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Sophocles the Honeybee: Dramatic Context and Interaction

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SOPHOCLES THE HONEYBEE:

DRAMATIC CONTEXT AND INTERACTION

by

JENNIFER SARA STARKEY

B.A., St. Olaf College, 2007

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Department of Classics

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This thesis entitled:
Sophocles the Honeybee: Dramatic Context and Interaction
written by Jennifer Sara Starkey
has been approved for the Department of Classics

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John C. Gibert

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Peter A. Hunt

Date____________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
There have been very few large-scale studies of Sophocles’ poetic interactions with the other playwrights of the fifth century B.C. This project seeks to fill that gap by putting Sophocles in contact with both tragic and comic poets and offering new readings of his work from that angle. By examining Sophocles as an exploiter of other poets’ dramatic ideas and strategies, I hope to demonstrate his versatility and creativity; by viewing him as a source of inspiration for other dramatists, I aim to show his relevance and significance within his own time.

The ancient Life of Sophocles claims that he was nicknamed melitta (“honeybee”) for his ability to glean the best elements from the work of other poets and integrate them effectively into his own plays. Taking this idea as my starting point, I explore the “immediate dramatic context” of each of Sophocles’ late tragedies (Electra, Philoctetes, and Oedipus at Colonus) to show how they draw extensively on specific plays of Aeschylus and Euripides. I also aim to complicate common views of dramatic intertextuality, which, in light of the competitions at the festivals, is often understood in terms of simple imitation or rejection; in particular, the relationship between Sophocles and Euripides has frequently been reduced to one of polemics and polarity. My interest is rather in a type of engagement that was basically collaborative and constructive, and I argue that Sophocles and Euripides, as a result of working closely with each other’s material
over the course of several decades, were actually much more similar in terms of style and interest than is usually recognized.

Finally, drawing on recent work on comic intertextuality, I argue that all fifth-century playwrights were essentially honeybees in their own right, eager to experiment with recent innovations and developments in the theater. Sophocles thus becomes the basis for a more general model of dramatic inspiration and composition in the late fifth century: in contrast to the view that tragedy was becoming exhausted or even dying out, the poets continued to find new ways to exploit, expand, and build on each other’s material.
This project is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother,

Kay Mathias,

who passed away on the Ides of March, 2011.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go first and foremost to John Gibert, who supervised my research, diligently read countless drafts, and patiently offered criticism on everything from word choice to overall conception; our many wide-ranging discussions have been invaluable to me. I am also grateful for the new perspectives and depth of scholarship provided by my readers and examiners, Peter Hunt, Lauri Reitzammer, Peter Knox, and Philip Holt. I have received further encouragement and support from Gwen Compton-Engle, Beth Dusinberre, and Alan Sommerstein; Alan especially deserves my thanks for his hospitality at the University of Nottingham during the spring of 2012, when he took the time to read my entire project and discuss with me its strengths, weaknesses, and potentialities. My work that year was funded by a dissertation fellowship from the Center for Humanities and the Arts at the University of Colorado, which I am happy to acknowledge here. Finally, I offer my thanks to those who have had to live with me for the past several years and have enriched the time with good humor and thoughtful conversation on a variety of topics, especially Reina and Kris Callier, Michaela Börner, Myrci Konyak, and of course my parents, who have supported my interest in the Classics from the beginning.
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### ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>IG</td>
<td>F.H. Gaertringen et al., eds. <em>Inscriptiones Graecae.</em> (^2) 1924-. Berlin.</td>
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Throughout this study, translations and quotations of the ancient texts are regularly drawn from the following editions (which are cited in footnotes by the editor’s name alone):


Quotations of the Greek are taken from appropriate OCT editions; dramatic fragments and testimonia are from *TrGF* and *PCG*. Unless otherwise noted, translations are from the Loeb editions, except those of the comic fragments, which are from Rusten 2011. Titles of plays are abbreviated in the footnotes according to the format used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 
1

Introduction: Contextualizing Sophocles

Sophocles was a man of the theater. He produced more plays and won more victories in the competitions at the Dionysia and Lenaea than any other ancient dramatist.\(^1\) Aristotle commends Sophocles’ use of the chorus and cites his *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a paradigm of proper tragedy more often than any other play.\(^2\) Ancient critics mention his sweet style, his *ethopoia*, his dramatic power.\(^3\) What was it, other than innate talent, that made Sophocles a great tragedian? According to the ancient *Life of Sophocles* (20.87-9), one trait that contributed to his success as a poet was his ability to glean the best features from both previous and contemporary poets and combine them profitably in his own work:

\[καὶ ἄλλοι μὲν πολλοὶ μεμίμηται τινα τὸν πρὸ ὀφθέν ἢ τὸν καθ’ αὐτόν, μόνος δὲ Σοφοκλῆς ἀφ’ ἐκάστου τὸ λαμπρὸν ἀπανθίζει καθ’ ὁ καὶ μέλιτα ἐλέγετο.\]

And many others have imitated one of those before them or in their own time, but only Sophocles gleans what was splendid from each; for this reason he was also called “honeybee.”\(^4\)

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\(^1\) The *Vita* (8, 18 = Soph. T 1) gives him 20 victories and 130 plays (17 of which are spurious). The Suda (s.v. “Sophocles” = Soph. T 2) gives the more conventional numbers of 123 plays and 24 victories. It is not known how many were satyr plays, or how many were produced at the Lenaea versus the Dionysia.

\(^2\) Chorus: 1456a; *OT: Poetics* 1452a, 1453b, 1454b, 1455a, 1460a.


\(^4\) The translation is mine.
Though this explanation of Sophocles’ nickname is at odds with other sources, who typically associate him with the honey rather than the bee and call him sweet with reference to his poetic style, it suggests a useful way to think about his aims and methods of dramatic composition. No poet works in a vacuum, perhaps especially when he lives in Athens for the better part of the fifth century B.C. and writes texts for public performance.

But Sophocles’ debts to contemporary dramatists – or as we might rather think of them, the bits of literary nectar he gleaned from them – have received surprisingly little scholarly attention. It is the aim of this study to sketch in some of the dramatic context in which Sophocles wrote his plays, including a few items that have been almost completely neglected by modern scholarship; we will be interested both in what Sophocles gleaned from his peers and how he used those bits of literary nectar, and in what the other dramatists found useful about Sophocles’ work. In other words, this is a study of dramatic intertextuality and inspiration. Moreover, I hope not only to offer new readings of select plays and fill important gaps in the scholarship, but also to prompt a larger-scale reassessment of Sophocles’ work and how it relates to that of other playwrights, especially Euripides. Though these two have often been viewed as representatives of fundamentally different types of tragedy, I shall try to bring them closer together by showing how closely and frequently they engaged with one another’s material. Finally, I will argue that essentially collaborative and constructive types of interaction between poets enabled drama to continue to develop and flourish through the late fifth century – a time of widespread creativity, experimentation, and growth fueled by the poets’ constant attention to what was happening in their theater.

5 The ancient critics are collected in TrGF IV under the heading “Sophocles suavis” as testimonia 108-14. For a skeptical approach to the ancient biographical traditions, see Fairweather 1974 and 1984, Lefkowitz 2012.
The Scholarly Background: Comedy

Recent work in Old Comedy provides us with a basic model for tragic interaction. The comic poets interacted with each other most conspicuously by hurling creative insults in their parabases. But, though the context is undeniably agonistic and polemical, the comic poets’ insults are not as straightforward as they appear. Scholars have come to see the comic parabasis and its invective as participating in a system of “ritualized insults” in the iambographic tradition, a sort of game of one-upsmanship in which, though there was something to be gained from a rival’s discomfiture, the terms were partly or even entirely artificial. Comic poets constructed personae both for themselves and for each other, and as they continued to develop those personae on a yearly basis, they even appropriated and built on their rivals’ insults. Malcolm Heath was the first to describe this atmosphere of competitive creativity.⁶

“Reading through the comic fragments in bulk gives the impression that there was a common pool or repertoire of comic material: anything put on stage in a comedy would become public property and be absorbed into the repertoire, so that all comic poets contributed to it; and all drew on it, although each would aim to give a new and original twist to the material which he borrowed, so that the repertoire constantly evolved. … The charges of plagiarism are part of a system of ritualized insults; they are not meant to be believed, but to make the other party lose face.”

In short, the comic poets’ interactions are polemical on a competitive level, as they attempt to score points at each other’s expense in pursuit of the prize in the dramatic competition, but constructive on a compositional level, as they develop material already tried out in earlier plays.

Zachary Biles and Ian Ruffell have both built on Heath’s point in their readings of the intertextual relationship between Aristophanes and Cratinus in the 420s.⁷ Though the parabasis

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⁶ Heath 1990: 152.

⁷ Biles 2002 (reprinted in Biles 2011: 134-66) and Ruffell 2002 (reprinted in Ruffell 2011: 361-426). Biles links his project explicitly to Heath’s; Ruffell (pp. 138-9) apparently tries to distance himself from Heath, though it is not entirely fair to reduce Heath’s argument to suggesting that the poets merely drew on “a common stock or repertoire of jokes,” since he, like Ruffell, duly considers the role of innovation in contributing to the pool. Ruffell (p. 141) also compares comic composition to the speeches in Pl. Symp., which “each take off from the previous
of *Knights* and then Cratinus’ *Pytine* were written with polemical intent (on the competitive level), both poets in turn creatively exploited each other’s ideas in the development of Cratinus’ persona. Cratinus first created an image of himself as one who, in the tradition of Archilochus, drew poetic inspiration from wine;\(^8\) Aristophanes’ *Knights* put a new twist on that persona by attacking Cratinus as a washed-up drunk; and Cratinus responded by making himself the subject of an entire play about alcoholism, comedy, and poetic inspiration. Each poet scored a point on the other, as it were, but they did so by creatively building on ideas that had been introduced in previous plays. Moreover, the development of the image of Cratinus is not limited to a pair of plays but extends through at least three, and in the end Cratinus returns to his own material while also taking into account Aristophanes’ manipulation of it. This particular example of comic intertextuality, then, is both polemical and constructive.

In moving beyond simple ideas of personal rivalry and antagonism, scholars of comedy have made sound progress toward achieving a better understanding of the mechanisms and purpose of comic invective, as well as illuminating the creative environment of comic composition. Scholars of tragedy, I suggest, have much to gain from this basic approach, especially since interactions between tragedians tend to be oversimplified. For instance, it has often been imagined that tragic intertextuality (even between poets not actually competing with

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\(^8\) That Cratinus was the originator of this image of himself is the argument of Biles 2002; Ruffell 2002 thinks that the image first appears in *Ar. Eq.*, but he is looking at other comic poets’ abuse of Cratinus rather than Cratinus’ own work.
each other\textsuperscript{9}) is characterized by outright rejection rather than creativity.\textsuperscript{10} Burnett’s summary of Euripides’ \textit{Orestes} is a good example of this general attitude.\textsuperscript{11}

“The sequence of Orestes’ adventures … allows the poet to make a commentary upon the \textit{Oresteia}. Aeschylus had based the successful resolution of his trilogy upon a pair of related premises, arguing that political institutions could reflect divine Dike in an earthly administration of justice and that pious, innocent human beings do exist. Now Euripides, after half a century, uses his Oresteian play to challenge both of these assumptions. He attacks the secular optimism of the \textit{Eumenides} by showing a tyrant, a wise aristocrat, and a democratic polis, all equally unable to act justly in Orestes’ case, and meanwhile he makes a fundamental criticism of the view of human nature that is found in the \textit{Choephoroi}.”

Words like “challenge,” “attacks,” and “criticism” all suggest that Euripides means to refute Aeschylus’ views, while the substance of Burnett’s discussion really only shows that the world of the \textit{Oresteia} is different from that of \textit{Orestes}; the clash between those two worlds in Euripides’ play is what causes the failure of a number of dramatic actions (to use Burnett’s terms) and creates an atmosphere of absurdity. It seems to me that rather than criticizing

\textsuperscript{9} One difficulty in imagining that comic expectations of competitive one-upsmanship applied equally to tragedy is that Euripides, who repeatedly “parodies” Aeschylus, never actually competed against him directly. His use of Aeschylean material may be intended to demonstrate his poetic \textit{σοφία} (on which see Winnington-Ingram 1969a), thus promoting his bid in the dramatic competition, but he has less at stake in seeing Aeschylus lose face as well.

\textsuperscript{10} Such arguments often employ the idea of parody, apparently equating it with a rejection of the model text, as if parody is inherently critical; e.g. Bond 1974, Hammond 1984, Silk 1993; Hammond even suggests (p. 386) that Euripides’ “parody” of Aesch. \textit{Cho.} was provoked by his recent loss in the dramatic competition to a reperformance of the \textit{Oresteia} and, if I follow his logic correctly, seems to think that Soph. \textit{El.} was meant as a reassertion of serious tragedy in the face of Euripides’ antics. However, modern theories of parody generally assume a more constructive model of interaction (e.g. Hutcheon 1985, Goldhill 1991: 206-22, Rose 1993, Dentith 2000). Thus, Aristophanes’ tragic parodies are not simply critical but acknowledge tragedy as a serious genre and use it to raise comedy to the same level. Aristophanic parody, while assuming an aggressive tone to assert the dominance of comedy over tragedy, also necessarily acknowledges a comic debt to tragedy (see e.g. Taplin 1983, Silk 2000b; Cratinus (fr. 342) found enough similarity between Aristophanes and Euripides to make a joke out of it).

\textsuperscript{11} Burnett 1971: 205. Owen 1936: 146-7 similarly imagines two main arguments for dating the \textit{Electra} plays in one order or the other: “Of one thing, however, we may feel confident, that whichever was the first impelled the other dramatist to show his opposition. If Sophocles had written his play before Euripides, the latter would have been bound to feel indignation at the matricide being followed by little compunction and no punishment; equally the \textit{εὐκολία} of Sophocles would have been upset by a drama which made the tragic heroine so repulsive and brought the heroic legend into such a squalid environment;” cf. Segal 1966: 521 n. 61 on the same topic. Cf. Fuqua 1976, who carefully and thoroughly examines the relation between Soph. \textit{Phil.} and Eur. \textit{Or.} but still concludes that Euripides means to reject Sophocles’ view of heroism and society; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 299 n. 60, who essentially suggests that Soph. \textit{Phil.} is meant to show Euripides how to write proper tragedy; Falkner 1983, who speaks (p. 290) of Eur. \textit{Or.} as “little short of parody” of Soph. \textit{Phil.} and adds (p. 300) that “Euripides rejects this Sophoclean optimism;” and Dunn 1996: 176, who says of the opening of \textit{Or.} that “[t]he sustained parody, here as throughout the play, rejects the model of Aeschylus, defacing rather than deepening the tragic predecessor.”
Aeschylean dramaturgy, Euripides is using the *Oresteia* to bring out the immorality and powerlessness of his own characters, and in this way his reworking of the other poet’s material contributes fundamentally to the unique dynamic of *Orestes*.

Indeed, even when a poet designed his play in a way that ran directly counter to what his predecessor had done, we should not automatically think of it as a rejection of the earlier poet’s ideas. The *Electra* plays, for instance, certainly draw their inspiration from Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*, even though both Sophocles and Euripides have made very different choices with regard to plot and character. Both decided, in contrast to Aeschylus, to make Electra instead of Orestes the central figure, the one who pushes most vehemently for vengeance. This does not mean that Sophocles and Euripides reject the Aeschylean version but that they noticed the dramatic potential in what he did not do.\(^{12}\)

So the comic model provided by Heath, Biles, and Ruffell will allow us to move beyond ideas of simple rejection and put us in a better position to appreciate the creativity and sophistication of the tragedians’ engagement with their dramatic context. But a comic model must of course be adapted when applied to tragedy. I have suggested, for instance, that parabatic interaction in Old Comedy operates on two levels, a polemical competitive level and a constructive compositional level. Biles and Ruffell stress the importance of the first level in determining the dynamics of comic invective: the audience expected to see the poets compete with each other, and the genre’s tradition of “ritualized insults” become formalized as the parabasis, a part of the play where the poet could, in the manner of a Homeric warrior, take the

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\(^{12}\) Cf. Sommerstein 2012, who argues that Sophocles often attempted to surpass Aeschylus in theatricality or complexity; this does not imply rejection of Aeschylus’ ideas but that Sophocles used Aeschylean tragedy as a starting point for further innovation. Indeed, the current study suggests that the poets’ desire to improve on each other’s work is what motivated the development and growth of drama throughout the fifth century.
opportunity for extensive self-presentation and attempt to out-boast his opponents.\(^{13}\) As a genre, comedy puts a high premium on transgression, and the parabasis almost seems specially designed to showcase the poet’s transgression of both social and dramatic boundaries.\(^{14}\) But it is not clear that the same competitive expectations apply to tragedy – which, after all, has no formalized arena for polemic such as the comic parabasis\(^{15}\) – nor that we are justified in interpreting tragic interactions in a polemical light. Therefore, the current project sets aside the competitive and polemical level of interaction in order to explore tragic intertextuality as constructive on the level of poetic composition.

**The Scholarly Background: Tragedy**

This study applies the comic model of constructive interaction to Sophocles in order to examine his engagement with contemporary playwrights of both tragedy and comedy. Rather surprisingly, this is not a common endeavor in modern scholarship, which tends to treat Sophocles in relative isolation from other dramatists. The vast majority of monographs on Sophocles are just that – they have little or no interest in any other playwright and seek instead to offer a new reading of extant Sophocles from a particular perspective.\(^{16}\) Blundell’s *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (to take one example) offers new interpretations of all seven surviving Sophoclean tragedies from the angle of ethics and naturally has little to say about

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\(^{13}\) On “flyting” in Homer, see e.g. Muellner 1976, Martin 1989: 65-77, Lowry 1995.

\(^{14}\) Biles 2011 offers a new formulation of the comic parabasis as a venue for poetic transgression and self-advertisement.

\(^{15}\) There is an ancient tradition that Sophocles and Euripides experimented with parabases in their tragedies (Pollux 4.111), but see Cairns 2005.

Aeschylus or Euripides. Relationships between playwrights also receive little attention in studies that do not focus solely on one playwright but instead analyze a particular idea, theme, or device in all three of the tragedians. Buxton’s Persuasion in Greek Tragedy, for example, is an excellent study of the Greek concept of \( \pi\epsilon\theta\omicron \), Greek attitudes toward speech and rhetoric, and how these ideas are exploited in tragedies by all of the “big three” tragedians; but it is not a book about the style of individual poets, much less an investigation of dramatic interaction. Books like Blundell’s and Buxton’s add much to our understanding of ancient dramaturgy and the poets’ use of important themes and devices; individually, they have no reason to expand the study to include dramatic interaction. Nevertheless, the accumulation of work that adheres to one basic pattern or the other has made us accustomed to reading Sophocles apart from his dramatic context. It seems to me that if we remain unaware of his relation to other playwrights, we risk missing out on some of his creativity and complexity, as well as his significance to the people who lived and wrote during his own time.

So, like Blundell’s, this study seeks to read Sophoclean drama from a new angle, that of contemporary tragedy and comedy. While we will be interested in several different playwrights, putting Sophocles into his dramatic context inevitably means devoting a significant amount of space to the relationship between Sophocles and Euripides, whose careers overlapped for about fifty years and whose late work is relatively well represented in the surviving texts. Of late, Euripidean critics have rightly stressed the variety and versatility of their poet, but where Sophocles comes in, he usually serves as little more than a foil for Euripides – the paradigm of tragedy that Euripides characteristically seeks either to surpass or to undermine.

A good example of this position is Ann Michelini’s book on Euripides and the Tragic Tradition, which opens with a history of Euripidean scholarship that demonstrates the difficulty
many critics have had in describing Euripides’ tragic style. Michelini characterizes Euripides’ attitude toward Sophocles as one of jealous rivalry, whereby Euripides responded to the other poet’s regular success in the dramatic competitions by continually creating types of drama that were opposite to Sophocles’. \(^{17}\) We have already glanced at the competitive environment of ancient tragedy and concluded that there is no sure basis for presuming that rivalry influenced the tragedians’ composition of their work in this way; and in fact Michelini has been criticized for making Euripides into a “poor sport.” \(^{18}\) She does, however, put her finger on an important point of tragic criticism by arguing that Euripides is essentially indefinable. One effective way to demonstrate the extent of his variety is to compare his work to the more “consistent” (and smaller) corpora of Aeschylus and Sophocles: describing Sophoclean work as “ideal,” “balanced,” or “classical,” shows how extreme, non-traditional, and provocative Euripidean dramaturgy could be. As a result, the notion of a polarity between Sophoclean and Euripidean dramatic styles persists in much modern scholarship. \(^{19}\)

Michelini thus makes explicit a number of critical assumptions about Sophocles and Euripides that are quite common but usually remain unacknowledged and unexamined.

A recent challenge to this position has been made by Mastronarde in his book on *The Art of Euripides*. While Mastronarde does not deny Euripidean variety, he is willing to consider his engagement with other tragedians in a more positive light. Mastronarde is able to bring

\(^{17}\) Michelini 1987 (esp. pp. 52-69).

\(^{18}\) Dunn 1993.

\(^{19}\) It is noteworthy that the most critical reviews of Michelini’s book (Dunn 1993 and esp. Diggle 1989) have nothing to say about her presentation of the polarity between Euripides and Sophocles. Another recent book on tragic intertextuality, Janka 2004, notes (p. 69) that Michelini emphasizes Euripides over Sophocles and focuses on his “generalisierbare künstlerische Aussage oder politisch-philosophische Tendenz” rather than dramaturgy or development; Janka seeks to redress the balance by examining more precisely the dialogue between two plays, Soph. *Trach.* and Eur. *Hipp.* However, he still sees the relationship between Sophocles and Euripides as one of reaction and response rather than construction and expansion.
Euripides back into the “mainstream” of fifth-century tragedy both by examining his interest in older tragic techniques and by granting that poets like Sophocles could be equally experimental and provocative. Though Mastronarde is primarily interested in Euripides and therefore has little discussion of Sophocles specifically, his view of Euripidean dramaturgy as constructively engaged with its own tragic tradition is fundamentally similar to my take on Sophocles. In this study, as we reconstruct Sophocles’ dramatic context and explore his interactions with contemporary playwrights, we will also be bringing him closer to Euripides. Where Sophocles is often idealized, I will not be trying to demonstrate his flaws but rather his variety, his curiosity, his provocativeness, because in the end it is Sophocles who suffers more from idealization and polarity than Euripides. Euripides is allowed to provoke his audience, question their values, surprise them, anger them, disgust them, while Sophocles (we imagine) simply continues to give them what they want.

In fact, I will be arguing basically that Sophocles and Euripides often made similar points and aimed at similar effects, but that Sophocles did so less overtly than Euripides; he was thus equally bold in his conception but less aggressive in his manner of presentation, and that is why the similarity between the two poets has often gone unnoticed. If we are to bring these two poets together, we must be willing to see Sophocles as changing, developing, and experimenting, and we must be willing to see Euripides as constructively interested in what his fellow dramatists had to say.

**Sophocles Μέλιττα**

This project finds its roots in the model of interaction set forth in recent comic scholarship and in Mastronarde’s more expansive and constructive view of Euripidean
dramaturgy. But as a study of intertextuality, it could assume various forms along a spectrum of possibilities. The basic division is one of scale: do we focus on verbal echoes in individual words and lines or on central themes and concepts? Though tragic intertextuality is seldom studied on a large scale, the best representatives of these two models are Richard Garner’s *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry* and R.P. Winnington-Ingram’s book-length interpretation of Sophoclean tragedy. Garner’s main interest is in the various techniques used by the tragedians to create specific allusions to their literary tradition (including early lyric and epic as well as tragedy). Since he covers so much ground (all of fifth-century tragedy!), he cannot devote much space to interpretation of any one play, and his discussion often reads rather like a commentary as he collects and surveys allusions on a play-by-play basis. By contrast, Winnington-Ingram ranges beyond allusions and verbal echoes to explore Sophocles’ preoccupation throughout his career with Aeschylean ideas and patterns. He offers full interpretations of most of Sophocles’ surviving plays, as well as individual discourses on such topics as the poets’ views on fate and the gods.

In terms of scope and conception, the current project falls somewhere between the approaches represented by Garner and Winnington-Ingram (though closer to the latter). I am interested less in specific allusions and more in how the poets interacted on the level of theme and concept. Further, where Garner observes the “gap” between texts that keeps them distinct from each other, thus allowing the reader to notice the allusion and prompting him to think about its meaning, I focus on the integration of different poetic styles within individual texts. This is

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21 In this respect, my approach is somewhat akin to that taken by Fuqua 1976, which traces dramatic interaction between Soph. *Phil.* and Eur. *Or.* through “mythical paradigms” rather than verbal correspondences. By paying attention to similarities of theme and narrative structure, he is able first to show how the Sophoclean Neoptolemus is
not to say that all plays become essentially identical to one another but that the point of contact between two texts is not single and discrete. Rather, a play can be a complex combination of Sophoclean and Euripidean (and other) elements from a number of previous plays so that it is neither easy nor particularly meaningful to try to sort out the Euripidean from the Sophoclean. To borrow Hutcheon’s definition of parody, all intertextuality is also in some way “repetition with a difference,” even if the difference is only one of context. But parody and allusion can only be recognizable and effective if the audience notices that difference and is curious about it; the difference itself is what encourages them to seek further meaning. By contrast, larger-scale intertextuality which involves an exchange of themes, ideas, or dramatic strategies tends rather to efface the difference or at least not to rely on it to prompt interpretation and create meaning.

On the other hand, my study is in some ways less broad than Winnington-Ingram’s. Where I focus on one or two themes that are important to individual plays in the late fifth century, Winnington-Ingram identifies a number of Aeschylean ideas and reads most of extant Sophocles through this lens while generally leaving specific connections between plays unexamined. For instance, the tragedy of Creon in Sophocles’ Antigone evokes the pattern of hubris and punishment generally associated with Aeschylus and represented perhaps most clearly by Xerxes in the Persians, but does not necessarily depend on any one source; it is rather patterned after the Homeric Telemachus, and then to explore Euripides’ subversion of the Telemachean paradigm, even though Telemachus is mentioned only once in these two plays.

22 Fuqua 1976: 29-30 defends his “paradigmatic” approach (see previous n.) thus: “Most current studies of individual dramas or the genre as a whole are relatively conservative in their approach; interpretation is, for the most part, restricted to the direct evidence of the text, analogies with other texts, and studies of particular techniques such as examinations of plot types and different forms of dramatic action. While this restraint has placed our understanding of the genre on a secure footing, I believe that there are certain important aspects of the medium for which it is not totally suited. The most important of these in my opinion concerns the evocation of mythical paradigms which, while they may lie beyond the immediate context of the drama, nevertheless shaped the author’s conception and the audience’s response to the characters on stage.”

23 Hutcheon 1985.
Sophocles’ general response to a general Aeschylean tendency – which is not unlikely, but one wonders whether the argument can be taken farther. Of course, since all of Aeschylus’ surviving plays were produced before the extant Sophoclean corpus, it is often difficult to find specific links between plays, and Winnington-Ingram’s study nevertheless offers valuable material for anyone attempting to reconstruct the dramatic ideas that were most important to Sophocles when he sat down to write his plays.

Studying small and specific allusions has one marked advantage in that it is fairly easy to establish a secure connection between plays on the basis of verbal similarity. Since the current project does not explore such similarities, except in the final chapter, it may not always be self-evident that certain plays should be put into contact with one another and the burden of proof will be on me to provide a persuasive justification in each case. In order to lighten that burden somewhat, I have chosen to study plays that might reasonably be expected to have influenced one another, especially those that are close in date or that deal with the same mythical material. By focusing on late Sophocles as a relatively firm foundation for this sort of investigation, I do not mean to imply that early work should not or cannot be studied in the same way; but as uncertainties of dating and disparity of subject matter would make the task more tenuous, the overall argument about dramatic engagement offered here would be less compelling. I therefore begin with the more tractable material.

The primary aim of this study is to situate Sophocles (or at least, late Sophocles) within his immediate dramatic context. When I speak of a play’s “immediate dramatic context,” I have in mind something like the “pool” of available dramatic material described by Heath.24 This

24 See above, p. 3. Recent work on Herodotus has also been interested in the historian’s interactions with contemporary writers; see esp. Thomas 2000 and Raaflaub 2002, who speaks of a “pool of knowledge” and the “pool of ‘intellectuals’.”
pool was constantly growing as playwrights modified and experimented with material that seemed to have additional dramatic potential. If a poet developed an idea (as Aristophanes developed Cratinus’ persona), the result, upon being produced in the theater, also entered the pool where others could find it and develop it further. This was the literary environment frequented by Sophocles the honeybee in his search for likely material. So in my interpretations I will be asking what was in the pool when Sophocles sat down to write certain plays, what he did with the material that he found there, what he contributed in turn, and what other playwrights found appealing about his contributions. The goal, in other words, is to (begin to) understand how Sophocles interacted with other playwrights who were active at the same time – both as a source of inspiration for them and as an exploiter and developer of their ideas.

It would be impossible to reconstruct in full the immediate dramatic context of any one Sophoclean play, both (paradoxically) because of the sheer amount of potentially relevant material and because of how little has actually survived. No doubt Sophocles’ dramatic context, and how he engaged with that context, would look infinitely more complex if we had his and Euripides’ lost plays (both tragedies and satyr plays) as well as the work of their numerous contemporaries. Therefore, with the acknowledgement that the treatment given here is inevitably smaller and simpler than the reality must have been, this project attempts a survey of Sophocles and his immediate dramatic context at the end of the fifth century: how he made use of well-known Aeschylean material and recent Euripidean material, how he responded to important changes in the way tragedy was written and produced, how he contributed to the development of Euripides’ dramatic style (and vice versa) in this most innovative period of Greek drama, and how he contributed to the comic poets’ creation of humor and their discourse on the dramatic genres.
Finally, this project is intended as a study of the method of dramatic composition and production in the fifth century. Though Sophocles was by far the most successful of the Greek tragedians in the festival competitions, what we discover about his dramatic context and how he fit into it can inform our understanding of other poets as well, both by filling in specific points of contact between them and Sophocles and by altering our basic conception of the development of fifth-century drama. Just as Sophocles drew from the pool of available material, modified what he found there, and returned it to the pool, so did other playwrights, continually and contemporaneously with Sophocles. Though the metaphor should not be stretched too far, I would like to think of all fifth-century playwrights as honeybees in their own right. Dramatists in this period regularly found useful material in a range of earlier and contemporary writers, and though a great deal of their activity can no longer be perceived due to the accidents of survival, it seems likely that they were also acutely aware of what was happening in their own genre and their own theatrical space from one year to the next. Dramatists who succeeded in getting their plays accepted by the archon could be expected to reflect the latest developments in the theater. Some ideas did not take hold, but those that did could be expanded, inverted, experimented with, and built upon. If all of this is so, then the world of ancient theater was one in which every active member was always alert to what other members were up to; we might say that the ancient dramatists worked in an atmosphere of “extreme interaction,” where literary dialogues could span multiple plays and multiple poets. Sophocles, then, provides a very prominent and accessible model of the sort of intertextuality undertaken by every playwright in fifth-century Athens.

Except for the last (which is more comprehensive), each of the following chapters has a dual focus: Sophocles’ relationship with a particular poet in terms of a particular point of
dramaturgy. While every poetic relationship examined here has two sides to it, since each poet influences and is influenced by the other, we are not always in a position to be able to explore both sides. For instance, all proposed dates known to me for Sophocles’ earliest surviving plays are later than Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*; even though we know that those two poets competed with each other for ten or fifteen years, we cannot say much about how Aeschylus adapted Sophoclean material beyond the tradition that Sophocles added the third actor, which Aeschylus used very effectively in the *Oresteia*.

Chapter 2 examines the divine apparatus of Sophocles’ *Electra* and posits an Aeschylean inspiration. Though Aeschylus’ career ended some forty years before *Electra* is thought to have been written, the *Oresteia* continued to be immediately relevant to later generations of playwrights, both because it was the best-known dramatization of the myth and because it was probably still being performed after Aeschylus’ death. My focus is on *Choephoroi*, which is characterized by a relatively transparent divine world and a convergence of divine and human powers; *Electra*, on the other hand, reverses those ideas, fragmenting the divine world among the human characters, problematizing the gods’ relation to the human world, and even questioning their relevance to the action of the play. Sophocles’ use of Aeschylean material is oppositional but constructive: he appreciated Aeschylus’ strategy with respect to the gods and noticed the dramatic potential in using the reverse strategy in his own version of the myth. Further, Sophocles’ relatively agnostic and critical vision of the gods is more akin to what we normally expect to find in Euripides and perhaps shows a commonality of interest between those two playwrights in the 410s.

Chapter 3 explores the dramatic self-consciousness of much late tragedy, and especially the “untragic” plays of Euripides. I trace a dialogue between Euripides and Sophocles
concerning the nature of dramatic composition and performance in three tragedies written in close succession (Helen, Philoctetes, Orestes), all of which contain a “play within a play.” Though modern scholarship has occasionally noticed the connections between Philoctetes and the so-called “romances” on the one hand, and Philoctetes and Orestes on the other hand, it is very seldom that the entire cluster is treated together. This chapter attempts to show how Philoctetes acts as a bridge of sorts between the romances and Orestes by adapting and expanding Euripides’ metadramatic concerns in Helen and then providing material for further adaption in Orestes. Philoctetes can thus be viewed as a Sophoclean take on Euripides’ recent dramaturgical preoccupations, while Orestes, “the most Euripidean of Euripidean plays,” then becomes a Euripidean take on a Sophoclean take on Euripides’ thoughts about drama. This is the essence of extreme dramatic interaction.

Chapter 4 explores Sophocles’ final play, Oedipus at Colonus, and its relation to Euripides’ recent Theban plays. Of the two dramatic contexts most relevant to Sophocles’ treatment of this myth (his earlier Antigone and Oedipus Tyrannus, and Euripides’ more recent Phoenissae, Hypsipyle, Oedipus, and Antigone), the first has been widely recognized while the second goes all but uncommented. This chapter examines three figures in Phoenissae and Oedipus at Colonus, arguing that Euripides’ dramatization of the Labdacid myth contributes key ideas to the characterization of Antigone, Polynices, and Oedipus in Sophocles’ latest play. We are thus able to see not only the continuity of Sophocles’ thought from Antigone and Oedipus Tyrannus to Oedipus at Colonus, but also how significantly his conception of the characters changed under Euripides’ influence. Rather than being quintessentially Sophoclean types, the characters of Oedipus at Colonus are amalgamations of several tragedies by both poets.

My final chapter attempts to fill an especially large gap in Sophoclean scholarship: Sophocles’ relation to comedy and comic parody. This chapter surveys the comic poets’ use of Sophoclean drama (both tragedy and satyr play), organizing examples in order of increasing complexity, and this allows me to demonstrate the types of interaction I have had in mind throughout this study. Many instances of comic-Sophoclean intertextuality deal with specific words and phrases, but there are many others that contribute to a deeper level of meaning; the comic poet adopts Sophoclean ideas or strategies and manipulates them to suit the themes of his own play or even builds entire scenes on the basis of Sophoclean themes. This far-reaching discussion of Sophocles’ relation to an entire genre also illustrates some of the main themes of this study, such as the danger of oversimplifying and idealizing Sophoclean drama, which may explain why a thorough investigation of Sophocles and comedy has not yet been performed: the assumption that Sophocles was “too tragic” to be mocked has discouraged scholars from even looking at the evidence.

In short, what this project seeks to do is situate Sophocles with respect to established spheres of scholarly inquiry and within dramatic contexts that are frequently discussed. Given that Aristophanes (and other comic poets, such as Strattis) were growing increasingly interested in tragedy and its potential to create comic material, how does Sophocles fit into this? Given that Aeschylean tragedy continued to be performed and thought about even well after that poet’s death, how does Sophocles fit into this? Given that tragedy (especially Euripidean tragedy) was becoming especially innovative and experimental in the last decades of the fifth century, how does Sophocles fit into this?

This study aims to provide a few glimpses of that complex world of dramatic interaction using Sophocles as an exemplar. It must be acknowledged that there were many other dramatists
active in the fifth century than just the “big three;” there were many, many more tragedies than the thirty-two that have come down to us. This goes without saying, but it bears repeating: the world of fifth-century drama (both tragedy and comedy) was infinitely more complex, richer, and more elaborate than we can now see, so in the end, this study can only scrape the tip of the iceberg. Where I have examined Sophocles’ use of one or two plays, there may have been many others that he found useful, though we know nothing (or almost nothing) about any of them. Nevertheless, my goal is to offer an approximate model of how the poets developed and experimented with each other’s ideas near the end of the fifth century. Though he was more prominent and more successful in competition than many of his peers, I take Sophocles’ work to be basically representative of these dynamics. How Sophocles dealt with other playwrights’ work, and how they responded to or exploited his work, is essentially how all drama happened in that period.
We open our study with the earliest of Sophocles’ late plays, *Electra*. While most scholars agree that this tragedy belongs to the 410s,¹ it is uncertain whether it came before or after various of Euripides’ late plays (especially his *Electra*) and therefore whether it influenced or was influenced by them. For this reason, it would inevitably be contentious to construct an argument about how Sophocles’ *Electra* relates to these contemporary plays, so I turn instead to a different part of *Electra*’s immediate dramatic context: the Aeschylean context, represented chiefly by *Choephoroi*. Sophocles’ engagement with late tragedy will be dealt with in the next two chapters, where we are on firmer ground with *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.

It is both convenient and credible to relate *Choephoroi* and *Electra* because they both treat the same story and there is little doubt that the one influenced the other,² though it is not entirely clear how an audience of the late fifth century would have known Aeschylus’ work. It is possible that the *Oresteia* (or its individual plays) was read in the schools, recited at symposia, or


reperformed in the deme theaters; Aristophanic parodies show that it was still known in the late fifth century. Thus, even though *Choephoroi* was originally produced some forty years before *Electra*, it was still topical when Sophocles sat down to write his play and thus should be considered an important part of *Electra*'s immediate dramatic context. In this case, however, the Aeschylean influence operates oppositionally: rather than simply imitating or even building on Aeschylus’ depiction of the divine world, Sophocles takes exactly the opposite approach, thereby producing a play with very different implications. The neat reversal suggests that Sophocles had Aeschylus in mind when he wrote, though it need not be polemical. Sophocles does not so much reject Aeschylus’ view as create a new vision of his own, a new world for new characters to inhabit and interact with in new ways.

The focus of our examination will be religion, or better, the presentation of the divine world in each play. An ancient tradition regarded Sophocles as the most pious of all (θεοφιλὴς ὁ Σοφοκλῆς ὡς οὐκ ἄλλος), and older scholarship duly tried to categorize him as either “pietist” or “humanist.” But Sophocles’ personal religious beliefs are of course unknowable, and more

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3 For Aeschylus in the Athenian curriculum, see Hutchinson 1985: xl-xl, Sommerstein 1996b: 868n. (adducing Pl. Resp. 2.383c). It has long been assumed that Aeschylus’ plays were revived for competition in the Theater of Dionysus; but see Hutchinson 1985: xli-xlili and esp. Biles 2006/7. Reperformances in the deme theaters is still quite likely (this may be what Dicaeopolis refers to at Ar. *Ach.* 9-11; cf. Biles 2006/7: 226-7), and Csapo 2010: 89-95 is able to cite evidence that Sophocles and Euripides produced tragedies in the demes (where both they and their audiences may have come into contact with Aeschylean drama). *Nub.* 1353-72 reflects an interest in tragic recitation (including both old and new plays) at the symposia; see further Lai 1997. In a slightly different vein, see Rosen 2006.

4 E.g. Ar. *Ran.* 1126-8 = Aesch. *Cho.* 1-3; the parabasis of *Nub.* (534-6) appears to draw on the recognition scene of *Cho.*, and there may also be an echo at *Ach.* 478 (~ *Cho.* 750).

5 E.g. the prologue, where Orestes considers staying to hear Electra’s lament but ultimately does not, gestures toward Aeschylus’ treatment while signaling that Sophocles’ play will take a different tack (thus Segal 1966: 515, Finglass 2007: 6). Finglass also (pp. 7-8) briefly sketches Sophocles’ preference for Homer’s version of the story over Aeschylus’, on which see also Davidson 1988, 1999/2000.

6 *Vita* 12.41 (= Soph. T 1). See also the sources collected in *TrGF* under “Sophocles et Aesclapius;” Sophocles is said to have received a prophetic dream from Heracles, welcomed Asclepius into his house, and been heroized himself under the name Dexion (but see Connolly 1998).
recently it has become standard to emphasize the opacity of Sophoclean gods: they are rarely brought on stage in his extant plays, and while we might suspect that they are working behind the scenes somehow, we are rarely sure how or why.  

A good example is provided by *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Though no god actually appears in this play, Apollo is thoroughly implicated in the action. He has given two critical oracles, one to Creon regarding the plague and one to Oedipus concerning his parents. The first motivates Oedipus’ curse upon, and search for, the murderer of Laius, while the other has prompted him to leave Corinth for good and travel to Thebes, where the oracle is then fulfilled. No few readers have suspected Apollo’s direct involvement in Oedipus’ fate, since his oracular response (“you will kill your father and lie with your mother”) is not the expected answer to Oedipus’ original question (“who are my parents?”) and in fact seems designed to make him react in such a way that the prophecy will be fulfilled. Throughout the play, characters are vitally concerned with interpreting Apollo’s will and finding out all the details that he already knows. The prophet Teiresias is summoned on the grounds that he “sees the same things as Phoebus” (284-5); but he, like the god, refuses to help. When Oedipus accuses him of plotting his downfall, Teiresias responds ἵκανὸς Ἀπόλλων, ὃ τάδ’ ἐκπρᾶξαι μέλει (377). After Oedipus has put out his own eyes and the shocked chorus asks how he could do such a thing, he says Ἀπόλλων τάδ’ ἤν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι, ὃ κακὰ κακὰ τελῶν ἐμὰ τάδ’ ἐμὰ πάθεα (1329-30). But in the very next lines, he goes on to say that he did the deed himself. We are told that Apollo possesses the knowledge and the

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7 E.g. Whitman 1982: 115, Bristol 1987, Parker 1999, Budelmann 2000: 133-94. Many critics seem to find “inscrutability” to be a key part of Sophoclean religion; cf. Lee 1997: 8, Scullion 1999/2000: 230, and Segal 1993: 34-5, who summarizing others’ interpretations thus: “Sophocles’ traditional piety is not to be understood as a complacent acceptance of beneficent gods but rather as a recognition of the inscrutable and mysterious ‘other’ in divinities who exist in a far-off realm untouched by age, change, or time.” Other scholars measure the piety of his characters’ words (e.g. Mikalson 1991; cf. Hammond 1984: 387, who asserts that Soph. *El.* displays “an untroubled faith in Apollo”) or overlay his work with an “Aeschylean” scheme whereby fateful events are the product of divine justice (e.g. Kovacs 2009). For a more agnostic reading, see Ahrensdorf 2009: 14-25.
ability to manipulate human lives; is he actually doing so? Is he causing the future or merely predicting it?⁸

Sophocles has involved Apollo very closely in the action of the play without making him directly or manifestly responsible for any of the human decisions or suffering that we witness on stage. He has provided an Apolline lens through which the spectator may interpret the play, if he chooses; but ultimately the spectator will have to decide for himself where the responsibility for Oedipus’ fate lies. Perhaps Apollo is unjustly persecuting an innocent mortal. Or perhaps Apollo is indifferent to human affairs altogether, simply performing his oracular duties and becoming the vehicle through which the characters interpret their own actions. What characterizes the religious attitude of Oedipus Tyrannus is its very obscurity, its refusal, despite numerous hints, to give any clear indications of divine guilt or causality.

Sophocles’ Electra deals with many of the same ideas as Oedipus Tyrannus: intrafamilial conflict, murder, and justice, with a particular concentration on the relation between the living and the dead. It has been common to interpret it along the same lines as well, with Apollo overseeing the action and directing Orestes’ hand (or being tragically ignored).⁹ However, Apollo’s role and the characters’ understanding of the divine world are treated very differently in these two plays, and we must not ignore the distinctive religious framework that Sophocles constructs for Orestes’ vengeful matricide. I will try to show that in this play Sophocles’ mysterious, distant gods are even more distant than usual – so distant, in fact, that they might not even be there at all. Thus, rather than creating a tension between human action and an opaque divine will, Sophocles problematizes religious belief and the way humans act on

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⁹ E.g. Kitto 1961: 131-7, Seale 1982: 56-83; cf. Budelmann 2000: 180-2. The first “dark” readings of El. were based on the idea that Orestes has failed to ask Apollo whether he approves of the matricide in the first place (see n. 74 below).
it; the play explores different human understandings of the divine (without confirming that they are correct), human motivations for murder and revenge, and human attempts at justification. In other words, Sophocles updates Aeschylus’ story of archaic blood vendetta by applying a psychological focus and a skeptical religious attitude of the type more commonly associated with Euripides.

In particular, I am interested in the religious views expressed by the various characters in each play (including the choruses), and especially in how they view the process of revenge, its relation to justice, and the role of different divine powers, especially Olympian and chthonic. In *Choephoroi*, I argue, the religious beliefs held by the characters are homogeneous, and the divine and human worlds unified, with all forces tending toward the same end: punishment of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. This unity can be seen on two levels. First of all, the characters

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10 Recent scholarship has been cautious in distinguishing a characteristically “chthonic” side of Greek religion. Parker 2005: 424-5 fears that “chthonic” is often used too imprecisely; Schlesier 1991/2 represents a more extreme approach which denies the validity of the term altogether. While both raise important points, I prefer the stance taken by Scullion 1994 that “chthonic” and “Olympian” are still useful ways to describe different types of rites (e.g. libations with wine vs. without) which, he argues, may be used either alone or in combination, depending on the perceived character of the deity. Thus, a “chthonic” deity is one of dangerous and ambivalent disposition who must be appeased rather than worshiped (though chthonic deities may be worshiped with more festal rites in certain contexts, e.g. when the Furies are approached as Eumenides rather than Erinyes (Scullion 1994: 91-2); Winnington-Ingram 1980: 269-70 has good remarks on the tragic use of the Olympian/chthonian dichotomy). Though I will not be concerned in this chapter with the niceties of historical Greek ritual, I will be relying on the difference between powers that are basically Olympians and chthonians (without implying an essential opposition between them). As a general rule, this is not a distinction that should be insisted upon too firmly, but in the case of *Cho*.* and *El*.*, most of the powers which I will be describing as “chthonic” are straightforwardly so – either associated directly with the earth/underworld (e.g. Hades, Furies, the dead), or actually labeled “chthonic” (e.g. Hermes *χθόνιος*, whose connection with the earth lies in his role as psychopomp). Thus, I hope that the basic distinction between, on the one hand, gods and beings who are addressed with lamentation and associated with death and the underworld and, on the other hand, gods who are approached with prayer and thanksgiving will be unproblematic.

11 My primary interest in Aeschylus lies with *Cho*., since this play is likely to have been more influential on Sophocles than the rest of the *Oresteia*. Furthermore, while close examination of a play as complex and subtle as *Ag.* would lead me far from my task, I would venture that the portrayal of the relation between human conceptions of the divine system and its dramatic actuality are much the same in that play as in *Cho*. Characters may debate whether or not a particular act is just – at least in part because all retributive acts in the house of Atreus thus far have been in some sense both just and unjust. But all seem to imagine the divine world operating along similar lines (especially as laid out by the chorus): Zeus upholds justice, Zeus has laid down the laws of *πάθει μάθος* and *παθεῖν τὸν ἐρξαντα* (Dodds 1960 (reprinted in Dodds 1973), Sommerstein 1996a: 273-88), Zeus sends the Furies to enforce these laws. Crime begets crime, and Zeus works through those crimes, producing a sequence of acts that constitute
generally express religious beliefs consonant with one another, and where there are underlying tensions or contradictions, these are glossed over or go unnoticed altogether. Second and to the extent that such can be known in a play, the characters’ beliefs are shown to be correct: the various gods and supernatural powers do operate according to a system that normally runs smoothly and without internal conflicts. Winnington-Ingram, employing a term I find attractive, summarizes thus: “Whereas *Eumenides* (till near the end) is marked by a divergence of divine powers, *Choephoroi* is marked by a *convergence* of powers all driving Orestes towards the same act” (emphasis mine).\(^\text{12}\)

In *Electra*, conversely, the religious views are more disparate and more emphasis is put on the variety of motivations for the characters’ actions. Orestes and Electra stand in marked contrast to each other, the one driven chiefly by worldly, human motives, the other caught up in her vision of chthonic vengeance. Clytemnestra, a pragmatic user of religious rituals of all types, represents a third position. My argument here is that Sophocles fragments the unified religious system of Aeschylus into the figures of distinct characters to explore human motivations and human conceptions of justice. Different religious attitudes are brought to bear on the business of revenge (and matricide), and as these attitudes are juxtaposed and brought into conflict with one another, the audience is constantly discouraged from privileging any one of them. In the end, I both just punishment and fresh hubris. Though no gods appear on stage, there is nothing to be gained, for interpretation, by doubting that they stand behind events more or less as the characters imagine them to. When we come to the third play in the trilogy, the divine world appears much less unified. But comparison with *El.*, at least on the terms that I will use in this chapter, is no longer possible, since *Eum.* is not about the human conception of the divine and how it squares with the reality. The divine system of *Eum.* shows some stress fractures; but in the end it is the divine reality, and we do not find ourselves wondering whether or not the human characters understand it correctly. Therefore, I feel justified in overlooking both *Ag.* and *Eum.* on the grounds that 1) *Cho.* itself offers sufficient and suitable comparative material, 2) *Ag.* gives us rather the same dynamic, and 3) *Eum.* is built upon so different a design as to be of little help when set beside *El.*

\(^{12}\) Winnington-Ingram 1983: 136. He concentrates on the role of Apollo, which he sees as problematic, since Apollo is represented as both healer and destroyer. I do not deny the popular interpretation of the *Oresteia* as a story of “crime punished by crime.” That Orestes’ act is dangerous or even unjust does not change the fact of divine support for it.
suggest, Sophocles presents us with an agnostic view of vengeance – a world in which we cannot know what absolute justice is and matricide must be understood solely on human terms, since the divine apparatus is at best unknowable and at worst an opportunistic invention.

**Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*: Convergence**

My stance with regard to Aeschylus may be clarified by a brief discussion of two recent articles by Mark Griffith and Robert Parker.¹³ Both scholars address very similar questions relating to the “authority” of the characters’ words and the degree to which they can be counted on to communicate the “dramatic reality” faithfully. While Griffith especially ranges widely, both are concerned with the nature of divine involvement in Aeschylean tragedy. This is, after all, what we are usually after when we ask questions about what the audience can or cannot know: is there a god behind all this? Which god? What are his/her motives? Does he/she approve the characters’ actions? And by extension, are those actions just?

Parker begins with those statements which seem most straightforwardly reliable: the words of seers, prophets, oracles, and other intermediaries of the divine.¹⁴ He proceeds from there to explore other situations in which a character, or more often the chorus, declares something that we know to be true within the dramatic world, even though that character/chorus does not possess the divine pedigree of a Cassandra or a Calchas. Griffith surveys several registers of authoritative speech and shows how they may be deployed alone or in combination to lend credence to a character’s words. If I understand him correctly, he sees this use of language as operating on the audience in a more or less subconscious way: they recognize the

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¹⁴ Though he acknowledges in the following discussion that even these statements may be colored by their context and must be considered together with characterization.
traces of authority in the word choice, phrasing, and even meter, and thus instinctively accept the content as reliable. But Griffith is particularly interested in the way the authority shifts constantly from character to character: for example, from Clytemnestra describing the beacons to Cassandra describing the bloody history of the Atreids. This shifting provides a multiplicity of perspectives throughout a play, different angles from which we are allowed to view the action (55):

“I would suggest that the Aeschylean techniques of indeterminacy that I’ve described lead the audience not so much to ‘deconstruct’ reality or mistrust the power of language to identify and describe things as they ‘really are’, but rather to appreciate that ‘reality’ tends to comprise an immensely thick and many-layered package of meanings, and that any individual’s insights or inspired visions, even when uncannily accurate and revealing, will present only one momentary glimpse of that reality – and the glimpse of another speaker or singer may present startlingly different facets and wrinkles, without necessarily contradicting or undermining the ‘reality’ of the first one. This is, as you say, not so much a matter of ‘ambiguity’, or irony, as of polyvalence and multiple perspectives, and of the audience’s sense (if not always awareness) of competing authorities (vocal, visual and musical, as well as political) that are striving to express themselves within this one play. All of these voices speak (or sing) ‘Aeschylus’ poetry, and at times we come to believe – if only briefly – that one of them is communicating to us, and to other characters, with almost complete authority. But a moment later that authority may slip away, and we find ourselves listening instead to another voice that commands our attention with equal insistence and persuasiveness.”

At the risk of oversimplifying a complex and subtle argument, part of Griffith’s point seems to be that the poet’s voice can be heard throughout the play, but not always in the mouth of any one character, a tactic which allows Aeschylus to impart greater depth to our understanding of action and characters alike. The fact of different perspectives does not necessarily imply that they are contradictory; they may even be complementary or simply distinct from one another, depending on the poet’s purpose.

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15 In the end, Griffith and Parker both emphasize the human consequences of Aeschylean tragic myth, the latter even referring to the divine apparatus as “almost a metaphor for a purely human chain of causality” (140) – though he backs off from this formulation in the subsequent discussion and adopts rather a stance of double (or even multiple) determination. He does not so much aim to deny the involvement of the gods as to stress human guilt or innocence.
The chorus of *Agamemnon* is a central example for both Parker and Griffith due to its ability to shift from profound insight (e.g. in the parodos) to timorous obtuseness (e.g. in the scene with Cassandra). It is striking to me that both scholars take for granted that there *are* passages in which we are surely meant to privilege the chorus’ (or a character’s) understanding of the action. The issue is exactly how we are to know when a passage is conveying to us “the poet’s voice” (to use Griffith’s phrase) as opposed to the character’s limited perspective. My contention is that in *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus generally harmonizes the different perspectives: the action is to be understood along the lines of one comprehensive and cohesive divine system to which all of the characters subscribe. Sophocles, on the other hand, keeps the various perspectives distinct, and he effects this by consistently associating them with the same characters.

I have singled out these two articles because they complement each other so well, each bringing out the nuances of the other’s argument. They also broadly support my thesis, for while they are not addressing quite the same issue as I am, both suggest that there is a kind of unity to Aeschylean tragedy, a reliable thread of interpretation that may be traced through a drama if we are careful with our methodology. The religious dimension is of course only one aspect of “the poet’s voice,” which may communicate to us many other ways of interpreting the play in

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16 I have observed a tendency in Aeschylean scholarship to take every mention of deity as reliable theodicy, with little or no consideration of the speaking character’s motives. I think that this is generally the correct instinctive response to his tragedy, where we are meant to construct a larger divine world on the basis of chorus’ and characters’ words.

17 Seaford 2003 discusses the “unity of opposites” and the need to escape from it, dramatized in the *Oresteia* as a whole. According to his reading, the union of divine powers in *Cho.* is problematic on the human level (since this system guarantees that the cycle of vengeance will continue *ad infinitum*); the divine dispute in *Eum.* is problematic on the divine level (since the Olympians have ceased to punish murderers); and by the end of the trilogy, Olympians and chthonians are successfully differentiated, with the Furies subordinated to Olympian authority. I am not sure of the validity of problematizing both the union of powers in *Cho.* and the disjunction of powers in *Eum.*, since they seem to be problematic from the perspective of different parties, but in the end, I am concerned only with the fact of convergence in *Cho.*, which leaves little question of how various divine powers factor into the action of the play.
different spheres. But for now, I am only interested in the convergence of divine powers in *Choephoroi* and the characters’ acceptance of it as a fact within the world of the play. I therefore find support for my thesis in the combination of multiple perspectives and unity of “poet’s voice” discovered by Parker and Griffith, the idea that there is one “message” (in my argument, divine unity) which is communicated through many different voices at different times.

The blurring of boundaries between different spheres of divine influence and the convergence of various powers into the process of vengeance have an immediate and lasting effect on our experience of this play. Throughout, we gain the impression of a host of divine and semi-divine forces working on different levels, but working together, to achieve the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and the restoration of Orestes to his birthright. I hope that most of what I have to say here about *Choephoroi* will be uncontroversial and will provide us with a clear model against which to set *Electra*.

Agamemnon is the center of attention for the first six hundred lines of the play. The action takes place at his tomb, where Orestes immediately (14-5) notices women approaching with offerings meant to appease his angry spirit. Both siblings invoke chthonic Hermes in close connection with Agamemnon and other infernal powers. Electra’s prayer to her father

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18 The justice of Orestes’ act (on which see Dodds 1960, Goldhill 1984: 158, Sommerstein 1996a: 434-42) is not so important for my argument as the fact that various divine powers are seen to drive him toward that act – and it is acknowledged that the gods may drive humans to perform an injustice.

19 On the staging of *Cho*., and the question of “fluidity” in Aeschylean staging, see Taplin 1977 (esp. 338-40), Scullion 1994: 67-88. Whether the tomb is imagined as being near the palace or far away has no bearing on my argument.

20 We are told of Clytemnestra’s nightmare (38-41: ἐνοκτείναι τεῦχος τῶν δύσεων μετεφθαίναι τοῖς γὰς νέρθιν περιθύμως τοῖς κατανοουσί τε ἐγκτεῖν), though its content is not yet disclosed. Agamemnon is not quite treated as a hero in either Aeschylus or Sophocles, though in practice, it can be difficult to distinguish between basic funeral rites and hero cult. The Greeks attributed certain powers and attitudes to their dead, and the distinction between dead *polloi* and dead hero may not be important here. For further discussion of hero cult, see Burian 1972, Henrichs 1993, Parker 2005, and especially Jones 2010.
(130-48) includes requests for: pity toward her and Orestes,\textsuperscript{22} salvation (in the form of light), Orestes’ return,\textsuperscript{23} piety and self-control for herself, a deserved death for the murderers, and good things in general.\textsuperscript{24} The chorus, mourning Agamemnon as a good man (even though he was their captor), describes his tomb as an altar (106)\textsuperscript{25} and sings a paean for him at Electra’s urging (151ff.). They expect him to further his own vengeance by sending an ἀναλυτὴρ δόμων (160-3), and they call for justice and retribution on his behalf.\textsuperscript{26} The dead Agamemnon, a κατὰ χθονὸς ἐμπέπευον σεμνότιμος ἀνάκτωρ πρόπολός τε τῶν μεγίστων χθονίων ἐκεῖ τυράννων (355-9), is imagined to be capable of delivering all of these things, either by himself or in conjunction with other powers (as at 147-8).\textsuperscript{27} These passages also give us an idea of how and why living people believe they can communicate with the dead, and on what terms the dead might respond.

Orestes’ most compelling reason for undertaking vengeance is the threat of his father’s Furies, who would pursue him if he failed to do his filial duty. He seems to suggest (285; the

\textsuperscript{21}Orestes: 1-5 (where Goldhill 1984: 104 also finds in the phrase πατρῶια κράτη a link between Agamemnon and Zeus Pater). Electra: 124-30. Other passages mention residents of the netherworld more generally (such as line 886, just cited), and though the reference must be to Agamemnon first and foremost, we should not forget other beings like the Furies (and Ἀραί, if they are distinct), chthonic Hermes, Persephone, Earth, and perhaps other spirits as well (e.g. 124-6, 476-8).

\textsuperscript{22}Cf. 502.

\textsuperscript{23}Goldhill 1984: 117 does in fact see Agamemnon’s agency in the return of Orestes: “The irony of this coincidence, the answer to the prayer coming before the prayer – the tense of the infinitive also allows the sense that Orestes ‘has come’ (cf. ἥκω, 3) – invests her prayer with the sanction of success, and Agamemnon with having heard and brought about the fulfilment of the prayer.”

\textsuperscript{24}147-8: ἥμιν δὲ πομπὸς ἵσθι τῶν ἐσθήλων ἄνω σὺν θεοῖσι καὶ γῇ καὶ δίκῃ νικηφόρῳ.

\textsuperscript{25}Cf. the more elaborate description at 154-5: ῥεῦμα τόδε κεδνῶν κακῶν τ’ ἀπότροπον. At 483-8 Orestes and Electra negotiate with him in much the same way as they might with a god, with promises of offerings to come and the threat that there will be no more if he does not help now.

\textsuperscript{26}Orestes also asks him to send Justice (497) and to see that Clytemnestra’s dream is fulfilled (540-1). Clytemnestra herself obviously believes that he will perform the latter task if she cannot dissuade him with libations over his tomb (cf. 538-9, where the libations are called an ἄκος for the dream).

\textsuperscript{27}In fact, Orestes attributes his own return to the gods and Electra’s prayer, which was offered to Agamemnon and chthonic Hermes (212-3).
text is corrupt) that Agamemnon’s spirit is constantly watching him to see if he will kill the
murderers, for if he does not, then Agamemnon will send the Furies with their “madness and
empty fear in the night” (288). Even Agamemnon’s wrath, which may or may not be
synonymous with the Furies, will pursue Orestes, keeping him away from altars and other living
people (293-4). When Orestes finally does carry out his task, he declares to Clytemnestra τὸν
ζῶντα καίνειν τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω (886)28 and πατρὸς γὰρ αἶσα τόνδε σοφίζει μόρον (927),
thus clearly placing his actions under the purview of Agamemnon. In fact, Orestes is conflated
with his father on several occasions. For instance, at 508-9 Orestes stresses the unity of his
actions and his purpose with those of Agamemnon:29

"The dead" can of course refer to Agamemnon as actually dead or to Orestes, who has supposedly come back
to life after being reported dead – and the plural may suggest the viability of both readings simultaneously (Garvie
1986 ad loc.).

See also 119, 238-43. At 471-8, the chorus states that vengeance in this case can only come from within the
household (which must mean Orestes, since it is never suggested that Electra might take up the sword) and then
prays for assistance from μάκαρες χθόνιοι.

Line 517 has long been a problem; see the discussion of Garvie 1986 ad loc. It is indeed inconceivable that
Orestes should claim a lack of sentience for Agamemnon immediately after the kommos, but corruption may lie in
any of the words θανόντι οὐ φρονοῦντι. For lamentation and revenge, see McClure 1999: 4-5, Foley 2001: 151-5
(following Seremetakis 1991), McHardy 2004 (which borrows from McHardy 1997), Parker 2005: 145-6. Holst-
Warhaft 1992: 127-70 discusses the power of lamentation to raise the dead, though she is more interested in two
other arguments: the subversive portrayal of women’s lament in Aeschylus and the power of lamentation to rouse
anger and spur the living to vengeance.

The purpose of Clytemnestra’s libations is to assuage Agamemnon’s anger; the purpose of his children’s
lengthy kommos is to remind Agamemnon of why he should be angry and why he should act on that feeling (esp.
Clytemnestra’s dream illustrates very clearly the union of vengeful powers. The dream is mentioned briefly in the parodos as the chorus’ motivation for coming to Agamemnon’s tomb, and so we have been prepared to think that he has something to do with it. But not until after the kommos (at line 523) does Orestes ask about the reason behind the libation-bearers’ libations. The chorus outlines the nightmare stichomythically: Clytemnestra gives birth to a snake, which bites her when she tries to suckle it. The snake is a chthonic creature and regularly an attribute of the Furies (e.g. 1049-50), and I think it quite proper to read them into this dream. Nevertheless, nobody in the play suspects that the Furies are actually responsible for the dream; Clytemnestra assumes that Agamemnon is, and that is why she sends him libations. 32

In fact, several strands of religious belief come together here. Near the end of the kommos, Electra mentions that Agamemnon was a victim of maschalismos, 33 her intention probably being to stir Orestes’ anger and spur him on to the horrifying task at hand. 34 But the

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32 I therefore heartily disagree with the assessment of George 2001: 82: “Clytemnestra seems willing to believe in the initial superficial interpretation of her dream; since she has resolutely kept herself apart from the realm of dreams and the subjugated status it has signified, she lacks the perception to read her own dream independently. Perhaps it seemed easier to try to appease the dishonored ghost of Agamemnon than to face the ugly implications her birth-dream offered. Indeed, Clytemnestra does not perceive the dream’s most logical interpretation, as is apparent in her sending of libations to the tomb.” George apparently understands the dream as referring only to Orestes, while Clytemnestra willfully misinterprets it with reference to Agamemnon. It is not clear how Agamemnon enters into a “superficial interpretation” (since he does not appear in the dream at all). Rather, I think that Clytemnestra has understood the dream exactly as Orestes has: he is coming to kill her, and Agamemnon is the impetus; if he can be appeased, then perhaps Orestes will falter.

33 Maschalismos takes place only after the murder is done. It consists of cutting off the victim’s extremities (minimally, hands and feet, but sometimes also including ears, nose, even breasts and genitalia) and stringing them together around his neck and under his arms. Modern sources on maschalismos include Ceulemans 2007, Jebb (El. 445n., with further comments in the appendix), Kittredge 1885, Parker 1984, Teufel 102-26, Vanderpool 1970, Vermeule 1979: 236 n. 30, and Versnel 1973; the most important ancient sources are Aesch. Cho. 439, Soph. El. 445, and Ap. Argonautica 4.477-9, together with the scholia on these passages.

34 Kittredge 1885: 154-5. Parker 2009: 144-5, with n. 54 is interested in the complicity achieved with the audience through the kommos, which he says “has nothing to do with shaping Orestes’ resolve to kill his mother, a resolve already formed. It is a ritual designed to secure the dead Agamemnon’s support by reminding him of the
motive imputed to Clytemnestra deserves a little more thought. The ritual of maschalismos presupposes a belief in the vitality of dead spirits – principally, the angry spirit of the victim who seeks to revenge himself on his murderers. Chthonic deities also play a role by joining with the victim in his vengeful endeavors (hence the association of maschalismos with appeasement or sacrifice). The primary purposes of maschalismos are thus to weaken and bind the spirit of the victim and appease the Furies, and we should assume that this was Clytemnestra’s intent.

At the same time, the chorus says that she wanted to make Agamemnon’s fate unbearable for Orestes (441-2: μόρον κτίσαι μωμένα ἔφερτον αἰῶνι σῷ); it seems that what she was really hoping for was Orestes’ suicide as a result of intense shame. Given the conflation in this play of Agamemnon the victim and his avenger Orestes, this would be the predictable result of maschalismos as such, where the same magic works on both men at once: a successful attempt to bind Agamemnon’s spirit would also effectively “bind” his avenger. We might further note the implication that the vengeful spirit cannot work without a human agent.

It cannot be said for sure just which deities these are, and even whether they need be chthonic. The most obvious candidates are the Furies, and so will I designate them throughout this chapter, though the uncertainty surrounding their identity must be noted.

The elaborate binding bears a marked similarity to a medical procedure described by Hippocrates (De Articulis 47.20-8), suggesting that it was based on an actual means of restraint; this realistically symbolic binding evokes other magical rituals and indicates that maschalismos belongs primarily to that provenance. Therefore, while I would not deny that it could be used (e.g.) politically to make an example of a rebellious individual, it must have always had the defensive magical purpose outlined here. For the murderer interested in making an example, there were other (less elaborate) types of mutilation available such as impalement and decapitation.

See Garvie 1986 ad loc.

Consider, for example, the description of Agamemnon as listening to his children’s prayers ἐξ ἀμαυρᾶς φρενός (157-8). It is not always the case that these supernatural forces require a living human agent (such as Clytemnestra and her Furies in Eum.).
Aeschylus has constructed this segment of his play so that we experience events in the same sequence as Clytemnestra. During the kommos, we learn about her maschalismos and its rationale (while also suspecting its failure). Then in the episode after the kommos, we learn the content of her dream, which has suddenly ruptured her illusion of safety. The snake is indeed Orestes, as he declares, but it also represents a Fury. Just as Orestes is an avatar of Agamemnon, so is he of the Furies: in addition to the snake imagery, a Fury is said to have brought him home (648-51), and both of these “spiritual” beings, Agamemnon and a Fury, individually ineffective in the world of the living, join forces to urge their human agent to take vengeance on their behalf. Clytemnestra’s dream indicates just how utterly her maschalismos has failed (as it must): Agamemnon has not been bound, and the Furies have not been appeased; instead, they are free to aid their living agent of vengeance, Orestes.

39 The maschalismos comes up too late in the kommos to be a serious objection to what Orestes and Electra are trying to do with their lamentation; the chorus is not suggesting that their prayers will fail because Agamemnon is bound and unable to help.

40 And note the process implied in the word ἐκδρακοντωθείς, a process set in motion by forces of vengeance, like the Furies. Orestes is also figured as a snake because he is the son of Clytemnestra, who is elsewhere described in terms reminiscent of a snake. Orestes himself thus possesses both the serpentine nature of his mother and the aquiline nature of his father (Winnington-Ingram 1983: 135); all forces, even those which ultimately come to contradict one another, converge into the figure of Orestes, and this internal conflict becomes the catalyst to the plot of Eum.

41 It could also represent Agamemnon, as it seems to have done in Stesichorus (PMG 219). A snake could be viewed as the spirit of a dead hero, (Jones 2010: 56-8), though we would then have to be careful of reading the dream (especially the relationship between Clytemnestra and the snake) too literally.

42 Winnington-Ingram 1983: 140 n. 28 also presumes that the maschalismos simply failed (even though Agamemnon does not visibly rise from the dead), describing it here as “gruesome – and futile.” Garvie 1986 ad loc.: “Lesky rightly points out that [the use of maschalismos to disable the spirit] cannot have been in Aeschylus’ mind, since it is assumed that Agamemnon is in no way prevented from taking vengeance upon the murderers.” This of course ignores the possibility that the maschalismos could have simply failed (as Kittredge (1885: 163 n. 3) assumes, though he does not distinguish between the treatments of Aeschylus and Sophocles). Magic and prayer often do not have the hoped-for result, but that does not stop people from believing in them. In fact, I think it important that we understand Clytemnestra’s maschalismos to have failed: she has been living all these years in relative security, thinking that Agamemnon, his Furies, and his avenger were all taken care of, until she receives this dream. It frightens her not merely with its content, but with the implication that she is not as safe as she had previously assumed.
Quite a few Olympians and other deities are also involved in the action of the play, or expected to be involved, including: Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, Fate, Kratos, Justice, Punishment, and Persuasion. They are generally asked for the same types of things as the chthonians, sometimes in the same line or in back-to-back strophes, as my citations show, and they are sometimes given chthonic titles (especially Hermes). Orestes is conflated not only with Agamemnon, but also with Zeus. He famously refers to himself and Electra as eagle chicks (246-9) – the eagle being symbolic of the king of the gods as well as the king of Mycenae. Lines 436-7 point succinctly to an alliance of human and divine on Agamemnon’s behalf.

All divine and occult powers – and we have seen that there are many – are called upon to assist Orestes’ endeavor, and as far as the audience can tell, they do so. It is true that a playwright can only inform his audience of actual divine activities through a seer or by bringing the gods on stage, and it should be acknowledged that all of what we know about the gods in this play comes from various characters who may be biased. Still, the playwright does not appear to be deploying that bias as a means of problematizing any one point of view. If anything, he may be using it to confirm the validity of the characters’ beliefs. Take the chorus, for example. They consist of slave women, probably taken from Troy (75-7). As such, they

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43 Zeus: 18-9, 245, 246, 306, 382, 395, 409, 644, 783-93, 855; Apollo: 269 ff., 953, 1030-60; Hermes: 1, 124a-b, 727; Fate (as Μοῖρα/αί): 306 and 910-1, (as Αἶσα): 647; Kratos: 244; Justice: 61, 244, 311, 497, 641, 646, 949; Punishment (Ποινά): 947; Persuasion: 726.

44 For various articulations and assumptions of this convergence of powers, see Fowler 1967: 58-9, 63; Goldhill 1984: 99-207; Winnington-Ingram 1983: 221-3. Goldhill argues for an “open” reading whereby the slipperiness of language makes it impossible to pin down any specifics of causality. Practically speaking, this sounds very like double motivation, with the usual caveats against assuming that any one cause or agent is primary.

45 The starting point of Parker 2009. Kovacs 2000 argues that, as a way of getting around this difficulty, the playwrights used their characters’ speculations about the gods to signal to the audience instances of divine activity – though this method must be used cautiously and on a case-by-case basis.
have little reason to feel any affection for their captor, Agamemnon. Yet even in their opinion, he was a noble king and warrior, and to avenge his death is completely moral.\(^{46}\)

We should also consider the effect of the first six hundred lines on the audience’s interpretation of events. For over half of the play, they have heard little besides laments for Agamemnon and prayers for revenge directed at a variety of divine powers. It may not matter that these all come from the mouths of Agamemnon’s children and their loyal choral companions; the fact remains that the audience is bombarded with the same sentiments over and over again and are given no reason to understand events any differently. That Agamemnon does not actually rise from the dead might have surprised some in the audience,\(^ {47}\) but need not indicate his unwillingness or disapproval.\(^ {48}\) The chorus’ account of Clytemnestra’s terrifying dream comes immediately after the invocations of Agamemnon have finally been concluded, and none of the characters doubts that he is responsible for sending it.

My discussion of Sophocles’ *Electra* will be centrally concerned with the discrepancy of religious views and strategies expressed from one character to another. The same topic deserves brief consideration with regard to *Choephoroi* as well – brief, because there is not much discrepancy to be found. I have mentioned that the first half of the play consists of Orestes,

\(^{46}\) Alexiou 2002: 10 briefly discusses the use of captives in lamentation; see also Dué 2006. Here, the chorus is given ample opportunity, free of Clytemnestra’s supervision, to express their true (favorable) feelings toward Agamemnon. On the theme of freedom versus slavery in *Cho.*, see Patterson 1991: 111-5.


\(^{48}\) The argument of Sommerstein (ibid.) strikes me as inconsistent in the joint claims that because Agamemnon does not actually appear, he is not aiding his avenger, but that Hermes, who does not appear, \(\textit{is}\) helping him (because Orestes uses a trick). It seems to me that we must treat Olympian and chthonic powers with the same criteria: if appearance equates with effectiveness, then none of the powers invoked in this play is effective – and I doubt many readers have this experience of *Cho.* Indeed, it would be a tricky venture for Aeschylus to bring the ghost of Agamemnon on stage, for ghosts can be held to account, and for the purposes of this play, it is safer to idealize Agamemnon from a distance. I believe that Clytemnestra’s dream confirms his involvement on the spiritual level; surprise, then, does not result from the ghost’s failure to rise at all, but from the delayed revelation of his ongoing influence in the world of the living.
Electra, and the chorus lamenting Agamemnon and calling upon a series of divine powers to aid the revenge. There is no real indication of religious disagreement among these figures, no preference shown by any character for one brand of sacrifice over another, one type of prayer over another, one breed of god over another. They all pray indiscriminately to Olympian and chthonic beings. They all believe in the efficacy of human prayer and lamentation, whether directed at gods or the dead (320-2, 376-8); they all believe in the efficacy of occult powers in human life. If anyone shows a preference, it is Orestes for Apollo, and this is mostly because he has received specific orders from that god and, as we eventually learn, has had his safety guaranteed thence; but Orestes is as fully committed to the idea of chthonic vengeance as Electra or the chorus. Though he has human and material motives as well as religious, Apollo’s oracle and the Furies receive four times as much space (lines 269-97 versus 298-305). The more worldly motives range from sorrow over his father’s death and funeral (from which he was absent perforce) to the loss of his inherited property to shame on behalf of the Argives, who are now ruled by “two women” (298-305), and even these less patently religious motives evince Orestes’ emotional commitment to the revenge.

Any questioning of this system would have to come from the usurpers themselves, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and we are not told much about their religious stance in this play. Clytemnestra obviously shares a belief in the power of the dead, which is why she initially mutilated Agamemnon and then attempts to appease him with libations. Her interpretation of the dream shows that she also believes in the mechanisms of chthonic vengeance: the activity of the

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49 See Sommerstein 2010c: 191-4 on what we know and when about Apollo’s relationship with Orestes.

50 What we learn of Clytemnestra in Ag. generally confirms the picture given here (e.g. she is motivated by justice, Ate, and a Fury (1432-3), as well as the Atreid curse (1569).
Furies in conjunction with Agamemnon’s spirit and their ability to motivate an avenger.\textsuperscript{51} She understands that her own death will result in the same process, and we soon see that her threats to that effect (e.g. 912, 924) are not empty. Even Aegisthus’ slave sees justice in Orestes’ deeds (883-4), and the unity of religious beliefs is seen to extend even from the highest to the lowest elements of society.

So Aeschylus has created a play in which the power of absolute, divine justice is strongly felt, even though no god or prophet appears on stage. He accomplishes this through the commonality of beliefs among characters, the consistency with which they plead for justice, and the sheer range of divine powers invoked throughout the play. All gods, all chthonic powers are perceived to have a hand in vengeance. And this unity of purpose is passed on to the human agent, Orestes, who duly accomplishes his divinely sanctioned mission.\textsuperscript{52} The tragedy lies in the impossibility of Orestes’ situation – of being compelled to murder his own mother – and in the Atreid curse that has doomed this wretched family to tear itself apart.\textsuperscript{53}

\textbf{Sophocles’ \textit{Electra}: Fragmentation}

Sophocles approaches the same story from a very different angle. He adopts the same basic religious system, but fragments it among various characters, using these different

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Orestes’ very similar attitude at 927 (quoted above, p. 31).

\textsuperscript{52} Cf. Sewell-Rutter 2007: 83: “The human duty to requite is certainly paramount even in that most Erinys-ridden of works, the \textit{Oresteia} – but it is paramount in close conjunction with divine causation;” Winnington-Ingram 1983: 143: “It might seem that there are three distinct and separable directions from which Orestes is impelled towards matricide. There is Apollo’s oracular command; there is the infernal world crying out for vengeance and lending its powers to secure it; there are human resentments at work in the mind of the avenger. Now one, now another, is highlighted in the economy of the play; and it is futile and superfluous to try to relate them in terms of the psychology of Orestes. It is superfluous because they are in essence one and the same or, at the least, aspects of the same homogeneous tragic justice which has met us at every point in the drama: retaliation based upon human resentments, yet leading to the punishment of offenders and so a law upheld by Zeus, but operated by Erinyes.”

\textsuperscript{53} On the combination of necessity and free will in Aeschylean tragedy, see e.g. Lesky 1966.
perspectives to problematize and explore different motivations and systems of belief. Orestes is most interested in the human world, while Electra displays an obsession with chthonic vengeance, and Clytemnestra is shown to be a religious pragmatist, professing a belief in gods of all temperaments (and their rituals) if they have any chance of securing her safety and well-being.

Many readers have felt a certain disjunction among the characters of this play, especially (though not exclusively) Orestes and Electra. For Kitzinger, this disjunction arises from a variance in dramatic authority: for most of the play, Electra speaks with an authoritative voice, guiding our interpretation of the vengeance, but she becomes unreliable when Orestes is reported dead (and she is duped along with the rest) and altogether silent when Orestes reappears and takes control of the action. For Dale, the disjunction is a dramaturgic issue, the juxtaposition of a relatively shallow and a more filled-out character, of the exciting revenge plot captained by Orestes and the truly tragic circumstances experienced by Electra. For Wright, the two characters clash on the emotional level, the one passionate in the extreme, the other calm and detached. For my part, I will argue that this general reaction results at least in part from the

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54 See Kitzinger 1991: 302 n. 13 for a synopsis of others’ views.

55 Kitzinger 1991: 301 states that “[f]or an audience whose understanding of justice has been fashioned by the first half of the play, the acts that end it cannot constitute justice – at least not human justice.” I am not sure what she means here by “human justice;” n. 12 acknowledges Apollo’s oracle as well as the fact that “the play, in contrast to the Choephoroi and Euripides’ Elektra, so studiously avoids exploring the nature of this divine command that, if it is to be a justification, it is one that remains incomprehensible.” I take her main point to be that by the end of the play there is no reliable human figure to articulate a vision of justice for us and we are thus left with an interpretative void on that particular level – a conclusion which I am happy to endorse.

56 Dale 1966, Wright 2005b. Cf. Reinhardt 1979: 139: “At the beginning the brother and sister are worlds apart in nature and emotion.” We might also mention Woodard 1964 and 1965, who draws a fundamental distinction between the words of Electra and the deeds of Orestes, Segal 1981 (cf. pp. 278-80 on the recognition scene), who associates Orestes with the outside and Electra with the inside, Seale 1982: 58-9, who contrasts their physical appearances, Sorum 1982, who notes their different attitudes toward family and household, and Hutchinson 1999: 56-7, who points out that for Electra, Orestes’ return means the end of her suffering while for Orestes, it means the beginning of his greatest task. Foley 2001: 158 (with Aeschylus for comparison) detects a separation of traditional male and female roles in vendetta in conflict.
characters’ different religious attitudes. In the contentious encounters of various characters (especially Electra), Sophocles simultaneously juxtaposes different aspects of a comprehensive religious system such as that of *Choephoroi* and keeps them evenly balanced against each other. The audience is thus prevented from privileging any one view and thereby deprived of an important interpretative tool. From their perspective, it becomes questionable whether there is any divine involvement at all in the action of the play, especially as neither *deus ex machina* nor Furies appear at the end.

That the divine powers in this play remain distant and dependent on human subjectivity is first noticeable through a very simple fact of staging: the absence of Agamemnon’s tomb on stage, and hence the diminishment of his importance in the play. Where Aeschylus made Agamemnon a major focal point around which the action turned, in Sophocles, he has become a central concern for Electra alone. His tomb is located somewhere off stage and thus no longer functions as a constant, visible reminder of his wrath, lending substantiality to his presence and his children’s necromantic lamentation. Sophocles’ Agamemnon, lacking an independent existence of his own, is in effect created by the lamentation of Electra and the imagination of the audience. Her lamentation, in turn, lacks the concrete focus that the kommos of *Choephoroi* had. Instead of a tomb, there is an altar to Apollo on stage, and probably a statue as well with each other, the play in a sense fragments and disrupts the coherence of the system of vendetta justice presented by Aeschylus.”

57 For Electra’s lamentation, see Winnington-Ingram 1980: 335-9 and n. 30 above.

58 Cf. Seaford 1985: 22: “[Electra’s] anomalous lamentation…, apart from inflicting pain directly on the usurpers, also had the role of sustaining the reality of the dead Agamemnon. This is a more defensive role than the lament has in Aeschylus, where the assistance of the dead Agamemnon, whose independent reality is not at stake, is invoked for the coup. The Sophoklean Elektra on the other hand implies that if she does not lament, ὦ μὲν θανῶν γὰ τε καὶ οὐδὲν ὄν κείσται τάλας (245-6). This does not mean merely that the dead man will be treated as if he were nothing: there is also the implication that without her lamentation he will actually be no more than earth.”
(suggested by τὸδε in line 635). It is difficult to know the size and quality of the statue used in
the original production; given that many in Sophocles’ audience were sitting some distance away
in the auditorium, they may not have been able to discern the statue’s identity until the moment it
is named.\footnote{Add to this the fact that she actually spends more of the play talking about lamentation than actually
lamenting.} In the prologue, the Paedagogus points out the ἄγορά of Apollo Lyceius (6-7),\footnote{The statues of Artemis and Aphrodite are identified in the prologue of Hipp. (74, 101); Phoen. 631 requires
an image of Apollo, though it is clearly one of several (ἀγάλματα, 632) and serves only as the object of a brief
apostrophe. The closest comparandum to Soph. El. is the scene of Jocasta’s prayer in OT (919-21), which probably
includes both altar and statue, neither which has been explicitly identified before this. On the other hand, Apollo
hangs over the action of OT so strongly that the audience might have already suspected that the statue is his, and if
not, I doubt that they would be very surprised to learn it.} but
there is no particular reason at this point to believe that he is describing anything actually visible,
for he also mentions the grove of Io and the temple of Hera.\footnote{See Finglass 2007: 635n. for discussion of
the altar and statue. He does not connect it to the Paedagogus’
words in the prologue, understanding it instead as an altar to Apollo Agyieus (though Clytemnestra addresses Apollo
Lyceius – 645, 655). Whether the statue would have been recognizable as Apollo or more generic (or even visible
to most of the spectators) is unknown. On Apollo Lyceius, see also Graf 1985: 220-6, Gershenson 1991.} The altar, then, remains a
figurative tabula rasa for much of the play and only becomes an altar of Apollo when
Clytemnestra names it such at 635-7. The altar (and its statue) may be taken as emblematic of
my reading of the play as a whole: the gods are a blank until humans begin to construct them.\footnote{Neither of the temples was visible from Mycenae (Finglass 2007 ad loc.).}

Electra opens with two speaking characters, Orestes and his Paedagogus (as well as the
mute Pylades), who will turn out to have rather different conceptions of their joint mission. The
Paedagogus addresses Orestes as the son of Agamemnon (2)\footnote{A similar argument is made by Dunn 2006 regarding the landmarks mentioned in the Paedagogus’ opening
lines: each locale (potentially) establishes a different meaning for Orestes’ revenge, but this early in the play we
cannot be sure in which sphere he will choose to act.} and describes the physical
features around Argos (4-10). Though Apollo Lyceius will be invoked three times later in the

\footnote{Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1997 ad loc., following Carrara, note that the authenticity of the first line was disputed
in antiquity, but that “we have no good reason to believe the doubters.” For a response and further discussion, see
Finglass 2007 ad loc.}
play, his appearance here is unmarked; as he seems to have been an Argive deity, it is natural that the Paedagogus should mention him alongside Io and Hera in a physical description of the city. Though the Paedagogus himself does not directly address Apollo Lyceius, he offers an etymology of the epithet (λυκοκτόνος, “wolf-killer”) that may inform those later invocations. A wolf-killing god is a particularly appropriate ally for the murderers of Aegisthus (who was famously labeled a wolf by Aeschylus’ Cassandra at Ag. 1259). Orestes, however, never calls upon or even mentions Apollo Lyceius, who is thought to have had chthonic associations; rather, Orestes’ relationship with Apollo, to the extent that he has one, is with Apollo as the Delphic god. The Paedagogus attributes to Orestes a desire to see the parts of the city he describes, but we might suspect that the desire is really the Paedagogus’, especially as he goes on to describe how he fled from the city when Orestes was but an infant and reared the boy to be an avenger. He urges both Orestes and Pylades to take counsel, since the critical time is at hand (22: καιρός, ἀκμή). This is the moment he has been waiting for, and all his concern is directed at the accomplishment of vengeance for its own sake; his two companions are thus seen, at least initially, as conduits for his vengeful energies.

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65 See Graf 1985: 222.

66 On the Apollo’s lupine associations, see esp. Gershenson 1991. Segal 1966: 477 notes that by interpreting the epithet as “wolf-slaying” instead of “light,” “Sophocles thus invokes at the beginning of the action not the god’s restorative clarity, but his associations with an ambiguous, destructive power.” Segal sees this as part of the interplay throughout the tragedy of light and darkness as well as of life and death.

67 Thus Scullion 1994: 109-12, who remains cautious about putting Apollo in either category.

68 Kitzinger 1991 discusses the educative aspect of the Paedagogus’ character and its impact on the presentation of Orestes (302): “Orestes’ mission and Elektra’s voice are at cross-purposes from the very start, in their mode if not their aim. … the act of vengeance appears to be a lesson that Orestes has learned, its necessity a product of others’ words, not his own experience or understanding.”

69 This is not to say that the Paedagogus is necessarily as “sinister” as Wright and others have found him. I mean only to suggest the ordering of the Paedagogus’ priorities: he feels that vengeance (qua justice) is primary and has tried to educate the two boys to feel the same way.
Orestes’ response confirms the Paedagogus’ role as motivator of their current undertaking. But overall Orestes is less concerned with vengeance as such than with the restoration of his household and inheritance. He must establish his own legitimacy by killing the usurpers and showing himself to be the true son and rightful heir of Agamemnon. His mission requires him to avenge Agamemnon, but he shows little personal interest in vengeance, since it is only a means to his real end.

Orestes proceeds to give an account of his visit to the Delphic oracle, with the admonition that the Paedagogus should correct him if he says anything “untimely” (31). Kitzinger sees in this speech a young student repeating his latest lessons back to his tutor. Certainly it does show Orestes’ faith in the Paedagogus and the influence the latter has had on him; at the same time, we need not attribute to the Paedagogus the stimulus to visit the Delphic oracle, much less the specifics of Orestes’ plan as he lays it out in the following lines. The passage as a whole simultaneously reveals something of Orestes’ background and motives as they have been molded by the Paedagogus and his independence in devising a plan and duly marshalling his allies.

So we discover that at the beginning of the play Orestes already has a relationship with Apollo, though a very limited one in comparison with Aeschylus’ version. Prior to arrival in

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70 For instance, when Electra says of him (168-9) ὁ δὲ λάθεται ὅν τ’ ἐδάη ὥν τ’ ἔπαθ’, she is right; he was too young to remember the murder of his father and only sees himself as an avenger because that is what he has been brought up to believe. For Orestes’ material motives in various versions of the myth, see McHardy 2008: 103-12.

71 Winnington-Ingram 1980 sees Orestes as a chthonic agent – chthonic, because he seems to rise from the dead after the false messenger report to avenge another dead man. But Orestes does not think of himself as a chthonic avenger; those strange eight lines of the prologue (59-66) hardly amount to a chthonic manifesto, especially since the lingering image is that of a shining star. If we are nevertheless meant to see him as chthonic, then I think that also affects the way we understand the play on a broader level.

72 As Bowman 1997: 143 puts it, “Orestes’ plans on his return to Mykenai similarly exclude Klytaimnestræa, or include her only incidentally as an ally and co-usurper, to be cleared out of the way en route to his main objective, the killing of Aigisthos and the transfer of the rule to himself.” See also Segal 1966: 513.

Argos, he has traveled to Delphi to ask Apollo how he should go about the duty of vengeance (32-7). An old interpretation, which emphasizes the darker implications of the plot, argues that Orestes asks the wrong question: not whether he should avenge Agamemnon, but how.\footnote{Sheppard 1918 and 1927. Other “dark” readings of the play (though not always accepting Sheppard’s point about the oracle) include Winnington-Ingram 1954/5 (expanded in Winnington-Ingram 1980: 217-47), Friis Johansen 1964, Segal 1966 (and again in 1981: 249-91), Gellie 1972: 106-30, and Kells 1973 \textit{ad loc.}; see Stevens 1978 for response. March 2001: 16 n. 59 has a very thorough list of both “light” and “dark” readings.} By asking the wrong question, this argument continues, Orestes has made a dangerous assumption and not given Apollo the opportunity to warn him off his current course. But in my view, Orestes’ question shows his confidence and independence: he does not need to be urged on by Apollo, nor does he count on his help throughout the action of the play. He merely asks about the best approach to a task already decided upon – which illustrates his independence not only from the Paedagogus (in visiting the oracle in the first place) but also from Apollo (in asking this particular question).\footnote{Other critics take a slightly different tack from mine, arguing that Orestes’ question proves the morality of the matricide, as the issue is never even raised directly. That is, to ask whether Clytemnestra should be killed would allow the possibility that she should not; to ask how she should be killed takes for granted that she should be and the only thing in question is how. I am not (yet) interested in the morality of the matricide, but only Orestes’ attitude toward Apollo, which in Sophocles is not made out to be one of total dependence.}

It is difficult to know just how involved Apollo is supposed to be in the events of the play, or just how close is his connection to Orestes; the evidence for both seems slight. Orestes has asked the god’s advice on a specific point, has received a specific response, and crafts his own plan accordingly. Apollo’s advice is that Orestes should use trickery, but Orestes devises the trick himself. He recommends that the Paedagogus strengthen his false messenger report with an oath\footnote{It is noteworthy, given the Paedagogus’ pious attitude, that he discreetly refuses to obey Orestes on this count.} and expects that in addition to his ancestral possessions this route will win him
glory and safety. He says of himself that he returns to Argos as a purifier (70: δίκῃ καθαρτής πρὸς θεῶν ὁρμημένος) and hopes to be welcomed back into his ancestral wealth as a restorer of his house (72). His concern seems to lie primarily not with any ideal of vengeance or justice for its own sake, but with a righting of the social order. He offers a generic prayer to his homeland and native gods (67-72) to receive him with good fortune; the last lines of his prayer are wholly taken up with the social and political repercussions of his actions, and he nowhere asks for divine support in the business of revenge. His language overall suggests little of the personal injury felt by the Paedogogus and (as we soon discover) Electra.

At this point, comparison with the Aeschylean Orestes is fruitful. In his opening words he addresses chthonic Hermes, and throughout the play, he is seen as an instrument of the gods – all of the gods, not just Apollo or Hermes. As far as named Olympians, Sophocles’ Orestes speaks only of Apollo, and his “alliance” with that god is of a fairly normal variety. Aside from Apollo, he refers to non-specific θεοί, and so where he does reveal a religious attitude, it is unexceptional and unmarked. His segment of the prologue concludes with a departure to Agamemnon’s tomb to offer libations – which he does only at the urging of both Apollo (apparently: 51-3) and the Paedagogus, since it seems that he would rather stay and listen to

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77 I have already noted the presence of an altar and statue of Apollo on stage, though we cannot use these to say that Apollo is “overseeing” the action, since they are not identified as his until almost half way through the play. The closest Orestes comes to attaching responsibility for the outcome to Apollo is at 1424-5 (ἐν δόμοισι μὲν καλῶς, Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν). At the play’s conclusion, Orestes declares himself a μάντις (1498) of Aegisthus’ end, though this remark comes as a partner to his mocking comment at 1481, after Aegisthus has deduced his identity: καὶ μάντις ὠν ἄριστος ἐσφάλλου πάλαι;

78 Alexiou 2002: 20-2 provides a reason for Apollo’s command: “There is evidence that throughout Greek antiquity the right to inherit was directly linked with the right to mourn.” Orestes was not present to attend to Agamemnon’s funeral rights, and if he wants to lay a legitimate claim to his inheritance, then presenting offerings at the tomb is a good start. Alexiou suggests that the restriction of mourning to immediate kin only was meant as a way of keeping property within one family: “It is significant to note that the homicide laws restrict the initiative in prosecution to those who are ‘within the degree of cousins’ children’, that is to the same relatives who were considered legal heirs and were permitted to lament at the dead man’s funeral.”
Electra (80-1). Orestes’ interests, again, seem to lie with his living and suffering sister more than his dead and buried father. Of course, I do not claim that Orestes has no religious tendencies at all, but they largely subsumed by his focus on the world of men. What is significant about Orestes’ religion is its very colorlessness vis-à-vis the various beliefs that others hold about him specifically. The Paedagogus, for instance, shows much stronger religious feeling, advocating vengeance as equally the work of Apollo and Agamemnon, though Orestes does not see his task in quite these terms.

Electra’s views contrast with those of both the Paedagogus and Orestes. Before the chorus enters, she sings a short monody describing the death of Agamemnon and her lamentation for him. But her obsession with him has a purpose beyond annoying the usurpers and honoring her father: to rouse Agamemnon’s spirit to participate in its own revenge. She believes that her lamentation keeps the spirit of her dead father vital and attentive so that it may come to the aid of his human avengers when the time is right. In contrast with the elaborate, three-way

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79 Some have attributed these lines to the Paedagogus rather than Orestes. See Finglass 2007 ad loc. for refutation. Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1997 also retain the attribution used here. But cf. Blundell 1989: 153 n. 16: “Lines 82-5 are perfectly appropriate to the Paedagogus, but Sandbach’s proposal to give him 78-81 and 82-5 to Orestes is still tempting. If he is right, the scene would foreshadow Orestes’ rather than the servant’s subsequent coldness towards Electra, and confirm his practical, rational concern with ‘victory.’”

80 82-4: μηδὲν πρόσθεν ἢ τὰ Λοξίου πειρώμεθ’ ἐρδεὶν κἀπὸ τῶνδ’ ἄρχηγετεῖν, πατρὸς χέοντες λουτρά. The Paedagogus thus acknowledges the importance of both chthonic and Olympian powers and implies a union of the two.

81 The exceptional thing about Electra is the sheer extent of her mourning. She claims to be doing it as an honor to Agamemnon and because no one else will, yet that cannot be a complete explanation. It may be worthwhile to recall Antigone, who was satisfied to perform a much scantier funeral for Polyneices (without any lamentation) than Electra is for Agamemnon. But lamentation for Electra is a tool of revenge, whereas Antigone is not interested in revenge at all.

82 Winnington-Ingram 1980 fails to connect the business of the Furies with the murder victim, Agamemnon. Instead, Electra is seen as “at once the victim and the agent of the Furies” (p. 228), preying upon Clytemnestra’s mind and preventing her from sleeping at night. It might be possible to read Electra as an agent of the Furies, though she is also an agent of Agamemnon, and it is harder for me to see her as their victim, or to see that the Furies have already been worrying Clytemnestra for an extended time (rather, her fear in this play is the immediate result of her dream). For tragedy’s depiction of women as being more eager for revenge for its own sake than their male counterparts, see McHardy 2008: 37-42.
kommos of *Choephoroi*, Electra alone among the characters fully understands and exploits this system of chthonic vengeance, and she is repeatedly compelled to explicate and defend her stance.\(^{83}\)

She feels that Agamemnon has not received his due lamentation, as she is the only one to perform that task, and adds the important detail that she will never cease mourning (103-9). She moves directly from this vow to an invocation of a series of divine powers, all chthonic (110-2):\(^{84}\)

\[ὦ 
δῶμ' Ἀίδου καὶ Περσεφόνης, 
ὦ χθόν' Ἑρμῆ καὶ πότνι' Ἀρά, 
σεμναί τε θεῶν παιδές Ἐρινύες, 
αἱ τοὺς ἀδίκως θνῄσκοντας ὁρᾶθ', 
αἱ τοὺς εὐνάς ὑποκλέπτομένους, 
ἐλθετ’, ἀρήξατε, τείσασθε πατρὸς 
φόνον ἡμετέρου, 
καὶ μοι τὸν ἐμὸν πέμψατ’ ἀδελφόν.\]

O house of Hades and Persephone,  
O Hermes of the underworld and powerful Curse,  
and Erinyes, revered children of the gods  
who look upon those wrongfully done to death,  
who look upon those who dishonour the marriage bed in secret,  
come, bring help, avenge the murder  
of our father,  
and send to me my brother!

