that the hounds are ἄφυκτοι, 'inescapable', and μετάδρομοι, 'racing after', 'pursuing' [criminals], also recalls the chariot race and the Erinyes (compare Orestes' depiction of his pursuit by the Erinyes at *IT* 941–42: μεταδρομαῖς Ἐρινύων / ἠλαυνόμεσθα φυγάδες).[82] The Chorus are of course referring to the Erinyes of Agamemnon and their pursuit of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but in the context of the play, particularly following the messenger speech, the language they use is also suggestive of Orestes' own flight from his mother's Erinyes. Thus, the *stasimon* adds weight to the possibility that the new revenge plot may in fact perpetuate the cycle of retributive violence afflicting the house of Atreus, which here as in the prologue is associated with ancient wealth (ἀρχαιόπλουτα πατρὸς εἰς ἐδώλια, 1393 ~ ἀρχέπλουτον, 72; *cf.* 9–10).[83]

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[78] These lines have been taken to suggest identification with the audience of the tragedy (see Ringer (1998) 162, 169; MacLeod (2001) 116–17; Schmitz (2016) 143).

[79] See especially *Aj.* 923, of the dead hero (as suggested by Dunn et al. (2019) 262).

[80] See, for instance, Burton (1980) 216; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 218; March (2001) 220. On the disturbing nature of the *stasimon*'s presentation of darkness and violence in the palace, see Schmitz (2016) 215–17.

[81] Tr. Lloyd-Jones (1994) after Σ 1384–85; the word can also be read differently: 'bloodshed … against which the guilty will strive in vain' (Jebb (1894) 184–85; so also Kamerbeek (1974) 179; Burton (1980) 215). The adjec-

tive is ambiguous, but however we choose to understand it, it contains the notion of a contest or struggle.

[82] μετάδρομος/μεταδρομή are terms usually employed (as here) of hounds hunting down their prey (Kyriakou (2006) 304 thinks the *IT* passage first refers to hounds and shifts to chariot-race imagery with ἠλαυνόμεσθα), but the context suggests that the word could also allude to a chariot race. It is perhaps significant in this connection that Ap. Rhod. 1.755 uses the cognate adverb μεταδρομάδην of Pelops and Oenomaus' chariot race (as depicted on Medea's cloak).

[83] Segal (1966) 528–29; (1981) 268.

This impression is further strengthened by the matricide itself. Clytemnestra's two shrieks of pain as she is struck by Orestes (ὤμοι πέπληγμαι ... ὤμοι μάλ' αὖθις, 1415–16) precisely reproduce those uttered by Agamemnon as he is struck by Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1343, 1345). As Holger Friis Johansen argues, this echo creates a striking effect of closeness or *rapprochement* between the two killings:[84] although the matricide is differentiated from Agamemnon's murder by Apollo's backing, the emphasis at this point falls on the common horror of both intra-familial murders. The fact that the second half of each of Clytemnestra's lines is spoken by Electra ('strike twice as hard, if you can!'),[85] besides increasing the brutality of the scene, further emphasizes the similarity between the vengeful acts fulfilled by the mother and her children.[86] The Chorus, upon hearing Clytemnestra crying 'things not to be heard' (ἀνήκουστα, 1407)[87] from inside the house, are seized by *phrikē* (φρῖξαι, 1408). In the context of the scene and of lines 1407–08, the Chorus' experience of *phrikē* at the sound of Clytemnestra's despair might be taken as indicative of both shock and fear, but also, as in the case of *Trachiniae* 1044–45 and *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1297–306, of the mixed emotions, including pity and revulsion, aroused by the figure of Clytemnestra, her reversal of fortune and the sudden reality of matricide.[88] Although the Chorus remain on the side of Orestes and Electra, their reaction to Clytemnestra's death allows the audience a glimpse of the instinctive horror and pity that the matricide excites. Thus, the emphasis falls on human suffering and the pity and horror it inspires; the murder of Clytemnestra is the latest instalment of the repeated sufferings afflicting the Atreids, and there is no evidence that this cycle is about to end.