The prayer is quite thorough, including the rulers of the underworld, Hermes in his chthonic manifestation (probably as psychopomp), and both Furies and Curse. It should be noticed that the second of these lines provides what was missing from Orestes: chthonic Hermes, who was invoked by both siblings in Aeschylus (*Cho. 1*, 124b). Electra’s three-line address is amplified with relative clauses specifying the deities’ spheres of activity, evincing her concern with both

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\(^{83}\) Swift 2010: 336-50 has a similar reading of the play (especially the parodos), though she does not draw out the particular religious implications discussed here.

\(^{84}\) Cf. Finglass 2007: 110-20n.: “All these deities are named elsewhere in tragedy: what is remarkable here is their sheer concentration. Electra needs the attention of these figures, and so she calls on them directly without fear of the consequences.”
the crime and the punishment, which should originate with this group of chthonic deities. The prayer concludes with an impressive sequence of imperatives in asyndeton.

The basic tenets of Electra’s beliefs are clear: she expects supernatural powers, several in number and all chthonic, to notice acts like the murder of Agamemnon, judge them unjust, and render punishment. It is not clear whether she expects Orestes to be the avenger; she specifies that her reason for missing him is that she can no longer bear the burden of lamentation alone (119-20). I have suggested that Electra’s purpose in mourning (in addition to honoring her father) is to rouse Agamemnon’s spirit so as to aid an avenger when he comes. We have learned that her lamentation has been going on for quite some time, and it may be that she is simply worn out from the constant effort – not to mention the social strain that comes with rebelling against the current rulers. If Orestes were to return and kill the usurpers, Electra would be freed from both the burden of grief and the task keeping Agamemnon’s spirit alert; she would be able to cease mourning at last.

So when the chorus enters, Electra’s continual lamentation has been placed in a context of anger and resentment over Agamemnon’s treatment (in life and in death) and invocation of chthonic gods for the sake of vengeance. Whoever the avenger may turn out to be and whatever the precise role to be played by her lamentation in that process, it is plain that her preferred religious system is almost wholly chthonic.

The parodos consists of an exchange between Electra and the chorus on the topic of loss and lamentation, with the chorus offering consolation and Electra rejecting it. She gives several reasons for her behavior, but in the end, though they agree to follow Electra’s lead, the chorus is

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85 Lamentation is usually the task of the female kin (Alexiou 2002: 10-4, Hame 2008), and so it might seem unlikely that Orestes is expected to ease her burden by joining her in mourning. However, as next of kin, Orestes does join Electra in the kommos of Cho., but even if we import this context into El., she is still drawing a connection between lamentation and chthonic revenge.
not quite convinced that it is a good idea to antagonize the current rulers.\textsuperscript{86} They do not completely grasp the concept of lamentation as a type of vengeance in itself, or as a stimulus to vengeance. For instance, when they attempt to console Electra with the standard line that endless laments cannot raise the dead (137-9), Electra censures them rather sharply (145-6): νήπιος ὃς τῶν οἰκτρῶς οἰχομένων γονέων ἐπιλάθεται. Foolish? Not unjust, wicked, dishonorable? The chorus means the sentiment literally, and Electra does not dispute this simple fact; but she appears to understand the purpose of lamentation differently. Electra’s words also introduce the theme of remembrance in connection with lamentation and revenge,\textsuperscript{87} a conjunction which will be explored further in the first scene with Chrysothemis.

As an indication that she is interested in action and not just mourning for its own sake, she expresses frustration with Orestes’ inactivity. She does not know that he has recently returned, yet her sentiments confirm what we learned in the prologue: Orestes is emotionally detached from the situation, feeling no particular urgency to act. The implication is that Electra perceives her only possible role as being that of mourner and motivator, while actual vengeance must be left to Orestes or another.\textsuperscript{88} This is a milder form of the argument Electra will have later with Chrysothemis, though the outcome is slightly different: the chorus may not fully

\textsuperscript{86} 233-5: ἀλλ’ οὖν εὐνοία γ’ αῦδο, μάτηρ ὡσεὶ τις πιστά, μὴ τίκτειν σ’ ἄταν ἄταις.

\textsuperscript{87} Electra goes on to recall Procne and Niobe as examples of faithful mourning. Finglass 2007 is rightly skeptical of Winnington-Ingram’s assertion (1980: 336) that Procne’s title “messenger of Zeus” is a reference to vengeance (on which see also Kamerbeek 1974 \emph{ad loc}.), for this is not spelled out in the text. But both Procne and Niobe do also feature in stories of revenge: Procne murdered her son in revenge on her husband, and Niobe’s offspring were killed by Apollo and Artemis, avenging their mother’s honor. Electra’s story, while not an exact parallel to either, clearly resonates with both in this respect, and perhaps highlights the difference between her understanding of lamentation and the chorus’.

\textsuperscript{88} Sommerstein 2010d: 224-49 tries to show that Sophocles maintains uncertainty throughout most of the play as to who will be the one (or ones) to kill the usurpers. While I am generally sympathetic to such a reevaluation of old assumptions, in the end I do not find his argument convincing. I know of no tradition in which Orestes did not kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (though Homer is reticent as to the latter’s death). The fact that no playwright ever changed this aspect of the myth does not mean that no playwright \emph{could have} changed it; but given precedents like Homer, Stesichorus, and Aeschylus, it is hard to imagine that the audience would not have expected Orestes to fill the role of avenger.
understand her position, but they are confident that the gods (and here they cast their net more widely than Electra) bring all things to pass in time (173-8). The thought underlying these lines is revenge, which for Electra is inextricably bound up with lamentation and remembrance of Agamemnon.

The chorus’ string of deities and vengeful agents at 173-8 recalls the divine convergence of *Choephoroi*. Olympian, chthonic, and human powers are all there; the only one missing is Agamemnon, Electra’s primary interest. As she describes the sorry conditions of her present life, she adds οἰκονομῶ θαλάμους πατρός, reinserting the critical figure omitted by her interlocutors. Throughout the play, the chorus evokes Aeschylean convergence; but this time they are alone, and they continually act as a foil to Electra’s thorough chthonicism. She shows no interest in their vision of justice, which does not appear to be as carefully worked out as her own and recommends that she play an unsatisfyingly inactive role. The chorus in turn simultaneously underscores the narrowness of Electra’s system and calls it into question, as they neither understand her motives nor endorse her strategy of lamentation.

89 Finglass 2007: 184n. comments that “the chorus’s reluctance to name the god [Hades] contrasts with Electra’s willingness to invoke a whole series of chthonic deities.” The chorus will maintain this comprehensive view through the second stasimon, contrasting first with Electra’s chthonic enthusiasm, then with her sudden humanism. Only in the third stasimon, when it looks as though Electra’s religious views are broadening, does the chorus cease to be comprehensive and focus instead on chthonic powers. Thus, they are used consistently as a foil to Electra, always questioning the validity of her views (and she theirs) by the very fact of their disagreement.

90 Cf. Finglass 2007: 173-84n.: “The chorus’s consolation takes on a cosmic aspect: it points to Zeus at the beginning of its song and Hades at its end, with the mighty Orestes standing between them. Electra’s response breaks away from this larger vision and insistently returns to reality.” See also Ormand 1999: 62-8 on the significance for Electra of her father’s *thalamos*.

91 The dynamic here is comparable to that of the prologue, where the Paedagogus’ interest in both Apolline and chthonic vengeance contrasts with Orestes’ more practical attitude. See Foley 2001: 156; while the chorus’ attempts at consolation are conventional, their failure to support Electra’s lamentation here runs counter to the normal practice. I cannot fully agree, however, with her claim (157) that “[t]he play reconstitutes for the isolated Electra a chorus that, despite occasional criticisms and calls to moderation, hears and responds to her lament in a traditional fashion and becomes fully identified with the heroine.”
The first scene with Chrysothemis expands on the same themes as were raised in the parodos. She expresses sympathy for Electra’s position – both her physical abuse and isolation, and her commitment to justice. However, she is all too aware that she is merely a young woman ill-equipped to resist authority. Electra is a case in point: her unceasing lamentation has only gotten her threatened with imprisonment. Scholarship usually sees Chrysothemis as a foil to Electra’s much stronger beliefs and personality, and this is not unreasonable.\(^9^2\) She claims to want the same things as Electra, and she probably does (marriage, for instance), but she can see no way to success. One point of contention between the two sisters stands out: the question of the efficacy of various ritual actions, such as Electra’s lamentation and Clytemnestra’s offerings to the dead. Electra readily convinces Chrysothemis that the offerings are in vain, for Agamemnon is unlikely to accept them after his treatment at Clytemnestra’s hands.\(^9^3\) Chrysothemis does not argue this point, and is ready to sabotage the offerings by pouring them out on the ground, as Electra recommends.

But what about Electra’s laments? It is Chrysothemis’ opinion that they are a waste of time (esp. 330-1: \(κόουδ’ \ εν \ χρόνῳ \ μακρῷ \ διδαχῆναι \ θέλεις \ θυμῷ \ ματαίῳ \ μὴ \ χαρίζεσθαι \ κενὰ;) and worse, since the current rulers, wearied by Electra’s complaints, intend to lock her up somewhere far away (379-82). In sharp rebuttal, Electra declares that \(s\)he is in the process of avenging their father (349, reiterated at 399),\(^9^4\) and then lays out more clearly by what reasoning lamentation equates with vengeance (355-6).\(^9^5\)

\(^9^2\) As she is a rather weak figure, it is difficult to know whether the opinions she expresses are really her own or Electra’s echoed back at her. Indeed, Electra accuses her of merely echoing Clytemnestra’s arguments (343-4).

\(^9^3\) Electra makes her argument very aggressively, almost as though she has forgotten that it is Chrysothemis and not Clytemnestra herself standing before her.
λυπῶ δὲ τούτους, ὡστε τῷ τεθνηκότι
τιμᾶς προσάπτειν, εἴ τις ἔστ’ ἐκεῖ χάρις.

And I give pain to them, so that I do honour

to the dead, if any pleasure can be felt where the dead are.

This short sentence deserves close attention. First, Electra causes pain to the usurpers, whom she despises; by the *lex talionis*, it is considered a good thing *per se* to cause pain to one’s enemies. The *result* is to pay honor to Agamemnon;\(^96\) while we can be confident from earlier passages that this is also one of her *purposes*, it is appended here as something of an afterthought, subordinated to the idea of inflicting pain on her foes. The protasis *εἴ τις ἔστ’ ἐκεῖ χάρις* should probably be taken as qualifying both preceding statements so that Agamemnon is imagined as being pleased both by the infliction of pain on the usurpers and by his resulting honors. The use of the word *χάρις* suggests a system of exchange\(^97\) in which Electra’s laments are a sort of down-payment for the help that Agamemnon should send in return. Thus, her payment of honor to him is not (or not only) an end in itself but a means to an end agreeable to both parties: the elimination of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. But the effect of placing this sentiment in a protasis is that Electra seems to admit the possibility that such a system, on which she has based her whole strategy of lamentation, is in fact nonexistent.\(^98\)

\(^{94}\) She challenges Chrysothemis to find a better course of action for her (352-3): ἐπεὶ δίδαξον, ἢ μάθῃ ἐξ ἐμοῦ, τί μοι κέρδος γένοιτ' ἂν τῶνδε ληξάςῃ γόων. Profit is imagined as Chrysothemis’ chief motive, in contrast with Electra’s attitude of honor and revenge.

\(^{95}\) Seaford 1985: 317 takes Electra’s lamentation as a sort of retaliation for Clytemnestra’s festival, which catches them both up in a suspension of ritual: “So far from contributing to the restoration of normality, it renews every month the insult to Agamemnon, and thereby contributes to the dual impossibility of incorporating Elektra back into the world of the living on the one hand and her angry, suffering father into the world of the dead on the other. She must respond to the perverted and protracted rites of her mother with anomalously protracted lamentation of her own.”

\(^{96}\) Seaford 1985: 320.

\(^{97}\) On the concept of reciprocity in Greek (and especially Euripidean) tragedy, see Yunis 1988, Belfiore 2000 and on *El.* specifically, Blundell 1989: 149-83.
But Chrysothemis does not see any of this and so is unable to understand why Electra laments so much in the first place. Chrysothemis possesses a relatively simple brand of piety, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, but not the will to act on that distinction (except in secret; cf. 468-9), nor the imagination to put her helplessness to good use. This is the dynamic underlying Electra’s discussions with Chrysothemis and the chorus, as I have sketched them above. They do not understand what use there could be in ceaseless lamentation, and they do not understand why Electra values lamentation over her own safety. The answer is that she does not. Keeping Agamemnon’s spirit wakeful means vengeance one day, which in turn means salvation for herself. But since Chrysothemis does not grasp the significance of vengeful lamentation, she is able to privilege her own safety above anything else; the higher priority inherent in lamentation simply never occurs to her one way or the other.

As the argument comes to an end, Electra asks where Chrysothemis is off to and is told that Clytemnestra has ordered libations to be poured at Agamemnon’s tomb because she has had a fearsome dream. Even before hearing the content of this dream, Electra exclaims optimistically ὦ θεοὶ πατρῷοι – not necessarily an appeal to Agamemnon himself, but clearly her thoughts turn in his general direction. That she does not immediately think of Apollo or some other god as the source of the dream is significant, as we shall see later.

Clytemnestra has dreamed of Agamemnon’s return to his palace and the world of the living. He plants his scepter in the hearth, and it sprouts a shoot that grows and spreads rapidly to overshadow all of Mycenae. Bowman has discussed the allegories at play in this dream:

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98 Finglass 2007 *ad loc.* in a comment that could well summarize my argument on this play: “Electra devotes her existence to honouring a dead man, when she cannot be sure that such devotion brings him any joy.” With this passage we might pair Orestes’ more famous words at 1424-5: ἐν δόμοισι μὲν καλῶς, Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἔθεσπισεν.

Clytemnestra as the hearth from which (with the help of Agamemnon’s “scepter”) springs the Orestes-shoot. But Agamemnon remains the only named person in the dream. He is presented as the source, the motivator of all the action, and though there is nothing particularly dire in the dream, Clytemnestra’s immediate reaction to it is fear (427). She suspects that Agamemnon himself is responsible for sending the dream, and therefore her first move is to offer (through Chrysothemis) libations at his tomb in an attempt to appease him.

Electra’s response to Chrysothemis’ account of the dream is twofold. She instructs her sister to pour the offerings out on the ground and offer their own instead. And she scoffs at Clytemnestra’s attempt to appease the angry spirit of a man whom she killed and mutilated (444-6). It is left unclear just who is most immediately responsible for his death, but as the maschalismos is not mentioned elsewhere, we are justified in attributing it to Clytemnestra alone.

From the angle of characterization, it is likely that such a ritual would be performed by Clytemnestra, since we are given no indication that Aegisthus has much thought for chthonic

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100 MacLeod 2001: 70-2 briefly analyzes this dream with a view to its political meaning: the confirmation of Orestes as legitimate heir and condemnation of Clytemnestra’s sexual liaison with Aegisthus. Segal 1981: 251 describes the dream in terms of “inversions of fertility in nature.”

101 Ormand 1999: 70-2 argues that the dream effectively removes Clytemnestra from the equation altogether, replacing her with “an endogamous oikos in which the father directly generates the son.” Bowman 1997: 136 notes that we are never given a single, authoritative interpretation of the dream, as we are in Cho. The gist of the dream is clear enough, and Sophocles does not go so far as to give contradictory interpretations of it; but his refusal to explain it is consistent with his tendency throughout the play to leave religious questions open to interpretation.

102 At 97-9, both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are the murderers. Here, Electra is only concerned with her mother’s religious views, and so it is perhaps to be expected that she receives all of the blame. However, this does demonstrate the difficulty in using Electra (a heavily biased source) in reconstructing other characters’ views. For instance, she claims to have rescued the infant Orestes from death (1131-5) at the time of their father’s death and accuses Clytemnestra of being the would-be murderer (601), while the Paedagogus says simply that Orestes was taken πατρὸς ἐκ φόνων. At 964-6, Aegisthus is said to have kept both Electra and Chrysothemis from marrying because he feared a male rival (a point missed by Seaford 1985: 318), and in fact, he is more likely to be concerned with a challenge to his rule from Orestes or other male kin; Clytemnestra, on the other hand, seems more occupied with her own personal safety, which is guaranteed by Aegisthus’ protection and Orestes’ absence – whether in death or in exile.
powers. I would suggest that she performed this ritual primarily as a defensive measure. For Clytemnestra – as, in theory, for any murderer – the maschalismos need not be intended as abuse, humiliation, degradation, or a political example. Her revenge depends upon Agamemnon’s death; her safety lies in binding him and his Furies. So this detail about Agamemnon’s demise offers us some insight into Clytemnestra’s religious views and suggests that they are much in accord with Electra’s. Both believe in the ability of the dead to influence the world of the living and are vitally concerned with manipulating Agamemnon’s wrath; it is significant, moreover, that Electra also understands Agamemnon to be the source of Clytemnestra’s ominous dream (459-60, quoted below). But there are differences. For instance, Clytemnestra must think that her libations could be acceptable to Agamemnon. She evidently views his wrath as an isolated threat, to be neutralized by a particular ritual, and other facets of her religion will be revealed later in the play.

The final lines of Electra’s speech effectively summarize her view of chthonic χάρις and vengeance (453-63):

αῖτοῖ δὲ προσπίτνουσα γῆθεν εὖμενὴ ἕμαν ἄρωγὸν αὐτὸν εἰς ἔχθροις μολέν, καὶ παιὸ Ὀρέστην ἐξ ὑπερτέρας χερὸς ἔχθροσίν αὐτὸν ἡντ ἐπεμβήναι ποδὶ, ὡς τὸ λουπὸν αὐτὸν ἄρνεοτέρας χερσὶ στέφομεν ἢ ταῦτ ὄρομομπο. οἴματι μὲν ὦν, οἴματι τι κάκεινο μέλειν

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103 Maschalismos seems to have been a combination of binding the victim and appeasing the Furies. I would avoid the word “expiation,” however, particularly in this context. We are told that Clytemnestra wiped off the gore on Agamemnon’s head for this reason; why would she need to do that if maschalismos had already served the same purpose?

104 It is a despicable act, just as murder itself is a despicable act. But like murder, the despicable-ness lies in the fact of performing the act, not in how it is done (for it is always done the same way).

105 And in fact, we are told that she sleeps with Aegisthus Ἐρινὺν οὔτιν ἐκφοβουμένη. Electra means to mark her hubris, but it may be simply (or additionally) that Clytemnestra has successfully negotiated a peace with the Furies and need not fear them. Clytemnestra’s concern with distancing herself from the murder (or its attendant guilt) is also evinced by lines 445-6.
πέμψαι τάδ’ αὐτῇ δυσπρόσοπτ’ ὀνείρατα·
δμος δ’, ἀδελφή, σοί θ’ ὑποώργησον τάδε
ἐμοί τ’ ἄρογά, τῷ τε φιλτάτῳ βροτῶν
πάντων, ἐν Ἅιδου κειμένῳ κοινῷ πατρί.

Kneel and pray him to come in kindness from below the earth
to help us against our enemies,
and pray that his son Orestes may get the upper hand
and may trample, alive and well, upon his enemies,
so that in the future we may honour him with hands
richer than those with which we now bring him gifts!
I believe, yes, I believe that it is he who was concerned
to send these ugly dreams to her.
But none the less, my sister, perform this service
in aid of both yourself and me, and of the dearest of all mortals,
the father of us both who lies in Hades.

Chrysothemis is given thorough instructions on what to pray for when she makes the offering at
Agamemnon’s tomb. She is to ask for Agamemnon himself to rise from the earth and send
Orestes as well. That Orestes is not merely seen as a bearer of grief (a possible interpretation of
some earlier passages) but as an avenger, indeed, as a living agent of the dead Agamemnon, is
plain from lines 455-6: Agamemnon sends Orestes, his living son, who is to approach his
enemies ἐξ ὑπερτέρας χερὸς; even the description of his movement (ἐπεμβῆναι ποδί) evokes the
activity of the Furies. Orestes’ act of vengeance will neatly complete the cycle of χάρις by
which father aids son in his own vengeance in return for Electra’s mourning and anticipated
future offerings (458). Electra spells out the interconnectedness of living and dead family
members in lines 461-3, where Chrysothemis’ offerings will be of help to both sisters
(presumably in their ability to call up Agamemnon and so gain revenge and liberty) and to
Agamemnon himself. It may be significant that the identity of τῷ φιλτάτῳ βροτῶν πάντων is
held until the end of the prayer; taken by itself, that phrase would be an appropriate way to refer
to Orestes – again, father and son, dead victim and living avenger, are melded in Electra’s
imagination.

106 Cf. e.g. Aesch. Ag. 1468-9.
Like the parodos, the choral ode at 472-515 constitutes a partial reiteration of Electra’s view, but also an expansion of it in terms that would be unfamiliar to her. The chorus attempts to interpret Clytemnestra’s dream as portending the arrival of ἁ πρόμαντις Δίκα, δίκαια φερομένα χεροῖν κράτη. They go on to claim that neither Agamemnon nor the axe that killed him is unmindful – of what, we are not told, but the dream is again taken as evidence that Agamemnon’s spirit is stirring, while the axe suggests a reciprocal fate for his murderers. Likely Electra would agree with the basic sentiment that vengeance is just, though she never goes so far as to personify Δίκη, normally an Olympian figure, nor does she suggest that “Justice” might be yet another source of Clytemnestra’s dream (the clear implication of the epithet πρόμαντις). In fact, the system sketched here sounds very Aeschylean: a vague conjunction of Olympian and chthonic figures, all of equal valency, none well defined. It is not clear exactly who sends the dream, who wields the axe, or what is the relationship between prophetic Justice and the dead Agamemnon, not to mention the adultery-punishing Fury of the antistrophe. Vagueness is perhaps to be expected in a choral ode, yet this is just how Aeschylus avoided fragmentation of beliefs in his play – by the repeated invocation of a series of ideas, without spelling out the link between them.

However, unlike Choephoroi, the scope and flexibility of the chorus’ system is not symbolic of the play’s larger religious movement, being instead juxtaposed with Electra’s concentrated chthonicism. The chorus has picked out elements of her system, but they have also broadened it and explained certain phenomena differently. This same dynamic is evident, on another level, in their brief account of Pelops and Myrtilus, which expands the mythical scope beyond what we see elsewhere in the play. For a moment, the chorus is allowed a more comprehensive view of family history and of divine activity than any of the characters; but we
have been given reason to think that the characters do not share these comprehensive views and may even disagree on particular points.\footnote{Sewell-Rutter 2007 has less interest in Sophocles’ version for the very reason that it is concerned more with a snapshot of the myth than with an intergenerational family curse.}

The \textit{agon} at first sight could tell us much about Clytemnestra’s religion, but in the end it is difficult to tell whether she or Electra (or indeed, either one) is ever giving us a full and correct version of events.\footnote{On the construction of Clytemnestra’s character in this passage, see Budelmann 2000: 66-71. He draws attention to the personal quality of her words, which create a sense of depth for her as a character while also keeping the audience ignorant of the exact circumstances surrounding Iphigenia’s death. Thus, we are not given enough information to know whether or not the sacrifice was “really” justified (and by extension, whether or not Agamemnon’s death was justified). His point regarding lines 788-96 (two different perceptions of Nemesis) is similar; again, the audience is deprived of a sure religious angle for interpretation.}

While it reveals some profound differences of opinion on the matter of justice,\footnote{Blundell 1989: 162: “But while Clytemnestra claims that her actions are justified, they are condemned by Electra and the chorus as unjust (113, 521, 561), ‘unlawful’ (494), \textit{hubris} (271), a ‘most disgraceful outrage’ (487; cf. 559), ‘evil villainy’ (1387; cf. 126) and an affront to both \textit{aidos} and reverence (249f.; cf. 124, 1383). If they are right, then Clytemnestra’s particular application of Help Friends/Harm Enemies, based on her own quite reasonable evaluation of who her friends and enemies are, must inevitably violate a whole series of moral norms. But if she is right, then their pursuit of the code is equally reprehensible.” Segal 1966: 498 notes the political language used by Clytemnestra to describe Orestes’ “revolt” from her affections.} it cannot tell us conclusively what really motivates either character. Thus far, then, we know that Clytemnestra believes in chthonic wrath and its power enough to commit \textit{maschalismos}. Further details are reserved for the exchange following the \textit{agon}, since the debate itself is more concerned with the motives and morals of the past than with the coming vengeance.

Clytemnestra is a difficult figure to assess accurately, as most of what we hear about her in this play comes from Electra.\footnote{Blundell 1989: 163 observes that Electra’s description of her quarrels with Clytemnestra is “far more vitriolic, at least on Clytemnestra’s part, than anything we actually observe. Ironically, Electra shows no awareness that such terms may be equally applicable to her own abuse of her mother.” In my opinion, it is a disregard to engage with this issue that vitiates much of Wright 2005b. The situation in Aeschylus is similar, but since his Electra is less individualized, less rebellious, we are prevented from worrying much about latent bias in her words.} Clytemnestra is acknowledges a greater range of divine involvement than other characters and is more willing to participate in a variety of rituals to
accomplish her personal goals. I have argued that *maschalismos* should not be taken as a moral black mark against her so much as a manifestation of her constant concern with safety.\textsuperscript{111} Her pragmatic approach to religion is again evident in her prayer to Apollo Lyceius, which she offers in response to her ominous dream of the night before. She has already responded to this dream by sending Chrysothemis with libations to the tomb of Agamemnon, indicating her suspicion that he is one possible source of the dream. His appearance to her in a troubling dream makes her fear that the *maschalismos* has failed, and so she needs another means of diverting his spirit. As her belief in chthonic powers was earlier enough to spur her to commit *maschalismos*, so now she makes a last-ditch effort to avert his wrath by appeasement with libations. At the same time, she prays to Apollo that the dream may turn out well for her and ill for her enemies;\textsuperscript{112} this is an appropriate prayer to the “wolf-killing” god, who protects the flock by driving off predators and thus may be expected to defend the home and hearth from intruders. If, as it seems, Apollo Lyceius is at least partly chthonic in his manner of worship,\textsuperscript{113} then he might be best approached with fear, as a god more inclined to send harm than good. But here Clytemnestra is only concerned with her own well-being, and so she prays not only that the threat posed by the dream may not be fulfilled (a typical apotropaic prayer) but also that something good may come of it (a less common request of chthonic deities). Her prayer also suggests that she views Apollo Lyceius as another possible source for the dream. There is no way for her to know which is the true source of the dream, or even if both together might be, so she takes the appropriate measures

\textsuperscript{111} Not all critics have found Sophocles’ Clytemnestra to be a completely abhorrent figure (e.g. Kells 1973); but my business in this chapter is not to offer a moral defense of her actions, but rather to consider how her religious attitude meshes with those of the other characters. Nevertheless, in order to do this, we must approach her with a mind free of moralizing judgments.

\textsuperscript{112} Blundell 1989: 151 points out that she may legitimately consider Orestes to have broken their bond of φιλία by choosing to side with Agamemnon, as Electra also has.

\textsuperscript{113} See above, n. 67.
to propitiate both and thereby covers all her bases.\textsuperscript{114} We have already seen that she and Electra both believe the dream to have been sent by Agamemnon; now Clytemnestra’s religious system diverges sharply from Electra’s, becoming in some respects more inclusive – and this poses a difficulty for any spectators who might be interested in discovering the “true” nature of her dream.

If Clytemnestra’s primary concern is safety, her primary means of obtaining it is control. \textit{Maschalismos} allows her (or so she hopes) to control Agamemnon and his Furies, if only in a negative sense. Libations and prayer function similarly, by inducing divine powers to help her, or at least not to harm her. Finally, it is significant that she seems to fear Orestes even more than the gods (who might seem scarier and infinitely more powerful) or Electra (who is more spiteful and immediate). Orestes is in fact the cause of her greatest fear because he is the one element she feels unable to control; all she can do is hope that he stays away, a thing which no pious offerings or magical spells can accomplish.\textsuperscript{115} This explains her vast relief at the news of his death. She has had cause to fear that at least one of her previous defensive measures has failed, and if so, then divine powers (not to mention Electra) might be conspiring with Orestes to aid his revenge. The report that he is dead allows her to stop worrying about the prospect of a human avenger, and perhaps also lays to rest her fears of chthonic vengeance.

The arrival of the Paedagogus with his false messenger’s report is often seen as an ironic response to Clytemnestra’s prayer (637-59); but I would caution against attributing it directly to

\textsuperscript{114} An anachronistic interpretation might consider her comprehensiveness a lack of faith in any one deity or method, but in the ancient world, the opposite was the case: because she is willing to acknowledge the involvement of both Olympian and chthonic powers, she must pay heed to both.

\textsuperscript{115} At least not in this play. Sophocles chooses not to raise the possibility of \textit{defixiones}. I suggested that in \textit{Cho}. the murder and mutilation of Agamemnon were also aimed directly at Orestes. Nothing in \textit{El}. makes a similar interpretation here impossible, but neither is there any statement quite so explicit as \textit{Cho}. 441-2.
Apollo.\textsuperscript{116} I am more sympathetic to the position of Reinhardt, who draws a distinction between *Oedipus Tyrannus* 911ff. and this passage of *Electra*: “this time the part played by fate and the gods is played by mere intrigue. And this time illusion is no longer a symbol of the human condition, but simply a successful trick.”\textsuperscript{117} Further, while the Paedagogus is a part of the δόλος recommended by Apollo, Orestes is ultimately the author of this particular strategy, having given the Paedagogus very specific instructions as to what he must do (39-50).

The Paedagogus’ report shakes the foundations of Electra’s religious beliefs and ultimately leads her to abandon her strategy of lamentation in favor of a more humanistic approach. Despite her earlier declaration that she would never cease lamenting (103-4), she actually does cease when she hears that Orestes has died.\textsuperscript{118} One might naturally expect this to be an *additional* cause for lamentation, not a reason to stop. Her line of thinking seems to be that with Orestes dead there is no hope of rescue or revenge. There is no longer any reason to keep Agamemnon’s spirit wakeful, since it has no human agent; if there is no hope from either of those quarters, then lamentation is useless, and Electra must look out for her own well-being. This is basically Chrysothemis’ reasoning, and Electra’s change of perspective becomes clearer in the second encounter between the two sisters, when Electra attempts to convince

\textsuperscript{116} Winnington-Ingram 1980: 233 n. 55 understands it as a response by the chthonic gods to Clytemnestra’s prayer that they never give Electra rest. Bowman 1997: 134 seems to connect the dream, the prayer to Apollo, and the arrival of the Paedagogus: “As in the O.T., the messenger by implication comes in fulfilment of the prayer; in the Elektra, his arrival also sets in motion the fulfilment of the dream. The implication that Apollo has sent the dream as in the O.T. he has given the oracle is unmistakable.” A spectator watching the play would first learn of the dream, then witness Clytemnestra’s prayer, and finally hear the false messenger report. It would be easy to connect these last two elements, and it is true that the Paedagogus’ activity aids fulfillment of the dream. But it is less obvious that we should attribute the dream to Apollo because the Paedagogus appears after Clytemnestra’s prayer. The sequence of events is too jumbled for that to be a simple deduction for the audience.

\textsuperscript{117} Reinhardt 1979: 151.

\textsuperscript{118} At 796 Electra says πεπαύμεθ’ ἡμεῖς (either “we have ceased” or “we have been stopped”), probably with reference both to her hopes for revenge and to her lamentation (which is how Clytemnestra understands it at 798). The only time we truly see Electra lament is much later in the play, when Orestes approaches the palace with the urn.
Chrysothemis to join her in a plot to murder Aegisthus. After telling her the news about Orestes, Electra gets right down to business (938-41):

**Ηλ.** οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτ’· ἐὰν δ’ ἐμοὶ πιθῆ, τῆς νῦν παρούσης πιμονής λύσεις βάρος.

**Χρ.** ἦ τοὺς θανόντας ἐξαναστήσω ποτὲ;

**Ηλ.** γούκ ἐσθ’ ὃ γ’ εἶπον· οὐ γὰρ ὧδ’ ἄφρων ἔφυν.119

**El.** That is how things stand; but if you will obey me, you will lighten the weight of our present pain.

**Ch.** Shall I ever make the dead rise again?

**El.** That is not what I said! I am not such a fool!

She has a plan to release them both from their current problems – a common theme in this play, where several characters seek release from fear or suffering. The striking thing is that salvation has not been among Electra’s biggest concerns up to this point.120 But it is now that her would-be savior is dead.

Chrysothemis responds with a desultory question that might almost seem mocking. In fact, she is reacting to what Electra said earlier about the efficacy of lamentation. She deduces that Electra wants her to join in the lamentation, which between the two of them might be enough to raise two dead spirits – though Electra has diplomatically given Chrysothemis all the credit (note the singular verbs). The sense of mockery that we might hear in these words is the result of Chrysothemis’ continuing disbelief and simplicity. She still does not believe in the power of lamentation as Electra does, and one suspects that, like the chorus in the parodos, she cannot conceive of the process so subtly as Electra does. Chrysothemis imagines ghosts

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119 As to the corruption in this line, Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1997 list a number of conjectures, none of which substantially alters the meaning.

120 See Alexiou 2002: 61-2 on the connection among lamentation, salvation, and mystic cult – a connection which Electra fails to make. See also Seaford 1994 for an interpretation of *El.* as echoing the mystic themes of darkness and light, death and resurrection. He sees a correlation between Electra’s reaction to Orestes’ reappearance and the salvation granted after tribulation in mystic cult. In keeping with my argument that her world becomes more human upon the supposed death of Orestes, I will only add that Electra subsequently attains “salvation” (in the passage discussed by Seaford) through the human agency of Orestes himself. Seaford finds (288) that “the generally antithetical joys of vengeance and the mysteries are horrifically combined.” Sophocles’ point, I think, is not so much to undermine either of these “joys” as to humanize the ritualistic framework.
wandering around trying to frighten or kill their murderers, and while this belief was not unknown among the ancient Greeks, Electra’s thought is more spiritual: the dead may inspire strength, courage, and conviction in their living agents.

So Chrysothemis just misses the point once again. But Electra does not answer as we might expect, with a reassertion of her beliefs and aims in ritual lamentation. Instead, she scoffs at Chrysothemis’ words as if the whole idea were absurd. Isn’t this the Electra who has earlier insisted that the dead heed the living, and aid their just revenge? What has happened to that Electra? She has lost her faith, it seems, though the reason is not clear. Perhaps she no longer believes in the vitality of spirits, since they have failed to protect Orestes and bring his revenge to completion. Perhaps she recognizes the practical helplessness of those spirits without a human agent. It is intriguing, however, that her disavowal of the power of the dead comes at the very moment when she herself decides to become their agent, along with Chrysothemis (or so she hopes). This would be the appropriate time for both sisters to rouse their dead kin to support them, as Orestes and Electra did in Aeschylus’ Choephoroi. But for whatever reason, Electra no longer acknowledges that system of beliefs, and her attitude suddenly becomes much more like Orestes’ in the prologue. She will kill the usurpers or die trying (1043; cf. 1078-80, 1319-21). She has nothing left to lose, and she anticipates that success will bring her marriage, glory, wealth, and a return to her rightful position in the palace (959-85). She even fantasizes about the festivals that people will establish to celebrate her and Chrysothemis’ courage. It has

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121 Cf. Foley 2001: 156 n. 56: “Notice that when Chrysothemis invokes the dead Agamemnon’s presence on her return from his tomb, Electra, who now thinks that Orestes is dead, loses her earlier faith in the power of the dead.”

122 Foley 2001: 151-5 describes both ancient and modern Greek traditions of lamentation and revenge, stressing the female role of speech versus male action and violence; see Dué 2006: 9 n. 22 for further citations. For Electra herself to take action is highly unusual and, I suggest, a signal that she is no longer operating within a system of lamentation and revenge.

123 Cf. Electra’s very different sentiment at 361-2, part of her first conversation with Chrysothemis.
been suggested that the audience is meant to think of the famous Athenian tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogeiton,\textsuperscript{124} in which case the killing of Aegisthus becomes a political assassination more than vengeance for Agamemnon. Here is a woman, at last, firmly resolved to lay a hand directly to the work that needs to be done, and for purely human motives. She seeks from her dearly departed only a reputation for piety (\textit{εὐσέβεια}, 968). Now she looks to the future and the world of the living.

It is interesting to think about Electra’s fantasy festival in relation to the actual festival apparently held by Clytemnestra (277-84). Electra describes the latter as an impious celebration of criminality, but the details may tell a slightly different story. Clytemnestra holds dances (χοροί) – a standard ritual affair – and offers sacrifices \textit{θεοῖσιν τοῖς σωτηρίοις}.

Vickers suggests that the festival may be meant to expiate pollution incurred by the murder of Agamemnon, and it could also be interpreted along similar lines as a sacrifice of thanksgiving.\textsuperscript{126} We know that Clytemnestra is deeply concerned with her own safety, conscious of both divine and human threats that surround her after her treacherous murder of Agamemnon. This passage suggests that she recognizes a debt to the gods, whether Olympian or chthonic or both (it would be like Clytemnestra to cover all her bases), and pays that debt with monthly sacrifices.\textsuperscript{127} Her own personal safety is a matter of ongoing concern, and as such must be paid for regularly. But

\textsuperscript{124} Juffras 1991. Cf. Electra’s very different sentiment at 361-2, part of her first conversation with Chrysothemis.

\textsuperscript{125} Winnington-Ingram 1980: 233 n. 55 glosses this phrase as “to Olympian gods, especially perhaps to Zeus and Apollo,” though he gives no reasons for this interpretation and goes on to cite a tradition that Clytemnestra sacrificed to the Furies (\textit{Eum}. 106 ff.) – which is what we would expect in a rite of expiation for murder.

\textsuperscript{126} Vickers 1973: 573. Clytemnestra’s festival also sounds like a perversion of hero cult (on which see Jones 2010), which often featured sacrifices and contests of one kind or another – though these would of course be held in honor of the deceased, not \textit{σωτηρίοι θεοῖ}.

\textsuperscript{127} It may also be significant that Agamemnon was killed at a feast (193, 204), rather than in his bath as in Aeschylus; cf. Hom. \textit{Od}. 3.273-5.
σωτηρία in this context may also denote the salvation of her household (which was, after all, threatened from within by Agamemnon himself). According to this argument, Clytemnestra does not necessarily intend her festival as a celebration of Agamemnon’s death so much as the liberation of her household, as well as her own continued protection from revenge. It is hard to see how Electra’s festival would differ significantly from Clytemnestra’s. If anything, Electra’s appears to emphasize masculine virtues (e.g. courage) far more than Clytemnestra’s and even puts the two sisters on a semi-divine level (σέβειν, 981). Ultimately, it is a celebration of their character, their upbringing, their resolve, and their success – not, even in Electra’s imagination, a celebration of murder. But an important difference lies in Electra’s attitude toward the gods within her fantasy: there are no gods, only dead spirits who will be pleased at being avenged (without taking an active role in vengeance), and two sisters who are made to sound like gods. Where Clytemnestra acknowledges the support of divine powers, Electra attributes all to her own innate capacities. Her world has become more human with the death of Orestes, and her fantasy makes it more human still, with the gods assuming increasingly less importance. The implication, to which I shall return, is that revenge, including its incentives and its consequences, is a wholly human affair.

The second stasimon (1058-97) mostly consists of praise for Electra and commiseration for her wretched state of affairs. Again, the chorus attempts a more comprehensive view than the characters, in some cases attributing to Electra motives that we can be quite sure she does not actually have. The first strophe recognizes her devotion to Agamemnon (a brand of piety all too rare among mankind) and expresses the chorus’ desire to join her in sending a message to her dead kin in the underworld. But Electra no longer subscribes to a chthonic strategy. Her reaction to the death of Orestes, in contrast to the chorus, was to cease lamenting and rely instead
on her own powers. Neither has she (or anyone else) ever thought of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as Furies, for according to Electra’s chthonic system, the Furies are agents, not opponents, of Agamemnon’s revenge. Finally, the chorus ascribes to her a “reverence of Zeus” (τὰ Ζηνὸς ἐυσέβεια), but from what Electra has actually said, her ἐυσέβεια applies to her dead kin (968), and reverence for Zeus has not been foremost in her thoughts at any point in the play. Once again, the chorus echoes Electra, while at the same time diverging strikingly from her true attitude as it has been presented both in earlier scenes and in the one immediately preceding the ode.

Electra’s religious views shift again after the recognition scene. Orestes has arrived, thus relieving Electra of the burden of vengeance, and as her dramatic role becomes again that of an emotional support, so her religious attitude returns to a faith in chthonic powers. It is only as actor that she sees vengeance in worldly, human terms.

Electra’s relationship with Orestes has been labeled “dysfunctional,” and it is plain throughout this scene that the two experience reunion in very different ways. This is only reasonable, however, and not necessarily a sign of deeper weakness in their relationship. Orestes is emotionally affected by Electra’s lament for him; if he seems less affected by her wretched appearance, that can be attributed to the fact that he has already gotten a hint of her circumstances (back in the prologue, when he did express sympathy for her and a desire to stay). His anxiety about all the noise she makes once she has recognized him is also understandable, as he is in the middle of a murder plot, and the Paedagogus’ warning that their voices could be heard inside the palace shows that his fears are well-founded. But my purpose here is not a

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128 Burton 1980: 215 sees the return of Orestes as Agamemnon’s response to the χθονία φάμα of the chorus at 1066 – though as with Clytemnestra’s prayer to Apollo, it is harder to attribute Orestes’ return to divine will when we have already seen human machinations at work in the prologue. Cf. lines 1228-9.

129 Wright 2005b: 186; see also the scholarship cited in n. 56 above.
defense of Orestes or of the different emotional levels of the siblings, for these are in part a function of their differing religious attitudes.

We have seen that Orestes is mostly concerned with human affairs: politics, wealth, legitimate succession, and so forth. He does make an occasional prayer or offering, but when he speaks of the gods, they are a generalizing plural (οἱ θεοί), and his only real contact with the divine is of a fairly concrete and formal nature (he consulted the Delphic oracle). For these reasons, I am hesitant to associate him with any particular branch of the divine (e.g. chthonic or Olympian): gods manifest themselves to him through established oracles or else meld together into one homogeneous group. Then there is his generally to-the-point attitude. For instance, after the recognition scene with Electra, he brusquely tells her (1289-91) μὴ τε μὴτηρ ὡς κακὴ δίδασκε μὴθ’ ὡς πατρώαν κτήσιν Αἴγισθος δόμων ἀντλεῖ, τὰ δ’ ἐκχεῖ, τὰ δὲ διασπέρει μάτην. Most of his attention in this passage goes to the squandering of his inheritance, and he brushes aside the whole affair as something that he is in any case well aware of. No rousing speeches or emotional laments for him – just the business at hand.

Electra, on the other hand, is highly emotional and devotes herself to chthonic powers, especially the spirit of the dead Agamemnon, and her behavior might resemble that of a Fury. Upon hearing of Orestes’ death, she briefly abandons those chthonic powers as ineffectual and focuses instead on the human world. The reappearance of Orestes allows her to regain confidence in her earlier chthonic tactics; she was keeping Agamemnon’s spirit vital for just this moment, and Orestes’ arrival demonstrates that her long wait and lamentation were not in vain after all. This dynamic may explain some of her more bizarre words in this scene, especially at 1316-7 and 1361:

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130 By analogy, her practical ineffectiveness in avenging her father might raise questions about the Furies’ effectiveness.
1) ὡστε εἰ πατὴρ μοι ζόν ἱκοτο, μηκέτι ἂν
tέρας νομίζειν αὐτὸ, πιστεύειν δ᾽ ὀρῶν.
so that if my father were to return alive, I should not
now think it a miracle, but should believe I saw him.

2) χαῖρ', ὦ πάτερ· πατέρα γὰρ εἰσορᾶν δοκῶ
Hail, father – for I think I see a father

The first is meant as something of an adynaton, similar to Chrysothemis’ question at 940, but
like Chrysothemis’ question, it contains the kernel of a true belief. All of Electra’s mourning has
been intended to bring back her dead father – or at least, his strength, his support, his thirst for
vengeance. Most likely she would indeed be surprised to see him walk around the corner, but
her words suggest that in some sense he has already done just that. The adynaton is embedded in
a natural result clause; that is, the natural result of Orestes’ return is the raising of Agamemnon.
Thus the statement is an adynaton only insofar as Agamemnon is not expected physically to rise
from the earth; he has already risen in a spiritual sense. Electra’s delight at Orestes’ unexpected
return is informed by her chthonic convictions.

The second statement is addressed to the Paedagogus, whom Electra finally recognizes as
the man who helped her to spirit Orestes away from the palace so many years ago. He has been
something of a father-figure to Orestes, but Electra does not address him as father for that reason
alone. He was her partner in setting the revenge plot in motion in the first place, and they are
both credited with raising Orestes to be an avenger (14, 951-3). The Paedagogus’ return signals
success in that venture, confirms Orestes’ identity (if confirmation is needed), and proves that
Orestes’ reason for returning is revenge. The Paedagogus represents the fulfillment of Electra’s
initial plan and her laments since that day; this fulfillment may be attributed, in her view, to her
lamentation and through it, to Agamemnon. The Paedagogus symbolizes the working of
Agamemnon’s spirit for all those years while Orestes was being brought up in exile, and Orestes
himself signifies the next step, vengeance itself. Electra is not mad, as some have thought. She is witnessing the substantiation of her religious beliefs and actions.\textsuperscript{131}

So when the avengers enter the palace, Electra has experienced some considerable shifts in belief, from reliance on chthonic powers to human self-sufficiency and back to chthonic powers, with a final nod to Apollo Lyceius. According to Sheppard (1918: 87), “[i]t is … in the spirit caught from Orestes, that she makes her prayer to Apollo Lykeios.” This may be true, but it requires qualification. Orestes never prays to Apollo Lyceius, though it is possible that Electra takes his and Pylades’ proskynesis to the ἔδη θεῶν (Apollo’s among them) as her cue to pray (and line 1376 suggests as much). But Orestes’ Apollo, insofar as Orestes even has a personal relationship with Apollo, is the prophetic god of Delphi, while Lyceius seems to be Apollo in his chthonic aspect, at least partially. Electra’s prayer to the chthonic Apollo coincides with her reversion to her chthonic stance; if she is in fact influenced here by Orestes’ religious attitude, she still chooses to pray to the Apollo most closely related to her own chthonic worldview.

Further, the strands of religious belief begin to unravel here near the end of the play. The echo of Clytemnestra in Electra’s prayer to Apollo invites comparison of the two passages and brings out the difference in their respective interpretations of the “wolf-god.” For Clytemnestra, he is a protector of the home and its possessions, but for Electra, he is a punisher of the impious; since the impiety in this case is the murder of Agamemnon, Apollo Lyceius also becomes a god of vengeance who must kill the Aeschylean wolf and lioness.\textsuperscript{132} Apollo Lyceius was historically

\textsuperscript{131} Or so she thinks. Kitzinger 1991: 325: “Elektra’s willingness to entertain the illusion of her father’s presence creates an uncomfortable question about the frame of mind in which she now participates in the action and obscures rather than clarifies our understanding of that action.” I would not go so far as to say, with Kitzinger, that Electra’s talk of her father is a “deliberate deception;” on one level it does in fact clarify our understanding of the action, for Electra’s words are an articulation of her religious views. At the same time, those views are given no particular authority in this play, and so we are unable to rely upon them for a “true” understanding of the action.
worshiped together with more “typical” Olympians but with rites that seem quite chthonic. He is thus an ambivalent figure, ready to be defined in whatever way each character finds most helpful. The same is true of certain gods mentioned in the following choral ode. It first introduces Ares τὸ δυσέριστον αἴμα φοίνων, who thus sounds rather like the Furies in Aeschylus’ Eumenides (53-4), and the Furies themselves are described in the next very sentence (especially 1388: ἄφυκτοι κύνες). In the antistrophe, Orestes becomes a “cunning helper of the dead” (1391-2: ἐνέρων δολιόπους ἄρωγός), and then comes Hermes, here identified as the son of Maia, a master of trickery, who is using darkness (σκότῳ) to help someone who is himself described as a helper of the dead (ἐνέρων ἄρωγός). Nominally, we have two Olympians (Ares and Hermes) and two chthonic forces (the Furies and the dead), all apparently swirling around the human avengers. But as each of the Olympians is described in terms that may carry chthonic associations, the line, such as it is, between Olympians and chthonians is significantly blurred both in this ode and in Electra’s preceding prayer to Apollo Lyceius.

Moreover, opening the ode with the god of war may be a response to Electra’s invocation of Apollo Lyceius, who in Athens was closely associated with the army and warfare. The chorus thus implies a third possible role for Apollo Lyceius as a god of war; while protection,

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132 See Dunn 2006: 191-2, 198. Sheppard 1927: 8 notes the similarity between Clytemnestra’s and Electra’s (allegedly impious) prayers to Apollo and remarks that “from this moment Electra is lost.” Similarly Blundell 1989: 175: “It is by no means obvious that the daughter’s prayer for the death of her mother is preferable to the mother’s for the death of her son.”

133 See above, n. 67.

134 It is especially difficult to know when Ares is being thought of as a god in his own right, rather than a metaphor for violent death. Here, he is given no patronymic, as Hermes has, and perhaps no definite article (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson read τὸ δυσέριστον κτλ., while Finglass 2007 prefers Blaydes’ ὅ). Elsewhere in the play, he is associated with the battlefield at Troy (96), the threat posed by Clytemnestra to her offspring (1242), and the death of Clytemnestra (1423); in the first and last, his epithet of choice is φοίνως. All of these passages are consonant with the use of Ares as metaphor; Finglass 2007: 1385n. compares Aesch. Ag. 1389, where the dying Agamemnon breathes out blood just as Sophocles’ Ares does here. In any event, his characterization in this passage resonates more with the other chthonic figures of the ode than with the Olympians.
vengeance, and warfare may all have been the province of the contemporary Athenian Apollo Lyceius, they are presented in this play as the views (or even the constructs) of individual people with their own (mutually exclusive) goals. The same god would not, for instance, simultaneously preserve Clytemnestra’s well-being and punish her for impiety. The chorus is attempting to provide a religious framework for the murder of Clytemnestra, not very different from the one articulated by Electra throughout most of the play, but it is hard to say just what Apollo Lyceius stands for, and therefore difficult to take any of these views as authoritative in Griffith’s sense.

As Electra returns to her chthonic attitude, the chorus also resumes its apparently comprehensive tone (in contrast to Electra’s narrow chthonicism). Their religious views continue to differ with regard to Apollo Lyceius. While the chorus’ ode is superficially comprehensive, it appears deeply chthonic; that the chorus has consistently been figured as the last remnant of Aeschylean unity makes their sudden emphasis of a chthonic system startling, and it resonates with Electra’s recent shifts in religious belief. More significantly, the principal subject of these prayers and songs, Orestes, has given no indication that he thinks of himself as a Fury, a chthonic avenger, or an agent of Apollo. If Sophocles meant to draw together the characters’ disparate religious attitudes into something like Aeschylean convergence, he would have done better to allow Electra to retain her religious credibility, rather than changing her opinions several times. He would have done better to allow a single, coherent interpretation of Apollo Lyceius, rather than three different ones that all appear equally valid even as they cancel each other out. But instead, he has driven a wedge into Aeschylus’ alliance of divine and human entities. If there is an alliance of Olympian chthonic, and human powers, as in Choephoroi, none of the characters appears to be aware of it, least of all the avenger himself.
The final scene of the play bears out the interpretation offered in this chapter. Most of our interest in the gods fades amid the increased pace of the action as Electra immediately reemerges from the palace and cheers on the fatal blows to Clytemnestra, then Orestes rushes out to confirm that the deed is done and turns right around when Aegisthus is seen approaching. The chorus’ occasional comments continue to evoke a comprehensive Aeschylean system (1417-23), mentioning the Furies, the dead, and Ares, as in the previous ode. Orestes famously declares that “in the house all is well, if Apollo prophesied well” (1424-5); whether or not the conditional is meant to question the value of the prophecy, Orestes’ statement, combining reference to the Delphic oracle with concern for the household, reflects his general attitude about revenge throughout the play. Aegisthus’ vague sense of divine involvement (1466-7) contributes little to his characterization; from what we hear of him in this play, he appears to be primarily a political, material figure, one who would in any case be unlikely to operate in accordance with a fully developed system of religious beliefs. His notorious prediction of future evils for the house of Atreus (1497-8) is similarly tenuous: Aegisthus has no authority as a seer, either in this play or in any other account, and his prediction is suitably vague. The play concludes with the two characters most rooted in the human world: Aegisthus attempts to exploit fear of divine punishment to save his own skin, while Orestes, who has successfully avenged his family’s honor and regained his inheritance, is able to ignore his threat.136

135 Segal 1981: 270 points out that Aegisthus is caught in men’s nets, while the Aeschylean nets were those of the Furies or Justice (Ag. 1580, 1611).

136 The “dark” reading of Segal 1981 is developed on a different basis than the one I have offered here, but some of his concluding remarks are relevant (p. 290): “The triumphant choral song and ritual procession that end the Oresteia are here reduced to ambiguous discourse and reluctant, private movement toward a house whose contact with the divine order is clouded and uncertain. Sophocles seems to have deliberately stripped away the rich mythic perspectives which Aeschylus had so elaborately woven into his version of the story. The lyrics are sparse and for the most part restricted to discussions of the immediate situation. The few myths that do occur are briefly told. The divine perspective is the most reduced of any Sophoclean play. The narrow spatial limits…correspond to the
“Matricide and Good Spirits”?  

Throughout the play, the characters’ different religious stances and strategies are put in tension with one another, juxtaposed, problematized, and questioned. In the opening scenes, we are confronted with Orestes and the Paedagogus, one planted firmly in the human world, with very human motives and little more than a token regard for the divine, the other with a sense of the absolute justice to be accomplished through the execution of his king’s murderers and relying on the support of both Olympian and chthonic beings. Electra and the chorus soon appear, giving us yet another division of religious attitudes: Electra focuses on her father’s shade almost to the exclusion of all else and asserts the vengeful efficacy of lamentation, which the chorus approves on general principle but fails to grasp entirely; their more comprehensive religious system is not thoroughly articulated and serves to highlight the narrowness and specificity of Electra’s. And so it continues. Electra sketches a system (or part of a system) that characterized the action of Choephoroi – the involvement of chthonic powers – and yet she willfully misunderstands Clytemnestra’s fearlessness and festival, which are based on the same type of system as her own. She rehashes her argument about the efficacy of lamentation with Chrysothemis, and we begin to wonder whether to credit her system of belief when no one else seems to – and when she cannot understand Clytemnestra’s system, which is arguably the most similar to her own. It is in the following sequence, in which Chrysothemis describes Clytemnestra’s dream (417-30), that Sophocles most clearly juxtaposes and contrasts several systems of belief and shows them all to be without any sure foundation.

We have already glanced at Electra’s judgment of Clytemnestra’s libations; she finds it ridiculous to think that Agamemnon could ever be appeased. More significant, however, is the shallowness of the mythic and divine planes. The human figures are left to themselves, but in this highly concentrated and barren world they seem to have little scope for regeneration.”
implication that if Agamemnon cannot be appeased, then his vengeance is inevitable. Or is it? At this point, it becomes a question of the power of the denizens of the underworld. Perhaps the *maschalismos* did fail, perhaps Agamemnon did send the dream – now what? Can he do anything more than send an ominous dream? Can he aid Orestes if the latter does not accept a chthonic system of vengeance? And if not, then does it really matter that he does not accept Clytemnestra’s offerings?  

This sequence falls right after Electra’s first debate with Chrysothemis over the purpose of lamentation. Electra has asserted her reasons for continuing to mourn Agamemnon, which Chrysothemis failed to understand completely. The subsequent account of Clytemnestra’s dream might almost seem like confirmation of Electra’s view, if we believe that it testifies to Agamemnon’s power in the world of the living. But this scene also shows how Electra’s beliefs are guided by her own anger, grief, and fear. She believes that lamentation does work, but that the *maschalismos* did not. This is not problematic yet, since magical rituals in the ancient world must have failed with some frequency without any damage to their credence. However, Electra’s attitude toward Clytemnestra’s offerings may be more telling. On the one hand, she argues that under no circumstances would Agamemnon’s shade accept libations from his murderer; on the other hand, she is strangely insistent that Chrysothemis pour them out on the ground rather than offering them at Agamemnon’s tomb as instructed. The implication is that he *could* be appeased, whatever Electra says, and so the safest move is not to offer them at all, just in case chthonic spirits turn out to be more fickle than anticipated.  

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137 Alexanderson 1966: 90: “We can hardly doubt which of those two, Clytemnestra and Electra, has reason to count on divine help.” We *can* doubt, I think, whether either one receives divine help.

138 In fact, she suggests that they will be waiting for Clytemnestra’s imminent arrival in the underworld, so Electra effectively turns a canceled offering into a threat. Kitzinger 1991: 308 believes that “she prevents Chrysothemis from performing a ritual that would perpetuate the disorder that Clytaemnestra has created in their
So when we hear about Clytemnestra’s dream, we suspect, along with the characters, that Agamemnon may be responsible for it. When we hear that he was a victim of *maschalismos*, we may wonder whether he *could* have been responsible for it (if he was in fact successfully bound). When we hear Electra simultaneously asserting Agamemnon’s allegiance to her cause and implying that he might be influenced by Clytemnestra’s offerings, we begin to question the solidity of her beliefs. Finally, when Clytemnestra herself comes on stage in the very next scene and prays to Apollo, we begin to wonder whether *he* sent the dream – or indeed, whether any external being is actually responsible for it, or it might even be a psychological manifestation of Clytemnestra’s worries about human avengers. That Clytemnestra is willing to admit the possibility of two different sources is also problematic on an interpretative level. *She* does not have to decide whether Agamemnon or Apollo sent the dream, but *we* would like to be able to do so – for this might help us determine how the matricide is to be understood – and the playwright gives no guidance in this matter. It is worth noting that Aeschylus achieves the unity of powers in his version of the dream (Orestes is represented as a Fury in a dream sent by Agamemnon) without raising the issue of multiple sources. Clytemnestra assumes that Agamemnon is the sender, and nobody doubts her conclusion. All three agents of vengeance (Orestes, Agamemnon, Fury) are given a role to play, all three overlapping without conflict. Prayers to Apollo and other gods elsewhere in the play give the strong sense that they, too, are involved in the action, but without disturbing the balance or inviting the audience to wonder who is responsible for what.

world” – though I am reluctant to read order and disorder into the play quite so thoroughly as Kitzinger does, and I must disagree with her assertion (310) that “Elektra makes the ritual an act performed by the right people in the correct spirit and for straightforward reasons,” since beyond merely honoring the dead, she is also asking her father to help kill her mother.

Electra’s years of lamentation, all with no visible effect, might also be a sign that Agamemnon was prevented from taking action.
In fact, religious disjunction, not convergence, is a central theme of *Electra*, where characters often try to understand events and even each other through various frameworks, which the other characters do not share. So when the chorus sees Orestes as a Fury, they are attempting to recreate the system Aeschylus used comprehensively in *Choephoroi*. But that he does not see himself or his role in this way at all casts doubt on the ultimate legitimacy of that interpretation. We are given a glimpse into a variety of views, and sometimes those views seem tenable: for example, that Agamemnon sent Clytemnestra’s dream and that he was able to do so because of the energy and attentiveness generated by Electra’s lamentation. But then those views encounter resistance, doubt, or questioning (maybe Apollo sent the dream, and not Agamemnon; maybe lamentation is not enough to revive the dead) and the audience is given no clear signal as to which – if any – of these religious systems should be privileged in interpretation. Should we understand the action from a chthonic point of view when the chief avenger, Orestes, does not? Should we understand that Apollo stands behind all this when the central figure, Electra, does not?  

This last question brings me to that eternal dilemma in interpretation of *Electra*: is the matricide justified or not? Or better yet: are we to assume that Orestes will be pursued by Furies in the aftermath the dramatic action?  

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140 MacLeod 2001: 17 addresses a very similar question with regard to ironic readings of the play: “the alleged grim irony by which Elektra and Orestes are reduced to the level of their enemies remains unresolved in that both are left unaware of it. This would be a highly uncharacteristic use of irony by Sophokles whose heroes all come to recognize the tragic irony that informed their self-destructive actions. Orestes and Elektra do not; and it seems unlikely that the audience is expected to see the situation in such a diametrically opposed way to the characters without some strong suggestion to this effect in the text.”

141 Winnington-Ingram 1980: 227: “What did happen after the play was over? Critics are of course rash to ask such a question, but ask it they sometimes do. … But where does one stop asking such questions about matters which Aristotle might have described as ‘outside the drama’? The sooner the better, it may be said (as in the notorious case of Lady Macbeth’s children). But the subsequent fate of tragic personages can be a part of the drama, not least when it was a well-known part of the legend.”
a darker world of moral decay and corruption? This chapter has tried to show that the answer to this question should not be formulated in terms of divine will, whether Apollo’s or the Furies’; we must look instead to the human characters’ morals, beliefs, and attempts at justification.

We are presented with an array of religious beliefs and approaches to ritual, none of them exclusive of the others, but none of them privileged over the others, either. In the end, we are left with no particular moral or religious framework to use in interpreting the play because we have seen too many of them. And we have seen that even the characters do not always believe in them as staunchly as they might. Electra gives up on her strategy of lamentation altogether when she hears that Orestes is dead, and her faith in her own system is only restored by what she sees as proof: Orestes’ “resurrection;” but this cannot be proof to us, since we know that he has been alive all along. It is striking that she can change her course so suddenly, that she can stop believing in a system which she has been acting upon for so many years and which she has just defended before both the chorus and Chrysothemis. It is striking, too, that her beliefs and motives can change so suddenly in response to what we know are actually non-events. Orestes never did die, and so only Electra perceives his (re)appearance as resurrection. We know better. And yet the effect, I think, is not to make us doubt Electra’s personal faith or resolution (that begins to sound anachronistic), but to make us doubt whether her beliefs were ever founded on any secure basis to begin with.\textsuperscript{143} And if we doubt that, then it becomes more difficult to interpret the play as a whole through her perspective.

\textsuperscript{142} Murray 1901: vi, paraphrasing Schlegel.

\textsuperscript{143} Cf. Sewell-Rutter 2007: 103: “neither Sophocles’ nor Euripides’ play about the vengeance of Orestes accords the Erinyes anything like the importance that they enjoy in Aeschylus. Sophocles, whose concern is with a terrible moment in time and not a chain of woes, gives us a particularly notable version, in that it offers no Erinyes at all.” This merits qualification, since Sophocles’ Electra offers us several Furies – but Sophocles’ \textit{Electra} offers none. The religious beliefs of his central character go unconfirmed.
Both siblings, when they come to the business of revenge, turn out to be motivated by very human, worldly concerns: wealth, inheritance, legitimacy, glory, safety, well-being, marriage – the list could go on. These are Orestes’ personal motives from the beginning, and revenge is treated as a means to his real end. Electra adopts these motives suddenly when she decides that she must be the one to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. She then relapses into her previous system, yet in the final scene she is no longer the active avenger. It is significant that when she perceives herself as actor, rather than motivator, she sees the world in a much more human way. Significant, too, is the fact that the play ends not with Furies but with Aegisthus and Orestes, the two characters most detached from religious ritual and most concerned with the human and the political. And this, I suggest, is what Sophocles meant for the play as a whole: when you come right down to it, revenge is a human affair. Humans will have their own reasons for undertaking it, and they will be able to justify it in one way or another – as the command of a god, as the wish of a dead man, as a means of winning glory and restoration. They may even be willing to change their moral stance and adopt new systems of belief to explain or justify themselves. But in the end, their action must be evaluated on human terms alone, because that is all we have to go on. This does not meant that revenge is necessarily immoral, but that we

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144 For the importance of the polis in El., see Finglass 2005. Bowman 1997: 143 takes “the transfer of political power” to be “the central theme of the play” which is reinforced by the ending. Davidson 1988 sees the Homeric Odyssey as the major model for Orestes; the end thus brings the play back to the human/political level, even as the Odyssey ends not with the spirits of the dead but with their living relatives. Electra’s final words (1483-90) imply that Aegisthus’ body should be cast out for the birds (but see Segal 1966: 521 n. 60) ὡς ἐμοὶ τόδ’ ἀν κακῶν μόνον γένοιτο τῶν πάλαι λυτήριον. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 230 n. 45 expresses surprise that “he, the writer of Ajax and Antigone, meant to suggest what the scholiast thought he did,” while R.D. Griffith 1998: 232 deems exposure of the dead “a chronic Sophoclean obsession.” There is some ambiguity in Sophocles’ expression, where κακῶν may be taken as partitive genitive or with τῶν πάλαι. That “release” from evils can only be gotten from committing a like outrage against Aegisthus’ body (exposure to the birds in exchange for maschalismos) perhaps emphasizes that Electra is caught up in a world governed by vengeful, chthonic χάρις.

145 Cairns 1993: 241-9, with particular attention to the agon, notes the opportunism of both Electra’s and Clytemnestra’s positions (p. 249): “Both justify conduct which is aischron in terms of dikē.”
simply cannot know whether the gods approve or not, or which gods might approve, or what they
might do as a result, or whether they can do anything as a result, or whether they even exist. We
can only perceive them through the arguments and justifications of other, flawed humans. 147

This religious agnosticism is not what many have come to expect from Sophoclean
drama, which is supposed to shroud superhuman powers in mystery (rather than removing them
altogether) and create heroes who are great, admirable, or even god-like. A provocative religious
stance and a critical eye for human conduct are features more often associated with Euripidean
tragedy, especially that of the 410s, 148 when Sophocles’ play was likely to have been produced.
If Sophocles was drawing on a specific Euripidean source, rather than his general attitude of
skepticism, a strong candidate is Euripides’ own Electra. Neither Electra nor Orestes in this play
has found many sympathetic readers, the former characteristically consumed by hate but with an
added streak of spiteful pettiness, the latter upright and courageous at only the most superficial
level. Both are treacherous: Electra baits Clytemnestra into the house with the promise of
seeing her new grandchild, while Orestes murders Aegisthus by striking him in the back at a
sacrifice. The sudden remorse of both characters after the matricide, together with the
unenviable fates predicted for each after the action of the play, leaves little doubt about how we

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146 Budelmann 2000: 181-2 remarks that “in the final scene of Electra neither divine command nor divine
punishment is prominent. Critics and spectators have to import both or either, and they are not told which.”

147 Cf. Kitzinger 1991: 317 (on the agon): “the archaic justification of blood vengeance becomes inadequate if
divorced from an examination of motive and character; the question of justice is removed from the sphere of a
divinely sanctioned and unchallengeable system to a context limited by the capabilities of human thought, feeling,
and language.” Other critics, like Kitzinger, have argued that there is a sense of divine justice that nevertheless
remains beyond the reach of the human characters. My argument is slightly different in that I want to remove any
certainty of “divine justice” altogether. It is not that divine justice exists and we cannot grasp it; rather, it may or
may not exist and we cannot know even that much. If so, then a pessimistic reading of the play would most
profitably begin not with divine will but with Electra’s self-destruction and degeneration into a Clytemnestra-like
figure (e.g. Friis Johansen 1964, Segal 1966, Blundell 1989: 149-83).

148 Similarly to Soph. El., Ion more explicitly demonstrates the wrongheadedness of some human beliefs about
the gods; cf. Meltzer 2006: 146-87.
are to understand this whole affair. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are not completely whitewashed, but their murders (especially Clytemnestra’s) are portrayed as unjustified and unnatural.

But if Electra and Orestes are to be condemned in Euripides’ play, Apollo does not come out much better. He is blamed for the killing of Clytemnestra and his oracle called “unwise” (1302) by one who should know, the deified Castor. A god himself, Castor speaks as an authoritative figure in this play, and his criticism of Apollo is to be taken seriously. Sophocles’ *Electra* has no such authoritative figure, and that is what enables him to create an atmosphere of agnosticism even while the individual characters profess strong beliefs in one religious system or another. The provocativeness of Sophocles’ position lies in the denial of divine influence in human affairs, which in turn strips his human characters of legitimate divine justification for their actions and exposes them to the audience’s criticism. Euripides’ portrayal of the divine world also exposes his human characters to criticism, though in a different way: his extremely negative characterization of Electra and Orestes before the murders and their overwhelming remorse afterward suggest the inherent immorality of the matricide, which is confirmed by Castor’s denunciation of Apollo. In other words, Electra and Orestes should have known better than to put aside their own sense of morality in obedience to the “unwise” instructions of such an unreliable arbiter of justice as Apollo. But Euripides’ approach, both here and in many of his other plays, is perhaps less provocative than Sophocles’ insofar as he never questions the gods’ existence. Apollo may be foolish, Orestes may have been foolish to listen to him, but that oracle does stem from a real divine source, and it has a real effect in the world of men. Castor validates to some extent a negative view of the gods, but his very presence on stage lends them a more substantial reality than they have in Sophocles’ *Electra*. 
If these brief conjectures are correct, then Sophocles’ treatment of men and gods in *Electra* is a product of “extreme dramatic interaction.” The play is a thorough reworking of both Aeschylus’ divine system in *Choephoroi* and Euripides’ critical skepticism in *Electra*; both earlier plays are important parts of Sophocles’ immediate dramatic context, but in neither case does he straightforwardly imitate or contest the other poets’ ideas. The Sophoclean *Electra* combines central ideas and themes of both plays to produce an original version of the myth and a dramatic experience that is both ambiguous and provocative.
Sophocles Ποιητής and the Art of Dramatic Composition

The last chapter described a particular aspect of Sophocles’ dramatic strategy in *Electra* as a response to Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*; the difficulties of dating (and limitations of space) kept us from a thorough study of the relationship between the Sophoclean and Euripidean *Electras*, but we were able to conclude broadly that both poets show a commonality of interest in their skepticism toward the gods and their pessimistic view of human justice. In this chapter, we move on to Sophocles’ next play, *Philoctetes*, and his creative relationship with Euripides. We will study *Philoctetes* as a reaction to, and a source of further inspiration for, Euripides’ dramatic experimentation near the end of the fifth century.

Where the last chapter sought to relate *Electra* to an old but influential play that treated the same myth, this chapter deals with a series of plays that were produced within the same time period – *Helen* (412 B.C.), *Philoctetes* (409), and *Orestes* (408) – and use similar dramatic techniques prominently and thematically. This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of the relationship among these plays but merely examines one way in which Sophocles and Euripides engaged with one another in this period and within this range of ideas and dramatic strategies. But it is meant to describe, in miniature, the kind of exchange that must have driven the evolution of Attic tragedy throughout the fifth century, with many playwrights
constantly reacting to each other and contributing their own ideas and innovations to the pool of available material.

Simply put, this chapter attempts to place Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* in its immediate dramatic context as a part of late-fifth-century tragedy (represented overwhelmingly by Euripides), and then to show how Euripides’ *Orestes* belongs to a context comprising both recent Euripidean tragedy and *Philoctetes*. Since *Philoctetes* is securely dated to 409 B.C., it is unproblematic in general to group it with other plays of the late fifth century. But in what sense does Sophocles’ play belong to this period and this context in terms of its themes and dramatic conception? *Philoctetes* has often seemed exceptional among extant Sophoclean tragedies for various reasons (e.g. the *deus ex machina* and happy ending); but while it has been common to attribute such features generally to Euripidean influence, this is generally done in passing and without argument.\(^1\) I hope to fill that gap here by describing more specifically both the Euripidean context of *Philoctetes* and some particular ways in which Sophocles exploited it.

The Euripidean context consists primarily of his “romances,” by which I mean *Ion*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, and *Helen*.\(^2\) I use this particular term because it seems to me the best one for bringing out some of what is distinctive about this group of plays without being as loaded as labels like “melodrama” or “tragicomedy.” Though these plays have a generally lighter tone and a spirit of fantasy and adventure that we do not really find elsewhere, my purpose here is not to discuss their genre but to note that, by virtue of their similarity of tone and other elements such as structure and theme, they represent a distinctive type of tragedy. While

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\(^1\) E.g. Ferguson 1972: 209. Craik 1979 represents a partial exception in that she describes *Phil.* as a “melodrama” of the type written chiefly by Euripides, but her central aim is not to relate *Phil.* closely to late Euripides, but to explain problematic features of the play (e.g. the prophecy of Helenus) as products of melodramatic rather than tragic intent.

\(^2\) There is no reason not to include *Andromeda* in this group, but it is a difficult play to use in studies like this one for the practical reason that so little of it survives beyond the opening scenes.
Wright’s term “escape-tragedy” is attractive for its generic neutrality, he applies it only to *Iphigenia, Helen, and Andromeda*, which he thinks were produced together as a trilogy. But *Ion* is usually considered to be essentially the same type of play as the other three (whether or not any of them were produced together), and its structural innovations are clearly relevant to *Philoctetes*.³

As a type, Euripides’ romances are set in an Odyssean world of chance, benevolent gods, and happy endings. They typically portray a Greek protagonist’s attempt to escape from a barbarian or otherwise marginal land back to her (the escapee is usually female) own people. A rescuer, related to her either by blood or by marriage,⁴ duly arrives and a recognition scene ensues. After the two have been reunited, they devise a plan of escape (usually termed a *mechanema⁵*) which requires the heroine to dupe the barbarian king so that the Greeks can get away. Finally, a *deus* appears *ex machina* to prevent the barbarian king from pursuing the fleeing Greeks or harming those who remain behind, and the play ends happily. This basic pattern is followed almost formulaically in *Helen* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, and the lost *Andromeda* probably looked similar. The structure of *Ion*, as has been noted by Friedrich Solmsen,⁶ stands apart from the other three in its arrangement of these elements and so also in its overall effect. Most importantly, the recognition in the first episode fails, and the *mechanema*, rather than being a conspiracy between reunited relatives to deceive an oppressor, is Creusa’s attempt to kill Ion. Ion and Creusa must then be prevented from killing each other by various

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³ See esp. Levett 2004 on this topic.

⁴ In *Andromeda*, Perseus is not initially related to the escapee, though by all appearances Andromeda betroths herself to him in an early scene (see Gibert 1999/2000, CCG).

⁵ On the *mechanema*, see esp. Solmsen 1932.

⁶ Solmsen 1934.
Apolline interventions (a dove, the Pythia) until they finally recognize each other at the very end of the play and Athena appears ex machina to confirm Ion’s birthright and discourage him from asking embarrassing questions of the Delphic oracle. Though the theme of escape may be found in Ion’s progression from anonymous slavery to Athenian nobility, this play seems more concerned with the relationships and impulsiveness of the human characters and their respective evaluations of Apollo’s behavior than in the themes of barbarism, isolation, deception, and escape that are so prominent in Helen, Iphigenia, and Andromeda.

A brief sketch of Philoctetes reveals a similar pattern, though in respect to some details, it almost appears to be an inversion of the Euripidean formula. Philoctetes shares with Ion a delayed recognition and a mechanema deployed against one of the protagonists instead of a barbarian oppressor. The title character must be rescued from a desert island and brought back to rejoin his own people; two Greeks (standing in an ersatz father-son relationship) conspire to deceive a barbaric and potentially dangerous third party in order to bring about that rescue. A deus appears at the end to reveal the divine plan, predict future events, and generally send the escapee on his way. That the escapee turns out to be unwilling to leave and that he himself is the one who must be deceived are recognizable inversions of Euripidean technique and invest the play with its own unique dynamics. Insofar as the action of Philoctetes is built from the same elements as the romances, its most distinctive feature in this context is a massive extension of the mechanema, which is usually limited to one half of the play or less in Euripides.

These similarities in structure suggest that Philoctetes was conceived as a Sophoclean variation on this Euripidean type of play. But in order to situate Philoctetes in its immediate

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dramatic context, we must look at it from both angles, as an adaptation of recent material and as a source of further inspiration – but here we encounter another gap in the scholarship, which has linked this play to recent Euripidean work and to Orestes, but not to both at once. Orestes, too, is often grouped broadly with other late Euripidean plays considered to be “untragic,” though it is seldom related to the rest of late Euripides on the level of detailed interpretation. It is more often seen as a product of Sophoclean influence but usually as something like a parody of Philoctetes: thus Apollo’s epiphany at the end, for instance, becomes a deliberately absurd caricature of Heracles’ reversal of the action in the previous play. While this reading is certainly compelling on one level, it is important to beware of oversimplifying Euripides’ use of Sophoclean material and to remember what kind of drama Euripides was writing before Philoctetes was produced. This chapter attempts to show how both Euripidean and Sophoclean work prepares the way for Orestes, at least in terms of one nexus of themes and techniques.

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8 E.g. Dietrich 1891 (on the “sleep scenes”), Spira 1960 (including discussion of the deus in Phil. and Or.), Boulter 1962 (on the “savagery” of Orestes and Philoctetes), Parry 1969: 347 (on the isolation of Philoctetes and Orestes), Fuqua 1976 (on the use of myth and mythical paradigms in Phil. and Or.), Falkner 1983 (on the attitude toward nature and education in Phil. and Or.), Hoppin 1990: 151 (suggesting that the structure of the end of Phil. “varies Euripides’ practice in Electra and Helen but does Euripides one better”), Garner 1990: 149-51 (who surveys brief allusions to Phil. in Or.), Konstan 2000 (on pity and φιλία in Phil. and Or.), Levett 2004 (on dramatic technique in Ion and Phil.). Shucard 1973 is interested only in late Sophocles (here El. and Phil.). Greengard 1987: 34-49 describes Phil. as a “romance,” but with reference to Hom. Od. rather than Euripides (though she does (pp. 52-3) find similar “comic elements” in Phil. as in other late tragedies).

9 E.g. Porter 1994: 54-67 compares Or. to a series of Euripidean plays in terms of “the psychopathology of moral outrage,” Holzhausen 2003 compares Or. and Bacch. as plays of revenge, and Wright 2006 discusses Or. as a “sequel” to Hel.

10 E.g. Falkner 1983: 290-2, who also has a catalogue of similarities between the two plays; cf. Willink 1986: lvi n. 92 and Zeitlin 1980: 54-5. Burnett 1998: 247-72 views Or. as a parody of tragic convention. For ancient and modern criticism of Or., see Porter 1994: 1-44. It is highly likely that Or. was influenced by Phil., since these two plays were produced in consecutive years and treat many of the same themes (e.g. savagery, illness, isolation and reintegration, education and coming of age); see n. 8 above. Fuqua 1976: 66 (who constructs a thorough argument for Sophoclean influence on Euripides in terms of heroic paradigms), pointing to the dates of Phil. and Or., says, “Consequently, I believe that, if the plays can be shown to deal with some of the same specific isuses and employ similar dramatic techniques and patterns of action, the possibility of influence is so strong that the burden of proof rests upon those who would argue that Sophocles’ play did not influence Euripides.”
So it seems safe to say that Philoctetes has close ties both to the romances and to Orestes; we will explore these plays sequentially with a view specifically to dramatic self-consciousness. In general, dramatic self-consciousness is widely discernible in the plays belonging to this period. The most famous example may be the recognition scene in Euripides’ Electra (487-584), which is an explicit commentary not only on the parallel scene in Aeschylus’ Choephoroi but also on the recognition as a type of scene that different playwrights choose to fashion in different ways; the narratologists would say that this scene in Electra betrays the presence of an author who chooses among alternative methods of composition. Similar, if briefer, examples occur in Phoenissae (751-2, Eteocles’ comment that it would take too long to list all seven warriors) and Helen (1056, Menelaus’ remark that faking one’s own death in a tragedy is nothing new). Perhaps the most versatile type of dramatic self-consciousness is the so-called “play within a play,” which makes the spectators aware that they are watching theater and prompts reflection on dramatic production and the people involved in it (poet, actors, and spectators) as well as the meaning and value of drama itself.

Throughout this chapter, I will use the term “metadrama” rather than “metatheater” because the latter tends to be used of explicit reference to theatricality (with the characters often displaying an awareness of being in a play), while what I have in mind here is more a matter of framing the action in such a way that an attentive spectator could appreciate its implications for a discourse on drama and performance; the characters themselves do not have to be conscious that they are enacting a performance. Falkner 1998: 29-33 observes a distinction between different “modes” of audience experience (mimetic, synthetic, thematic), and though his terms are different, his discussion is very much in line with my own.

E.g. Roberts 1989: 162 sees it as characteristic of Euripides’ late plays that they “tend to suggest a set of competing stories, only one of which the poet has chosen to write.” See also Marshall 1999/2000, Torrance 2011 for the metadrama in this scene.

Throughout this chapter, I will be paying particular attention to the poets’ thoughts about actors and acting. As the poets were probably responding in part to the increasing prominence and popularity of actors at the end of the fifth century, it is appropriate that we briefly consider some of the evidence for the development of the acting profession at the end of the century.

In the early fifth century, poets are said to have acted in their own plays and regularly employed the same actors, which suggests that there was little distinction in this period between the actors and the performance itself; actors were just another part of the poet’s toolkit. The beginning of a conceptual separation of poet and actor is marked by the poets’ complete withdrawal from acting sometime in the mid-fifth century. Around the same time, or perhaps a little later, official contests for the actors were established alongside the dramatic competitions at both the Lenaea and the Dionysia. The institution of histrionic competition reflected a growing popular interest in actors and their art, as well as motivating them to specialize and become more and more skilled. The gap that had been opening between poets and actors was thus formalized as their accomplishments began to be celebrated separately. However, on most occasions the winning actor and the winning poet must have come from the same dramatic team, so while poet and actor were growing farther apart conceptually, their practical experiences in competitive performances remained quite similar. But the separation had become complete by 418 B.C., when the tragic actor Callipides won the histrionic competition even though his poet lost the

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15 Sophocles is said to have been the first to stop acting because of the weakness of his voice. Vit.Soph. (4) describes his retirement from acting as one of his innovations, and the phrasing (πρῶτον μὲν καταλύσας τὴν ὑπόκρισιν τοῦ ποιητοῦ διὰ τὴν ἰδίαν μικροφωνίαν (πάλαι γάρ καὶ ο ποιητῆς ὑπεκρίνατο αὐτός)) also suggests that Sophocles’ personal choice not to act became the norm for poets generally.

16 The comic actors’ contest at the Dionysia is typically downgraded to the late fourth century on the basis of inscriptive evidence.
dramatic competition;\(^{17}\) ten years later, an actor named Hegelochus single-handedly “ruined” Euripides’ “cleverest” play.\(^ {18}\) Such events illustrate the professional independence of the actor, who did not need the poet as much as the poet needed him: a good poet with a bad actor could not win, but a good actor with a bad poet could. Though the poets and actors never competed against each other formally, the poets in the last decades of the fifth century were forced to recognize the actors’ contributions to a successful performance and the necessity of finding ways to work with them effectively.

In this same period, Old Comedy extended its mockery of tragedy to the actors as well as the plays,\(^ {19}\) and, as we will see, late tragedy abounds in metadrama demonstrating the poets’ interest in the art of dramatic production as a whole and especially in the actor; while earlier tragedy (such as the opening of Sophocles’ *Ajax*) is occasionally metadramatic the emphasis is on the figures of playwright and spectator rather than the actor,\(^ {20}\) who enters the conversation in a central way in the 410s. Finally, a glance ahead at the fourth century shows the actors becoming decidedly more popular than the playwrights (many of whom reproduced old plays

\(^{17}\) IG ii\(^2\) 2319. The establishment of the “three-actor rule” must have happened shortly thereafter. On the number of actors in comedy and tragedy, see *DFA* 135-8. Regulation of actors is usually seen as a means of achieving equity for contestants by giving the judges a way to compare apples to apples, so to speak (Csapo & Slater 1994: 222) – though it would have a greater effect on the poets’ competition than the actors’, since only protagonists competed against each other; cf. Sifakis 1995.

\(^{18}\) Thus Strattis fr. 1 on Hegelochus’ mispronunciation of Eur. *Or.* 279; Strattis fr. 63, Ar. *Ran.* 302-4, and Sannyrion fr. 8 also capitalize on Hegelochus’ faux pas. As Slater 1990: 391 remarks, “[i]f Aristophanes can have such fun at their expense, actors must now have something of the same public recognition and presence as the other public figures he attacks.”

\(^{19}\) A list of actors mocked in comedy can be found in Sommerstein 1996c: 349-50.

\(^{20}\) In the prologue of Soph. *Aj.*, Athena stages a play for her internal spectator, Odysseus; Ajax is not treated as an actor so much as a puppet. Easterling 1993: 81-3 gives a brief account of the metadrama in this scene. Scenes of deception are also not usually cast in a dramatically self-conscious way in earlier tragedy. For instance, the deception in Aesch. *Cho.* (Orestes’ entry into the palace) does not demand to be read as a play within a play, since there is no emphasis on who directs the plot, how the actor fills his role, or what is required to make his performance successful. The most Aeschylus does in this respect is have Orestes declare that he will speak in a Phocian dialect (564), which of course real tragic actors did not do.
instead of writing their own) and even reaching “superstar” status.\footnote{21 See e.g. Arist. \textit{Rhet.} 1403b33. The frequency of reperformances of old tragedy in the fourth century provided the audience with an opportunity to compare different actors’ renditions of the same characters and scenes, thus intensifying the competition among actors and allowing the audience to be more discerning in their judgments of histrionic talent; cf. Slater 1990.} Though this phenomenon surely did not occur before the fourth century, most agree that its roots belong to the end of the fifth century.

While \textit{Philoctetes} belongs broadly to the collection of self-conscious tragedies in this period, it is reasonable to study it most closely (at least in this context) with a Euripidean version of a play within a play; \textit{Helen} and the romances provide the closest analogies.

Of the romances, \textit{Helen} and \textit{Iphigenia among the Taurians} have the best examples of a play within a play. Since the \textit{mechanema} of \textit{Ion} is mean to kill rather than deceive, it is less suitable for such treatment. Even in this play, however, Euripides makes a gesture that reminds his audience of his play’s dramatic status: after delivering his prologue speech, Hermes ducks into the laurels so that he too can observe the action about to take place on stage (76-7).\footnote{22 Significantly, Hermes intends to learn τὸ κρανθέν; the aorist indicates something already accomplished – either Apollo’s prediction or the play itself (which has also been engineered by Apollo); I owe this point to John Gibert. For other types of self-referentiality in \textit{Ion}, see T. Cole 1997, S. Cole 2008.} But little more attention is given to the role of poet, actors, or spectators. Apollo, the putative author of the action, remains absent even when the play fails to conform to his intended script.\footnote{23 Easterling 1993 asks what it contributes to a play actually to bring gods on stage (instead of allowing them to float in the background, as in Soph. \textit{OT}) and suggests that a) they enable the audience to think about abstract ideas more concretely, and b) they draw attention to the play as a play insofar as their control over the action parallels the poet’s control over the plot. I am generally sympathetic to the argument, though I question whether the audience would find metadramatic connotations in every prologue or epilogue epiphany. Apollo in Eur. \textit{Alc.} hardly seems in control of events, and I have suggested that Hermes in Eur. \textit{Ion} is an internal spectator rather than a poet. Even if we grant that these two are exceptions to the rule, I would argue that since the audience was familiar with the \textit{deus} as a dramatic convention, they would be unlikely to link a god’s appearance with the concept of poetic composition without prompting.}

In \textit{Iphigenia among the Taurians}, Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades hatch a plot to deceive Thoas and escape from his barbarian land. Iphigenia takes the lead in laying out a workable
script and assigning the proper roles to Orestes and Pylades (who, it turns out, are not to have any lines at all). Iphigenia herself then exchanges the role of playwright for that of protagonist as she uses her office of priestess, the statue of Artemis, and a plausible story about purifying the matricides to convince Thoas to let them go down to the shore. Iphigenia’s performance cleverly exploits her and her fellow actors’ preexisting situation (she is a sacrificial priestess; they are polluted matricides) as well as their props and costumes (the statue of Artemis, the prisoners’ chains). Thoas in turn is cast as an internal spectator to Iphigenia’s performance, and it is noteworthy that he not only listens closely to what she tells him but also works to find meaning in it – as a spectator of tragedy is also expected to do. His interpretation lends the necessary meaning to her performance, which therefore comes off successfully.

In Helen, the female lead again fills the part of playwright in devising a plot, arranging costumes, and instructing her actor (Menelaus) in the role he is to play. Like Iphigenia, she then becomes her own protagonist, supported by Menelaus’ lesser histrionic talent. This sequence focuses especially on the significance of different costumes and their importance to the success of a dramatic performance: the actors perform better – and the internal spectators (Theoclymenus and the Egyptians) are more easily impressed – when they have costumes suitable to their standing and self-image. The effect, in Helen as well as Iphigenia, of casting a deception as a dramatic performance catered to a spectator who interprets verbal and visual clues

\[24\] See Burnett 1971: 59-61 for Iphigenia’s manipulation of real circumstances for the sake of deception.

\[25\] Though it must be noted that Iphigenia proposes adding chains Orestes’ and Pylades’ costumes during the deception (when the two men are still inside the temple).

\[26\] E.g. IT 1168, 1170, 1176, 1182, 1184, 1186, 1200, 1210, 1213, 1216, 1218.
as he should is to raise the question of drama’s moral and epistemological status: is all drama deceptive? is it harmful or beneficial?²⁷

_Helen_ has the most explicit play within a play, the most straightforward in terms of identifying characters with poet, actor, and spectator, and our main discussion will therefore begin with a brief analysis of that play in order to establish a starting point for comparison with _Philoctetes_ and eventually _Orestes_. In using _Helen_, I do not mean to suggest that it was Sophocles’ sole source in composing _Philoctetes_, nor even that it was necessarily a source. It seems more likely that Sophocles, having observed several of Euripides’ recent plays and found something of interest in them, decided to try his hand at writing the same type of play.²⁸ To the extent that Sophocles drew on specific Euripidean tragedies in _Philoctetes_, he could have used any or all of the romances, or even other plays of this period, such as _Electra_ and _Phoenissae_. Since space does not permit a complete treatment of how all of these plays may have influenced _Philoctetes_ (though reference will be made to them where appropriate), we will start with _Helen_, which contains a well-developed play within a play with features that are both symptomatic of the drama of that period and analogous to what we will see in _Philoctetes_. We will then proceed through _Philoctetes_ and _Orestes._²⁹

As we examine each of our three tragedies in the rest of this chapter, we will be attuned to how each play portrays the roles of poet, actor, and spectator, how these key members of the

²⁷ Cf. Gorgias fr. 23 D-K on the benefits of being deceived by drama: ὅ τ’ ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος. Falkner 1998: 43-6 has good discussion of this passage and its relevance to _Phil_. Segal 1982: 215-71 (reprinted in a shorter version in Segal 1985: 156-73) gives a reading of _Bacch_ that stresses drama’s ability to communicate truth through illusion or to reduce reality to an illusion.

²⁸ This seems to be the assumption of Craik 1979, as well as Levett 2004.

²⁹ Eur. _IA_ and _Bacch._ also contain notable bits of metadrama. Though the scope and aims of this chapter do not allow for full discussion of these plays, I will offer a few remarks in the conclusion.
theater are seen to interact with each other, and how all of this is communicated to the audience; we will be concerned with what the poets have to say about the demands of composing versus acting a play, as well as the relation between role-playing and the actor’s moral character. We will also be sure to observe what elements are considered important for a successful dramatic performance and what overall attitude each play takes toward drama as an illusory art. The late fifth century was a time of explicit experimentation, and comic poets like Aristophanes had long been questioning what makes for “good” tragedy, comedy, or melodrama. It is perhaps no accident that the three plays studied in this chapter present a remarkable variety of tone: the romances seem to be generally light-hearted and even amusing, while Philoctetes is more serious and Orestes simultaneously grim and absurd. What (we might ask) does an atmosphere of fantasy, tragedy, or absurdity add to a metadramatic discussion of performance? How does the tone of the play color its presentation and assessment of the value of drama – or vice versa?

**Helen: Costume, Deception, and the Dramatic Illusion**

*Helen* presents us with a “play within a play” wherein each point of the triangle (poet, actor, spectator) is represented by one of the characters (Helen, Menelaus, and Theoclymenus, respectively). As often, the miniature play is built around the *mechanema* – in this case, Helen’s and Menelaus’ plot to escape from Egypt and their execution of that plot, which caters specifically to the internal spectator and requires him to interpret his dramatic experience. Euripides’ metadramatic interest in these scenes is primarily in exploring what elements are necessary for a successful performance, such as originality, plausibility, proper costume, and obedience to the poet’s directions. While this miniature play is a fairly straightforward discourse

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30 See Ar. *Thesm.* (esp. Agathon’s description of dramatic composition, 101-72) and the agon in *Ran.*
on dramatic performance and what is required for success, it does link provocatively with other central concerns of the play such as appearance versus reality and knowledge versus illusion: the audience is asked to consider the implications of a literal “dramatic illusion.”

When the Greeks set to planning their escape, Menelaus is the first to suggest several strategies (1035-48). All are shown to be unworkable, so Helen takes over the task of devising a μηχανὴ σωτηρίας (1034) and instructs Menelaus in the part he is to play in the deception. Her role as director of the scheme is evident not only in the dynamic of the conversation, where she continually tells Menelaus what to do and responds competently to his concerns (1049-86), but also in her brief assessment of what is at stake for her personally (1091-2):

> ἢ γὰρ θανεῖν δεῖ μ’, ἢν ἅλῳ τεχνωμένη, ἢ πατρίδα τ’ ἐλθεῖν καὶ σὸν ἐκσῶσαι δέμας.

Either I must die if my tricks are discovered, or return to my fatherland and save your life.

She is the one who devises the plot (τεχνωμένη), she is the one who will save Menelaus, and she is the one who will suffer the consequences of success or failure (escape or death). Menelaus has no useful ideas of his own and must rely on Helen’s clear-sightedness, both in formulating the mechanema and in executing it.31

But of course both characters have a role to play in the deception, and it is fitting that Helen fills the function of lead actor as well as playwright/director.32 While she herself dons a new costume of black robes, cut hair, and torn cheeks, she makes good use of Menelaus’ current sorry state by inventing the story that he is a sailor who has lost his ship in a wreck (as he

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31 Like Helen, Iphigenia is the one to devise an original (καινόν, 1029) and workable plan after rejecting two or Orestes’ proposals. As Helen does for Menelaus, Iphigenia continues to instruct Orestes with respect to the plot (1031-51) and to direct the other actors’ movements on stage (1079-80, 1204, 1206-10, 1217-8).

32 We might compare Iphigenia, who conceives the plan and does all of the talking in Eur. IT.
actually is) and the only surviving follower of...himself.\(^{33}\) He agrees to the plan with what many have seen as a particularly overt bit of self-consciousness (1050-6), perhaps referring to Orestes’ rather similar plan to report his own death in the Sophoclean \textit{Electra} or perhaps to the conventions of myth and tragedy more generally.\(^ {34}\)

The performance itself begins when Theoclymenus, the primary internal spectator,\(^ {35}\) returns to the palace at line 1165; Helen again takes the lead. She delivers a prologue of sorts, introducing the ragged Greek “sailor” and reporting the news of Menelaus’ death. She is responsible for setting the scene, as it were – narrating the necessary backstory, explaining her new costume, and even covering Menelaus’ first few lines. She is also the one responsible for turning the spotlight over to Menelaus (1249); if it had been left up to him, he might not have gotten to deliver his lines!

The fourth episode is taken up with final preparations for the “funeral rites” of Menelaus. Helen’s feigned mourning continues to be effective – almost ruinously so, in fact, as Theoclymenus tries to prevent her from attend the funeral rites personally for fear that she might jump in the sea and drown herself (1395-8). Theoclymenus, hearing only what he wants to hear – that Menelaus has died and Helen will marry him – completely swallows their performance, even donating a new ship and anything else they ask for. Menelaus is now wearing another costume, one that finally equips him like a hero out of the \textit{Iliad} and prepares him for his final

\(^{33}\) Cf. \textit{IT} 1033-4, where Iphigenia suggests using Orestes’ real status as a murderer from Argos in their deception and he replies \textit{χρῆσαι κακοῖσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς, εἰ κερδανεῖς}.

\(^{34}\) See Allan 2008 \textit{ad loc.} (esp. 1055-6n.) for the statement’s connection to \textit{Electra} and to tragic plots in general. Burnett 1971: 92-3 sees this moment as a turning point for Menelaus, the moment when he starts to become a “credible” tragic figure.

\(^{35}\) The chorus might seem a more natural candidate for “internal spectator,” but in \textit{Hel.} (as in \textit{IT}, \textit{Phil.}, and \textit{Or.}), they are on the same side as the plotters and are therefore not in a position to interpret what they say and wear. Indeed, the chorus of \textit{Phil.} is more of a collective internal deuteragonist to Neoptolemus’ protagonist.
performance off stage on board the Egyptian ship. When the messenger arrives to describe how the Greeks took over the ship and escaped, he emphasizes the Greeks’ histrionic talent: Helen weeps convincingly for a man who is standing by her side (1527-9), Menelaus himself displays δόλιον οἴκτων (1542), and the Greek sailors follow suit by ἐκβαλόντες δάκρυα ποιητῷ τρόπῳ (1547).

The play is an extended meditation on the power of performance, disguise, and the illusory nature of drama. The internal audience of this play within a play (Theoclymenus and the Egyptians) is literally deceived by the dramatic illusion, and the Greeks’ successful performance relies in large part on the quality of their costumes. Though many other plays involve some sort of deception, it is less common for characters actually to change their costumes, as Helen does here. Moreover, she is concerned not only with her own dress and its effect on Theoclymenus but also Menelaus’ physical appearance. In fact, costume turns out to be a significant factor in determining how well Menelaus plays his role. I have already noted that Helen is generally the brains of the operation; this is manifest in her ability to devise a plan of escape, outfit herself in an appropriate costume and play a variety of roles as the situation warrants (whether it be mourning widow, eager bride-to-be, or even a sort of military leader on board the ship). But Menelaus is not so quick-witted, and he seems to have trouble playing his assigned roles without the right costume. In his initial appearance on stage, he tries to play the role of war hero and conqueror of Troy – but he looks like (and is) a shipwrecked sailor, and his role-playing fails to have the desired effect on either the old woman (who is unimpressed by his noble birth) or Helen

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36 These lines may be inspired by Electra’s lament over the empty urn as Orestes stands by (Soph. El. 1126-73); Allan 2008: 1528n. remarks that “the audience can appreciate H.’s skilled performance of the role of mourning wife.”