Orestes' reappearance after the deed does not dispel the horror. As he enters, dripping with his mother's blood, he utters the notorious words 'in the house all is well, if Apollo has prophesied well' (τὰν δόμοισι μὲν / καλῶς, Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν, 1424–25). These lines have been the focus of much controversy, with some scholars arguing that the εἰ-clause is meant to express doubt on the part of Orestes and others that it conveys his confidence.[89] However we interpret Orestes' state of mind at this point, the context of his words lends them deep ambiguity. The emphatic repetition of καλῶς (which echoes Clytemnestra's own disturbing, and misguided, use of the word in response to the news of Orestes' 'death', 791–93; compare *Trach*. 26–27)[90] contrasts with what the audience has just seen on the stage: the matricide was anything but καλῶς.[91] Orestes uses καλῶς in a relatively amoral sense (everything has gone 'well', Apollo's prophecy was 'accurate'); yet the word also carries a strong moral value ('good', 'noble', 'honourable') to which he seems oblivious and which contrasts sharply with the preceding scene. Further, one might argue that the εἰ-clause is indicative of Orestes' isolation from the god:[92] he is confident (or doubtful) that Apollo has prophesied well, but the god does not intervene to confirm this, or to provide clarification of what will happen next. Of course, the characters and the audience know that Apollo has sanctioned the revenge; yet they also know that the god has said nothing regarding the moral implications and consequences of the matricide, an issue that is repeatedly problematized in the play. Thus, the line and a half devoted to Apollo points to the vagueness of his guidance and the problematic nature of Orestes' blind trust in his command.[93]

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[84] Friis Johansen (1964) 26–27; see also the discussions of Erbse (1978) 295–96; Finglass (2007) 516–17; Schmitz (2016) 217–19.

[85] Tr. Lloyd-Jones (1994).

[86] See Segal (1966) 501; (1981) 255, 285.

[87] Jebb (1894) 187: '"not to be heard": then, "dreadful to hear"'.

[88] On *phrikē*, see Cairns (2017).

[89] See, for example, the discussions, on both sides of the argument, of Bowra (1944) 252–53; Kamerbeek (1974) 184; Erbse (1978) 287–88; MacLeod (2001) 172–73; March (2001) 224; Lloyd (2005) 105–06; Finglass (2007)

520–21; Medda (2014) 55–56 n.4; Schmitz (2016) 225.

[90] See Winnington-Ingram (1980) 234–35 n.60; Blundell (1989) 176 n.102. Orestes' words also give an ironic answer to Electra's bewildered question following his 'death' (816): ἆρά μοι καλῶς ἔχειν;('Are things well with me?', tr. Lloyd-Jones (1994); *cf.* also 790, ἆρ' ἔχει καλῶς;) (see Nooter (2012) 113–14).

[91] See, for example, Friis Johansen (1964) 27; Stinton (1990) 474 n.65; Garvie (2014) 36.

[92] Segal (1981) 253.

[93] For a similar interpretation, see Kitzinger (1991) 326–27.

The play's final scenes are also shrouded in ambiguity, and similarly fail to provide any clarity regarding the future. Shortly before his exit, Aegisthus offers the following observation (1497–98):

ἦ πᾶσ' ἀνάγκη τήνδε τὴν στέγην ἰδεῖν
τά τ' ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα Πελοπιδῶν κακά;

Is it needful that this house should witness the present and the future woes of the Pelopids?[94]