37 For Bacch., in which Pentheus not only changes his costume but takes the time to adjust it on stage under Dionysus’ direction, see below, pp. 152-5.
herself (who thinks that he is one of Theoclymenus’ henchmen). He is more successful when he actually plays the part of a shipwrecked sailor and his own subordinate (while also playing second fiddle to Helen); and only when his rags have been replaced with regal finery does he effectively portray a war hero and lead his followers in a rout of the Egyptian sailors.

Though Theoclymenus’ role as internal spectator of Helen’s and Menelaus’ performance receives less attention than the performance itself, it is noteworthy that he, like any good spectator of tragedy, watches and listens to the performance closely and uses the clues he is given to draw conclusions about the action.\(^{38}\) When he first arrives (1165), he immediately notices Helen’s new costume of mourning garb and deduces that she has either had an ill-omened dream or else received bad news from home (1184-92);\(^{39}\) without even hearing a word, he uses Helen’s outfit to prepare himself for the rest of her performance. Of course, the whole point of Helen’s new costume is to catch Theoclymenus’ attention and make him suspect that something fateful has happened; but this is also essentially the purpose of all dramatic costumes: to help the audience identify the characters and their situations, even before any lines have been spoken. So when Euripides has Helen and Menelaus enact a deceptive mechanema that is also cast as a dramatic performance and that succeeds in part because of the internal spectator’s willingness to accept the dramatic premise and interpret visual clues, he is questioning the fundamental epistemological status of all drama. Scholars nowadays generally make a point of

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\(^{38}\) Thoas’ response to Iphigenia’s mechanema (1153-1233) is comparable, if much more thorough. Most of the deceptive information actually comes from him rather than her, as he uses her status as sacrificial priestess to draw conclusions about her intentions. It should be noted, of course, that real spectators of drama cannot influence or participate in the dramatic action as Thoas and Theoclymenus can, but the way the two barbarians kings respond to performances by interpreting what they see and hear is fundamentally similar to how dramatic audiences are expected to respond.

\(^{39}\) Euripides pointedly emphasizes the effectiveness of Helen’s and Menelaus’ disguises by the use of language with double meaning (e.g. 1201, 1205, 1288-9, with Allan 2008 ad locc.).
qualifying the term “dramatic illusion” or avoiding it altogether on the grounds that it is strictly inaccurate.\textsuperscript{40} everyone in the audience knew that he was watching a play, and no one was really deceived into thinking that what he saw was real. But the nature of reality, the limits of human perception, and the power of illusion were important topics for the Greeks of the late fifth century and feature especially prominently in Euripides’ romances.

The importance of these themes to \textit{Helen} is evident from the very beginning, in the bipartite prologue.\textsuperscript{41} First, Helen explains, in almost omniscient fashion,\textsuperscript{42} how the gods created a phantom look-alike of Helen herself and transported her to Egypt while the phantom went to Troy; now all of the Greek world is operating under a false impression of Helen’s character and behavior. The point is then illustrated concretely when, in neat counterpoint to Helen’s opening speech about the phantom, which prepared the audience for a play of illusion and visual confusion, Teucer arrives and encounters Helen before the palace. He immediately recognizes Helen but just as immediately dismisses that recognition as fallacious (72-7, 80-2). He knows Helen by sight, but he also “knows” that she was dragged away from Troy by her hair (116) and therefore cannot be in Egypt. His experiences at Troy interfere with his current visual experience so that he simultaneously recognizes Helen by her appearance and dissociates her from the Helen he thinks he knows. This contradiction is highlighted not only in the action of the scene but also in the special emphasis laid on words for seeing and knowing, especially in lines 116-22:

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{41} This is a common format for Euripidean prologues. On Euripidean beginnings, see Roberts 2005: 136-42. Burnett 1971: 77-8 notes the self-conscious quality of Helen’s song at 164-78 and suggests (p. 78) that the audience is “invited to think about the poet and the process of composition that lies behind the danced and costumed play.”

\textsuperscript{42} For Helen’s omniscience in this prologue, see Segal 1992: 89-90.
\end{footnotesize}
Teu. Menelaus dragged her by the hair and led her off.
Hel. Did you see the poor creature? Or do you speak at second hand?
Teu. I saw her with my eyes no less than I see you.
Hel. Take care: you might have been under some divinely sent illusion.
Teu. Speak of some other subject: no more of her.
Hel. Are you so convinced that your impression is right?
Teu. I saw her with my eyes. And my mind also sees.

Teucer’s knowledge or ignorance here has little bearing on the progress of the plot; he exists to introduce in vivid fashion the theme of appearance versus reality, to report the rumor of Menelaus’ death, and to motivate Helen’s departure into the palace midway through the first episode, all of which is accomplished whether he knows to whom he is speaking or not.

This prologue also establishes the audience’s position relative to the dramatic action. As often in Greek tragedy, that position is one of superior knowledge. Helen’s prologue speech puts them in possession of information they will need to interpret and appreciate the rest of the play; that Helen almost immediately forgets some of the most important details (such as Hermes’ guarantee that she and Menelaus will return safely to Sparta (56-8)) only emphasizes her human short-sightedness and creates a sense of distance between audience and characters. From their privileged epistemological position the spectators can witness Helen’s unhappiness without

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43 See Dale 1967 and Allan 2008 ad loc. for arguments for and against deletion of lines 121-2.

44 On this basic theme in Hel. (with further references), see Allan 2008: 46-9.

45 This is not to say that spectators of Greek tragedy always anticipated everything that would happen in a play, but they usually had enough of an advantage over the characters to appreciate dramatic irony and to grasp the wider religious or mythical implications of the action.
despairing themselves, and the fact that they already know about the phantom allows them to appreciate Teucer’s and Menelaus’ difficulty identifying the real Helen when they encounter her. The audience knows that Teucer did not see the real Helen at Troy, and they can appreciate the irony of a man who relies so heavily on his senses, as Teucer seems to, nevertheless ignoring what his eyes tell him here. Through this distance Euripides is able to demonstrate straightforwardly the limits of human comprehension and human inferiority to divine whim. The characters are trapped in a world where nothing is as it seems, while the audience observes the ironies from a safe distance and a position of superior knowledge.

Against a scholarly tradition that has viewed much of late Euripides as melodramatic or even comic, Matthew Wright argues that Helen (together with Iphigenia among the Taurians and Andromeda) should be read as “true” tragedies, dark in tone and dire in implication. Much of Wright’s argument rests on the problematization of knowledge and ignorance, appearance and reality in these plays, and the suggestion that humans are pitiful, helpless creatures at the mercy of a whimsical world that may not always prove friendly. An important part of this interpretation is the treatment of myth in these plays. Wright observes a number of instances in both Helen and Iphigenia among the Taurians in which characters question some aspect of their own myths. For instance, Helen tells the story of Zeus’ seduction of Leda in the form of a swan, and then wonders aloud about its veracity (17-21). Again, was Helen really born from an egg, as the story goes (257-9)? Have Castor and Pollux died or not (138)? Wright terms this

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46 The audience probably expected a happy ending anyway from their external knowledge of the myth (on which see Gantz 1993: 662-4, who relies heavily on Hom. Od. and Eur. Hel.): in every known version, Menelaus and Helen both survive to return to Sparta.

47 Wright 2005a.

48 Diggle and most other editors brackets these lines, but see Allan 2008 ad loc.
phenomenon “metamythology,” and he argues that the “audience is made to question what they know now about the mythical past.” Though Wright makes a strong argument for the tragic tenor of *Helen* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, his reading verges too close to total nihilism for both the characters and the audience. Part of being a spectator of tragedy is being aware of different versions of a given myth and their inherent contradictions. While a sense of distance between audience and characters is not incompatible with a “dark” reading of the play, such as Wright advocates, I would argue that the audience is brought to understand *intellectually* the limitations of the human condition but is probably not drawn *emotionally* into the action or involved personally in the confusion – at least, not to a significant degree. As far as metamythology is concerned, it seems more likely that Euripides is having a little fun in a play that does, after all, present a story alternative to the more usual version. In any case, I would argue that the questioning of these mythical details does not really affect our experience of the play: we can observe how little the characters know even about themselves, but our sympathy for Helen does not depend on the manner of her birth.

So *Helen* is a study of appearances, illusions, and perceptions. These themes manifest themselves in part in the development and execution of the *mechanema*, which not only demonstrates the power of deception and deceptive appearances but does so in dramatic terms. This raises the question of whether all drama is in fact a type of illusion, and whether dramatic illusion is substantially different from other kinds. The audience, however, may consider these and other questions from a position of relative epistemological security. Even where

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50 Wright 2005a: 156. Cf. Meltzer 1994, who argues that *Hel.* uses the backstory of “Helen’s” abduction to explore its own appropriation of Helen within the mythical tradition.
metamythology is concerned, the audience enjoys privileged knowledge and is able to observe from a distance the characters’ attempts to grapple with the slippery world around them.

**Philoctetes: The Ethics of Role-Playing**

The play within Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* is easily recognizable: Odysseus (and later Heracles) represents the playwright, Neoptolemus the chief actor, and Philoctetes the internal audience; as in *Helen*, the play within a play begins with the devising of a *mechanema*. This miniature play shows rather more interest in the challenges facing the actor and spectator than in the poet (whose representatives appear principally in the prologue and exodos). While the actor does not physically disguise himself (as in *Helen*), *Philoctetes* exploits and builds on the themes of role-playing and deception that we saw in the romances. Rather than exploring the importance of matching costume to role and other such performative possibilities, *Philoctetes* suggests that a successful dramatic performance depends not only on effective costume but also on achieving a coherent match between the actor’s role and his moral character. Moreover, the tension between the actor’s nature and the part he is required to play raises important ethical implications. What happens when an actor (especially an inexperienced actor) is asked to play a part incommensurate with his own nature? Does he adapt the part to suit his nature, or does he adapt his nature to suit the part? And what does this mean for the success of his performance? Neoptolemus’ dissatisfaction with his assigned role eventually leads him to abandon his script and improvise against the wishes of his internal playwright (Odysseus); the tension between these characters perhaps reflects the tension between playwrights and actors in the late fifth century as the latter began to enjoy greater publicity. But in *Philoctetes* only the true poet

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51 For the metadrama in *Phil.*, see Greengard 1987: 25 n. 16, Falkner 1998 (who focuses especially on Odysseus as internal playwright) and Lada-Richards 2009: 50 (whose main interest is in Neoptolemus as internal actor).
(represented by Heracles) is able to provide a complete and satisfying conclusion to the play, and in this way Sophocles reasserts the primacy of the poet over the actor.

Who plays the role of the spectator? Philoctetes’ experience as the victim of a deception that is accomplished in part because of his own appreciation for Neoptolemus’ performance is fundamentally similar to that of Theoclymenus and Thoas (though much extended). However, Sophocles creates an original twist in his play within a play by drawing the audience into the deception alongside Philoctetes. Though the audience begins the play in a position of superior knowledge to Philoctetes after witnessing Odysseus’ instructions to Neoptolemus in the prologue, in the rest of the play, those two characters seem to know more than they say about the mythical background. Since Neoptolemus is engaged in deception for much of the play, it is not always clear (to Philoctetes or to the audience) when he is telling the truth. David Seale describes well this aspect of Philoctetes:

“Much of the dramatic technique of the play relies not on the audience’s knowledge but on its ignorance or, more correctly, its uncertainty. … The audience is caught up in the complexity; not only do they not view the action from their traditional vantage of superior knowledge, but there is actually a reversal of standpoint: remarkably, two characters on-stage, Odysseus and Neoptolemus, know more than the audience and they appear reluctant to tell what they know, for example, about the oracle, or, especially in the case of Neoptolemus, what they feel.”

In addition to the unreliability of these characters, the audience’s acquaintance with the mythical tradition (including past tragedies) interferes with their ability to distinguish falsehoods from truth, since sometimes Neoptolemus tells a “lie” that is paralleled in other accounts of the myth.

52 Cf. Greengard 1987: 5 n. 3: “What is unique to Philoctetes is that the truth is never sorted out from the fiction; there is no onstage voice of truth to pronounce which of the many secondhand and fabricated pieces of information are in the end correct.”

53 Seale 1982: 48; my reading of Phil. has much in common with that of Seale 1972 and 1982: 26-55 and Roberts 1989; see also Taplin 1987: 69-70 and Falkner 1998: 36-9, who concludes that “[o]ur confusion about the meaning of what is being said on stage and about what the characters are seeking to accomplish heightens our consciousness of ourselves as audience.” Avery 2002: 14 considers the possibility that Sophocles intentionally left it vague how many ships Odysseus and Neoptolemus brought to Lemnos, which also contributes to the play’s general atmosphere of epistemological instability, and Hoppin 1990: 165-71 for the importance of perception in this play (especially with regard to the “double ending”).
and therefore seems to be true. Thus, where Helen raises the possibility of a drama that is all illusion, Philoctetes actually creates an illusory performance for both Philoctetes and the external audience: both (though for different reasons) are unable to distinguish dramatic reality from dramatic illusion. Further, though the problematization of myth (Wright’s “metamythology”) is less explicit than in Helen, it has more of an impact on how we understand the characters or the action (e.g. whether or not we sympathize with Neoptolemus).

We turn first to the prologue, which lays out the characters’ various roles in a play within a play and begins to draw the audience into the action to participate as quasi-internal spectators alongside Philoctetes. Even before Philoctetes appears, the audience is plunged into a conversation between Neoptolemus and Odysseus and thereby made to work to understand the dramatic situation. This type of prologue is common in Sophocles, and indeed, Felix Budelmann has argued that Sophoclean tragedy is characteristically demanding of its audience at all levels.54 In this case, Sophocles’ penchant for challenging drama contributes to his metadramatic commentary on what it means to be a spectator of tragedy by requiring the audience to exercise its own interpretative powers right from the start to reconstruct the dramatic situation on the basis of information provided casually in conversation.

Though this play within a play is not marked as such by a character’s change of costume (as in Helen), the prologue of Philoctetes has clear dramatic overtones as Odysseus, filling the role of playwright and director, instructs Neoptolemus in how to play his role, even down to the tone he should use and specific lines he should deliver (56-66).55 Like every competing

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54 Budelmann 2000; see esp. p. 19: “Sophoclean language can engage many different spectators by giving them a degree of information but no complete knowledge, prompting them to use what they know for struggling with what they do not know.”

55 Fuqua 1976: 32-6 shows that Sophocles’ choice to characterize Neoptolemus as a would-be son of Odysseus may be an extension of a Homeric tradition that associated the two characters and goes on to explore the similarities
playwright, what Odysseus wants most is victory (νίκη).\(^{56}\) Neoptolemus is the young actor making his debut appearance, and even at the outset, he is not entirely satisfied with the role he has been given; he is in a similar position to Menelaus, insofar as both would prefer to play the part of the dominant warrior when the situation demands instead that they pretend to be passive sufferers of misfortune or injustice. Neoptolemus also objects to the very idea of acting (here, δόλος\(^{57}\)), because it is itself at odds with his preferred type of role-playing: it is uncharacteristic of a dominant warrior to pretend to be anything else. In addition to the promise of glory, Neoptolemus ultimately agrees to Odysseus’ plan because he is convinced that there is no other way (101-7).\(^{58}\)

With these attitudes Neoptolemus and the audience enter the first episode. Thus far, the prologue has prepared us to view the deception in dramatic terms: we have seen Neoptolemus’ aversion to his assigned role and wonder how he will fill it. Will he lie to Philoctetes or not? Is he still reluctant, or has he put aside his moral qualms? Can someone with a supposedly Achillean nature pull off a deception on this scale?

Neoptolemus is in a peculiar position when he first meets Philoctetes. He is a young warrior possessing (we are led to assume) a noble, aggressive nature like Achilles, but he has

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\(^{56}\) E.g. 81, 134, 1052; Odysseus’ famous lines at 1049-51 illustrate his consummate histrionic talent: οὗ γὰρ τοιούτων δεῖ, τοιοῦτός εἰμ’ ἐγώ· | χῶπου δικαιῶν κάγαθεν ἀνδρῶν κρίσεως, | οὐκ ἂν λάβοις μου μᾶλλον οὐδέν’ εὔσεβη. For discussion of Odysseus’ values, see Blundell 1987, 1989: 184-93. Stephens 1995 attempts to rehabilitate Odysseus by suggesting that the audience would have sympathized with the view that Philoctetes’ presence was intolerable because of his loathsome wound.

\(^{57}\) For δόλος as a metaphor for dramatic production, see Goward 2004: 39-41.

\(^{58}\) For the moral dimensions of Odysseus’ persuasion of Neoptolemus, see Blundell 1989: 184-93, Cairns 1993: 250-3, and cf. Gibert 1995: 67: “in Philoctetes, Odysseus skilfully overcomes Neoptolemus’ reluctance to deceive Philoctetes in two stages: first he confuses him as to the meaning of key moral terms (γενναῖος, σοφός, δίκαιος), and then he clinches the case with an appeal to profit (κέρδος, 111-2).” Scodel 2012: 14-7 suggests that both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are easily deceived because their native innocence has not been exposed to Odyssean corruption at Troy.
agreed to deceive a fellow Greek into doing something he does not want to do (which seems to run contrary to his Achillean nature); but in order to effect this deception, he must pretend to have an Achillean nature.\textsuperscript{59} In other words, he must pretend to be himself without actually being himself – though we cannot know whether his Achillean nature has been realized yet; perhaps he must pretend to be the person he is meant to become without actually becoming that person.\textsuperscript{60} This is a rather more complicated scenario than the one faced by Helen and Menelaus. In both plays, the characters take advantage of what is already available (Menelaus’ ragged clothing, Neoptolemus’ lineage) as a means of deception, but the challenge in \textit{Helen} is to match the role with its appropriate costume; the performance is most successful when it is effectively communicated on the visual level. Neoptolemus’ dilemma is primarily ethical rather than visual or physical (no disguise is necessary since he and Philoctetes have never met before), and his discomfort with his role arises from his performative preferences, rather than dissatisfaction with his costume.

So both \textit{Helen} and \textit{Philoctetes} are concerned with the deceptive nature of drama, but where the former devotes more space to the visual aspect of performance and the compatibility of costume with role, the latter explores the connection between role-playing, self-perception, and ethics.

\textsuperscript{59} On illusion and reality in \textit{Phil.}, see Seale 1982: 26-55, who reads the play as a “basic movement from appearance to reality” (p. 46). For complication of Neoptolemus’ association with Achilles, see Blundell 1988, Gibert 1995: 143-58, Belfiore 2000: 73-80.

\textsuperscript{60} See esp. Knox 1966: 123 on Neoptolemus’ performance as a “spurious Achilles;” Hamilton 1975 argues rather that Neoptolemus’ story provides the framework for the action of the play – though that does not necessarily negate the Achillean parallels. Similarly, Hamilton (132 n.4) is correct to point out Neoptolemus’ parallels with Ajax, but there is no reason that Neoptolemus has to be modeled on only one Homeric hero. Lada-Richards 1998: 80-4 suggests that Neoptolemus’ performance ultimately fails because he does not complete the transition from his Achillean self to his Odyssean role but instead attempted to play a part that fused the two together; alternatively, Lada-Richards 2002: 406-7 suggests that it is because he misunderstands an Odyssean part as Achillean.
After Neoptolemus’ reluctance to accept Odysseus’ scheme in the prologue and until his cry of anguish at line 895, it is difficult to tell what is going through his mind, what he thinks of his role, and how eagerly he performs it – and that is exactly the point. We, the quasi-internalized audience, know broadly the dilemma he faces as an unwilling and inexperienced actor of an Odyssean part, but for nearly two-thirds of the play we cannot tell how he handles this dilemma. Philoctetes, who is unaware of Neoptolemus’ dilemma, can be deceived because of his ignorance about what has been going on in the outside world for the past ten years and his preconceptions about Odysseus and the Atreidae. All he can do is listen to what Neoptolemus says and evaluate it on the basis of his own prior experience. That is essentially all the external audience can do as well; but instead of ignorance it is their familiarity with the myth that prevents them from being able to distinguish truth from falsehood in Neoptolemus’ words.61

Since they know how Neoptolemus is supposed to carry out his mission, the audience anticipates a scene of deception, and more specifically, they probably expect Neoptolemus to feed Philoctetes a false story that will convince him to leave the island. But in fact the exchange between these two characters focuses to a surprising extent on true information and actual past events. Questionable information is mixed in with secure, perhaps leading the audience to conclude, along with Philoctetes, that it is all secure and usable. This epistemological instability is reminiscent of the uncertainty surrounding Helen’s identity in the early scenes of Euripides’ play, but Sophocles extends the experience of interpretation and confusion beyond the characters to involve the audience as well.

61 Budelmann 2000: 97-8 sees this effect already in Odysseus’ prologue description of Lemnos as abandoned (line 2) even though it was not deserted according to any known myth or history. Falkner 1998: 34 notes that the description of Philoctetes’ cave as having two entrances metadramatically makes the audience aware of the back side of the skene and raises the question of whether Philoctetes will make his first entrance from the skene or an eisodos.
Neoptolemus first identifies himself as the son of Achilles from Scyros and says that he is on his way home (239-41). Philoctetes then questions him further, sparing him the need to invent a deceptive speech. When Philoctetes asks where he is coming from and why he is on Lemnos, Neoptolemus answers only the first question, apparently quite honestly (245, ἐξ Ἰλίου τοι δὴ τανῶν γε ναυστολῶ); he is saved from answering the second when the subject of Ilium diverts the conversation. Neoptolemus continues to avoid falsehood when, instead of saying that he has never heard of Philoctetes, he asks instead πῶς γὰρ κάτοιδ’ ὄν γ’ εἶδον οὐδέπώποτε; (250) – though when Philoctetes presses the point, he states more directly, ὡς μηδὲν εἰδότ’ ἵσθι μ’ ὄν ἀνιστορεῖς (253). By this point, the only other demonstrably false thing Neoptolemus has said is that he is going home, and Philoctetes has not shown any interest in this information.62 For the next eighty lines, all Neoptolemus has to do to keep the “deception” going is listen to Philoctetes’ tale (254-316). So far, the deception is operating more through the human relationship developing between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes than outright dishonesty.

Like Theoclymenus, Philoctetes is the unwitting audience of Neoptolemus’ debut performance. Like Theoclymenus, Philoctetes to some extent sees what he wants to see: when he learns who Neoptolemus is, he thinks he also understands what kind of a person Neoptolemus must be as the son of Achilles. Neoptolemus starts out strongly, and as long as he keeps to the script Odysseus has given him, he continues to hold his audience of one; following Odysseus’ instructions, Neoptolemus paints a picture of himself as a true son of Achilles (a picture whose essence is accurate, as we will discover), all the while moving further and further away from that image of himself in his actual behavior. As a result, the internal audience, Philoctetes, both does and does not fall under the dramatic illusion: he understands, or at least presumes, Neoptolemus’

62 Adams 1957: 143 parses Neoptolemus’ words too finely when he claims that lines 240 and 383 mean “going towards home” rather than “going home.”
true nature perhaps better than Neoptolemus himself, but he is deceived as to the young man’s true purpose and method.

Neoptolemus’ performance is also designed, at least ostensibly, to give both characters and audience enough information to understand what people are like and why they act the way they do. I say “ostensibly” because in fact it is often unclear how the events narrated by Neoptolemus really transpired: what happened to Neoptolemus at Troy and how did he really respond? Or has he even been to Troy? What is his true attitude toward the Atreidae? Which warriors have really died and which survived – and what does that tell us about the justice of the gods in this play? The answers to these questions would clarify the present action, but they remain elusive.

Neoptolemus’ account of his visit to Troy (329-90) is a case in point. He states that Achilles was killed by Apollo, that he himself was summoned to Troy by Odysseus and Phoenix, that he was deprived of his father’s arms by Odysseus and the Atreidae, and that he left Troy as a result. There is nothing patently false here, except (once again) Neoptolemus’ angry departure for Scyros. Achilles’ death at the hands of Paris, with the help of Apollo, is in accordance with the standard myth. It is likely that Neoptolemus was summoned by Odysseus and Phoenix, that it is his task to take Troy (now that Achilles had fallen) has already been suggested in the

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63 On past, present, and future in Phil., see Roberts 1989: 175. Kosak 1999 discusses the tension between Philoctetes’ past self (a respected warrior) and his present circumstances (potentially diminished social status due to illness).


65 According to Hom. Od. 11.508-9, Odysseus was sent to bring Neoptolemus from Scyros, though the Little Iliad has Neoptolemus being fetched after Philoctetes; see Proclus’ summary at Allen 1912: 106, Gantz 1993: 636-7, who notes that “the drama is as much a study of Neoptolamos’ character under pressure and temptation as it is of Philoktetes, and Sophokles is likely to have invented a good many of the details of his plot to serve that purpose. We should note, though, that other playwrights of the fifth century (e.g., Achaios, Philokles) also wrote dramas entitled Philoktetes, and we cannot say what they may have added to the tradition.” Fuqua 1976: 44 suggests that this passage 343-7 “may summarize the action of [Sophocles’] Scyrians;” if so, and if Scyrians was produced before Phil., then Phoenix’ role in fetching Neoptolemus was already established.
prologue (114) and is also paralleled in the epic cycle.  

We do not know just how Neoptolemus reacted to the Judgment of the Arms; he may well have been disappointed to find that they had been awarded to someone else and angry at the Atreidae. He may even have lashed out at Odysseus in the way he describes, though his anger has obviously cooled, and even here he admits that the Atreidae are more to blame than Odysseus (385). Neoptolemus’ speech is not clearly honest or deceptive; the combination of dubious items and reliable is such as to make them all seem reliable – or all dubious.

The topic of conversation turns to the Greeks who have died at Troy (410-52). Homeric parallels validate most of Neoptolemus’ answers here, but Thersites is said to be still alive, while the Aethiopis has him dead by Achilles’ hand. There may also be a slighter change regarding

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66 Any potential dishonesty on this point is in any case attributed to Odysseus and Phoenix (345): εἴτε ἀλήθες εἴτε ἄριστον μάτην.

67 According to the Little Iliad (see Allen 1912: 106), Odysseus gave the arms to Neoptolemus, but the Sophoclean Neoptolemus makes it plain that he does not have them (380-1, 383), and Odysseus (who is obviously unreliable) suggests that he use this story as part of his deception (58-64). Calder 1971: 159 thinks that Neoptolemus does not have the arms because he has not yet been to Troy; Adams 1957: 137 and Belfiore 2000: 75-6 think that Odysseus kept the arms for himself. Following Schlesinger 1968, O’Higgins 1991: 42 (with n. 20) points out that Neoptolemus’ supposed rage at losing the arms of Achilles at least seems true because of its similarity to Ajax’ rage over the same thing (and of course we may compare Achilles’ wrath and consequent withdrawal from the fighting). Again we may ask: is Sophocles following a different version (or innovating) or is Neoptolemus falsifying his account?

68 See Seale 1982: 33, Budelmann 2000: 100-6 for the mixture of truth and falsehood in this passage. Adams 1957: 140 rather paradoxically notes the ambiguities while also stating that “Neoptolemus, with sincere intention to deceive, is yet saved from actual untruth with admirable dramatic skill;” while Sophocles is indeed careful how to phrase Neoptolemus’ words, it is inaccurate to claim (p. 142) that “Neoptolemus…has not yet uttered anything that is not really true.” Easterling 1977: 126-7 sees the ambiguity of Neoptolemus’ words in this passage as an example of one of Sophocles’ primary methods of character-drawing.

69 For this motif in Phil., IT, and Hel., see Davidson 2006, who remarks (p. 11), “It would be rash indeed to claim that this Sophoclean passage was directly indebted to the Euripidean passages. It nevertheless displays many similarities with them and this suggests at the very least an on-going interaction involving the two dramatists, and probably other dramatists as well, in the handling of a type of scene whose origins are likely to be located in Homer.”

70 Thus Proclus (Allen 1912: 105). On Thersites, see Huxley 1967 and O’Higgins 1991: 41 (who speaks of the characters as “reconstructing” the past). Scodel 2012: 5-6 notes that Achilles was purified by Odysseus after he killed Thersites; removing the murder of Thersites would thus remove an important (positive) connection between Odysseus and Achilles.
Antilochus, who now seems to have been Nestor’s only remaining son, in contrast to the Homeric tradition.⁷¹ In both cases (Thersites and Antilochus) a dubious member is included among others backed by Homeric precedent (Odysseus and Diomedes, Ajax and Patroclus), and there is no way to know whether Neoptolemus is lying selectively or Sophocles simply following a different version of the myth.⁷²

The answer to this question matters, of course, because whether Neoptolemus leaps enthusiastically into the deception or avoids outright lies as much as possible says something about his character and his handling of his assigned role, the degree of sympathy to be accorded to him, and the ethical implications of role-playing.⁷³ It also matters because we would like to know what kind of world these characters inhabit – and more specifically whether the gods are wicked or just, whether they preserve the bad and neglect the good or vice versa (447-52).⁷⁴ As a result, critics have diligently attempted to determine how much of what Neoptolemus says in the first episode is true. Davidson, for instance, thinks that Sophocles is adapting the myth and that Neoptolemus’ reports about what went on at Troy are therefore true;⁷⁵ Calder, on the other

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⁷¹ On Sophocles’ changes to the tradition (if changes they are) and support for the MSS reading ὅσπερ ἦν γόνος in 425, see Davidson 2006: 13-5;

⁷² Roberts 1989: 169-70 points out that Philoctetes asks about different people “in the wrong order,” that is, in contrast to the sequence of events known to the audience; the result for the audience, Roberts notes, is a sort of “dislocation” from their sure knowledge of the epic cycle.” Scodel 2012 has a careful analysis of the positive and negative implications of Neoptolemus’ account, which, she argues, simultaneously idealizes the past and problematizes any straightforward idealization.


⁷⁴ Cf. Levett 2004. By contrast, in Eur. Hel. we have a fairly clear idea why Hera and Aphrodite are plotting about Helen and Menelaus even before the epiphany, and the difference between divine and human morality is plain (cf. Conacher 1967a: 295-7, though I cannot agree that Theonoe necessarily represents Euripides’ own views).

⁷⁵ Davidson 2006: 11-5. Many readers have a basically favorable opinion of Neoptolemus and prefer to see him as a reluctant liar at worst (in spite of his bloodthirsty reputation in the mythical tradition); contra Calder 1971, Kott 1973: 177-80, and (more reasonably) Belfiore 2000: 73-80. We might compare a common critical attitude toward
hand, is convinced that Neoptolemus’ whole speech is false on the grounds that “in production it is impractical to hope that an audience could discern ‘the truths’ from ‘the lies’. “

But that is exactly my point. Sophocles keeps us uncertain of how to evaluate the characters and their world and thus makes us uncomfortably aware of our vulnerability as spectators.

Another element critical to our reading of the play – indeed, critical to most readings of this play – is Helenus’ prophecy. Much ink has been spilled in debates about what Helenus “really” said or what his prophecy really means and whether Odysseus and Neoptolemus understand it correctly; there has also been extensive discussion about just how much Neoptolemus knows about the prophecy, when, and how. It seems to me that the ambiguity surrounding the prophecy is deliberate, and so all the attempts to elucidate it are misdirected.

Throughout the first episode, Sophocles has made the audience aware of what it means to be a spectator of Greek tragedy: that they must rely on the characters’ (potentially unreliable) words, that they naturally and necessarily – but sometimes mistakenly – interpret the action with reference to other versions of the myth. The prophecy is another element that keeps the audience guessing about the backstory of the play, the characters’ motives, and the role of the gods.

Helenus’ prophecy is first mentioned by the false merchant (604-13), but since it is continually reinterpreted as the characters either manipulate it deceitfully or achieve a fuller understanding of it, the audience is likely to keep considering and reconsidering its significance retrospectively at various points in the play. Thus, for example, when we first hear Odysseus’

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Ajax’ so-called “deception speech” (Aj. 646-92): some have felt that the speech cannot be purely deceptive in part because deception simply runs counter to Ajax’ character.


plan in the prologue, it seems quite reasonable: since Philoctetes cannot be persuaded or forced to rejoin the Greek army, he must be tricked. But when we learn of Helenus’ prophecy (if in fact we trust the false merchant\textsuperscript{78}, we must revise our opinion of Odysseus and his plan, since, as Buxton and others have noticed, using first \(\delta\text{όλος}\) and then \(\betaι\alpha\) only reduces the likelihood of winning Philoctetes by \(\pi\varepsilon\iota\vartheta\omega\),\textsuperscript{79} and the prophecy has stated that Philoctetes must go to Troy \textit{willingly}. Odysseus’ decision to use trickery made good sense on human terms, but now it appears that he has either misunderstood or disregarded the prophecy.\textsuperscript{80} The audience, meanwhile, is left to wonder whether \(\delta\text{όλος}\) and a voluntary departure to Troy are reconcilable or whether the prophecy’s stipulations have been dangerously disobeyed.

The situation is complicated further when Neoptolemus comes into possession of the bow, but refuses to depart without Philoctetes (who lies asleep on the ground) and asserts in

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\textsuperscript{78} Most have felt that the false merchant’s account of the prophecy is basically reliable, and some have even thought that the purpose of this scene is to inform Neoptolemus of its contents (e.g. Minadeo 1994: 140), though this fails to account for Neoptolemus’ own versions of the prophecy at 839-42 and 1329-47. For a reasonable assessment of Neoptolemus’ knowledge of the prophecy, see Knox 1964: 187-90 n. 21. Goward 2004: 101 correctly notes that “[g]iving such an important narrative so absolutely unauthoritative a position in the play is very much part of Sophocles’ subtle narrative strategy” (which, for her, is characterized by the deliberate creation of a multiplicity of ambiguous parallel narratives); cf. also Roberts 1989: 171.

\textsuperscript{79} As seen by Blundell 1989: 203 and others, Philoctetes’ reaction to the false merchant’s report (628-32) shows that Odysseus was right: persuasion would not have worked anyway. Taousian 2011 disputes this reading in the course of an argument that persuasion is a viable option from the start of the play; in the end, I cannot accept this interpretation since it seems to me that Philoctetes is too jaded to listen seriously to anyone he knew to be connected with Odysseus and the Atreidae (and if Neoptolemus concealed these associations, then he would be engaging in deception).

\textsuperscript{80} According to Nussbaum 1976: 34-6, Odysseus’ moral outlook prevents him from recognizing the importance of Philoctetes’ subjectivity and thus collapses persuasion and force into one. Hoppin 1981, arguing that deceit and persuasion need not be exclusive alternatives, suggests that Odysseus plans to trick Philoctetes out of his bow in order to gain the chance to use persuasion safely; see also Budelmann 2000: 123-30 emphasizes the difficulty characters (and the audience) have in coming to a correct understanding of the prophecy and sees this pervasive uncertainty as typical of Sophoclean drama.
dactylic hexameters that the man himself is also needed to take Troy (839-42). Since we have not heard such a thing prior to this, we might suspect that Neoptolemus is beginning to think of Philoctetes as a friend and therefore simply reinterprets Helenus’ prophecy for his sake. We may think that Neoptolemus, confronted with a direct conflict between the image of himself he has been creating for Philoctetes and the performance demanded of him by Odysseus, is beginning to push back against his internal playwright’s instructions: his “script” (as indicated by the chorus) requires him to take the bow and run, while his heretofore dormant Achillean nature is loath to abandon a friend who has placed his trust in him. As Goward says, “The experience of acting friendship for Philoctetes has produced real feelings of friendship.” Neoptolemus’ reason for hesitating may be practical, ethical, or emotional; we in the audience cannot tell whether his invocation of divinely inspired prophecy is accurate or merely meant to lend rhetorical weight to his decision to remain with Philoctetes.

Again, when Odysseus himself captures Philoctetes, he suddenly releases him on exactly the opposite grounds that the bow alone is sufficient: either he or Teucer can fire it as well as Philoctetes (1053-62). But since Neoptolemus thinks that Philoctetes is also needed, we might suspect that Odysseus is manipulating Philoctetes rather than expressing his true opinion. The prospect of being abandoned again, this time without a weapon, combined with the thought of

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81 These hexameters are usually associated with oracular language, but Winnington-Ingram 1969b: 48-50 believes that Neoptolemus now conceives of Philoctetes as an agonistic prize, and thus the hexameters are heroic rather than oracular. Belfiore 2000: 63-80 describes the bow as a guest-gift extending an offer of xenia to Neoptolemus, whose decision to return it or not thus becomes a choice between violating and affirming xenia.

82 Goward 2004: 100.

83 Easterling 1978 emphasizes the ambiguity of the characters’ motives throughout the play and comments (p. 30) that “[t]here is nothing an audience finds more baffling than motiveless behaviour, but if what the characters do is susceptible of explanation, even of multiple explanation, then we accept it because this is what we are used to in real life.” While she is right to point out that the various ambiguities and contradictions in Phil. do not confuse or distract the audience, I would argue that they are also not typical of ancient tragedy and are therefore meant to be noticed.
Odysseus wielding his bow, might be enough to provoke Philoctetes to accompany the Greeks to Troy just to prevent these things from happening. Both Neoptolemus and Odysseus could be using the prophecy for their own ends. Or one could be telling the truth and the other lying; it may even be possible that both are telling the truth, as they see it, but that they have not correctly understood the prophecy. Sophocles does not give us enough information to answer these questions, but that does not mean the audience will not ask them; we want to know what kind of people and what kind of situation we are dealing with. So does Philoctetes, and perhaps it is not surprising that, after hearing a couple versions of what the Greeks intend (from Odysseus at 1053-62 and Neoptolemus at 1314-47) he is still unconvinced that going to Troy is really in his best interest. Neoptolemus’ account of Helenus’ prophecy and what is destined to happen at Troy appears to be complete, and given that he has just returned the bow as a sign of repentance and good will, it seems unlikely that he is lying, but the fact remains that he is still trying to convince Philoctetes to do something he expressly does not want to do; Neoptolemus’ chief rhetorical tool, the one most likely to persuade, is an optimistic interpretation of prophecy. By this point, we have heard several different versions of the prophecy and are not in a strong position to know whether the latest one is correct.

So we do not know what Odysseus “really” thinks about the prophecy, except perhaps what he says in the prologue (before the prophecy itself has been mentioned), nor do we know Neoptolemus’ true opinion, since both characters have ulterior motives for saying what they do about it. This ambiguity is symptomatic of the way Sophocles manages the audience’s

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84 Calder 1971: 163-6 argues, rather implausibly, that this entire scene is still part of the attempt to deceive Philoctetes, that Neoptolemus remains false to the very end, and that the deception would have been signaled to the audience through comic acting style and techniques; curiously, Calder does not address Neoptolemus’ confession at 915-6. For response to this negative view of Neoptolemus, see Fuqua 1976.
epistemological position in this play.\(^85\) In spite of the fact that they have witnessed the prologue and already know the basics of Odysseus’ plan, as well as the eventual outcome of the myth, the Sophoclean audience is consistently placed in the same position as the internal spectator, Philoctetes – a position of relative ignorance and dependence on Neoptolemus and Odysseus for information about recent events. In *Helen*, the audience’s foreknowledge of the characters’ identities, background, or plans allows them to observe the action from a distance and appreciate moments of deep irony; the audience of *Helen* is truly external. But Sophocles’ audience is “internalized” into the play within a play and thus obliged to interpret what the characters say and do alongside Philoctetes. Euripides lets us *observe* the characters’ epistemological struggles and the process of interpreting dramatic performance; Sophocles makes us *experience* these things.

The false merchant scene (542-627) almost seems designed to illustrate this point. As Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are about to leave for the harbor, the chorus spots one of Odysseus’ men approaching in the guise of a merchant and advises the other two to wait a moment until they learn what he has to say. The “merchant” greets Neoptolemus immediately and indicates that he has news for him specifically. He is concerned not to incur the ire of the Atreidae and leads Neoptolemus on for several lines before finally giving the important information: Phoenix and the sons of Theseus have left Troy to find Neoptolemus and bring him back. Neoptolemus goes on to ask for additional details (by what means will they bring him back? why isn’t Odysseus coming?) and after answering a few of these questions, the “merchant” eventually refuses to speak further until he learns who Philoctetes is. Neoptolemus tells him, prompting the “merchant” to urge their swift departure. This is all very well; between them, Neoptolemus and

\(^85\) It is also reminiscent of the cynical agnosticism of Soph. *El.*, which demonstrated how malleable religious beliefs can be when they are used to justify various human actions; see ch. 2 above.
the “merchant” have put up a credible front, each maintaining his side of the story and asking questions or providing responses that help the other to know where he is going while also conveying a realistic sense of urgency. But at 578-9, Philoctetes interjects τί φησιν, ὦ παῖ; τί δὲ κατὰ σκότον ποτὲ | διεμπολὰ λόγοις πρὸς σ’ ὁ ναυβάτης; It seems that he has not actually heard any of the exchange! He has been waiting politely on the sidelines for Neoptolemus to finish his conversation with an old acquaintance; only when he hears his name (575) does he begin to take a personal interest in what is being said.86

So what was the purpose of the last thirty-five lines? Why have Neoptolemus and the “merchant” gone to such effort to construct their false story, ask each other the right questions, make their concern and agitation seem real if Philoctetes was not even paying any attention? The answer: for the audience. The audience has known all along what the “merchant’s” ploy is. They saw Odysseus in the prologue promise to send one of his men if Neoptolemus seemed to be taking too long. They can recognize that much of what the “merchant” says is false, as well as noticing the way he twists true information so as to encourage a particular course of action; they can finally enjoy an actual deception, complete with false characters and false information,87 that

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86 Pace Seale 1982: 35. Bain 1977: 84 remarks significantly that “[t]he obvious dramatic function of the scene is not so much to deceive Philoctetes as to put him in possession of the facts, to let him know that his presence or perhaps the presence of his bow at Troy is essential if Troy is ever to be taken and that an attempt will be made to remove him from Lemnus, an attempt involving his deadly enemy, Odysseus. In other words it is the ‘true’ part of the merchant’s story that matters.” The significance of this passage depends heavily on how it is played on stage. The chorus announces the arrival of the false merchant with instructions to both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes (in the dual) to depart only after hearing what he has to say (539-41); obviously the chorus, who is in on the plot, wants Philoctetes to listen to the forthcoming deceptive exchange. But since the false merchant’s first words are Ἀχιλλέως παῖ and he does not even acknowledge Philoctetes’ presence for another thirty lines, Philoctetes might reasonably deduce that the conversation is none of his business and stay out of it; there is no sign that Philoctetes is listening until 578. Bain believes that 573-4 and 576-7 are spoken aside; Webster 1970 ad loc. is correct that the merchant’s quieter voice “is designed to arouse Philoctetes’ suspicion,” and Neoptolemus’ response (including Philoctetes’ name) is probably spoken aloud (as Bain implies) in order to catch his attention. These devices suggest that Philoctetes has not been listening to the conversation, since they would not be necessary if he were. Simply put, the false merchant cannot carry out his mission to hasten Philoctetes’ departure if Philoctetes does not notice anything he has to say.
they have been led to expect in this play. But while they are focusing on all these details, they fail to realize that none of it is relevant. Only when Philoctetes finally speaks up do they recognize that they have been deceived themselves into thinking that what they saw and heard was meaningful.\(^88\) Their experience of this scene is similar to Philoctetes’ throughout the play, as he weighs information and tries to evaluate people who end up being quite irrelevant to his decision to go to Troy.

Once Philoctetes joins the conversation, the exchange of information resumes its prior course. Neoptolemus reasserts his hatred of the Atreidae – the one falsehood critical to his deception, if falsehood it is\(^89\) – and the “merchant” explains why Odysseus and Diomedes are searching for Philoctetes, including an account of Helenus’ prophecy and its reception in the Greek camp.\(^90\) The only explicit falsehood here is the inclusion of Diomedes in Neoptolemus’ place, and even this is not inconsistent with the audience’s knowledge of the myth: Euripides’

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\(^87\) For instance, as Budelmann 2000: 98 points out, no known account has Phoenix and the sons of Theseus sent after Neoptolemus (though Phoenix’ involvement is not inherently implausible).

\(^88\) Many have commented on this scene’s metadramatic connotations (e.g. Kittmer 1995, Easterling 1997b: 169-70, Ringer 1998: 101-25, Lada-Richards 1997, 1998, 2009). Goward 2004: 97 draws attention to the importance of both acting and spectating in this scene: “A major underlying purpose of this loop seems to be nothing less than to force the audience to focus on acting, and bear witness to the effect both of participating in it, and of observing it. … Neoptolemus is acting. He is also acting with, and observing the acting of, the False Merchant. He is observing the effect of the joint acting on Philoctetes. Meanwhile the audience is observing all of this. At this point, how can they assess Neoptolemus’ real frame of mind? As Neoptolemus’ and the False Merchant’s words have no simple truth-value, only the audience’s emotional responses can guide them to Neoptolemus’ concealed feelings and help them assess whether any speech of his is ‘true’ or not. There is no escape from subjectivity here.” But while the audience is trying to decide what is going through Neoptolemus’ head, they fail to notice the trick being played on them by the poet.

\(^89\) Adams 1957: 134-59 sees Neoptolemus’ supposed rage at the Atreidae as a central premise of the play.

\(^90\) Minadeo 1994: 140 thinks that the false merchant is to be understood as implicitly instructing Neoptolemus when he describes Odysseus’ determination to use force or persuasion to bring Philoctetes to Troy, but this stands in direct contradiction to what Odysseus said in the prologue, and it is surely deliberate that the true strategy (deception) is not mentioned (Buxton 1982: 121).
Philoctetes (431 B.C.) featured just that pair.\(^{91}\) We are entitled to ask once again whether the false merchant is feeding Philoctetes a false story or deceiving him with the simple truth.\(^{92}\)

Neoptolemus, relying on the script given to him by Odysseus, has delivered an effective performance so far. Even when he must improvise, as in the false merchant scene, he still acts under Odysseus’ direction, since the “merchant” is another actor-figure sent by Odysseus (and even played by the same actor, as is frequently noted) whose main purpose is to supplement Neoptolemus’ performance for the sake of both the internal and the external audience. We are given no insight into the false merchant’s moral character; like the chorus, he is a blank slate, both willing and able to fill whatever role is assigned to him. He initiates the conversation with Neoptolemus and cues him on his lines (much as Helen turns the dialogue over to Menelaus at Hel. 1249); he sets the stage anew, as it were, by delivering a prologue-like speech at 603-21 and clearing the way for his fellow actor, Neoptolemus, to improvise a new plot on that basis. But the false merchant’s performance is meant for Philoctetes at least as much as Neoptolemus.\(^{93}\) The false merchant takes some of the burden of improvisation off Neoptolemus, who merely has

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\(^{91}\) Cf. Fuqua 1976: 66 on Phil. 591-7, 603-19, Or. 1654-7: “The use of such references seems to have been ‘double-edged’; on the one hand they give the action a greater verisimilitude than it might otherwise have possessed, and on the other they point out the extent to which the action on stage differs from the customary account.” Budelmann 2000: 98-100 suggests that the “force of myth” itself is responsible for the fact that the false merchant does not invent a completely mendacious speech.

\(^{92}\) The ambiguity extends even to the weather: when Philoctetes insists upon leaving immediately, Neoptolemus replies that the winds are contrary. It is possible that the adverse winds are also Neoptolemus’ invention, but Philoctetes does not know that – and neither does the audience. Any audience of ancient drama must rely on the characters for information about things like the weather, but the reliability of those characters is not usually so severely compromised (Ussher 1990 ad loc.).

\(^{93}\) This is true even if (as I argue above) Philoctetes does not actually listen to the false merchant’s opening speech.
to go along with Philoctetes’ predictable reaction to the false merchant’s news. In other words, even when he is technically not “on script,” Neoptolemus is still following his director’s lead.\(^9^4\)

Eventually, Neoptolemus becomes so uncomfortable with the role he is playing that he casts it aside and removes his Achillean mask, as it were, for Philoctetes.\(^9^5\) But it is difficult to know just when Neoptolemus begins to separate himself from the plot. After Philoctetes’ attack of pain, Neoptolemus begins to show signs of discomfort or even remorse. Philoctetes is made nervous at first by Neoptolemus’ unresponsiveness (804-5), and the latter offers a vague explanation: \(\text{ἀλγῶ πάλαι δὴ τὰ πάντα σοὶ στένων κακά}\) (806). After reassuring him that his illness comes and goes quickly (on the assumption that that is what he meant by \(\text{kaká}\)), Philoctetes secures Neoptolemus’ promise to stay with him. The moment passes. With hindsight, we can suspect that Neoptolemus’ conscience is beginning to bother him, but that is not made explicit yet; the audience, like Philoctetes, is free to interpret his silence however they choose. But after Philoctetes has recovered from his seizure, Neoptolemus becomes agitated again (895-922). He cries out in apparent anguish, causing Philoctetes to think that he has changed his mind about rescuing him from the island. The tension is drawn out while Neoptolemus remains indecisive about his course of action, and finally he reveals the whole situation to Philoctetes.\(^9^6\)

Much of the play to this point has repeatedly challenged the audience’s ability to achieve an accurate interpretation of the characters and events. The external spectators, like the internal spectator, have been made aware of what it is like to be manipulated by a poet’s (and his actors’)

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\(^{9^4}\) Errandonea 1955-6 argues that the “merchant” is actually Odysseus in disguise. I disagree, but if anything, that would only make Odysseus’ control of the action at this point more obvious.

\(^{9^5}\) Levett 2004: 262 sees Neoptolemus’ confession as “something of a meta-theatrical moment, in that a character, in the midst of a \(\text{mēchanēma}\), rejects the use of deception, one of its most common characteristics.” It is certainly unusual for a character to foil his own deception, but I don’t quite see how that simple fact makes this passage metatheatrical.

\(^{9^6}\) For the dramatic technique in this scene of revelation, see Dubischar 2007: 203-4.
clever use of their own knowledge and expectations. As a result, the audience has been continuously kept uncertain of how to evaluate Neoptolemus’ moral character; we have been able to say less about his attitude toward his assigned role because his attitude, like his moral character, has not been clearly revealed. Once he comes clean, however, even if not everything he says is certainly reliable (such as his final account of the prophecy), we are better able to consider the effects his role-playing has had on himself and his internal audience. Philoctetes does not understand how someone could take on a role so opposed to his own nature. Actually, Philoctetes’ outrage seems to be directed at Neoptolemus’ moral choice to go along with the deception rather than his success at role-playing. Philoctetes accuses Odysseus of teaching Neoptolemus “to be clever at evil” (εὖ προὐδίδαξεν ἐν κακοῖς εἶναι σοφόν), thus implying Neoptolemus has allowed his inherently good nature to be corrupted to suit a wicked role. This is of course part of Plato’s ethical criticism of drama: bad behavior imitated too often eventually becomes habit and destroys the actor’s moral character. Philoctetes sees that process at work in Neoptolemus, and evidently the young man does as well, for he casts aside the wicked role before it can destroy him entirely.

Nevertheless, it is ironic that very little of what Neoptolemus has done while playing his Odyssean role is straightforwardly deceptive or un-Achillean. Except for a few particulars (as discussed in the first section of this chapter) he has not lied to Philoctetes, instead merely voicing agreement with Philoctetes’ views and painting a picture of himself that he would like to live up to someday. The deception relies rather on Neoptolemus’ pretense of an Achillean nature that he possesses but has not yet realized. And perhaps this explains his success at deception, which is supposed (in this play) to be so un-Achillean. Odysseus has not given Neoptolemus a role that

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97 Plato Resp. 394d-397b.
runs completely counter to his nature but one that, paradoxically, allows him to exploit it for deceptive purposes. For an actor in the theater, this is a recipe for success; we might think of Polus, who is said to have delivered Electra’s lament for Orestes especially memorably because he used an urn containing his own son’s ashes. Insofar as acting is inherently “deceptive,” an actor is likely to be most successful when he can exploit his own natural inclinations to that end.

But Neoptolemus feels that his behavior has been disgraceful, and he finally abandons Odysseus’ script when the implications of his role bring him to a moral impasse. It takes him some time to find a way out of this dilemma, not least because Odysseus, the internal playwright himself, appears on stage to take matters into his own hands. A recalcitrant actor may get away from his script or improvise a little too much, but he must yield when the playwright becomes personally involved.

Or must he? When Odysseus first intervenes, Neoptolemus silently submits, but when they return to the stage a little later (1222), Neoptolemus usurps the role of playwright and attempts to contrive his own resolution to the plot. The internal poet’s drama has failed because his protagonist was not up to the part. Interestingly, it seems that Neoptolemus objects not so much to the role-playing itself as to its ultimate implications: the theft of the bow and the re-

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100 Goldhill 2009: 35-48 discusses characters who act as internal spectators, thereby both inviting the real audience to construct their own reactions to what they witness and providing a model for “critical observation.” Among other passages, Goldhill examines the third episode of Soph. *Phil.*, making Neoptolemus the representative of the “audience on stage” as he observes the quarrel between Odysseus and Philoctetes; Neoptolemus is silent throughout, inviting the audience to construct his moral and emotional reactions to the quarrel. However, this has been the case with Neoptolemus throughout the play, both when he was actively participating in Odysseus’ plot and when he remained silent in response to Philoctetes’ pleas. The spectators are at any rate made aware of their own position as spectators when they are forced to imagine what is going through Neoptolemus’ head, and I see no reason to think of Neoptolemus as anything other than an actor-figure throughout. But cf. Easterling 1993: 81-3, who suggests (p. 82) that Odysseus in the prologue of Soph. *Aj* “illustrates the function of theatre to create models for us to try out.”
abandonment of Philoctetes, with whom he has come to feel a certain kinship. Ironically, when Neoptolemus first landed on Lemnos, he was quite willing to capture Philoctetes by force (90-2). But his role-playing has been so successful that he has drawn his internal audience into his performance and forged a friendship with him on that basis; and now force is no longer a viable option. In fact, neither is deception. It might be valid to deceive an enemy (and Philoctetes was certainly hostile to the Greek army), but once he becomes a friend, he must not be deceived any longer – even if that friendship is based on deception. So Neoptolemus puts aside all role-playing, both the Achillean role of violence and glory (as he imagines it) and the pseudo-Achillean role required by Odysseus. Neoptolemus gives the bow back to Philoctetes and returns the play almost to where it began.\textsuperscript{101} He attempts to start all over by using persuasion to get Philoctetes to come with him to Troy. But the internal spectator is no longer receptive. When Philoctetes demands that Neoptolemus take him home as promised (1398-9), even though Neoptolemus made that promise when he was still playing a role that he has since put aside, Philoctetes is in essence asking for evidence that their friendship is based on more than an illusion. And Neoptolemus’ agreement confirms that it is. The two start toward the eisodos, signaling an ending that is only partially satisfying: the main characters are reconciled and behaving in accordance with their principles, but the myth has not been fulfilled.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{101} According to Hamilton 1975: 133-4, Philoctetes’ reference to the arms of Achilles is meant to link this passage to Neoptolemus’ false story in the first episode, thus marking this ending as insufficient (because it is based on a lie).

\textsuperscript{102} Hoppin 1990: 142-9 describes thoroughly the elements of closure surrounding the first ending, showing that the audience would have been ready to accept it on dramatic terms, if not mythical ones (an effect Hoppin associates broadly with Euripides); this false ending is thus a red herring akin to the false merchant scene. Hamilton 1975: 134 argues that this first ending is “wrong not only because that is not the way the myth goes … but also because it is based on an insufficient model for action,” i.e. Neoptolemus’ false tale in the first episode. See also Seale 1982: 42-5 on this passage and the near-departure immediately preceding the epiphany.
Ismene Lada-Richards has explored Sophocles’ play within a play with a particular view to the changing dynamics within the theater at the end of the fifth century. In this period, power and prestige were beginning to shift away from the playwrights to the actors, who were becoming increasingly popular in their own right; the playwrights had to find a way to work effectively with them and use their talents to create a powerful piece of drama. For Lada-Richards, Neoptolemus represents the recalcitrant actor who deviates from his script and improvises to suit his own preferences (and to please his audience), thus frustrating the performance intended by the playwright (Odysseus). In this case, the actor’s improvisation also fails to effect the necessary resolution, as he ignores the requirements of plot in favor of satisfying his internal audience; since neither internal playwright nor internal actor can devise an appropriate ending, that must be handled by the real playwright (Sophocles) with a *deus ex machina*. On this level, the abruptness of Heracles’ appearance and Philoctetes’ reversal are apt: as the sorcerer corrects his apprentice, Sophocles steps in with an efficient solution to the problem created by his wayward characters, both of whom have failed to fill the roles given to them. Unlike Neoptolemus’ ending, in which Philoctetes is denied his destined glory at

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103 Lada-Richards 2009.

104 Some have argued that Heracles is really only Odysseus in disguise (Errandonea 1955-6, Lattimore 1964: 44-5, with n. 35, Roisman 2001; for similar suggestions relating to other plays, see DeForest 1989). I do not subscribe to this reading myself – it is a matter of dramatic convention to have an actor play multiple parts, and Sophocles would have to give some positive indication that he wanted this epiphany to be understood as a deception – but if we take it so, then the tragedy ends with the internal playwright (Odysseus) rather than the external (Sophocles) reclaiming control of his play.

105 Hoppin 1990: 150-1 notes that among extant epiphanies it is highly unusual for the *deus* to interrupt trochees (which indicate closure) with “a competing meter of closure” (here, anapaests); in this case, the shifting meters allow the play to “back up” and try again. The effect, she argues, is to “jolt” the audience and the characters, both of whom now expect the play to end with a departure for Malis, back onto the correct mythological track. Thus, even at the end, the audience’s experience parallels that of Philoctetes, both having their expectations foiled by the *deus*, who also finally provides (some) secure knowledge.

106 The primary argument in favor of reading Heracles’ epiphany as an Odyssean trick is the fact that otherwise Odysseus seems to run out of ideas, whereas in the mythical tradition, he is never at a loss for a clever solution. But
Troy, and unlike Odysseus’ ending, in which a victim of injustice is again manipulated into going where he least wants to go, Sophocles’ ending is satisfying on all levels. Philoctetes and Neoptolemus preserve their new friendship, Philoctetes will be healed by Asclepius himself, and both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes will win glory for conquering Troy – and Philoctetes has not had to surrender his principles.¹⁰⁷

But the audience is reminded not to place too much confidence in what they have learned from this dramatic performance. Neoptolemus’ apparent intention to live up to his Achillean nature does not resolve our doubts about him, since Heracles warns Philoctetes and Neoptolemus to observe εὐσέβεια during the sack of Troy (1441), which we know (again, relying on our external knowledge of the myth) that Neoptolemus will fail to do. The play ends on a note of aporia:¹⁰⁸ has Neoptolemus really developed into a decent individual, as we thought, or is he a

¹⁰⁷ For the ending of Phil. and how it satisfies the audience, see esp. Easterling 1978: 36-9; for Heracles as a representative of the true playwright (as opposed to Odysseus), see Falkner 1998: 47-8. Hamilton 1975: 135 n. 17 reviews earlier scholarship that was less satisfied with the epiphany; for Hamilton, Heracles’ story finally provides a proper model of action, displacing the fallacious model of Neoptolemus’ story in the first episode. Ussher 1990: 11 takes a darker view on the grounds that Philoctetes’ enemies win out – but this is in no way emphasized in the text; cf. Nussbaum 1976: 49: “Though justice has achieved a victory and we have come to see how merit and fairness may be related, we are asked now to recognize the dependence of the moral scene as a whole upon caprice and chance, the stormy moods of nature and the carelessness of the gods.” See O’Higgins 1991: 47-8 for the argument that, regardless of what will happen at Troy, Philoctetes has already won glory from his time on Lemnos. Levett 2004: 263-5 describes the epiphany of Phil. as a type of recognition that caps a mechanema à la Euripides’ romances.

¹⁰⁸ A common feature of Sophoclean endings, on which see Roberts 1987, 1988, and 2005: 145, Goward 2004: 50-2; Hoppin 1990: 161 (with nn. 44-6) has a synopsis of views on the ending of Phil. Roberts states (1988: 191-2), “Sophocles, then, seems both to point to a future beyond the play and to point to its being always in the future. Easterling suggests a further effect of Sophocles’ glimpses of later events when she comments that this device ‘draws attention to the play as a play’ and is thus ‘in some respects analogous’ to Euripides’ use of the deus ex machina. The analogy, it seems, lies in the fact that both poets appear to use references to the larger myth in a way that comments on the ending of a particular play and asserts that it is just that: the ending of a particular play.”
sacrilegious criminal? How does our experience of the play match up with our external knowledge of the myth?

Sophocles has added an ethical twist to his play within a play. Neoptolemus’ performance ultimately fails not because of inappropriate costuming but because the role does not suit the actor. The quality of Neoptolemus’ moral character is a central focus of *Philoctetes*, and Sophocles approaches it from two angles: that of the actor, Neoptolemus himself, and that of the audience. In the prologue, Neoptolemus notes his discomfort with role-playing and thus invites us to wonder, as Plato did, whether acting has an effect on one’s inborn nature and ethic. It is not easy for us to answer that question, however, since Neoptolemus’ attitude toward his role is opaque for much of the play. The audience’s angle, which is characterized by epistemological instability, does not grant them secure knowledge of Neoptolemus’ character and behavior prior to the action of the play, so they cannot see whether he changes as a result of his role-playing. Even if they did know his backstory, it is difficult to tell when Neoptolemus is lying, how well he plays his part, or even how he feels about it. The potentially negative effects of role-playing finally become a little clearer when Neoptolemus renounces his performance and Philoctetes condemns the internal playwright as a teacher of evil; Heracles’ warning to observe piety also seems to suggest a downward turn for Neoptolemus’ morality, though it is not clear whether that turn results directly from anything we have seen in the play.

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109 In her study of narrative in *Phil.*, Roberts 1989:175 observes that “[t]he story of Neoptolemus’ past is partly invented and partly true, partly his own and partly Odysseus’; he seems to be deciding whether or not to accept it as his past. His future is similarly indeterminate, with hints of dangerous possibility.” Neoptolemus’ sacrilegious acts (on which the negative reading of Calder 1971 relies heavily) were well known from a variety of sources: the death of Priam (*Iliou Persis*), the murder of Asyanax (*Little Iliad*), the sacrifice of Polyxena (*Ibycus fr. 26* (Page), Eur. *Hec.* 523-68); see Gantz 1993: 650-9. Neoptolemus’ claim at *Phil.* 334-5 that Achilles died at the hands of Phoebus looks ahead to the tradition that Neoptolemus was also slain by Apollo as punishment for killing Priam (Gantz 1993: 690-4 records the different versions). Eur. *Or.* 1554-5 puts a decidedly negative spin on the “twin lions” theme introduced in Heracles’ speech (1435).
Though the poet receives proportionally less attention in Sophocles’ play within a play than the actor and audience, this figure returns powerfully at the end of the play to establish the creative ability of the tragic playwright and his preeminence over up-and-coming actors who would think that they could do better.

_**Orestes: The Chaos of Performance**_

Euripides’ _Orestes_ is clearly a step away from his earlier romances, not least in its decreased interest in disguise and deception.\(^{110}\) In _Helen_, for instance, the Greeks (led by the captive heroine) must trick the barbarian ruler so they can escape back to Greece; but Orestes is attempting to escape from condemnation and death (rather than a foreign land),\(^ {111}\) and his primary means of escape are persuasion and violence. Deliberate deception is only a factor in the attempted murder of Helen, when Orestes and Pylades pretend to supplicate her for their lives before pulling out their swords. Likewise, costume and disguise are not especially relevant, since everybody in the play already knows everybody else and a simple change of costume is unlikely to fool anyone. So Euripides, under the influence of Sophocles’ treatment of ethics and role-playing in _Philoctetes_ (or so I will argue), has moved from one set of metadramatic interests in _Helen_ to another in _Orestes_.

_Philoctetes_, though it is much akin to the romances in many respects, also discards previous Euripidean interests in costume and disguise, replacing them with a discourse on the ethics of imitation and role-playing and the effect such activities might have on the actor’s moral character. Further, it examines the role of the actor as such: a creative individual with his own

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\(^{110}\) See Wolff 1968: 138-42 on deception versus reality in _Or._

\(^{111}\) On the theme of σωτηρία (rather than physical escape) in _Or._, see Parry 1969.
talents and preferences who performs a critical function in the creation of a successful drama. *Orestes* expands both of these ideas (role-playing and histrionic independence) and carries them to extreme conclusions.

The external audience is again “internalized” and made aware of the weakness of their position as spectators and interpreters of dramatic performance. Once again, the ambiguity of the mythical background is the primary means of problematizing the audience’s experience of the play. As in *Philoctetes*, it is not always clear which version or treatment of a myth Euripides subscribes to – for instance, whether Clytemnestra was a frightening and tyrannical figure (as in the *Oresteia*) or a somewhat regretful mother intent upon reconciliation (as in Euripides’ *Electra*). Indeed, the play itself amounts to a large-scale reinterpretation of the myth of Orestes, and the audience’s uncertainty about its mythical background makes it difficult for them to comprehend fully the context of the action and the characters’ motives. The audience’s position is further destabilized by the nature of the plot: Euripides has inserted his own, almost wholly invented story between two well-established mythical traditions, the murder of Clytemnestra and Orestes’ subsequent trial and acquittal in Athens. Since the part of the myth represented by *Orestes* did not exist before 408 B.C., the only sure events are the past (Clytemnestra’s death) and the future (Orestes in Athens), and certain details about these are left uncertain; everything in between is wholly unknown. Finally, Euripides makes several gestures toward both the “traditional” myth of Orestes and the “traditional” format of tragedy but then indicates that *Orestes* does not fit into either of these paradigms; the audience cannot use their external
knowledge of the myth or notions of what tragedy usually looks like to anticipate or evaluate the action of the play.\textsuperscript{112}

Like several other tragedies, \textit{Orestes} has a play within a play that centers around the planning and execution of the \textit{mechanema} beginning at line 1098.\textsuperscript{113} But there is another play within this play, one that, paradoxically, spans almost the entirety of \textit{Orestes}. Prior to the action of the play, we are told, the playwright-figure (Apollo) has given directions that his actors have duly carried out (the matricide). Now, however, the playwright is absent and the actors restive;\textsuperscript{114} like Neoptolemus, they begin to improvise solutions to the plot. But these actors, especially Orestes, are more ambitious than capable, and they are unsuited for the roles they attempt to fill; those roles in turn are unsuitable for the action to which they are applied. In the end, as in \textit{Philoctetes}, the playwright-figure must step in to provide a real solution. The poet again reasserts his primacy over the actors, though the specific message is almost opposite that of \textit{Philoctetes}: instead of being the only one who can provide a satisfying ending, the poet is the only one who can get away with a completely absurd ending, one that actors and audience alike have no choice but to accept even as it contradicts the action of the play. There is no clear internal spectator (except for Menelaus and Orestes at the very end), but, as in \textit{Philoctetes}, the external audience is drawn into that position. Euripides establishes a dramatic world in which the usual “rules” of myth and tragedy do not apply only to double-cross his audience at the end

\textsuperscript{112} Burnett 1998: 247-72 (followed by Porter 1994: 89-93) similarly reads \textit{Or} as an inversion of tragic form that continually foils the audience’s expectations of tragic characters and tragic story patterns.

\textsuperscript{113} Burnett 1971: 188, though not thinking in terms of metadrama, finds that line 960 (the kommos after the messenger report and before the \textit{mechanema}) marks the end of the suppliant/rescue action and essentially begins a new play.

\textsuperscript{114} Zeitlin 1980: 52 notes that the absence of Apollo, “the myth-sustaining god,” is what makes room for the play’s extensive mythical inventiveness and exploration of alternative solutions for the usual story of Orestes. It is worth remembering that the playwright-figures in \textit{Phil.} (Odysseus, Heracles) are also absent for most of the play, which enables the actor to go his own way. The main difference between \textit{Phil.} and \textit{Or.} is that Euripides omits the prologue scene where the playwright instructs his actor and only mentions this event retrospectively.
by reaffirming the world of traditional myth and tragedy. This audience, like that of *Philoctetes*, cannot distinguish between illusion and reality.

In the prologue and parodos, Euripides establishes a tone of tragic depth founded on the traditional myths of the house of Tantalus only to undermine this tone repeatedly. The effect is to caution the audience against expecting a “normal” treatment of the story – that is, heroic characters punished, persecuted, or rewarded by deities who take a personal interest in them. This is the kind of world adumbrated in Electra’s opening words (1-3):\(^{116}\)

\[
où\, ε̂στιν\, οὐδὲν\, δεινὸν\, ο̂δ’\, εἴπειν\, ἔπος\noù\, πάθος\, οὐδὲ\, ξυμφορά\, θεήλατος,\n\text{ ἦς οùκ ᾤν ἀραίτ’ ἄχθος ἀνθρώπου φύσις.}\]

There is virtually nothing horrific, no suffering, no god-sent affliction, whose burden man, being what he is, might not shoulder.

Though this ringing statement portends the suffering and misery that will attend the protagonists through most of the play, the sense of the steadfast endurance, strength, and nobility of mankind will be belied almost immediately by Orestes’ pathetic appearance and his weakness in the face of Menelaus, Tyndareus, and the Argive assembly (not to mention his desperate violence in the final scenes of the play).

The world of traditional tragedy continues to be implicit in Electra’s account of her own ancestry. She tells of the privileges and crimes of Tantalus and his descendants with cautionary language about how far that information can be trusted (ὁς λέγουσιν) in lines 5 and 8, εἰ δὴ

\(^{115}\) Cf. Wolff 1968 on the disjunction of myth and plot in this play. Burnett 1971: 183-204 argues that Or. is built around a series of plot failures that continually foil the audience’s expectations of “normal” tragic action; as she puts it (183): “No situation is allowed to resolve itself in the ordinary tragic way, no character behaves throughout quite as we feel he should, and meanwhile the dramatist seems to stand aside, refusing all aid.”

\(^{116}\) Fuqua 1976: 82 sees these lines as programmatic for the play’s treatment of φύσις and its connection to the same theme in *Phil*. For the interplay of traditional myth and modernity in this opening sententia (dependent on the polyvalence of δεινός), see Willink 1986 *ad loc.*, who also comments “[t]he sentiment is traditionally ‘tragic’ in focusing attention on the δεινόν character of human πάθη …; at the same time the reflective hyperbole warns us, in a manner consistent with irony, to expect the presentation of an extravagantly δεινόν myth.”
κλεινός in line 17). She describes her family, including current generations, as living in a world in which gods and men still mingle, where divine wrath can sentence a mortal to eternal punishment and criminal behavior can resonate for generations. She is more reticent about her own parents, characterizing Clytemnestra as ἀνοσιωτάτη (24) but avoiding any details about her motives (26-7). Such avoidance will be Euripides’ strategy throughout the play; we know what Electra believes but not why she believes it, and when the audience does not know clearly the mythical details assumed in the backstory of the play, they are also unable to know what sort of characters they are dealing with and where to place their sympathies.

Apollo’s effective absence from the plot at this point, while eventually allowing the actors to take control of the script, also stands in contrast to other well-known accounts of the myth that the audience might like to rely on in interpretation (e.g. the Oresteia of Stesichorus or Aeschylus). That Apollo is said to have commanded the matricide is no surprise – indeed, it is a regular part of the myth – but Electra’s and Orestes’ extremely negative attitude toward him is unexpected. Electra speaks of ξυμφορᾶ θεήλατος (2), denounces Apollo as the ultimate cause of Clytemnestra’s death (28-31), and even accuses him of sacrificing her and Orestes (191-3); throughout the first half of the play, the two continually blame him for their crime and for abandoning them to the fallout of the matricide (28-30, 161-5, 285-7, 416-20, 590-6). But nobody else is impressed by this line of defense, and when even Orestes gives up on it, that might be taken as confirmation of Apollo’s disinterest and irrelevance. This assumption will of

117 Wright 2006: 40: “there is no reason to doubt Tantalus’ parentage or the reason for his punishment. In other words, it is the attitude towards myth, rather than the details of the myth itself, that strikes one as unusual.” As with Hel., he sees this application of “metamythology” as intended to question the concept of myth itself, whereas I would relate it to the audience’s evaluation of the action of this particular play.

118 Willink 1986 *ad loc.* thinks that Electra must have in mind Clytemnestra’s affair with Aegisthus.

119 See Gibert 2003 for the significance of this statement.
course turn out to be unfounded at the end of the play, but until then it contradicts what we know from other versions and suggests that Orestes does not after all operate in accordance with the “traditional” tragic myth. Electra’s and Orestes’ upcoming trial before the people of Argos, seemingly in place of the trial at Athens conducted by the gods, further removes the situation from the best-known (Aeschylean) version of the myth.\(^\text{120}\)

So Electra’s prologue speech sketches a typical “tragic” world of gods and heroes while simultaneously hinting that none of that is applicable here. Further, as Wright notes, “Electra is refusing to deliver a straightforwardly expository prologue-speech of the usual kind;”\(^\text{121}\) the lack of secure information in a speech that would normally be almost omniscient suggests a disjunction from traditional tragedy on a formal level as well. The same is true of the unusual parodos: the vast majority of the parodos is performed by Electra, rather than the chorus,\(^\text{122}\) who is instead scolded for singing and dancing. But this traditional tragic world is undermined most starkly by the preceding scene, in which Helen’s frivolity accentuates the dissonance within Electra’s speech and helps to mark the action and characters of Orestes as somehow alien to “normal” tragedy.

Helen seems to have a very shallow understanding of her family’s situation, almost parodically so; her offerings to Clytemnestra are paltry and her prayer singularly inappropriate.

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\(^\text{120}\) Cf. Euben 1986b: 230: “In the opening seventy lines Electra distances herself from the history of her house that she is recounting in detail: Tantalus was born of Zeus ‘or so they say’; the story of his fall from grace is a legend about which she does ‘not really know’; and of her father’s fame she says, ‘if what he had was fame.’ These doubts (which appear in other plays of Euripides), here deprive her and us of any sense of secure interpretative context, and break the continuity of past and present. Since the story of the house includes the gods, her uncertainty extends to them and the deed Orestes has done at their behest.”

\(^\text{121}\) Wright 2006: 40.

\(^\text{122}\) Burnett 1971: 196-7 briefly discusses the unconventional features of the parodos. The chorus is given 58 words out of a total 270 (= 21.48%); their part comes out to be 27% the size of Electra’s. See also Dunn 1989: 240-2 (reprinted in Dunn 1996: 163-5) for the unusual quality of these opening scenes as produced by an interplay of speech and silence.
and she blithely declares Electra and Orestes undefiled on the questionable grounds that Apollo is the one truly responsible for Clytemnestra’s death.\textsuperscript{123} That she lives closely and unconcernedly with the matricides while mourning for her sister and that she even attempts to send Electra of all people to Clytemnestra’s grave with offerings characterize her as thoughtless and absurd,\textsuperscript{124} qualities which are brought out even more sharply by Electra’s acerbic responses. This pathetic, petty family hardly seems the stuff of myth; the implication is that we should not expect the usual myth.\textsuperscript{125} And if they cannot look to the usual myth as an aid to interpreting \textit{Orestes}, then they cannot use their outside knowledge of the story to evaluate the characters or anticipate what will happen next. Moreover, they should beware of trusting any of the characters (such as Electra) when they attempt to cast the action in terms of traditional myth. In this respect, the spectators of \textit{Orestes} are more at the mercy of the playwright than the spectators of \textit{Helen}, more dependent on their own capacities to reason and interpret, more prone to being surprised or misled – in short, more like the audience of \textit{Philoctetes}.

After Helen has gone and the chorus arrived, Orestes experiences a bout of madness (253-79).\textsuperscript{126} His eyes grow wild and he leaps about as he sees Furies coming for him. Electra herself, clinging to Orestes and trying to soothe him, appears to him to be another Fury, and he pushes her away in panic. He imagines that he draws a bow given to him by Apollo and fires on the Furies, who eventually fall away from his shafts and leave him alone.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{123}] For Helen’s statement and how it reflects on her character, see Parker 1983: 104-43, 309-11 (for whom (p. 311) Helen’s statement “is simply an expression of her glib moral laxity”) and Gibert 2003: 188 (with n. 91).
\item[\textsuperscript{124}] See Willink 1986 \textit{ad loc}. for Helen’s ἀβουλία.
\item[\textsuperscript{125}] Cf. the discussion of Fuqua 1978, which, while demonstrating the relevance of myth and mythical paradigms to \textit{Or.}, constantly points out the ways in which the play undermines its apparent endorsement of traditional myth.
\item[\textsuperscript{126}] For a level-headed assessment of the theme of madness in \textit{Or.}, see Porter 1994: 298-313.
\end{footnotes}
What to make of this scene? The audience sees Orestes jumping around the stage, brandishing an invisible bow at invisible Furies and misidentifying Electra as one of them. At first appearance, it seems clear that Orestes’ mad vision is just that: a hallucination, a psychological manifestation of his guilty conscience (as he himself suggests later at 396). On the other hand, we know that the Orestes of myth is supposed to be pursued by Furies who need not be visible (as at the end of *Choephoroi*). Electra is surely not a Fury, but she often displays an unquenchable, Fury-like thirst for vengeance. We see no bow, but there was a tradition that Apollo gave Orestes a bow with which to defend himself, and the invisible bow even appears to work in this scene; as Orestes threatens the Furies and fires his bow, he imagines that he defeats them and in due course his madness subsides. But we are not able to say

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127 Cropp 1982 argues that lines 268-70 are interpolations (with further literature on the scene cited in n. 5), but see Kovacs 2002 for response. Kovacs, however, thinks that Orestes must brandish a physical bow in this scene (p. 280): “(1) There would be little point in having Orestes deludedly imagine such a gift and such instructions. Such a procedure would be mystifying, but the mystery would never be dispelled. The lines speak of a particular bow, with particular characteristics, given by Apollo to Orestes on a particular occasion with instructions to use it against the goddesses if they should attack him. This suggests a real, not an imaginary, object. (2) The most obvious interpretation of the scene is that Orestes’ words and gesticulations are effective in frightening off the Erinyes. (The alternative is to suppose that the end of Orestes’ distress just happens to coincide with the threat.) But an imaginary bow would not have that effect. (3) The lines embody an allusion to Stesichorus, for whom the bow was a real gift from Apollo. That allusion would only contribute puzzlement if in Euripides the bow is imaginary.” In my view, the point of including such a detail in this scene would be precisely to suggest the reality of Orestes’ experience even while the audience cannot visually verify it. Mystification, in other words, is exactly the desired effect of this passage. That the bow was real in Stesichorus does not require Euripides to make it real here, and in fact the Stesichorean allusion might suggest to the audience that the play operates within multiple layers of reality; if the Furies can be both imaginary and real, why not the bow? (cf. Willink 1986: 268-74n.: “[t]he Stesichorean ‘bow-giving’ had always, in a sense, been a metaphor for the protection promised by Apollo; its ‘reality’ is of the same mythic order as that of the Furies themselves” (his italics)). Kovacs accepts the reality of Orestes’ vision, claiming instead that Electra’s experience is the faulty one and that the bow is proof of this; I would prefer to remove the bow and thus leave both options equally open. Burnett 1971: 201-3 (cf. 205-22) thinks that the bow is real and remains on the stage throughout the play as a visible reminder of Orestes’ lack of faith in Apollo, but some have found this reading to be something of a Judeo-Christian anachronism.


129 Stesichorus fr. 217 Page. See Willink 1986: 268-74n. for other tragic archery scenes and for the (non)existence of a real bow in this scene. Dunn 1996: 177 describes this scene as “pitting Stesichorus against Aeschylus, pitting the bow of the lyric poet against the Furies of the tragedian.” Both bow and Furies are given at least figurative substance by their presence in previous treatments of the myth.
straightforwardly whether Orestes’ vision is a product of his fevered imagination or a real experience of the divine world.\textsuperscript{131} Our own visual experience of the scene is brought into competition with our prior knowledge of the story, and Euripides does not tell us which should be the primary basis for interpreting the play. This is exactly the dynamic operative in Helen, where Teucer and Menelaus encounter a conflict between what they know about Helen from past experience and what they see in front of them now – except that this conflict now engages the audience as well. It is thus also fundamentally similar to the first episode of Philoctetes, where the audience is “internalized” and rendered unable to determine the reliability of Neoptolemus’ story by their own prior knowledge of the myth. If my argument for the dissociation of Orestes from traditional myth in the prologue and parodos is convincing, then we may also prefer to divorce Orestes’ madness from its mythical precedents and understand it in more modern, human terms.

The same argument can be made about the dialogue between Tyndareus and Orestes (491-631). Without denying Clytemnestra’s guilt, Tyndareus contends that she should have been expelled rather than murdered (492-502); she deserved to die, but not by Orestes’ hand (538-9). Many critics have found fault with Tyndareus’ argument, since fifth-century legal processes were not supposed to exist in mythical Argos.\textsuperscript{132} But the prologue introduced several mythical details in order to demonstrate that they are irrelevant in this particular dramatic world, and I would suggest that the same thing is happening here. Euripides’ Argos is not Aeschylus’ Argos: it is essentially democratic and already has an established legal system; it is not a primitive

\textsuperscript{130} As soon as sanity returns, Orestes goes back to blaming Apollo for his predicament, which is ironic if we think that the god really did help stave off the Furies.

\textsuperscript{131} Willink 1986 \textit{ad loc.} describes this passage as a “fusion of reason, emotion and unreason.”

society of blood vendettas, and the very fact that Orestes and Electra have been put on trial perhaps shows that something similar could indeed have been done to Clytemnestra. Further, when Tyndareus imagines an Aeschylean context in which Clytemnestra bared her breast to Orestes as she begged for her life (526-8), it is significant that he invokes a passage that makes Clytemnestra out to be a victim of impious violence; there is no mention of the “man-counseling” Clytemnestra who dominates the action of Agamemnon. Euripides is citing Aeschylus very selectively. Reference to one part of the Oresteia should make us aware of the parts that are missing and wonder how much of Aeschylus’ treatment should be transferred to Orestes.

Orestes responds to Tyndareus with arguments borrowed from the Aeschylean Apollo that he is the son of his father rather than his mother and that by killing Clytemnestra he set an example for other would-be adulterous and murderous wives, thus protecting all the men of Greece. But the very fact that it is Orestes, not Apollo, making this argument points up Apollo’s already conspicuous absence from the play. Moreover, Orestes’ audience here (Tyndareus and Menelaus) is rather less amenable to these arguments than the Aeschylean Athena was. This defense won acquittal for Orestes in Eumenides, but here it fails even to budge Tyndareus or win Menelaus’ support, and it fails again in the trial (931-42).\footnote{Willink 1986 \emph{ad loc.} prefers to delete 932-43 as an interpolation. But given the nature of this play and its sometimes ambivalent characterization of Orestes, sarcasm and flawed logic seem insufficient justification for deleting these lines; see also Porter 1994: 74 n. 102 for defense.} Characters like Menelaus and Tyndareus are not interested in a defense based on divine justification; they are more concerned with the laws and politics in Argos and Sparta, and their disregard for what Apollo did or did not do suggests to the audience that the gods are simply irrelevant in this play.\footnote{The trial itself}
appears to be a replacement for the Aeschylean trial at Athens, but without any gods and apparently without much concern for justice. It is not meant to end a cycle of vengeance, as in Aeschylus, and if the Argives and their various leaders were really interested in finding a just solution, they would probably side with Diomedes, who proposes exile rather than execution.

Instead, the Argives are swayed by Tyndareus and the friends of Aegisthus, who simply want vengeance, and the likes of Talthybius, who sides with whoever is in power. We are indeed meant to think of the *Oresteia* in these passages – but only to notice the differences between it and *Orestes*.

After the messenger has described the trial and its decision, Electra and the chorus sing a lament (960-1012). Electra sticks to the version of her family history which she outlined in the prologue: her fate is simply the worst and most recent in a chain of disasters reaching back to Tantalus. We have already been cautioned by the prologue against taking uses of the traditional myth at face value; the world of the play does not appear to be the same as that which was supposedly inhabited by Tantalus and the rest, nor does it appear to be a world in which gods and men still interact meaningfully, whether for good or for ill. Moreover, the chorus offers an alternative explanation according to which the fall of the house of Tantalus is due to a more vague φθόνος θεότε, which suggests that the successful family has reached the end of its

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134 Cf. Gibert 2003: 195, commenting that “[i]t is a commonplace of criticism that the characters of *Orestes* are represented as distant from the gods, and also that Euripides encourages us to measure this distance by constantly recalling specific passages of the *Oresteia*.”

135 At the end, Apollo explains that Orestes will still have to go to Athens and stand trial before a panel of gods there (1648-52) – but the audience does not know that until Apollo’s appearance.

136 For Diomedes’ proposal as moderate and unbiased, see Willink 1986: 898-902n.

137 This is the argument of Porter 1994: 93-7 (against Greenberg 1962).

138 In my discussion, I follow Diggle’s text; see Willink 1986 for an alternative distribution of lines. Damen 1990 suggests that the whole thing was originally choral, and Electra’s part was only recast later.
good luck, and “fate,” which seems to comprise little more than the vicissitudes of fortune that attend all human affairs. Electra’s attempt to connect her suffering with a family history that is important and renowned (if not always admirable) rings hollow in the modernized context of Argive democracy and in the absence of the sort of divine activity usually associated with the house of Tantalus (and with Orestes in particular). The malleability of the mythical past reaches beyond the characters, each of whom thinks he or she has figured out how the world works, to affect the audience, who is constantly reminded that the characters’ knowledge is not reliable and is thus deprived of any real guidance in interpretation.  

The hatching of the mechanema signals the start of the smaller-scale play within a play, but in fact Orestes has already been trying out many different roles throughout the tragedy. As Froma Zeitlin has shown in her definitive article on role-playing in *Orestes*, Orestes is trapped within his own myth, and role-playing seems to be his primary means of escaping from it and finding some control over his own destiny. During his fit of madness, he assumes the Stesichorean version of himself, an Orestes who still has divine support and can fight off the bloodthirsty Furies. When he goes off to the assembly supported by Pylades, he becomes a

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139 Cf. Euben 1986b: 247: “Removing the spectator’s omniscience unites him with the principals in their baffled groping for meaning, puissance, and stature.” Euripides’ tactic in this scene is fundamentally similar to the one used in Soph. *El.* (studied in the previous chapter), in which the audience is presented with contradictory views of the divine world with no way to choose between them.

140 Cf. Dunn 1989, who argues that Orestes employs various types of comic license to escape from his tragic situation; his argument for the collapse of generic boundaries at the end of the play broadly supports my contention that *Or.* deliberately defies the audience’s expectations of “typical” tragedy.

141 Zeitlin 1980; though she discusses role-playing with reference to mythical characters (rather than actors), it is an easy step from a character who plays a role to a character who therefore conceptually represents an actor, and indeed, Zeitlin’s “closet of masks” analogy invites such an extension. Cf. Fuqua 1976 (from which Fuqua 1978 borrows heavily), who discusses the “mythical paradigms” used by Sophocles to create Neoptolemus (and, to a lesser extent, by Euripides to create Orestes); the concept is fundamentally similar to that of role-playing, as Neoptolemus and Orestes each in turn attempt to follow the example of Telemachus.
double of Heracles supported by Theseus. His mocking comment about the Gorgon identifies him with Medusa but also (indirectly) with his own mother. When he appears on the roof of the stage-building at the end with his knife at a girl’s throat, he tries to assume the role of the victorious Medea, who kills her sons, avenges herself on Jason, and escapes with impunity.

But even as he ransacks the “closet of masks” in a search for the role that will free him from his mythical constraints, he keeps returning to the same patterns of Atreid violence. In attacking Helen, he repeats the murder of Clytemnestra; in threatening Hermione, he nearly repeats the sacrifice of Iphigenia. He plays the roles of both of his parents against each other and his own family, making as if to continue the cycle of violence along exactly the same lines as the previous generation – all in an attempt to get away from that cycle. The paradox is that the plotline gets so out of control (to the point where Orestes orders the burning of the palace at Argos) while still being a closed system of Atreid violence; no matter how far Orestes strays from his script, he ends up right back where he started.

So when Orestes and his friends devise the *mechanema*, they are making more explicit a pattern of salvific role-playing that has pervaded the tragedy up to this point. Like Neoptolemus, who agrees to deception once force and persuasion have been ruled out, Orestes turns to the *mechanema* when all other options have failed him, when Apollo, Menelaus, Tyndareus, and the Argive assembly all seem to have turned against him. Orestes, Pylades, and Electra plot to deceive and kill Helen, kidnap Hermione, and coerce Menelaus into helping them escape. Pylades continues to give the lie to the audience’s tragic expectations by assuming a role that

143 A point made also by Kovacs 2002.
perverts his more usual tragic self. As often, he is the one responsible for offering advice in a critical situation, but in this case that means proposing the murder of Helen (1105). In an ironic reversal of his advice to Orestes in *Choephoroi* (902, “hold all men your enemies, rather than the gods!”), he urges a course of action that could draw the enmity of both men and gods. His usual willingness to take risks and even die with Orestes (cf. *IT* 674-86) becomes to a willingness to help murder Helen and kidnap Hermione.\(^{144}\) The perversity of the whole situation is underscored by Orestes’ effusive praise for his friends’ “noble” suggestions (1155-61, 1204-8).

In fact, if we are looking for a playwright-figure in this scene, Electra is the best candidate. Though Pylades is the first to suggest something other than immediate suicide, Electra is the one to change the plot fundamentally from one of revenge (and then suicide) to one of escape and salvation (1177-8). She describes for Orestes two alternative scenarios, one in which Menelaus yields and one in which he does not (1195-9), and predicts which course the action will take (1200-2). While Orestes and Pylades enter the palace to carry out the plot, she remains outside and directs the chorus to keep watch (1246-95). When Hermione appears, Electra hurriedly explains the plan to the chorus again, telling them how they and she should behave in order to deceive Hermione (1317-20): they must school their facial expressions, which were of course represented by masks, so that they look the way they always do – the chorus calm and expressionless, Electra σκυθρωπός. In the end, Electra even traps Hermione by giving her a role to play in her miniature drama as a suppliant of Helen (1337-9, though Orestes and Pylades have already made an attempt on Helen’s life). Even after Hermione has gone into the palace, Electra continues to call directions to her allies (1345-6, 1349-52). Urging on Orestes from

\(^{144}\) See Burnett 1971: 213-5 on Pylades in this scene. Sommerstein 2011 discusses Orestes and his companions (together with Sophocles’ Neoptolemus and Euripides’ Eteocles and Pentheus) as “problem kids” who fall into corruption and hubris – a type of character specific to tragedy in the late fifth century.
outside is also her role in the Sophoclean *Electra* (1415) and in both of her eponymous plays she is a keen advocate of vengeance, so her eagerness here to kidnap the innocent Hermione is a perversion of the tragic tradition along the same lines as Pylades’ advice to Orestes to kill Helen. But Electra is also a playwright-figure like the heroines of the romances, who take the initiative to devise and direct a plot.\(^{145}\)

Orestes and Pylades attempt to cast themselves in a heroic role by imitating Odysseus when they enter the palace to supplicate Helen (cf. Odysseus’ supplication of Arete) and when they lock up the servants in different rooms to keep them out of the way (cf. Odysseus’ return to Ithaca). In both cases, Orestes is attempting to appropriate a heroic paradigm for his rather unheroic actions,\(^{146}\) that is, he plays the part of the epic hero even though his situation and his moral character do not fit the part. Sophocles’ Neoptolemus attempted something very similar in creating an image of himself as heroic even though he did not yet have any real claim to heroism. Neoptolemus’ role-playing, however, is arguably more appropriate to his character, since he does possess the Achillean legacy to which he is pretending; Orestes’ appropriation of the heroic paradigm is specious, and one might even argue that while Neoptolemus risks destroying his good character by playing a wicked role, Orestes is concealing a wicked character beneath a good role. The clash between his heroic assumptions and his bullying behavior is evident in the pseudo-epic description of his slaughter of Helen’s slaves (1402-6, 1458-89) and his interview with the terrified Phrygian, who is clearly not up to playing the role of epic opponent.

\(^{145}\) Of course it is also appropriate from a Greek point of view that the heroine should be responsible for the deception, since, as Orestes says (*IT* 1032) δειναὶ γὰρ αἱ γυναῖκες εὑρίσκειν τέχνας.

\(^{146}\) Cf. Fuqua 1976.
The Phrygian’s extraordinary performance (1369-1524) provides another good example of how this play constantly foils the audience’s tragic or mythic expectations. It is standard tragic practice to have a messenger emerge from the palace after one or more characters have entered with the intention of committing a murder. But instead of the usual faceless messenger who gives an impossibly detailed narration of what went on in the house, we have a panicked Phrygian slave who either bursts out of the palace or even vaults down from the roof and sings a nearly incoherent description of Orestes’ failed attack on Helen. After more than a hundred lines of this, it is still not entirely clear whether Helen has died or what has happened to her (information that a normal messenger would have announced up front); in fact, the Phrygian is intent only on telling Orestes whatever he wants to hear, and Orestes’ own bullying attitude turns what could have been a staid and mournful messenger scene into an absurd stichomythia. When the Phrygian asserts that Helen died justly (ἐνδικώτατα), Orestes accuses him of merely saying what he wants to hear, then turns around and threatens to kill the Phrygian if he does not say what Orestes wants to hear (1514-6):

Or. δειλία γλώσση χαρίζῃ, τάνδον οὐχ οὕτω φρονῶν.
Phr. οὐ γάρ, ἤτις Ἐλλάδα ἄυτοίς Φρυξὶ διελυμήνατο;
Or. ὅμοσον (εἰ δὲ μὴ, κτενῶ σε) μὴ λέγειν ἐμὴν χάριν.

Or. You’re a coward, trying to curry favor with your tongue: this is not what you really think.
Phr. No? When she has ruined Greece – and the Phrygians too?
Or. Swear an oath (or I’ll kill you) that you’re not just saying so to please me.

This messenger is not only incoherent with fear, he is ready to adapt his message in order to save his own skin. As a soft, cowardly Phrygian, he is the antithesis of the typical tragic Trojan and instead reflects fifth-century Athens’ jingoistic attitude toward easterners (especially the Persian

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147 For defense of the authenticity of this passage, see O’Brien 1986 and Porter 1994: 216-44.
148 For the conventional omniscience of tragic messengers, see Barrett 2002 (esp. pp. 23-6).
The Phrygian undermines the audience’s expectations of both tragic messengers and tragic Trojans.150

By this point in the play, confusion reigns. Even those who were actually inside the house when Helen disappeared are not sure what really happened, and the Phrygian only seemed sure about her death when he was threatened by Orestes. When Menelaus arrives, he rejects the report of her disappearance as a product either of the messenger’s fear or of Orestes’ trickery (1556-60). He remains convinced that Helen has been murdered, though Orestes’ response that he would have killed her if he could have indicates that she is not dead (1579-85).151

The question is finally resolved by the appearance of Apollo ex machina (1625), possibly with Helen in tow.152 His speech is intensely mythological, as if to counter the unreliability of myth as a criterion throughout the play up to now and emphasize the characters’ inability to appreciate divine involvement in their affairs, most recently in the disappearance of Helen. The prologue and numerous significant scenes throughout the play have suggested that the world of myth, a world in which gods personally protect and reward their favorite mortals and punish their enemies, was no more than a distant memory with no real pertinence to the action on stage.

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149 Cf. the treatment of Trojans in Eur. Hec. and Tro. The Phrygian’s fear is cast as un-Trojan esp. at 1517-24, where his obvious fear of dying leads Orestes to wonder how the war at Troy could have lasted ten years. Orestes assumes that, as a Phrygian slave, he should be tough and courageous (the type of Trojan who resisted the Greek invasion) or else eager to die and thus cease to be a slave. Willink 1986 ad loc. gives a balanced account of the Phrygian and aptly compares Polyxena’s nobler attitude at Hec. 357-78. On Athens and Persia, see Miller 1997 (who is interested in positive reception of Persian culture in Athens but still admits (p. 1) that “by the end of the fifth century the word barbaros usually denoted an inhabitant of the Persian Empire, and connoted cowardice, weakness, and effeminacy”), as well as Long 1986 and Hall 1989 for the depiction of barbarians in Attic drama.


152 See Willink 1986 ad loc., Mastronarde 1990: 262-4 for the staging of this scene.
Apollo’s epiphany not only reverses the near-disastrous climax of the play but also reasserts that mythical world: not only do the gods still take an active interest in human affairs, we are even told that Aeschylus’ divine trial on the Areopagus (or something like it) will still take place. It turns out that Electra’s mythical paradigm was accurate all along, though we would never have known it from the action of the play.

So Euripides creates a dynamic similar to that of Sophocles’ false merchant scene but on a much larger scale and reveals that the entire tragedy has been a red herring. Apollo’s willingness to step in and help Orestes (in spite of his hostility) and his ability to reverse everything in the human world suggest that the characters (and the audience) have been attempting to sort out the mythical background and determine the legitimacy of the matricide to no purpose. The audience has been constantly comparing the world of Orestes with that of Aeschylean myth only to discover that there is in fact no meaningful difference.

Apollo’s appearance also represents the playwright’s return to reclaim his script from recalcitrant actors. Like Neoptolemus, Orestes has taken the play into his own hands and improvised in ways that run counter both to the traditional myth and to Apollo’s plans as he describes them in this play. Neoptolemus is almost literally given a script by Odysseus, which he eventually abandons to go his own way. Orestes is not being closely directed by any such figure of authority, but that is the very problem. Apollo, who should have been his playwright,

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153 Cf. Wolff 1968: 134: “The past has no more viable connection to the present, but is still a burden on it. This burden is so great that the present – the plot of the play – appears to lose its substance, to lead nowhere, to achieve nothing. The new story, in terms of the traditional continuity of the myth to which the play returns in the end, might just as well not have taken place.”