Although Aegisthus' words are general and ambiguous, there can be little doubt that the present and future woes they predict are relevant (ironically or not) to Electra and Orestes.[95] The specific reference to the Pelopids takes the audience back to the very beginning of the play, when the Paedagogus spoke of the house of the Pelopids, 'rich in destruction' (πολύφθορον, 10).[96] It also evokes Pelops' chariot race in the first *stasimon* and, by extension, Orestes' disaster in the fictional race told by the Paedagogus. This would be a subtle allusion, but it has been prepared by a number of hints throughout the scene. Before Aegisthus' arrival, the Chorus observes that he is about to 'rush into a hidden *agōn* prepared by Justice' (λαθραῖον ὡς ὀρούσῃ / πρὸς δίκας ἀγῶνα, 1440–41; *cf.* also 1491–92). The idea of rushing into a contest recalls both the familiar depiction of Orestes as an athlete and the false messenger speech. The theme then occurs twice in Aegisthus' own language: first, when he asks Electra about Orestes' death in a 'shipwreck of horses' (ἱππικοῖσιν ἐν ναυαγίοις, 1444), echoing both the first *stasimon* and Orestes' chariot race, and, second, when he speaks of the 'bridle' with which he exercises his authority over the Mycenaeans (1461–63). When Aegisthus beholds what he believes to be Orestes' corpse, he concludes that the young man's death must have been caused by divine *phthonos* or *nemesis* (1466–67), echoing the chariot race and its aftermath (696–97, 792–93). These hints create a strong connection between the play's final scene and Orestes' fictional chariot disaster, giving weight to the idea that the evils predicted by Aegisthus may include the intervention of the Erinyes.

VII. Conclusion

The allusion to the Erinyes in the messenger speech forms part of a network of associations (horses – chariot race – Atreids – Erinyes) that is also present in Aeschylus and Euripides, and which Sophocles assimilates and reconfigures in his own way and for his own dramatic purposes. While specific intertextual links are few and far between (a reworking of *Cho.* 1021–25 being, in my view, the likeliest candidate), I would argue that the allusion functions in a more diffuse way, combining 'small-scale references … which build up a pattern of association'[97] with broader dramatic movements and, crucially, the audience's expectation of the Erinyes. As Deborah Roberts puts it, 'hints in the text … may evoke a known aftermath; but it is the known aftermath that leads us to notice hints we would otherwise not see'.[98] In an influential statement of the view that *Electra* does not evoke Orestes' pursuit by the Erinyes, Tom Stinton argues that, had Sophocles wished to make this episode a part of his tragedy, he would have made it explicit, following the principle that 'anything essential to the plot of a Greek tragedy is always emphasised in the play'.[99] Stinton therefore rejects any possibility of ambiguity or obscurity.[100] Yet part of the point of the ironic

[94] Tr. Lloyd-Jones (1994).

[95] On these controversial lines, see, for example, Winnington-Ingram (1980) 226–27; Stinton (1990) 478–79; Lloyd (2005) 106–10; Finglass (2007) 526–28; Schmitz (2016) 235.

[96] So also Dunn et al. (2019) 361.

[97] Swift (2018) 120.

[98] Roberts (1997) 259.

[99] Stinton (1990) 463 n.28, *cf.* especially 479 on *Electra*. His argument also hinges on what he calls 'dramatic' or 'tragic' 'effect', 'logic' or 'appropriateness' (for example, 456, 479, 482, 489), which in *Electra* would be spoiled by any hint of future events; but it is hard to see how this can be used as an objective criterion.

[100] *Cf.* Stinton (1990) 489–90 (on the possible allusion to Heracles' apotheosis in *Trachiniae*).

allusion I have tried to identify is precisely that it is ambiguous and obscure: the messenger speech, as I read it, offers a window into one possible course of events beyond the end of the tragedy; no-one on stage or in the audience knows what will happen. Some may think it likely that Orestes will be pursued by the Erinyes, and the chariot race narrative will have confirmed or strengthened that suspicion, but the tragedy offers no certainty, and individual spectators or readers are by no means forced to accept this outcome.[101] The Paedagogus, even in the midst of his impressive, completely convincing rhetorical *tour de force*, is never fully in control. He is manipulating Clytemnestra and Electra, and yet he is also, in a sense, being manipulated: his language spirals out of his control and acquires a life of its own, taking on ironic meanings that point to a potential outcome that would undermine everything he is trying to achieve. Thus, the ironic allusion to the Erinyes highlights the limits of his knowledge and of his control over the events of the plot. Irony and ambiguity, as often in tragedy, acquire a broader epistemological dimension.