154 As Parry 1969: 344 puts it, “[t]he characters merely experience a brief and futile sojourn in the real world until Apollo returns them to their mythical destinies.” Euben 1986b: 243-5 has a particularly cynical reading of the end of this play. Wolff 1968: 138 sees Orestes’ statement at 1668-9 as another indication of the futility of the action: not only does Apollo impose an arbitrary conclusion in despite of human activity, but that activity may not even have been instigated by a legitimate oracle. But cf. West 1987: 292-3 for the problematic phrase μ’ εἰσῄει δῆμα, which could refer to the recent or the more distant past, i.e. to what Apollo has just said in his epiphany speech or to his earlier command to kill Clytemnestra.
has deserted him, forcing him to become his own playwright and invent his own script. Thus, though Euripides does not set up his play within a play as clearly as Sophocles does, he creates an authorial void for Orestes to step into early in the drama; once we have been told that the sorcerer is away, we know that the apprentice is free to experiment. As a result of these rogue actors’ experiments, both plays nearly end with mythically impossible events (Neoptolemus taking Philoctetes home instead of to Troy, Orestes killing Hermione and burning down the palace at Argos), and in both cases, the impossible conclusion is forestalled by the appearance of a *deus ex machina* who represents the authoritative intervention of the true playwright, the only one who can effect a proper ending.¹⁵⁵

But are the endings of *Philoctetes* and *Orestes* “proper”? Both Heracles and Apollo essentially reverse the natural conclusion toward which events have been building, and thus both endings contain a hint of improbability, if not outright absurdity. At the same time, Heracles is fairly well integrated into the major themes of the play,¹⁵⁶ and he has been mentioned before as a model of heroic endurance; Philoctetes’ quick change of mind seems less far-fetched when we consider his relationship to Heracles, the thematic importance of friendship in this play, and its exploration of the meaning of heroism. Apollo, on the other hand, after being blamed and criticized throughout the first half of the play for giving an impious command and failing to support the people who carried it out, drops from sight entirely until his appearance on the crane at line 1625. Though he is present in a fashion throughout the play, his intervention is not thematically prepared for, as Heracles’ is, and his speech seems designed to highlight the

¹⁵⁵ Apollo is the only one who succeeds (and spectacularly so) in his attempted action; cf. Burnett 1971: 195.

¹⁵⁶ Winnington-Ingram 1980: 299 (who perhaps goes too far (n. 60) in calling the epiphany an “unobtrusive demonstration of how the deus-ex-machina convention could be used without that discontinuity of tone we find so often in Euripides”), Seale 1982: 45-6, Hoppin 1990: 161-4.
completeness and absurdity of the reversal: Orestes will marry the woman he is threatening to kill, Menelaus blesses his daughter’s marriage to the man who has just tried to blackmail him, Orestes will rule as king in a city that has just condemned him to death…. What is Euripides up to? Why would he deliberately mark the god’s intervention – the playwright’s correction of his actor’s chaotic experimentation – as an absurdity?

Perhaps absurdity and arbitrariness are exactly the point. Orestes, the would-be actor-playwright, has abandoned his script and attempted to invent a new version of the myth; his version is both disastrous for all involved and, paradoxically, not very original, since it rehashes various aspects of Atreid myth as well as most of Euripides’ previous work. When Orestes appears atop the stage-building, he is attempting to play the role of authoritative deus only to be literally upstaged by the real thing (as many critics have noted). But Orestes is also a recalcitrant actor trying to do the playwright’s job and impose some sort of conclusion on the play; on this level too he is supplanted by the real playwright, who is able to send a real deus to effect a real conclusion. The harshness and absurdity of the conclusion are the playwright’s reassertion of his dominance in the actor-poet relationship: the poet can write whatever sort of conclusion he likes – even an illogical one – and the audience has little choice but to accept it. Only the playwright, not the actor, can get away with this degree of dramatic absurdity.  

Cf. Roberts 1988: 192: “where Sophocles leaves loose ends, Euripides tends to tie up loose ends with an exaggerated completeness, answering questions we would not even have thought to ask. The most extreme example of this tendency is his Orestes, but it is not the only one. Euripides’ predicted futures, moreover, frequently stand in contrast to what preceded … by juxtaposing and contrasting the world Euripides has created in a play with the world of traditional myth. By this and other means, Euripides (especially in his later plays) suggests the arbitrariness or artificiality of endings, an artificiality that seems sometimes benign, sometimes disturbing.”

Cf. Dunn 1996: 171: “Only a god [and a poet?] has the power and authority to impose a ‘resolution’ that resolves nothing, to prescribe a conclusion that is totally oblivious of all that has gone before.” Schein 1975 connects the disjunction of myth and reality in Or. with a Thucydidean political pessimism at the end of the century and suggests that myth is ultimately shown to be meaningless, destroyed by the reality of the characters’ moral depravity.
So *Orestes* vastly expands the themes we have been studying in this chapter. There are actually two plays within this play, the one represented by the *mechanema*, the other incorporating Orestes’ nearly continuous role-playing and his attempts to escape from the script set for him by Apollo and the mythical tradition. His attempts fail because he lacks either the histrionic competence or the heroic character necessary to fill these roles, and in the end, these shortcomings lead to a nearly catastrophic conclusion which only the true playwright has the skill and authority to correct. Euripides reestablishes the superiority of the playwright by using the same device as Sophocles but with opposite implications. The absurdity of the conclusion, which runs counter to the “rules” of the play as the audience has come to understand them and reveals that the entire play was a red herring also establishes the poet’s control over his spectators. It is the poet, and the poet alone, who decides what sort of dramatic experience the audience will have; their role, if they can manage it, is to find the meaning in the poet’s carefully crafted absurdity.

**Conclusion: Tragedy and Absurdity**

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the close interaction between Sophocles and Euripides in one phase of their careers by comparing sequential uses of similar dramatic strategies. Given the close chronology, it is not unlikely that *Helen* and the other romances influenced *Philoctetes*, which in turn influenced *Orestes*, and that has been my working assumption throughout this chapter. But whether or not that assumption is correct, the commonality of interests and similarity of techniques among these plays indicates that they are all drawing on the same ever-evolving pool of dramatic material. In this case, a key element, the growing self-consciousness of tragedies in the late fifth century, should be attributed in part to an
external phenomenon, the rise of star actors, who were becoming increasingly prominent and perhaps even beginning to rival the poets for the audience’s interest and approval. Creating a play within a play was not something the poets just did; it was a response to the changing dynamics of theatrical production and was accompanied by a great deal of dramaturgical experimentation and self-reflection. The poets made tragedy itself a medium for discussing dramaturgy and performance. Their interest lay not only in innovating and toying with traditional elements of dramaturgy but in being seen to do so by the audience. All three plays we have examined in this section put a creative new twist on a well-known story, and Sophocles and Euripides both use these occasions not only to advertise the novelty of their plots but also to discuss the current state of tragic production – the role of the poet, the role of the actors, and the relationship between the two, as well as the importance of the spectator in creating dramatic meaning.

*Helen* shows a relatively superficial interest in dramaturgy, focusing on such matters as costume and plausibility of plot, and the inventiveness of the poet-figure receives more attention than the roles of either actor or spectator; it does, however, raise the question of drama’s status along a spectrum of illusion and reality. *Philoctetes* is more concerned with both actor and spectator and expands on the theme of drama as illusion. In response to the rising status of actors in the late fifth century, this play examines more closely the challenges that face an actor asked to play a difficult or unappealing part and reasserts the primacy of the poet over the actor, as only the former is able to create a fully satisfying conclusion. Sophocles also brings the external spectator into the play so that he, like Philoctetes, is unable to tell dramatic appearance from dramatic reality (especially with reference to the mythical background). *Orestes* builds on

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these ideas further. The external spectator is again drawn into the action and made uncertain of how he is to apply his mythical knowledge in interpreting the play. The actor-figure again improvises a script, drawing on numerous mythical paradigms that fail to suit his particular plot; the poet again confirms his dominance in that relationship by imposing an ending that would have been impossible for the actor alone and that the audience has little choice but to accept, absurd though it is.

In each play, a similar combination of elements creates a different overall tone. Helen is generally light-hearted. Not all have found it so, and certainly the characters take risks and nearly bring themselves to disaster; certainly the action has serious implications for the human condition. But the audience, observing from an epistemologically secure distance, can appreciate these implications without actually becoming caught up in them. Spectators of Helen do not fear for the happy ending as the characters do, nor as spectators of Philoctetes do. Sophocles’ play, on the other hand, is quite serious throughout: Philoctetes’ pitiable state (including an onstage seizure), his unrelenting hatred for his enemies, Neoptolemus’ pangs of conscience, the contradictory burdens of duty and morality, his sacrifice of his own worldly well-being for the sake of a promise – these are serious issues, and they are treated with a serious tone. The irony in this play is not amusing or absurd, as it often is in Helen. But Euripides’ way of dealing with ideas of deception and illusion is through absurdity. His ideas are serious too, but he uses the close juxtaposition of human knowledge and ignorant behavior to drive home the point in an almost academic fashion. Orestes is a curious combination of tragedy and absurdity. The dramatic action is detached from its mythical surroundings, making the epiphany at the end
unexpected\textsuperscript{160} and (one suspects) deliberately difficult to reconcile with the rest of the play. The epiphany itself reverses the action so drastically – and the characters change their attitudes so drastically – as to suggest a certain hollowness to the conclusion, which the characters doubt even as they accept it.\textsuperscript{161} The poets’ inventive engagement with each other has given us three plays with numerous thematic and structural similarities and yet a remarkable variety of tone and content.

This chapter’s main purpose has been to situate \textit{Philoctetes} within its immediate dramatic context, which means relating it to plays on both sides, earlier and later. In general, this approach brings Sophocles and Euripides closer together, since we can witness them treating the same ideas and using the same techniques in a series of plays. Indeed, if we look at only half of the equation (\textit{Philoctetes} and the romances, or \textit{Philoctetes} and \textit{Orestes}), we risk oversimplifying the relationship among these plays.

For instance, Euripides’ \textit{Helen} explores relatively simple aspects of performance such as costuming, delivery, and plausibility of plot, while \textit{Philoctetes} dwells more on a single actor-figure and invests his role-playing with an ethical importance. It would be easy to conclude that these two plays demonstrate a fundamental difference between the poets: Euripides is interested in spectacle, Sophocles in character; or perhaps Euripides sees drama primarily in terms of entertainment, while Sophocles uses it as a vehicle for moral thought and teaching. Once we add \textit{Orestes} to the mix, however, we find that these conclusions cannot stand. \textit{Orestes} redeploys several Sophoclean themes and techniques. Its hero is a perverted version of the Sophoclean Neoptolemus – a malleable young man whose moral character becomes corrupted \textit{in spite of} the

\textsuperscript{160}Orestes has already taken up a position “on high” (to use the term of Mastronarde 1990), and there is no known precedent for a pseudo-\textit{deus} and a real \textit{deus} appearing together. The scene is otherwise similar to the end of Eur. \textit{Med}.; see Arnott 1973: 59-60, Zeitlin 1980: 62.

many heroic roles he assumes; and in fact, Sophocles’ discussion of the ethics of role-playing probably has its roots in Helen in Menelaus’ struggle to find a role that suits his natural talents.

Again, the spectator is treated differently in Euripides’ romances and Sophocles’ Philoctetes. Helen is more concerned with the figures of poet and actor and the challenges of performance than with the spectator’s experience: while the internal audience of Helen grapples with the principals’ deceptive performance, the external audience sits high and dry, as it were, and observes from a safe distance. By contrast, Philoctetes depicts the spectator as a potentially vulnerable interpreter of performance; instead of placing his spectators in a position of superior knowledge, Sophocles involves them in the characters’ confusion by putting much of the mythical background in the mouth of a deceptive character. But we should beware of suspecting that Euripides prefers to keep his audience distant from the action or that Sophocles is uniquely interested in ambiguity. Rather, Sophocles is extending to the external audience an effect that Euripides had already applied to the internal audience, and in Orestes Euripides does the same thing. In an extension of the false merchant scene in Philoctetes, where the audience is tricked into thinking that an exchange is meaningful when it is not, the audience of Orestes is made to think that they are watching a modernized tragedy only to discover that all the usual rules of myth and tragedy still apply.162 In both plays, the audience’s own outside knowledge of the myth proves to be an impediment to straightforward interpretation of the action. So also Apollo’s epiphany in Orestes is not merely a rejection or parody of the epiphany in Philoctetes but is meant rather to make the same point about the primacy of the poet: both plays not only

162 Fuqua 1976: 66 n. 40: “It is also possible that, if the Orestes is considered as a response to the Philoctetes, then Euripides’ highly imaginative version of the events after the death of Clytemmaestra signals the dramatist’s desire to echo Sophocles’ innovative treatment in the Philoctetes and to carry this technique to an extreme.”
drive home the precariousness of the audience’s epistemological position but also emphasize the poet’s unique ability to create a conclusion for his play.

Even the three-play discussion we have pursued here is a great deal simpler than the reality must have been. An exhaustive account of the extant evidence for the poets’ ongoing dialogue about acting and performance at the end of the fifth century would have to include, minimally, the historical context of acting and dramatic competition, contemporary sophistic and philosophical attitudes toward role-playing, Euripides’ other romances (*Ion, Iphigenia among the Taurians*, and even *Andromeda*), and comedies like *Thesmophoriazusae*. This chapter only touches the tip of the iceberg.

Of course, dramatic self-consciousness did not die out after *Orestes*. Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Bacchae* both contain notable bits of metadrama. *Iphigenia*, though lacking a full-blown play within a play, also opens with a bit of dramatic self-consciousness: as Agamemnon attempts to rescind his earlier command to have Iphigenia brought to Aulis, he is also trying to rewrite (μεταγράφω, 108) the plot of the play at the last minute. *Bacchae* is even more conspicuously self-conscious, and it would be natural to include it in a discussion of tragedy and metadrama in the late fifth century; it has been omitted here simply because our focus is on Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* and how it relates to the plays on either side of it. It is more than likely, however, that *Bacchae* could and should be read as another step in this same sequence, and I shall conclude this chapter with a few thoughts on how *Bacchae* relates to this discussion of metadrama.

Like *Helen*, *Bacchae* focuses on the use of costume in performance and the question of the illusory status of drama. Like *Orestes*, *Bacchae* contains two plays within it, one of which

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163 The prologue of *IA* is notoriously problematic; for recent attempts to sort Euripides’ work from later additions, see Diggle and Kovacs 2003.
spans most of the dramatic action. Dionysus devises the plot of the play in the prologue and then disguises himself in order to carry out a large-scale deception of the people of Thebes. As the creator of the main outline of the action, Dionysus represents the external poet, Euripides, but he also becomes an internal playwright when he helps Pentheus disguise himself as a maenad. It is Dionysus who suggests spying on the maenads in the first place and directs Pentheus’ costuming and subsequent journey to the mountains – even though Pentheus thinks that he is the one in control. Pentheus himself collapses the roles of actor and spectator: he dons a new costume, but (as is often noted) with the intention of playing the part of spectator (οὐράς, 829) to the maenads; but the maenads’ own Dionysiac delusion causes his costume to fail, and they draw him unwillingly into their “performance,” eventually reducing him to a prop. Though we have seen internal and external playwrights in the plays discussed in this chapter, it is an original move on Euripides’ part to collapsed the two into one character in Bacchae. Like Helen, Dionysus is to some extent his own protagonist, but for the most part he lets Pentheus play the dominant role while he himself remains ostensibly passive; for instance, when he disguises Pentheus and sends him into the mountains, Dionysus orchestrates his movements and the maenads’ reactions while participating relatively little in the action himself. But for all his passivity, this poet never loses control over his actors.

At first glance, the audience’s epistemological position is the steadiest since Helen and the other romances, as the prologue informs spectators of Dionysus’ plan and prepares them for his disguise. At the same time, they witness Pentheus as spectator being pulled into the dramatic action, and the Dionysiac quality of the play creates an atmosphere of unreality that causes the

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165 I.e. when Agave returns from the mountains carrying his head, which is essentially a prop whether or not the word πρόσωπον (1277) could mean “mask” in the fifth century.
external audience to experience Dionysus’ power in some of the same ways as the characters. This is most notable in the “palace miracle” scene, where it seems that Euripides has his chorus describe the total collapse of the palace (602-3) without representing it visually, thus creating a disconnect between the audience’s two main sources of dramatic knowledge (what they see on stage and what they hear from the characters). Dionysus’ smiling mask, together with the notorious “comic elements” (including Pentheus’ costuming and the aged Cadmus’ and Teiresias’ attempt at ecstatic dance), may serve the similar purpose of disorienting the audience and suggesting to them a tragic world turned upside-down. And Charles Segal has suggested that when Agave slowly returns to her senses at the end of the play, we may be meant to observe that this is the same sort of process the spectator undergoes when he leaves behind the “dramatic illusion” and “attempts to integrate the fiction now ending into the reality of his own experience and self-understanding.”

The absurdity of Bacchae is different from that of Orestes, as it derives entirely from the god’s mystifying power that alters the way the characters see the world around them. Dramatic performance becomes a religious experience brought about by direct contact with the god of the theater. That it is Dionysus who represents both the internal and the external playwright, and who creates for both internal and external spectators a dramatic experience that is simultaneously

166 On the staging of the earthquake and collapse of the palace, see e.g. Segal 1982: 219-22, Goldhill 1986: 276-82; Taplin 1978: 119-20 does not think that these events were staged at all, but his discussion is more concerned with the contrast between the chorus’ excitement and Dionysus’ calm. Segal especially has a good discussion of the language of “seeing” and “appearance” that lends subjectivity to the audience’s experience of the collapse. If the collapse is rendered only (or almost only) through the words of the characters and chorus, then it becomes a focal point for Euripides’ discussion of the “dramatic illusion;” what the audience sees does not line up with what they hear from the characters, and so they must decide on their own whether or not the collapse “really happened.”

167 These elements, together with some that seem satyric, suggest that Bacch. may also be a discourse on genre. On comedy and satyr play in Bacch., see esp. Seidensticker 1978, Sansone 1978 (the latter urging caution in identification and interpretation of satyric elements in tragedy).

168 Segal 1982: 265.
illusory and illuminating raises questions about the meaning of the “dramatic illusion” particularly insistently.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Goldhill 1986: 265-86 discusses some of the ways the audience is brought into the action of Eur. Bacch., emphasizing (against Taplin) the inherent subjectivity even of the original performance (p. 283): “Each actor reads his lines as an interpretation – with the overseeing of a director or even the author, who may also offer an instructive reading, an interpretation for the actor. The actor’s interrelations on stage are subject to the constructive interpretation of the audience.” The experience of any tragedy is thus constructed jointly by the audience and the actors; plays like Bacch. make the audience aware of this fact. On self-referentiality in Bacch., see also Lada-Richards 1999: 159-215.
In the last chapter, we examined an ongoing dialogue between Sophocles and Euripides about the nature of their art, the demands upon the poet and the actor to give a good performance, and the challenge to the spectator of achieving a satisfactory interpretation of the performance. Metadrama of this sort occurs more frequently and more openly in tragedy of the late fifth century than it does earlier and thus is more usually associated with Euripides than Sophocles. In this chapter, we turn to what is supposed to be a more “Sophoclean” sphere: the characters and conception of his last play, *Oedipus at Colonus*. Like previous chapters, this one attempts to describe the playwright at work at a particular moment late in his career: what was fresh and topical in the world of Greek drama when Sophocles sat down to write *Oedipus at Colonus*? What tidbits did he gather from others’ recent dramatic accomplishments, and how did he manipulate or combine them effectively in his latest extant play?

Interpreters of *Oedipus at Colonus* have often viewed it as an extension or reworking of the ideas treated in Sophocles’ earlier *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Since so much of Sophocles’ modern reputation derives from his “three Theban plays,” it is natural to think of one in the context of the

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1 *Vit. Soph.* (21) gives what is probably the best known description of Sophocles’ skill at characterization; this chapter, however, will be more concerned with Sophocles’ overall conceptualization of certain characters rather than his techniques of characterization.
other two, and since so little of Sophocles’ corpus survives, it is reasonable to analyze three complete treatments of the same mythical family all together to formulate conclusions about Sophocles’ dramatic style and preferences. This tendency is reinforced by the fact that Sophocles himself clearly links the action of *Oedipus at Colonus* to both *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus.*² On the other hand, it is a bit of a stretch to claim that Oedipus is *the same character* in both of his namesake plays or that both are ultimately based on some essentially consistent conception of Oedipus’ story. But the fragments of Sophocles’ lost work indicate that the Theban myths were of less interest to him than his surviving plays would suggest,³ and though *Oedipus Tyrannus* was highly esteemed even in antiquity,⁴ there is no particular reason to think that Sophocles saw *Oedipus at Colonus* as the restoration of his paradigmatic tragic hero or worried about portraying Oedipus (and others) consistently in plays written some twenty years apart. Most scholars nowadays shy away from such an extreme account of the relationship between Sophocles’ Theban plays.

*Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* thus constitute one particular dramatic context of *Oedipus at Colonus* (what we might call the “authorial context”), but the *immediate* dramatic context of *Oedipus at Colonus* is still largely overlooked. It is more than likely that recent productions also influenced the composition of that play. So what other tragedies were produced

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² E.g. Oedipus’ defenses of his past actions at (*OC* 510-48, 960-99), the curse on Creon (*OC* 864-70) and references to the burial of Polyneices (*OC* 1410). On the intertextuality of *OC* with *Ant.* and *OT*, see esp. Markantonatos 2007: 195-230. There is no doubt that *OC* refers to *Ant.* and *OT*, but using these allusions to create an extradramatic story line on which to base a reading of *OC* (as e.g. Rosenmeyer 1952 does) is wrongheaded. Zeitlin 1986: 134-7 notes several connections between *OC* and *OT* and *Ant.*, as well as *Eum.* and *Sept.* Calder 1985 surveys a number of possible literary sources for *OC*, but his approach is brief and lacks nuance.

³ Sophocles seems to have been particularly interested in Troy, and especially Achilles and Neoptolemus (Fuqua 1976: 43-4, Sommerstein 2003b: 355 n. 2).

⁴ Hyp. II Soph. *OT* (= Soph. T 39), Aelius Aristides *Or.* 46.256.11 (= Soph. T 40), Arist. *Poet.* 1452a.22-6, 1452a.32-3, 1453b.29-31, 1453b. 6-8, 1455a.16-8, 1460a.27-30; it is noteworthy that Aristotle often does not bother to specify which *Oedipus* he means when he refers to the *Tyrannus.*
in the years leading up to the composition of *Oedipus at Colonus* in 407 or 406 B.C.? Of particular relevance to *Oedipus at Colonus* is a group of Theban plays written by Euripides in 411 or later: the fragmentary *Oedipus, Hypsipyle, Antigone*, and the extant *Phoenissae*. Metrical criteria place *Oedipus* at the end of Euripides’ career, and the other three may be placed more precisely by a scholion to line 53 of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*; the Aristophanic Dionysus claims to have been reading Euripides’ *Andromeda*, and the scholion expresses confusion as to the comic poet’s choice of tragedy:

διὰ τί δὲ μὴ ἄλλο τι τῶν πρὸ ὀλίγου διδαχθέντων καὶ καλῶν, Ὑψιπύλης, Φοινισσῶν, Ἀντιγόνης; ἢ δὲ Ἀνδρομέδα οὖν ἐτεὶ προεισθήλεν.

Why not another of the good plays produced a little earlier – *Hypsipyle, Phoenissae, Antigone*? But *Andromeda* was produced eight years before.

Since the complaint here is specifically one of chronology, we have good reason to believe not only that *Hypsipyle, Phoenissae, and Antigone* came later than *Andromeda* (which was produced with *Helen* in 412) but also that they came at least a couple of years after *Andromeda*. The range can be narrowed further if we believe that Euripides left Athens for good in 408, in which case these three plays must have been produced before he left. In any case, Euripides produced

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5 I am assuming that *OC* was written in the last year(s) of Sophocles’ life, and not significantly earlier, as some have thought. Since he never produced it himself (as we might reasonably expect him to have done if he had the chance), we may assume that he did not have the chance, i.e. that he died before it could be presented at the next festival (thus e.g. Stoessl 1966: 6).

6 CCG: 112.

7 The translation is mine. Many scholars emend *Antiope to Antigone*, as I have done here; see esp. *TrGF* V (s.v. *Antigone* T I, *Antiope* T ii), CCG: 269 (with further bibliography). Both plays are of course Theban, but *Antiope* seems to belong to an earlier period on metrical grounds, while *Antigone* fits nicely with the other Labdacid plays of this later period; for all dates, see esp. Cropp & Fick 1985. As Kannicht (*TrGF*) shows, the confusion of names is not uncommon. The question of whether *Hyps., Phoen., and Ant.* belong to a true trilogy has no bearing on my argument.

8 So Craik 1988: 40, Mastronarde 1994: 11-4; Amiech 2004: 14 places it between 410 and 408.

9 Sources for Euripides’ Macedonian exile are collected in *TrGF* V as Eur. *testimonia* 112-20, and its historicity is widely accepted. I am skeptical myself; see Scullion 2003.
this trio no more than three or four years before Sophocles wrote his *Oedipus at Colonus* and significantly later than the production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* (usually placed in the early 420s). It is hard to imagine that Sophocles’ decision to return to Oedipus was not at all influenced by Euripides’ sudden spate of Theban tragedies.

Broadly speaking, then, it is legitimate to consider Euripides’ *Hypsipyle, Phoenissae, Oedipus*, and *Antigone* potentially significant antecedents to Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* on the grounds of both content and chronology. A brief survey of a few specific similarities between the Euripidean and Sophoclean material will strengthen this connection. Most obvious is of course a basic mythical similarity: four of the five plays portray Thebes and its ruling family (the Labdacids) and feature several of the same characters (Oedipus, Creon, Antigone, and Polynice); four of the five draw on the story of the expedition of the Seven against Thebes. *Phoenissae* tackles this story directly, though expansively and with an additional interest in stories subordinate to the fratricidal war (e.g. the sacrifice of Menoeceus); the action of *Antigone* seems to have been based on the aftermath of the war, including the burial of Polynice; *Hypsipyle* approaches the war from the point of view of the Seven, rather than Eteocles and Thebes, while focusing on a story (the reunion of Hypsipyle and her sons) which had never before been related to the war. The story dramatized in *Oedipus at Colonus* is also tangential.

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10 Additionally, Eur. *Phoen.* was parodied by Strattis in his *Phoenissae* (see frr. 46-8 and testimonia), which suggests the immediate impact of Euripides’ play among other dramatists. The probable connection between *OC* and Euripides’ Theban plays is surprisingly under-researched. An introductory discussion of sources in Kamerbeek 1984: 1-3 mentions *Phoen.* only in connection with Jocasta’s role in the Lille Papyrus and Oedipus’ death at Colonus (which he thinks originated with Sophocles). In a chapter on mythical sources of *OC*, Markantonatos 2007 devotes only three pages (57-60) to Euripides and focuses only on the figure of Oedipus and his association with Athens; the section on “intertextual reversal” in Markantonatos 2002 (pp. 161-5) comments only on *Ant.* and *OC*. Segal 1981 devotes 46 pages to *OC* (including numerous links to *Ant.* and *OT*) without a word about Euripides. Imhof 1970 compares *OC* with *Ion*, but the latter was probably less recent and less immediately relevant than *Phoen.*
to the war, from the viewpoint of characters outside of Thebes (and with one scene reserved specially for Polyneices instead of Eteocles). And all five tragedies depict reunions of family members who have been estranged, separated, or unrecognized – though the reunions do not always fall out happily.12

Phoenissae and Oedipus at Colonus both make some basic mythical assumptions that differ from those of Oedipus Tyrannus, Antigone, and Aeschylus’ Seven against Thebes.13 Thus Oedipus is made to survive until the time of his sons’ war; thus Creon, who has been regent since Oedipus’ fall, becomes an advisor or henchman of Eteocles when the latter seizes power and casts out his brother. Similarly, Creon, who may have figured as the villain of Euripides’ Oedipus and Antigone,14 reappears in similar guise in Oedipus at Colonus. In the backstory to both Phoenissae and Oedipus at Colonus, both brothers have made a deliberate attempt to avoid the family curse (by agreeing either to share the kingship or to give it up altogether). Antigone accompanies her father into exile at the end of Phoenissae and throughout Oedipus at Colonus (a role unmentioned in Sophocles’ earlier plays). The idea of some special affection between

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11 The connection between the Seven and the foundation of the Nemean Games had been made at least as early as Aeschylus (probably in his Nemea; see fr. 149a), but it was Euripides’ innovation to import Hypsipyle and her sons into this context.

12 Estranged: Polyneices and Eteocles (Phoen.), Polyneices and Oedipus (OC); separated: Polyneices and Jocasta (Phoen.), Polyneices and Antigone (OC), Hypsipyle and her sons (Hyps.); unrecognized: Oedipus and Jocasta (Oedipus). Antigone may have featured a sort of recognition scene between Creon and Antigone (who was thought dead) or Creon and the son of Antigone and Haemon.


14 See e.g. Eur. frs. 551, 554a; see CCG: 105-32 (with further bibliography) for the possibility that Creon’s jealousy was a significant theme in Oedipus. The plot of Antigone is much disputed, but Creon again seems to be the one responsible for the deaths of Haemon and Antigone; see TrGF V ad loc.
Polyneices and Antigone is not developed until *Phoenissae* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. And this list could no doubt be extended.

The first point to be made in a study like this is the simple fact of poetic interaction within the immediate dramatic context of *Oedipus at Colonus*. I hope that this admittedly short and rough overview of the Theban plays written in the last years of the fifth century demonstrates that Euripides’ influence on Sophocles in this case is more than merely plausible on the basis of chronology and content. The next step, to which the rest of this chapter will be devoted, is to examine just how Sophocles manipulated the Euripidean material. Rather than (in the manner of a commentary) proceeding sequentially through *Oedipus at Colonus* and indicating specific points of contact with Euripides’ plays, I examine three individual characters who appear in both plays and the themes developed around them. This method affords the opportunity to move beyond simple comparison of mythical features and to appreciate some of the ways Sophocles engages closely with the ideas and problems raised by Euripides’ work. First we will examine the two poets’ depiction of Antigone as a *parthenos* and budding heroine. Then we will study the two scenes in which Polyneices appears (*Phoen. 261-637, OC 1249-1446*) with particular attention to his experience of exile, his reception by his family members, and his doom-laden departure. Finally, we will consider Oedipus himself, the meaning of his pollution, and his importance to the theme of power. Since it is difficult to undertake a thorough study of characterization in fragmentary plays, *Phoenissae* naturally furnishes the bulk of comparative material. Though this approach inevitably results in some repetition of material

15 In Soph. *Ant.*, the heroine insists upon burying Polyneices *qua* brother; she does not advocate for him personally but the rights of the dead and her duty to her family. Eteocles, who has already been granted burial, receives almost no attention at all in the play.
from one section to another, it is to be hoped that points of overlap are more meaningful than tedious.

The Heroism of Antigone

The character of Antigone in *Phoenissae* has been interpreted as undergoing a sort of transition or transformation over the course of the play;\(^\text{16}\) I shall argue here that she exchanges the role of impressionable maiden for that of defiant hero – though the transition is not entirely successful. These ideas carry over into *Oedipus at Colonus*, where Antigone evinces a more coherent combination of maidenly and heroic traits.\(^\text{17}\)

At the beginning of *Phoenissae*, she is an innocent girl under the protection of an old servant, eager to catch a glimpse of the Argive army; more importantly for our purposes, she is a proper *parthenos* with a due concern for keeping to her appointed place within her family and society. She has asked her mother’s permission to view the army (89-91), and she duly cooperates with the servant’s careful strategizing to keep her out of the sight of anyone who does not belong to her own household (92-5, 193-201). In fact, she never leaves the building itself,

\(^{16}\) E.g. Foley 1985: 139-43, Lamari 2007: 21-2; cf. Mastronarde 1994: 89n.: “Ant.’s maidenhood and the seclusion it requires according to conventional etiquette become a leitmotif which articulates her action in the play, illustrating her emergence from a protected innocence into the harsh realities of adult life.” Similarly Amiech 2004: 512: “En quelque sorte, Jocaste la projette dans le monde des hommes et des adultes où règne la violence; elle la fait sortir définitivement du monde clos et feutré du gynécée. Elle n’y retournera plus puisqu’elle va prendre la route de l’exil avec son père à la suite des événements qui vont se précipiter.” Müller-Goldingen 1985: 249-50 locates Antigone’s transition more specifically in the exodos, when she decides to accompany Oedipus into exile.

\(^{17}\) There have been many studies in recent decades of the depiction of women in Greek tragedy, how it is influenced by contemporary social values, and how male authors and audiences use it to think about themselves; important studies in this vein include Foley 1981a (with 1981b), 1985, and 2001, Zeitlin 1996: 341-74, McClure 1999. The current discussion will be less concerned with these issues than with how Euripides’ characterization of Antigone (and, to a lesser extent, Jocasta) influenced Soph. *OC*. I thus rely on basic knowledge about what was or was not expected of women in the ancient world when I describe Antigone as submissive and silent versus outspoken and defiant; but I do not attempt to draw conclusions about the audience’s reactions to Antigone, nor about the use of women in tragedy more broadly. Indeed, the figures discussed in this chapter generally transgress social boundaries less boldly (or less successfully) than many other women in tragedy and therefore receive less attention in the scholarship mentioned here.
being content to look out at the army from an elevated position in the house and to accept the servant’s descriptions.\textsuperscript{18} His very presence reinforces our impression of Antigone as an essentially normal girl who must not be out in public, even so far as she is, without male supervision, and who is expected to follow his instructions without argument.\textsuperscript{19}

When Jocasta calls her out of the palace at line 1264 and begins to lead her off to the battlefield in an attempt to stop the fratricidal single combat,\textsuperscript{20} Antigone initially demurs (1270-1, 1275-6).\textsuperscript{21} A battlefield, surrounded by strangers and watched by countless male eyes, is hardly an appropriate place for any woman and especially an unmarried girl like Antigone. But Jocasta will brook no excuses or delay when her sons’ lives are at stake. This is a key point in Antigone’s transition, the first time she willingly disobeys society’s rules about when and where women should be seen,\textsuperscript{22} and the advice Jocasta gives her may be emblematic of this change: οὐκ ἐν αἰσχύνῃ τὰ σά (Phoen. 1276). For Jocasta, the impending familial catastrophe outweighs any concerns about social propriety, and her urgency soon infects Antigone as well. The


\textsuperscript{19} Cf. Amiech 2004: 264: “Dans le discours du vieux serviteur, Antigone apparaît comme une jeune fille plutôt docile – différente en tous les cas de celle de Sophocle que le spectateur ne peut qu’avoir à l’esprit et aussi de l’Antigone qui réapparaîtra plus loin dans notre pièce, disant elle-même que, sous la pression des événements, elle abandonne la pudeur, la rougeur qui sied aux jeunes filles.”

\textsuperscript{20} On the authenticity of this scene, see Mastronarde 1994: 1264-83n.

\textsuperscript{21} For the phrase τῶν δὲ δωμάτων πάρος, see Mastronarde 1994:1270-1n.

\textsuperscript{22} Antigone’s words in 1275 (ποῖ, παρθενῶνας ἐκλιποῦσ’) are probably meant to underscore the significance of this moment for her by echoing the servants words at 89-90 (ἐπεί σε μήτηρ παρθενῶνας ἐκλιπεῖν μεθῆκε…); see Mastronarde 1994 \textit{ad loc.}, Amiech 2004: 264. Cf. Craik 1988: 1270n.: “The successive reactions of Antigone – anxious interrogation, horror at the information that the duel is imminent, incredulity at the suggestion of intervention – are entirely realistic, and heightened through implicit contrast with her earlier situation, when she needed her mother’s permission even to look out on the army, 88-91; and where the slave shielded her from contact with strangers and from any hint of scandal, 92-5, 193-7. Repetition of key words … and reiteration of key ideas … is telling. The way is paved too for Antigone’s final appearance, where the same words and ideas recur (esp. 1486, 1489). Antigone’s character does not change in the course of the play; merely her circumstances.”
transition to a more outspoken, defiant Antigone is eased by the fact that it is initially motivated by respectful obedience to her mother and an active worry for her brothers.

Antigone reappears on stage for the last time in the exodos. This entire scene has fallen under heavy suspicion of interpolation and even large-scale revision under the influence of reperformances of Sophocles’ Antigone. Thus, the most disputed elements are the references to Haemon and the burial of Polyneices; if we think that the exodos could have been revised with a view to Oedipus at Colonus as well, then we may also doubt the exile of Oedipus and Antigone.

Let us assume for a moment that everything after line 1624 is spurious and imagine what Euripides might have written. Both Antigone and Oedipus have already been brought on stage in 1480-1581; this passage is generally accepted even by skeptical editors, and anyway Antigone and Oedipus must appear at the end of the play, the former because she alone survives of those who have gone off to the battlefield and must now play the part of the one who mourns

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24 I am not sure how popular or influential Soph. OC was in the fourth century; the strongest indication of interpolation on that basis is lines 1703-7, on which see Mastronarde 1994 ad loc. I agree in principle with Craik 1988: 1703-7n. that “[i]t is unreasonable to suspect these lines, simply because they refer to the situation which underlies the plot of S.OC.” I would still delete 1706-7, which do not naturally follow 1705 (why ask “where in Attica?” after Oedipus has said “in Athens”?)?; see also Reeve 1972: 468, Müller-Goldingen 1985: 255-6. If Euripides is inventing the tradition of Oedipus’ burial at Colonus, his motivation is not obvious and he does not develop the idea; he could of course be alluding to a preexisting local tradition, but again the point of the allusion is not obvious.

25 Diggle (followed by Kovacs) brackets everything from 1582 to the end of the play; Willink 1990 is similarly skeptical. Much more conservative approaches to the text are represented by Craik 1988, Mastronarde 1994, and Amiech 2004, who helpfully summarizes (567) the most common criticisms of the surviving text; Foley 1985: 131 n. 45 also has further bibliography. As lines 1595-9 were imitated by Aristophanes (noted by Craik and Mastronarde, discussed by Sommerstein 2012b: 11-6), it seems likely that the substance of the text is sound at least as far as 1624 (the end of Oedipus’ speech).

26 See Mastronarde 1994 ad loc. Amiech 2004: 567 opens her commentary on 1582-1682 with the statement that “[a]vec le v. 1582 commence le débat sur l’authenticité de la fin des Phéniciennes.”
over the bodies of her kin (and Creon would not be suitable for this), the latter because he has been made to survive, lurking in the palace, beyond his usual mythical expiry.\(^{27}\) Given that Oedipus so manifestly represents the family curse and destructive pollution (as I will discuss later), his exile is not an unlikely way to conclude the tragedy: the danger of his presence, now confirmed by the tragic deaths of his wife, sons, and nephew, would be motivation enough for Creon to expel him before he can bring further disaster upon Thebes; furthermore, the departure of Oedipus under his daughter’s guidance nicely balances the arrival of Teiresias, also guided by his daughter.\(^{28}\) The question of burying Polyneices would also be a natural – if not inevitable – one, since his body is displayed on stage with the others. It is hard to see how the play could have ended without at least one of these topics. Would Creon, Antigone, and Oedipus (a volatile group in any tragedy\(^{29}\)) simply lament the dead and then return to the palace together? Would that not be an anticlimactic way to use Oedipus, whom Euripides has been holding in reserve for the entire play? At any rate, it seems likely that the exodos featured some sort of controversy (whether over exile or burial), and either one would give Antigone a chance to behave in defiance of societal norms – and she has already pointedly divorced herself from maidenly

\(^{27}\) So Amiech 2004: 255.

\(^{28}\) Frequently noted by commentators (e.g. Foley 1985: 143, Goff 1988: 140, Mastronarde, 1994: 7, Dunn 1996: 195-6, Lamari 2007: 19 and 2010: 86); both scenes are also reversals of the prologue, where a girl is guided by an old man (Antigone and the servant).

\(^{29}\) In addition to the conflict between Antigone and Creon in Soph. *Ant.* and the brief altercation between Oedipus and Creon in *OT* (512-678). Antigone has some sort of run-in with Creon in Euripides’ *Antigone*, and Oedipus and Creon seem to be at odds again in his *Oedipus* (for both plays, see above, n. 14). Antigone and Oedipus will of course quarrel with Creon again in *OC.*
behavior at 1485-92. If the text is in fact sound as far as 1624, then both themes have been raised already in Creon’s speech at 1584-94 – unless, of course, we excise key lines.\textsuperscript{30}

Upon the deaths of her mother and brothers, Antigone is deprived of almost all her family at once, severed from her previous life and left without a female role model (such as Jocasta had been); her only remaining κύριος is now Creon, who makes intolerable decrees about the other members of her family. In these circumstances, she completes the transition begun in the fourth episode, leaving behind her life as a parthenos and becoming something like the willful and defiant heroine of Sophocles’ play. She either defies Creon to his face regarding the burial of Polynoeices or she pledges to leave behind the comforts of home and tend Oedipus in exile (or both, as in the text we have). Either of these acts is a far cry from her behavior in the prologue, where she was obedient to her male supervisor and careful to avoid the gaze of strangers. The argument can be taken at least this far, whatever we think about the state of the text from 1624 on. In the following pages, I will assume for the sake of argument that the exodos as it stands is basically genuine.\textsuperscript{31} In that case, Euripides shows Antigone trying to become her earlier Sophoclean counterpart without quite succeeding.

After the lyrics of Antigone and Oedipus, Creon immediately announces that Oedipus shall be banished (1589, reiterated at 1626 after Oedipus’ protest) and that Polynoeices’ body is to remain unburied (1628-34). Antigone contests both of these decrees in reverse order. Her arguments against abusing the dead are reminiscent of the Sophoclean Antigone,\textsuperscript{32} but Creon’s

\textsuperscript{30} For fuller treatment of the ideas in this paragraph, see Conacher 1967b, with whom I am in complete agreement. For an account of the inconsistencies at the end of Phoen. that takes into consideration its dramatic inversion of several other tragedies, see Dunn 1996: 180-202.

\textsuperscript{31} On the state of the text, see Mastronarde 1994: 39-49 (generally), 591-4; in his notes, he defends the substance of all of the passages cited here. Hose 1990 has a good overview of scholarly attempts to elucidate the exodos of Phoen.
responses are less impassioned. In Sophocles, he had something at stake in his arguments with Antigone: prevailing over her meant proving his masculinity; furthermore, he was very conscious of his role as new ruler and determined that his first decisions as king should be seen as sound ones. But in Euripides, he is an advisor and aide to Eteocles, and after the latter has died, Creon merely claims to be carrying out the former king’s wishes. Creon has nothing in particular at stake, and for the most part he does not even engage Antigone in argument. As she offers reasons not to abuse the dead, he shrugs them off and asserts that the decision has already been made and will be enforced. When she declares that she will bury Polyneices herself, Creon responds just as directly that she will bury herself with him (1657-8). His tone is not so much crude or aggressive (as in Sophocles) as matter-of-fact. Antigone, by contrast, becomes increasingly emotional as the situation slips out of her control. When Creon grows tired of the argument and orders her to be taken inside, she throws herself on Polyneices’ body and refuses to budge (1660-1); she pleads in Jocasta’s name (1665). Creon remains unmoved, so she actually lowers her request: just let her wash Polyneices’ body and bind his wounds (1667-9). Again she is denied. Antigone’s advocacy for Polyneices proceeds from verbal defiance and moral argumentation to simple pleading to physical resistance (as she clings to the body) to bargaining for a lesser favor. Most of this behavior is unimaginable for the Sophoclean Antigone; that is not because Euripides’ heroine is any less noble in nature, but because he puts her in a situation where her efforts at heroism are unrecognized and unappreciated. All her attempts to resist Creon are ineffectual; as he remains indifferent, refusing to fight back or show

32 E.g. her description of Creon as μῶρος (1647); cf. Soph. Ant. 469-70. There are several more or less significant echoes of Ant. throughout this passage; see Craik 1988 ad locc.
any real concern for her resistance, she backs down and eventually abandons the argument altogether.  

But there is still a chance for her to realize her new, stubbornly defiant self. By threatening to murder Haemon on their wedding night, she gains an opening to declare that she will go into exile with Oedipus. She emphasizes her willingness to share his suffering with words compounded with συν- (1679-81), which makes her sound rather like the Sophoclean Ismene begging to be allowed a share of heroism. Creon seems rather puzzled by all this (he turns her talk of μωρία back on her at 1680), but he is satisfied to let her go into exile; once again, he cares little for her motives and is only glad that his remaining son will be safe. Even Oedipus, who immediately praises her filial loyalty (1683), attempts to refuse her offer, not wanting her to sacrifice her own comfort on his behalf (1685) or incur disgrace by wandering in

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33 At 1672 Creon mentions (in connection with her mourning) Antigone’s upcoming marriage to Haemon and thus diverts the conversation; Antigone never expressly disavows her intention to bury Polyneices, but neither does she resume her argument – except at 1743-6, which is certainly spurious as it now contradicts the decision she has just made to go into exile with Oedipus (see Foley 1985: 130 n. 44). My interpretation of Antigone’s gradual acquiescence regarding Polyneices matches that of Conacher 1967b and Mastronarde 1994 ad loc. Craik 1988: 1630n. describes the only way to salvage 1743-6: “It is possible to argue that Antigone intends to perform burial of Polyneikes, but not within Theban territory, and that she could readily achieve this on her way with Oidipous to Athens (so Pearson 1917); this solves some of the problems of the exodos, but at the cost of admitting that Euripides left his intention unclear.”

34 Mastronarde 1994: 30: “Her decision to accompany her father … seems to be part of a reinterpretation of her heroism in which burial of her brother has been effectively blocked (an innovation if Antigone’s main role in earlier myth was to bury her brother). Thus Antigone’s exile is presumably a Euripidean innovation, followed by Sophocles in OC.”

35 Cf. Soph. Ant. 536-7, 540-1, as well as 41 (Antigone’s invitation to Ismene). But Antigone’s use of ξυνθανοῦμαι at Phoen. 1681 parallels Jocasta’s words at 1283 (noted by Mastronarde 1994: 1681n.) and perhaps shows Antigone laying claim to the same brand of heroism as her mother.

36 Pace Mastronarde 1994: 1682n., who comments that Creon has been pressing for Antigone’s marriage to Haemon but backs off because of her threat, Creon does not seem to be especially concerned with Antigone’s attitude toward the marriage (until she issues her threat). As Antigone’s king and κύριος, he does not need to persuade her to marry Haemon but can simply compel the marriage.

37 Cf. Craik 1988: 1307-76n. (p. 246): “to her decision to repudiate the match [with Haemon] Kreon reacts with bafflement (1674, 1678) and Oidipous with remonstrance (1683, 1685, 1691).” Mastronarde 1994 ad loc. notes that Oedipus’ αἰνῶ μέν in 1683 could be equivalent to “no, thanks.”
exile (1691). He does not understand that Antigone has come to realize (in accordance with Jocasta’s advice at 1276) that sometimes one must put aside shame in pursuit of a greater service to one’s φίλοι. In failing really to take her seriously, Oedipus and Creon both treat her like the naïve parthenos she was in the first episode and thus keep her from becoming the Sophoclean Antigone. Unlike that Antigone, she is unable to bury Polyneices or even defy Creon effectively, and though she is allowed to fulfill her duty to Oedipus in the end, it is not on a resounding note of heroism and only after he has tried to stop her. As Helene Foley puts it, “When Euripides’ Antigone tries to act on a heroic model, the result is forceful but rather grotesque.”

Euripides’ debt to Sophocles’ Antigone is obvious in two ways. First is the way he has elaborated and refined the male/female dichotomy. In Sophocles, Antigone had a basically masculine disposition; Ismene warned her to heed her status as a woman, naturally inferior to men (61-4), while Creon even felt his masculinity threatened by her open defiance of him (484-5). Antigone does not undergo any transition from feminine to masculine; her boldness and independence are simply manifestations of her inherently fierce nature (471). But in Phoenissae,

38 The use of στέργω in 1685 is perhaps echoed by OC 7-8; cf. also the sentiment of OT 1413-5.

39 Mastronarde 1994 ad loc. notes that “Oed.’s concern recalls the theme of Ant. as sheltered maiden, but she has gone beyond that condition; and her appeal to nobility matches Oed.’s in 1623.”

40 Cf. Foley 1985: 141: “Ironically, Antigone’s attempt to follow tradition seems to result in the only action of the play that fails to achieve the expected outcome, her burial of Polyneices. This naïve and sheltered girl lacks the disposition requisite to fulfill her Sophoclean (and perhaps Aeschylean) role.”

41 Cf. Foley 1985: 143: “Although Oedipus finally accepts Antigone’s company in exile, he seems to contest her choice to the end.”

42 Foley 1985: 142; cf. her assessment (on the same page) of the play’s closing lyrical exchange: “Antigone and Oedipus sing past each other, and at cross purposes. The babbling old man has no interest in his daughter’s attempts at heroics.”