The uncertainty surrounding the possibility of reversal and pursuit by the Erinyes arguably makes the ending of *Electra* even more terrifying. Unlike his counterpart in Euripides, for instance, Sophocles' Orestes does not leave the stage with the promise that any subsequent suffering will eventually find a resolution: he enters a future that is completely obscure, but which will involve further reversal and suffering. In his response to Aegisthus' comment at 1497–98, Orestes sarcastically notes that he is a good prophet regarding Aegisthus' forthcoming evils (1499), a reply that ironically points to Orestes' lack of knowledge regarding his own future.[102] The play's final lines further increase the open-endedness and ambiguity of its ending:[103]

ὦ σπέρμ' Ἀτρέως, ὡς πολλὰ παθὸν
δι' ἐλευθερίας μόλις ἐξῆλθες
τῇ νῦν ὁρμῇ τελεωθέν.

Seed of Atreus, after many sufferings you have with difficulty emerged in freedom, made complete by this day's enterprise![104]

Ostensibly, these lines celebrate the Atreids' new-found freedom and the end of their ancestral evils.[105] Yet, as the messenger speech and other passages suggest, the world of the tragedy is one in which no true release is envisaged.[106] The Chorus' words echo Electra's exclamation at 1256 ('now only with difficulty (μόλις) have I had my lips set free', ἔσχον ... ἐλεύθερον στόμα), pointing back to a scene in which Orestes repeatedly silences his sister, while assuring her that there would be time to rejoice after the revenge. Sophocles, however, does not offer any joy at the end of the

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[101] See Easterling (1981) 67 on the end of *Trachiniae*: 'this is not to suggest that the allusion *compels* the audience to imagine a sequel in which Heracles is taken up into heaven trailing clouds of glory: Sophocles leaves a gap (just as he does at the end of *Electra*), and the only clues he gives are to be found in the action of the rest of the play'. On this passage, *cf.* also Halleran (1997) 158. For a good discussion of irony and ambiguity at the end of *Electra*, see now Carroll (2020) 234–35. On lack of closure as a typical feature of Sophoclean endings, see Roberts (1988); Garvie (2014) 33–36 with bibliography.

[102] See Winnington-Ingram (1980) 226–27: at 1497–98, Sophocles 'throw[s] doubt on the capacity of Orestes to foresee the future.'

[103] Some editors delete these lines, together with 1505–07 (see especially Finglass (2007) 544–49;

Schmitz (2016) 235–37; Dunn et al. (2019) 363–64 are rightly sceptical). While there are legitimate concerns regarding the language, deletion seems extreme, particularly given the relevance of the lines and their contribution to the overall effect of the ending.

[104] Tr. Lloyd-Jones (1994), modified.

[105] So, for example, Jebb (1894) 203; Grossardt (1998) 313–14 n.332; March (2001) 231; Lefèvre (2001) 151–52; MacLeod (2001) 184. See Winnington-Ingram (1980) 226 and Goldhill (2012) 51–52 on Sophocles' ironic use of the *telos* motif. *Cf.* also Myrick (1994) on the use of *telos* in the context of chariot racing and the 'tension between the possibilities of *telos* as "turning point" and *telos* as "finish"' (132).

[106] See Goldhill (2012) 17–21 on the rhetoric of release in the play.

play, only a vague sense of future suffering. The tragedy provides little evidence that the outcome of the siblings' actions, which certainly involved many sufferings (πολλὰ παθόν; echoing Electra's πολύπονον, 1275), will bring any freedom or closure. The opacity pervading the play's abrupt ending paradoxically emphasizes the complete absence of the divine. Having commissioned and backed the matricide and murder, Apollo retreats from the scene, leaving the human agents of his justice, and the spectators who have observed them, to deal with the terrifying uncertainty of their actions and of the future that hangs over them.

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