43 Cf. Lane & Lane 1986 (esp. 162-8) who argue that, though Antigone herself does not think in terms of masculine versus feminine, everyone else sees her attitude as masculine.
the dichotomy is more complex, since Antigone is characterized not only as a female but specifically as a *parthenos* – a young, unmarried girl, innocent, naïve, dependent on and obedient to others (especially her natal family). Her behavior in the exodos directly contradicts her initial characterization, and that is exactly the point: the extent of her family’s crisis and disaster has caused her to mature and even to cast off her youthful and socially conventional ways in order to become the kind of figure who can defy authority, face threats of death and respond in kind, and put her (natal) family first in all things. In *Phoenissae*, the *parthenos* and the hero are mutually exclusive ideas, and over the course of the play, Antigone changes (or tries to change) from one to the other.

Euripides’ second debt to Sophocles is in developing Antigone as a noble and heroic figure determined to do what is right regardless of the consequences. What Euripides has done differently is first to cast Antigone as a *parthenos* with a strong sense of shame and propriety and then, when she tries to move beyond that attitude, to hinder her in various ways – through the particular arrangement of events, through blocking figures like Creon and Oedipus – from actually becoming the heroic Sophoclean figure. It is noteworthy that Euripides’ treatment of Antigone is similar to his handling of Eteocles, who in the second episode continually tries to fill the role of confident general (as he had in Aeschylus) only to be shot down by Creon’s relentless practicality.44 In this way, Eteocles, too, is deprived of his dramatic weight. The same may even be said of Oedipus, who embodies the family curse, pollution, and devastation throughout the play – until the end, when this horrifying figure is revealed to be only a wretched old man whose strength and glory are gone (1688-9), a wraith shut away in the dark palace (1539-45), now


45 For the difficulties in line 1543 (esp. surrounding ἀφαιρέζεις), see Mastronarde 1994 *ad loc.*
mourning for his dead wife and sons, now imagining himself wandering alone in exile and dying wherever he happens to fall (1687). He hardly seems the type of figure others have made him out to be, and despite choral claims that he is an integral part of the force that motivates the destruction of his house, he hardly seems capable of motivating any action at all.46

As in Phoenissae, the Antigone of Oedipus at Colonus is also characterized in terms of masculinity and femininity; as in Phoenissae, masculinity equates with boldness, labor, independence, and so on, while femininity is defined more specifically as maidenliness.47 But where Euripides sees these concepts as opposites, with Antigone moving out of the feminine sphere and into the masculine over the course of the play, Sophocles brings them both together at once. His new Antigone does not have to cease to be a proper parthenos in order to perform unmaidenly duties (like accompanying Oedipus in exile). At the same time, Sophocles allows her to be concerned with maidenly conduct while also restoring her effective heroism to her. As a character, she combines modesty and humility with a degree of confidence and self-assertion unknown to the girlish Antigone who appears at the beginning of Phoenissae. Her relative independence in thought and action enables her to care for herself and Oedipus, to stand up to the chorus of old men who want to evict them from their land, and to mediate between her quarreling father and brother. But in none of these activities does she become abrasive and intractable (as in Antigone) or desperate and helpless (as in Phoenissae) – except when Creon’s goons seize her, a circumstance in which no amount of feminine heroism could be expected to avail her. She maintains a sense of decorum in an eminently unmaidenly context (squalor, poverty, exile) and

46 Cf. Mastronarde 1994: 1540n. (citing Edmunds 1981 on Oedipus as a revenant): “there is an intended discrepancy between this intimation of demonic power and the realistic portrayal of Oed.’s feebleness with the evocation of his ordinary familial attachment to Jocasta, Antigone, and even his sons.”

47 See esp. 342-5, 1367-8.
acquits herself with grace, intelligence, and strength. Against all odds she manages to be a socially acceptable heroine.

We are encouraged to see Antigone as a *parthenos* throughout by the fact that she is constantly in the company of her *father*, tending him instead of a husband and children (749-52).

On the other hand, nurture is a role more commonly associated with mothers than with *parthenoi*, and nurture of Oedipus in exile is even associated specifically with his (and Antigone’s) mother in *Phoenissae* (1617). Antigone is thus paradoxically something of a maidenly mother to her own father – maidenly in her manner, motherly in her tasks, but masculine in her circumstances.

As a character, then, Sophocles’ Antigone combines both sides of Euripides’ Antigone, her maidenliness and her heroic attitude. But her dramatic *function* is to be a failed reconciler. Her chief role as a reconciler is to get both sides (Oedipus and the chorus, Oedipus and Polynoeices) to talk to each other, though she cannot force them to come to terms and her attempts at reconciliation ultimately fail. Antigone shares her role as both a motherly figure and a failed reconciler with the Euripidean Jocasta, who, in addition to being the matriarch of the ruling family, also serves the dramatic purpose of creating space for discussion between her two sons who would rather not discuss anything with each other. It is noteworthy that Antigone’s role is more difficult and less successful when the parties to be reconciled both belong to her own family. It is appropriate that bringing the Labdacids together should result in familial destruction

48 In what is both a reflection and a reversal of *Phoen.*, the first time we see Antigone, she is accompanied by and taking instructions from an old man, but this time she is the one describing what she sees to the old man.

49 And also, it appears, in Euripides’ *Oedipus* (fr. 545a.11-2).

50 Noted briefly by Zeitlin 1986: 137 n. 45. See Michelini 2009: 172-3 for Jocasta as maternal figure. If Scharffenberger 1995 is correct in arguing that the “reconciliation scene” of Ar. *Lys.* stands behind the *agon* of *Phoen.*, then Jocasta’s failure is also underscored by contrast with her comic exemplar.
rather than reconciliation;\textsuperscript{51} it is also appropriate that Antigone collapses the generations by filling her mother’s role as reconciler of quarreling family members and nurturer of Oedipus.

Oedipus’ utter dependence on Antigone for guidance and support is made abundantly clear in the opening scenes of the play, but despite his blindness and physical weakness, he retains his sense of authority. Antigone shows him due respect, obeys his commands without question, and holds her peace when Oedipus wishes to speak with someone else (such as the Ξένος or Theseus);\textsuperscript{52} but the simple fact of Oedipus’ blindness also requires her to possess some authority and independence of her own. She must describe and interpret the world for him, choose the paths along which to guide him, and find stones for him to sit on. When the two of them arrive in the grove of the Eumenides, she does not wait for his command but immediately volunteers to reconnoiter and find out what district they have stopped in (26). She is willing, in her service to her father, not only to sacrifice her physical comfort and reputation\textsuperscript{53} but even to risk her own safety by traveling without protection; instead, it is her task to protect Oedipus by hiding him from potential enemies or by standing up to them herself.\textsuperscript{54} In short, Antigone has freely chosen to perform a physically and mentally exhausting duty that requires “masculine”

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Sewell-Rutter 2007: 123 (with reference to Sophocles’ Polynices scene): “This, it could seem, is how familial interactions between male Labdacids proceed: in this house, when a son is not killing his father (as Oedipus killed Laius), then a son who has urgent need of his father’s good offices receives not a benison but a curse. In a sense, the pervasive dysfunction that has brought the family to this point cannot but be capped by such an interaction.”

\textsuperscript{52} Cf. Seale 1982: 117: “It is particularly noticeable that she informs Oedipus of the stranger’s departure as well as his arrival, but is excluded from the dialogue of the meeting which she has ‘arranged.’” Antigone’s sensitivity to propriety is perhaps most evident in the scene in which Theseus, after rescuing the two sisters from Creon’s men, returns them to their father. Oedipus asks for an account of the battle and rescue, only to have Antigone defer to Theseus (1117-8): it is not her place to make a long speech about another person’s brave deeds. It is noteworthy that while Antigone is on stage for nearly the entire play (1419 lines, or 79.8%), she speaks only 164 lines (9.2%).

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{OC} 345-52, 747-54; cf. \textit{Phoen.} 1684-5, 1690-2. These are all, perhaps, “significant details” (Easterling 1977) that lend depth to Antigone as a character and suggest an interplay of masculinity and maidenliness.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{OC} 113-4, 236-53. The vulnerability of both is vividly illustrated in the scene with Creon, who orders his henchmen to seize Antigone and makes for Oedipus himself. Both father and daughter are powerless to resist, even in the company of the chorus, until Theseus arrives.
courage and strength and is not obviously compatible with the behavior normally expected of young women. What I will try to show in the rest of this section is how Sophocles maintains a balance between these apparently opposite ends of the behavioral spectrum and achieves in Antigone a reconciliation of masculine heroism and feminine propriety.

In the first episode, after the chorus has learned Oedipus’ identity and demanded that he leave their country, Antigone steps in to plead on his behalf (237-53):

Strangers of respectful mind,  
since you have not borne  
with my aged father here,  

having heard of the things he did unwittingly,  
yet pity my unhappy self,  

I beseech you, strangers,  
when I appeal to you on behalf of my poor father.  
I appeal to you, looking upon your eyes  
with eyes that are not blind, appearing as though  
I came from your own blood, that the miserable man  
may meet with respect! We are in your hands,  
as though you were a god. Come, grant  
the unhoped-for favour,  
I beseech you by whatever you hold dear,  
be it a child or a wife or a possession or a god!  
For however hard you look, you will not discern a mortal who,  
when a god drives him,  
can escape!
Antigone acts as Oedipus’ protector by coming to his defense immediately after the chorus has ordered him out of the country. But she also does not steal Oedipus’ thunder; she appeals to the chorus’ pity and sense of shame and leaves the more polemical and controversial argumentation to Oedipus so that her speech turns out to be more of a prelude to his. Without being prompted, Antigone is willing to put herself forward and defend her father, but she also observes her proper place by yielding the spotlight to her male kin and letting him make the rational (iambic) argument to match her emotional (lyric) plea.  

In making her plea, Antigone rather openly takes on the role of damsel in distress. She appeals humbly to the chorus (using words like ἰκετεύομεν, ἀντομαί, νεύσατε) and as if in a law court casts herself in the role of the defendant’s innocent and pitiable daughter (241-2), reminiscent of the chorus’ own families at home (245-6, 250-1). She begins by flattering the choristers as αἰδόφρονες (237), which anticipates the substance of her petition: she asks only for pity and αἰδώς (247), but even this minimal request is more than she can expect to be granted (249). She puts the focus on herself (who is more clearly an innocent sufferer) in order to win the chorus’ goodwill and thus makes effective use of her unfortunate situation.

Despite the humble tone and emphasis on her helplessness, Antigone’s speech is an intelligent and spirited piece of rhetoric. Though she figures herself as the defendant’s pitiable...

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55 Cf. Σ 237 (cited approvingly by Jebb ad loc.): τὸ τῆς Ἀντιγόνης πρόσωπον ὅλον καὶ τοῦ χοροῦ τὸ τετράστιχον ἀθετοῦνται· κρεῖττον γὰρ φασιν εὐθέως τῷ δικαιολογικῷ χρῆσασθαι τὸν Οἰδίπουν πρὸς αὐτούς· ἀλλὰ τὰ πράγματα αὐτοῖς οὐκ ἐν καιρῷ ἐστιν ἂλλ᾽ ἐν δυσπραγίᾳ ὥστε ἐπαφρόδιτον εἶναι αὐτοῖς τὴν ἐλεεινολογίαν καὶ τούτο τὸ πρόσωπον ἢ Ἀντιγόνη πληροῖ…. 

56 Her appeal to a hypothetical blood relation as a compelling motivation for moral action also links her to Sophocles’ earlier Antigone. Cf. OC 1189-91 and n. 62 below.

57 She flatters them further at 246-7 by indicating her and Oedipus’ total dependence on them. For αἰδώς as a sort of mercy, see Jebb ad loc. (citing Dem. 37.59).

58 Cf. Jebb ad loc.: “τὰν ἀδόκ. χ., the unlooked for grace, i.e. for which, after your stern words (226), we can scarcely dare to hope, – but which for that very reason, will be the more gracious.”
child, she actually plays the role of Oedipus’ advocate and makes it clear that her requests are made on his behalf rather than her own (243, 246-7). Antigone herself does not enter the passage until line 241 with ἀλλὰ ἐμὲ τὰν μελέαν, whose language and phrasing parallel that of ἀλλὰ ἔπει γεραὸν πατέρα three lines above, so that Antigone seems to step right into Oedipus’ place as advocate. Similarly, her words in 244-5 do more than point out Oedipus’ obvious pathetic blindness; they describe Antigone herself as sighted and willing to confront the choristers face to face.\(^{59}\) If Oedipus’ blindness makes him incapable of engaging in direct argument, Antigone is able to make up for this deficiency by standing in for him and looking the chorus in the eye herself.\(^{60}\)

Antigone’s behavior is very different in this passage than at the end of Phoenissae, where she pleads on behalf of Polyneices. There, she begs Creon, clings to the body, and even seems as though she will have to be dragged away from it. Here, she remains upright and faces the chorus; rather than begging for one thing at a time in stichomythia, she makes a complete, forceful appeal, and though she uses the language of supplication, it seems plain that she is not physically humbling herself in any way. Her reference in 248 to τὴν ἀδόκητον χάριν plays to the chorus’ imagined graciousness but also suggests her resignation: if the chorus insists on their immediate departure, it would just mean a return to wandering as usual. Antigone’s situation is less desperate than it is in Phoenissae, and so her speech, while moving and passionate, is also less desperate. And what is more, the chorus takes her seriously, which Euripides’ Creon generally did not; though they do not change their minds about expelling Oedipus, they admit to

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\(^{59}\) Allan 2006: 113-4 suggests that the middle form of ὁράω here carries an extra “emotional overtone.”

\(^{60}\) Antigone is thus asking the chorus to display a certain respect for social norms even as she herself violates maidenly protocol by looking them “shamelessly” in the eye (a point I owe to John Gibert).
feeling pity for both father and daughter, which is an improvement on their curt rejection at 228-36 (and pity is, after all, the only thing Antigone actually asked for).

As we have seen, Antigone makes her first major utterance in this play before the chorus in defense of Oedipus’ suppliant rights; the second is made before Oedipus himself in defense of Polyneices’ suppliant rights (1181-1203). Antigone again assumes the role of protector by reassuring Oedipus that he will not be harmed by Polyneices (1185-8); indeed, line 1185 (οὐ γὰρ σε, θάρσει, πρὸς βίαν παρασπάσει) sounds like a pledge to defend Oedipus against violent assault, such as Creon attempted in the previous episode, until γνώμης in the next line makes it clear that she is talking about persuasion, not physical force.

In this speech, Antigone sets herself up as a moral authority to Oedipus, lecturing him on his duty to his kin rather than asserting Polyneices’ innocence. From her point of view, it does not matter whether Polyneices is good or bad, whether his actions have been honest or wicked; it also does not particularly matter what Polyneices has to say to Oedipus. What matters is that Oedipus has a duty to Polyneices as his son and suppliant to hear him out and not to do him any harm; he must also honor her and Theseus’ services to him by honoring their request to hear Polyneices (1202-3). Antigone asks Oedipus to remember that he is responsible for Polyneices’ nature (1189), and to keep a hold of his temper (1195-1200). In this scene, it is

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61 And Oedipus is afraid of being kidnapped by Polyneices as well (1207). Jebb ad loc. calls 1186 “a tribute, marked by feminine tact, to her father’s judgment.”

62 In her insistence on the importance of blood relation over deeds or morality, she is a reflection of the heroine of Soph. Ant. On the other hand, Oedipus has stressed his blood relation to his sons throughout the play as a reason to condemn them for failing to take care of him; cf. Markantonatos 2002: 59-63.

63 The good services Oedipus has received could be either Theseus’ acceptance of Oedipus or Antigone’s caretending. Antigone’s words appear to echo Amphiaraus’ in Hyps. (fr. 757.872-3); for more on the use of this Euripidean play in the fourth episode of OC, see pp. 194-8 below.
Antigone who behaves as the parental figure by rebuking her charge for headstrong behavior and an excessively rigid morality, and her initial apology for giving such advice when she is merely a young girl (νέα, 1181) seems more and more appropriate as her stern lecture continues.

It is perhaps significant that, while Antigone does not succeed in softening Oedipus’ nature, he does not take offense at her presumptuousness but yields to her (1204-5) and changes his mind about an issue he had seemed to be set on – quite unexpected in a character with a “heroic temper.” After pressing him to heed his responsibilities, she reasserts her moral high ground with a claim to justice that also shows once again her concern not to speak any more than is expected of her (1201-2). In this passage, Antigone seems to have stepped further out of her role as parthenos than in any previous scene (tellingly, her long speech comes right after her maidenly deferral to Theseus at 1115-8), and yet she refrains from discussing specifically Polyneices’ crimes (1189-90) or Oedipus’ past (1196), topics which may be thought unfit for ladies’ tongues. She asks no more than that Oedipus make the minimum gesture toward what is right by listening to his suppliant. Even while she censures Oedipus’ harsh nature, she avoids making demands or insisting on anything; she reasons with him, encourages him, and pleads

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64 If we read αἰδοῦ νιν in line 1192 (suggested by Jebb ad loc. and adopted by Lloyd-Jones & Wilson), Antigone repeats the substance of her plea to the chorus (236, 246). As Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990 point out, this conjecture “yields a far weightier utterance than ‘let him alone’.”

65 Cf. Jocasta’s rebuf of her sons’ haste (Phoen. 452) and of Eteocles’ narrow morality and intransigence (Phoen. 528-68), and her advice that ὅταν φίλος τις ἄνδρι θυμωθεὶς φίλῳ ἐς ἐν συνελθὼν ὀμματα’ ὀμμασῖν διδῶ, ἐφ’ ὀσίν ἥκε, ταύτα χρή μόνον σκοπεῖν, κακῶν δὲ τών πρὶν μηδενὸς μνείαν ἔχειν (461-4).

66 Cf. Linforth 1951: 155: “She is plainly shocked and resentful, and, though her feelings are essentially womanly, she speaks without the restraint expected of a woman, still more of a daughter speaking to her father.”

67 See Knox 1964 (esp. 143-62 on OC), 1966; his method is criticized by Gibert 1995: 255-62, who remarks (258-9), “Oedipus in Oedipus at Colonus is more than just stubborn; those moments in which he is are not, to my mind, the most important ones in the play.”

68 Noted by Winnington-Ingram 1980: 259 n.33.

69 Cf. Euripides’ Electra (Or. 26-7), who is reluctant to speak plainly about Clytemnestra’s adultery.
with him, so that despite her sternness she never becomes disrespectful or abrasive. Both here and in the first episode she is persuasive as she could not be in *Phoenissae*, and agreeable in personality as she could not be in *Antigone*.

In the dialogue between Polynices and Antigone that closes the scene, it is quite clear that both understand the power of Oedipus’ curse: if Polynices marches on Thebes, he will die. So Antigone makes another attempt at persuasion and begs Polynices to turn back. He refuses, as we know he must, and in some ways this dialogue tells us more about him as a character than about her (and I will return to this passage in the next section). But despite their obviously close relationship, there is a bit of a disconnect between Polynices and Antigone. The latter points out a number of practical reasons to turn back to Argos: there is no profit in sacking Thebes (1420-1), his soldiers might not follow him (1427-8), he will die (1424-5). She does not understand that Polynices must confront Eteocles as a matter of pride and honor; and given her attitude in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, it is rather surprising that she does not understand the concept of taking a stand on basic principle. In her inability to comprehend the male ego or appreciate the motivating power of honor and glory (which Polynices offers to her at 1411-3), we perhaps catch a glimpse of the relatively simple Antigone of the prologue of *Phoenissae*.

Though Antigone successfully maintains a balance between *parthenos* and hero, she is to some extent characterized by failure. All of her major actions are attempts at persuasion, which

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70 After Polynices’ initial speech, Oedipus remains stubbornly silent, and it looks as though he (like the chorus earlier) intends to grant Antigone only the bare minimum of what she requested: he will let Polynices speak to him but will not respond or do him harm. The curse (which we are surely meant to see as effective) does not come until after Polynices has renewed his plea in a second speech – at the urging of Antigone, who hopes that Oedipus will thus be prompted to speak. Oedipus fulfills this hope but not her request that he do no harm.

71 Alan Sommerstein (in private communication) has compared her also to Lysistrata (another practical female opposed to hawkish men); this comparison is all the more appropriate if Lysistrata was the original model for Euripides’ Jocasta (as Scharffenberger 1995 argues) and therefore an indirect model for Sophocles’ own failed reconciler as well.
regularly yield no more than the bare minimum of what she has asked for: the chorus grants her pity but not permission to remain at Colonus, while Oedipus agrees to see Polyneices only to curse him.\textsuperscript{72} How can this be, if she is a successful blend of heroism and maidenliness, as I have been arguing? In \textit{Phoenissae}, Antigone fails either to become a coherent character or to achieve any control over events, so there is no conflict between her character and her dramatic function. But in \textit{Oedipus at Colonus}, Antigone’s character is separate from her dramatic function: her character consists of a resolution of the Euripidean Antigone’s conflicting maidenly and heroic tendencies, while in terms of function, she is more akin to the Euripidean Jocasta. Antigone’s failure is not that of the heroic maiden but of the mother-figure who works in vain to bring her self-destructive family together.\textsuperscript{73}

Antigone makes one final attempt to halt disaster in this play – or rather, she announces that she will. After Oedipus’ passing, she and Ismene decide to return to Thebes and try to stop the conflict between their brothers (1769-72). This conclusion is reminiscent of \textit{Phoenissae} 1264-83, when Jocasta summons Antigone to the battlefield, and the latter first begins to move away from her innocent, maidenly life and become a more involved and assertive figure. If we take our reading of \textit{Oedipus at Colonus} a step farther, we might see in the exodos the seeds of a similar crisis for Antigone. She has just lost her father, and she is about to lose both her brothers; her first attempt to stop Polyneices’ expedition has already failed. Again she sets out to save her brothers, this time without Jocasta to lead her, and again her efforts will be in vain.

\textsuperscript{72} Buxton 1982: 143-4 says of πειθώ in \textit{OC} that “it is a \textit{human} quality, depending for its effectiveness on the moral authority and credibility of the human agents who do the persuading” (his emphasis), but Antigone’s persuasions are at best only minimally effective; that is, she convinces both sides to talk to each other but not to resolve their differences.

\textsuperscript{73} Winnington-Ingram 1980: 274 may have the right reading of Antigone’s heroism in \textit{OC}: “If Antigone represents the power of persuasion, she fails: fails with the Chorus in the Parodos, fails with her father, fails with Polynices, fails (as we know) in the task she sets herself at the end of the play. She fails to prevent terrible events, but by her love and pity mitigates the gross evil of them.”
Perhaps we are meant to imagine that Antigone, who has maintained her maidenly qualities – and even some of her innocence – while fulfilling a long and arduous duty to her father, will emerge from this crisis changed, as she did in *Phoenissae*. It remains an open question, however, whether she will emerge as the distressed, ineffective Antigone of Euripides or the harsh, adamantine Antigone of Sophocles’ earlier work.\(^74\)

**The Return of Polyneices**

Rather surprisingly, Polyneices is an uncommon character on the Attic stage. Together with the rest of the Seven, he is an important part of the off-stage action in Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*, but he only appears on stage as a corpse at the end of the play. His burial is of course the central issue of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, but little is said about what kind of a person he was in life and it is questionable whether that even matters (Creon thinks he was impious for attacking his own city, and Antigone does not dispute the point). From a dramatist’s point of view, the most obvious way to treat the story of the Seven and their war against Thebes is to set the play in Thebes and to focus on the figure of Eteocles; this is exactly what Aeschylus does, and if Euripides’ *Phoenissae* ranges much farther, it has a similar strategy. But it is probably Euripides’ innovation not only to bring Polyneices into Thebes\(^75\) – an unexpected move, since he must die in combat (i.e. outside of Thebes) – but even to bring him on stage in the first place. That Polyneices’ only other known appearance in Greek tragedy occurs in Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* is likely to be significant. The main object of this section is to demonstrate that

\(^74\) The fact that she never responds directly to Polyneices’ requests for burial (1409-10, 1435-6) allows the question to remain open. See Jebb *ad loc.* for a defense of 1435-6 (with transposition of τελεῖτε and θανόντι). Markantonatos 2002: 163-5 notes that Antigone’s lament at the end recalls Soph. *Ant.*, where her mourning becomes a threat to civic order; but here Antigone yields to Theseus’ civic authority.

\(^75\) Euripides marks his innovation in Jocasta’s words at 310-1 (McDermott 1991: 30). On possible poetic models for this scene, see Mastronarde 1994: 26.
Sophocles modeled both the character of Polyneices and the scene in which he features after their counterparts in *Phoenissae*. However, the end of Sophocles’ scene, with the stichomythic exchange between Antigone and Polyneices betrays the influence of Euripides’ *Hypsipyle*, a matter to which we will turn at the end of this section.

Let us first sketch in broad outline the similarities between the two Polyneices scenes (*Phoen. 261-637, OC 1249-1446*). In both plays, Polyneices enters by an eisodos into potentially hostile territory; in both plays, he has received a guarantee of safe passage and his approach is made possible by the prior advocacy of a female relative (Jocasta, Antigone). He comes for the purpose of reconciliation with a male member of his family (a brother!), and he has an offer to make to that end: in *Phoenissae*, he is prepared to disband his army and resume the alternating schedule of kingship he and Eteocles had previously agreed to, while in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he offers to bring his father home to Thebes and install him in the palace; he also offers vengeance on Eteocles, who has wronged them both. His entrance is prepared for by a scene featuring Antigone: in Euripides, she views the army from the walls and anticipates Polyneices’ arrival in Thebes (170-1); in Sophocles, she persuades Oedipus to receive him as a suppliant. At the end of the scene, he exits to his death, either after agreeing to meet Eteocles on the battlefield or after being cursed by Oedipus.

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76 In *Phoen.*, Jocasta is always credited with bringing the two together ὑπόσπονδον πρὶν ψαῦσαι δορός (81-2; cf. 273, 364-6), though it is never made plain that Eteocles has granted his brother safe passage (600 comes close), and Polyneices remains apprehensive throughout his visit.

77 The servant tells her that Polyneices will come ὃστε σ’ ἐμπλῆσαι χαρᾶς. Craik 1988 comments *ad loc.* that “Euripides arouses expectations to be fulfilled in part (that Polynikes will come to the palace) but unfulfilled in essence: there is no joy; Eteokles vetoes a meeting (616-7); brother and sister are reunited only on the battlefield, as later reported (see esp. 1447); they are seen on stage together only after Polyneikes is dead;” it is only at 1671 that Antigone’s “wish to embrace Polyneikes is ironically fulfilled” (Craik 1988: 165n.). The irony may have been apparent to the audience even this early, since, as Lamari 2010: 37-8 points out, a vain wish to embrace an absent loved one was a traditional motif.
The Polyneices scene in *Phoenissae* develops into a fairly standard agon, with the two brothers each giving a speech in defense of his own point of view and Jocasta moderating. In these speeches the brothers are clearly contrasted and it becomes obvious that justice stands on the side of Polyneices. As is usual in Euripidean agones, though the contestants intend to use the debate as a vehicle for reconciliation, it ends up polarizing them even more than before and provides an opportunity for the audience to learn more fully the positions and motivations of each side. 78 Also as usual, after the speeches, the scene dissolves into angry stichomythia as the brothers threaten each other and eventually agree to find each other on the battlefield. This appears to set up the mutual fratricide, though neither brother knows what the outcome of their fight will be, and in fact they do not meet in the first battle and must eventually establish a single combat to settle the issue. Polyneices thus departs from the first episode to a doom that we know is certain, though he does not. 79

The Polyneices scene in *Oedipus at Colonus* is most immediately a suppliant scene: Polyneices takes refuge at the altar of Poseidon until he can secure a guarantee of safe passage, and Theseus and Antigone manage to convince Oedipus to see him by appealing to the respect due to a suppliant. However, the scene also contains elements of the agon, as Polyneices and Oedipus both offer speeches containing logical arguments and proofs to demonstrate the validity of their respective positions. Where suppliancy in tragedy usually results sooner or later in the acceptance of the suppliant’s plea for help, the outcome of Oedipus’ and Polyneices’ confrontation is again a polarization that demonstrates the impossibility of reconciliation. But


79 Oedipus has cursed his sons (66-8), but they have shut him away in the palace deliberately to forget about his curse and the family doom that he represents (64-5 – but see Kerkhecker 1996, Amiech 2004: 253-4).
Sophocles adds a twist by having Oedipus initially refuse to respond to Polyneices at all. We could thus read Polyneices’ first speech as a failed supplication scene: he makes his more emotion-based plea to Oedipus here, attempting to convey remorse for his past crimes and to rouse sympathy for his own similar plight; but instead of making a speech in response, Oedipus remains silent, and the supplication structure fizzles and dies. Moreover, when Polyneices turns to Antigone for help, she does not remonstrate with Oedipus (as for example, Euripides’ Aethra remonstrates with Theseus) but instead encourages Polyneices to continue speaking. At this point, he offers a more straightforward account of his recent activity, Eteocles’ injustices, and his mission to take back Thebes for himself, and now Oedipus answers with his own speech; though he is angry and hateful, his purpose is to refute Polyneices’ account through logical argumentation and an alternate description of the past. The scene has shifted from a supplication to an *agon* such as we found in the Polyneices scene of *Phoenissae*. The *agon* as a formal dramatic element is usually studied in context of Euripidean tragedy, but it seems that Sophocles constructed his formal debates scenes according to a similar model. At any rate, since (as I argue) this particular *agon* in *Oedipus at Colonus* draws on a specific Euripidean *agon* in *Phoenissae*, and the two scenes share a superficially similar *agon* structure (matching speeches followed by stichomythia), it is reasonable to think that certain similarities and differences are intentional and significant. In the case of *Oedipus at Colonus*, the stichomythia is not an escalation of anger (as it is in *Phoenissae*) but a pathetic exchange between one of the contestants and a third party (Antigone). Thus, Sophocles’ milder stichomythia should not be taken simply as evidence of the distinctiveness of Sophoclean *agones*, but as a deliberate reversal of Euripides’ method in *Phoenissae*.

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80 See Holt 1981, who argues that the *agon* had become formalized by the mid-fifth century (when we see variations in Aesch. *Ag.* and Soph. *Aj.*).
Polyneices is similarly characterized in both plays. That *Phoenissae* and *Oedipus at Colonus* 1) bring him on stage as a living character, 2) develop his side of the story, from his perspective, and 3) give him a generally or partially sympathetic treatment are all important innovations. Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* raises the basic problems surrounding Polyneices without exploring them thoroughly. We are told, for instance, that the Seven have sworn an oath to destroy the city or die trying (46-8), but Polyneices hopes not only to avenge himself on Eteocles but to rule in Thebes (647-8). Again, we are told that Polyneices’ shield depicts Justice bringing home the exile (642-8), but the just man *par excellence*, Amphiaraus, disapproves of violence against one’s native city (576-86). It is not entirely clear which side, if either, is in the right, and in any case, Aeschylus’ main focus is on Eteocles; since Polyneices remains largely undeveloped as a character, our attention and sympathy are devoted instead to Eteocles. Sophocles’ earlier Antigone never questions Creon’s assertion that Polyneices was impious for attacking his own city but merely advocates the rights of the dead and the gods of the underworld. We never get Polyneices’ side of the story.

Euripides’ treatment of Polyneices, then, is a considerable step away from the traditional approach, and Sophocles follows his lead. Both poets bring Polyneices on stage and give him the opportunity to tell his own story. What is more, they characterize him similarly on various points of detail. For example, both the Euripidean and the Sophoclean Polyneices are straightforward in their manner of argumentation, though both are in some sense superficial. Euripides’ Polyneices seems not to have considered fully what it means to attack a city that he

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81 See Mastronarde 1994: 27-8: “the lengths to which Eur. goes to win sympathy for Polynices are not matched in any other source that we know of.” Amiech 2004 includes a section (pp. 38-41) titled “Un parti pris favorable à Polynice” in her account of Euripides’ mythical innovations in *Phoen.*; she nevertheless sees Polyneices as a problematic figure – as indeed he must be in any version.
supposedly still loves,\textsuperscript{82} and Sophocles’ Polyneices speaks the right words and perhaps even feels due shame and guilt over his contribution to Oedipus’ sorry circumstances, but he has a fairly simplistic idea of what Oedipus has gone through and what it will take to appease him.\textsuperscript{83} Again, though Polyneices’ relative age differs in the two plays (in Euripides, he is the younger brother,\textsuperscript{84} in Sophocles, the elder), in both cases his age serves to win the audience’s sympathy: as the younger brother, he has abided by the agreement he made with Eteocles, voluntarily gone into exile, and returned to find the deal broken; as the elder, he might be considered the natural heir to Oedipus’ throne, and to be driven out by his younger brother is both unjust and shameful.

As a mythical figure guilty of neglecting his father, marching on his homeland, and committing fratricide for the sake of political power, Polyneices is not obviously sympathetic, and any portrayal of him will inevitably contain some complexity. Given these circumstances, one especially effective way to cast Polyneices in a favorable light is to contrast him with other, more disagreeable characters, a method employed by both Euripides and Sophocles. Euripides juxtaposes him with Eteocles, a man who adheres to an extreme brand of moral relativism in his shameless love of power, while Sophocles sets him against both Creon and Oedipus. Creon’s attempt to get Oedipus back to Thebes involves bald-faced deception and even physical assault; Polyneices, who comes alone and uses only frank persuasion, cannot help looking decent by comparison. Oedipus is a trickier case, since our sympathy for him has been built up over the first 1250 lines of the play. Nevertheless, his reception of Polyneices has seemed to many (starting with Antigone, line 1189-91) to be excessively harsh, and Polyneices’ resigned

\textsuperscript{82} Polyneices’ love for Thebes: 358-9, 406-7; Jocasta confronts him with the consequences of Argive victory: 570-77 (cf. Eteocles’ retorts at 604-17).

\textsuperscript{83} See e.g. Easterling 1967: 6, Seale 1982: 134-5.

\textsuperscript{84} Apparently an innovation (Sommerstein 2010b).
acceptance of his father’s curse and his concern with preserving his honor before his Argive allies perhaps cast him in the role of doomed but admirable tragic hero (an argument to which I shall return).

All of this, from similarities in staging to conception to characterization, suggest that Sophocles deliberately modeled his scene and his Polyneices after their Euripidean counterparts. But differences between the two plays are of course equally important, and it appears that Sophocles has pointedly reversed some key elements in Euripides’ scene; these reversals may alter the way we understand the Sophoclean Polyneices by contrasting ironically with what he (and we) expect to get out of the scene or by lending him depth and tragic pathos.

The Polyneices scene in *Oedipus at Colonus* is actually set up in the fourth episode with Theseus’ announcement that an unidentified suppliant has taken up a position on the altar to Poseidon and requested an audience with Oedipus (1156-62). Oedipus remains puzzled as to the stranger’s identity for some time, until finally Theseus mentions that he appears to be an Argive (1167). This play with Polyneices’ identity is reminiscent of Euripides’ rather bolder game in the opening of the first episode of *Phoenissae*, where Polyneices appears as a character (possibly for the first time in Attic tragedy) and Euripides plays the initial moments of his entrance to full effect. Though we have been told of the parley (81-2), we may not expect Polyneices to come into enemy territory alone, without his allies or bodyguards; and we may not expect the grand figure described in the prologue (167-9) to creep furtively through the city with his sword drawn, peering around for possible ambushes (265-6) and keeping an eye out for altars where he can take refuge if necessary (274-5). A full twelve lines after his entrance, Polyneices obliquely identifies himself by referring to his mother’s persuasion (272-3, looking back to 81-2), and
formally identifies himself only at line 288. Euripides toys with an audience who may have been doubtful that Polyneices’ would appear on stage at all, and who might be even more doubtful as to his identity when the manner of his arrival runs counter to the description of him in the prologue. Though Sophocles’ audience could probably guess the identity of the suppliant as soon as they heard him called a “relative of Oedipus, but not from Thebes” (1156-7), his purely verbal play with Polyneices’ identity – indeed, with the very idea of bringing him on stage in a tragedy – is perhaps a hat-tip to Euripides’ own innovation in that regard. Euripides’ Polyneices scene, falling as it does in the first episode, is only one of many innovations and surprises; by contrast, Sophocles’ Polyneices scene is in some sense climactic, coming late in a very long tragedy – when, perhaps, we have even less reason to expect to see Polyneices at all. In this respect, Sophocles’ tribute to Euripidean innovation packs more punch by virtue of being something of a surprise in its own right.

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Antigone’s speech on her brother’s behalf (1181-1203) puts her in a position similar to Jocasta’s in *Phoenissae* and prepares us for a reunion between siblings such as is hinted at in Euripides’ “teichoskopia” and such as his Polyneices actually receives from his mother. In the latter passage, Jocasta expresses sorrow over Polyneices’ long absence and joy for his return; though fearing to dredge up bad memories, she asks what exile is like and finds further cause for sorrow in his report. Such a reunion is forestalled in *Oedipus at Colonus*,

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85 Ironically, the chorus has just been singing about Polyneices in the parodos (esp. 258-60), though without specific reference to the figure who enters by an *eisodos*. Sommerstein 2010b argues that earlier representations of Polyneices identify him as the elder by giving him a beard; if Euripides’ Polyneices, being the younger brother, wears a beardless mask this would also make it difficult for the audience to identify him at first (though 63 suggests that both brothers are at least old enough to grow a beard).

86 At least one event foreshadowed in the prologue (the reunion of Antigone and Polyneices, suggested at 165-6, 170-1) does not actually transpire in the first episode. See n. 77 above.

87 Linforth 1951: 154 describes the unexpectedness of Polyneices’ arrival within the larger context of the play.
however, and instead of being reunited immediately with his advocate, Antigone (as we may have expected after her speech), Polyneices addresses his first speech to Oedipus, only turning to his sister when their father maintains a stubborn silence. Again, Sophocles’ game is similar to Euripides’: his intimation that the siblings will be reunited turns out to be a red herring, even though this time both siblings are on stage at the same time.

Instead of a delighted mother and an arrogant brother, the Sophoclean Polyneices is met with a resentful father and sympathetic sisters – a neat reversal which brings out the variance between what Polyneices hopes to accomplish and the actual result of his suppliancy.

When Polyneices first appears in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he is weeping both for Oedipus’ lot and for his own (1249-50, 1254-6).\(^8^8\) He opens his plea with a distressed commentary on Oedipus’ wretched fate in exile, and an acknowledgement of his own responsibility for it. He claims to have been unaware of how terrible exile really is until he experienced it himself. This attitude is reminiscent of the Euripidean Polyneices’, who has voluntarily gone into exile as a part of his deal with Eteocles to share the kingship but returns to Thebes with a very poor opinion of exile\(^9^9\) and resolves not to give up his claims to his inheritance; he has discovered that any risk is worth running to avoid a lifetime in exile, and this is a sort of shortsightedness he shares with his Sophoclean counterpart. Neither realized what exile really meant; in Euripides, the realization motivates Polyneices’ march on Thebes, while in Sophocles, it constitutes Polyneices’ attempt at justification for failing to recall Oedipus to Thebes earlier: he simply did not know how bad Oedipus’ life had become and so did not feel any urgency in providing help. But Oedipus throws this argument back in his face by calling him, in effect, a hypocrite who

\(^8^8\) Cf. *Phoen*. 366-70, where Polyneices weeps over his own exile. In Sophocles, the simple fact of his tears (1255; noted also by Antigone, 1250-1) goes a long way toward establishing the sincerity of his pity for Oedipus.

\(^9^9\) In both plays, moreover, Polyneices complains about how the exile must live in subservience to others (*Phoen*. 388-407, *OC* 1336).
only wants to help someone who can return the favor. The Euripidean Polyneices’ incomplete understanding and newly discovered hatred of exile mitigate somewhat his apparent materialism and make him sympathetic by explaining his behavior; but in Sophocles, Oedipus uses these same things to expose Polyneices’ unfilial attitude and hypocrisy.

But his expectation of forgiveness is not completely unreasonable, as we may see from a comparison with *Phoenissae*. The Euripidean Polyneices comes to the parley with a remarkable offer: if only Eteocles is willing to resume their alternating rule of Thebes, he will send away his army and dismiss any claims to additional compensation (and we know that he has the right to make such claims). In other words, he is willing to forgive the past and start afresh. But since Eteocles will accept nothing less than total capitulation, the generous offer is made in vain. The Sophoclean Polyneices seems to share a similar outlook but finds himself in a weaker position. He acknowledges that he has been unjust, but he must hope that Oedipus will overlook his crimes, decline to seek further punishment, and exhibit αἰδώς instead. In other words, he expects that Oedipus will behave like the Euripidean Polyneices. But Oedipus subscribes to a philosophy of δίκη rather than αἰδώς (1267-9, 1381-2); for him, forgiveness is not possible and all he has to offer is a curse for his sons’ neglect. Oedipus’ harshness in this is pointed up not only by Antigone’s earlier admonishment about a parent’s responsibility to his children (1189-91) but also by the contrast between Oedipus and the Euripidean Polyneices – both in similar situations, but only one willing to give up his chance at revenge and let bygones be bygones.91

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90 Antigone also requested αἰδώς from the chorus on behalf of Oedipus (246), and perhaps (if we follow Jebb) from Oedipus on behalf of Polyneices (1192).

91 Of course, it is crucial to Oedipus’ characterization that he has been exiled from Thebes for many years, and the length of time has made him more extreme in several respects. Zeitlin 1986: 134 notes that Polyneices’ strategy of finding similarity in his and Oedipus’ experiences is no longer appropriate since now Oedipus’ “task is to make distinctions rather than efface them.” Mastrangelo 2000 argues that Polyneices and Oedipus are both defined by their bonds to friends and family members but that Oedipus alone is able to sever his old bonds and establish new
The dialogue between Antigone and Polyneices fulfills an expectation of their reunion that Euripides had toyed with (but not realized) in *Phoenissae* and that Sophocles himself seems to have raised and foiled already in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Euripides, no doubt taking his cue from Sophocles’ *Antigone* (which allowed, if it did not necessitate, a special relationship between Antigone and Polyneices), develops that relationship on both sides, allowing Antigone to anticipate Polyneices’ arrival eagerly and Polyneices to ask to see his sisters before he leaves Thebes (616–7) – but his request is denied and we never actually see how Polyneices and his sisters interact with each other.\(^{92}\) Sophocles takes this a step further: he finally brings both siblings on stage together, but at first it seems that they will not get the opportunity to speak with one another, as Polyneices engages with Oedipus immediately upon entering. But the stichomythic dialogue after the *agon*, normally reserved for an angry escalation between contestants, instead becomes an occasion to explore the relationship between Antigone and Polyneices in a way that it probably never had been before. In place of the threats hurled by the brothers in Euripides, we have expressions of mutual affection between Polyneices and Antigone and sorrow at the prospect of Polyneices’ death.

The Sophoclean Polyneices continues to be a difficult figure to interpret. Some find him insincere in his reaction to Oedipus’ condition or hypocritical in expecting Oedipus to forgive where he himself will not. Others draw attention to Polyneices’ tears and his affectionate relationship with his sisters, pointing out also that we have been given no reason to mistrust him.\(^{93}\) His decision not to tell his men about Oedipus’ curse is an especially polarizing point for ones; Oedipus’ curse is designed to cut all of Polyneices’ bonds, and at this moment we know that Polyneices is doomed.

\(^{92}\) The messenger report narrates a meeting of sorts between the siblings on the battlefield, but no interaction between them is described.
modern critics: is it a mark of selfishness and disregard for his men’s lives or an indication that he is a responsible leader concerned with the morale of his troops?

It seems to me that in his characterization of Polyneices, Sophocles is deliberately problematizing an inherently problematic figure. As Euripides does in *Phoenissae*, Sophocles makes Polyneices sympathetic by contrasting him with more negative characters (like Creon) and by emphasizing or changing important details (like his age) – but these sympathetic elements only highlight the more questionable aspects of his attitude and behavior.

A good example is Polyneices’ description of his allies. By this point in the tragic tradition, a catalogue of his allies is probably almost requisite in any treatment of the Seven; certain details of characterization, like the bloodthirstiness of Capaneus and the piety of Amphiaraus, are also traditional. The catalogue here (1313-23) is no longer than it has to be (even omitting any description of the heroes’ shields), and the order in which the Seven are listed, especially Amphiaraus and Capaneus, is significant. The former comes first, where his piety can make a good initial impression on Polyneices’ audience and suggest the justice of the expedition as a whole. Capaneus, on the other hand, is relegated to fifth, late enough in the catalogue that his attitude will not be taken as representative but one removed from Polyneices himself, who must come last in order to bring the catalogue back into his larger plea for Oedipus’ assistance. Though Capaneus cannot but be a problematic ally for anyone with a claim to justice, his presence is diminished in importance as much as possible in favor of the more straightforwardly honorable Amphiaraus. But where the catalogues of the Seven in Aeschylus and Euripides are put in the mouths of messengers, Sophocles’ version belongs to Polyneices’

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93 Sensible treatments of the sympathy accorded to both Oedipus and Polyneices may be found in Easterling 1967 and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 275-6.
speech to his father, and we are entitled to wonder whether the elevation of the pious man and
the diminishment of the impious is true or merely the result of Polyneices’ rhetorical purpose.

While the Euripidean Polyneices’ willingness to send his army away is a mark of his
generosity, the Sophoclean Polyneices’ unwillingness to do the same (even before he has reached
Thebes) casts Polyneices as an intransigent figure, but one who goes to meet his fate with heroic
acceptance. It underscores his strong sense of honor and shame before his army, while also
raising questions about how his personal morality and ambition influence his view of his
responsibilities as a general. However we interpret his decision to march on Thebes, it lends him
a depth unavailable to the Euripidean Polyneices, who does not seem to have thought much
beyond his personal feud with his brother.⁹⁴

So the most important thing for our discussion is the sheer complexity of the Sophoclean
Polyneices as a character; it would be easy to make Polyneices a straightforwardly villainous
figure, and we have seen Euripides’ attempt to do the opposite. Sophocles follows Euripides’
lead in giving him certain traits or experiences that render him sympathetic, but he avoids
whitewashing Polyneices completely. Instead, the combination of positive and negative features
creates a figure who is both admirable and repellent, honorable and hypocritical. Even while
Polyneices’ personal morality makes us uneasy, his acceptance of the curse is tragic and his
departure to certain doom is poignant.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ C.f. Easterling 1967: 11: “Sophocles’ intention in this scene is to show why Polynices in spite of the curse
did persevere: because he was that kind of man. Another motive, too, must be Sophocles’ desire to arouse further
sympathy for Polynices, to show the dreadfulness of Oedipus’ decision, and perhaps to touch us most deeply by this
emphasis on the fact that the issues of life are rarely clear-cut.” Seale 1982: 136 notes the effect of the staging:
“Both [sisters] leave the side of Oedipus and cling to their brother (1437). The father is alone, brother and sisters are
together. The disruption of the earlier grouping shows the vindictiveness of Oedipus and the harshness of the
retribution he is dispensing.”

⁹⁵ For Polyneices’ knowledge of his fate: OC 1399-1401, 1432-8 (cf. Phoen. 621-2, 633-5); for turning the
by Sophocles tended to suggest this question to the spectator: – Why should Polyneices persevere in the war, when
At this point, Sophocles’ conceptualization of the scene is also informed by a second Euripidean tragedy, *Hypsipyle*. Like *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Hypsipyle* dramatizes a story related but strictly external to the war of the Seven against Thebes. Like *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Hypsipyle* only brings one of the Seven on stage and portrays him sympathetically; this is of course not unusual for Amphiaraus, the only one of the Seven regularly treated with admiration and respect, but it does fit into the trend in the late fifth century of reevaluating the Seven as interesting and potentially justifiable characters. In other words, just as it would make sense for Sophocles to look to the Euripidean Polyneices as a model for developing his own Polyneices, so he might also reasonably look to the Euripidean Amphiaraus, a doomed member of the Seven carrying a burden of knowledge.

The central action of *Hypsipyle* revolves around the slaying of the infant Opheltes by a snake. While his nurse, Hypsipyle, leads Amphiaraus to a spring so that he can make a sacrifice, Opheltes is left unattended and is ultimately seized by the snake guarding the spring. Opheltes’ mother, Eurydice, is understandably upset when she learns of his death and apparently accuses Hypsipyle of acting with malice aforethought. The dispute is settled by Amphiaraus, who not only confirms Hypsipyle’s story but also – and more importantly – eases Eurydice’s anger and grief by explaining the significance of Opheltes’ death. He interprets this tragic event as an omen bearing on the expedition of the Seven, who will all be killed at Thebes just as Opheltes was killed by the serpent. In commemoration of the fatal expedition, Opheltes is renamed

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his defeat and death had been definitely foretold to him? For he plainly believes the prediction (cp. 1407, 1435), though he affects to think that there is a chance of escape (1444). The answer is furnished by the traits in his character which this dialogue brings out. They give the ἥθικη πίστις for a course which might otherwise have seemed improbable.” Segal 1981: 389 (who generally views Polyneices negatively) grants that “[h]e answers with the tragic hero’s acceptance of his daimon, the god’s will …. His last words have the noble calm of the doomed man who has turned his face to death but looks back in compassionate sorrow to those whom his death will hurt.”

96 The serpent is a very apt analogue for Thebes, a city founded by men grown from a serpent’s teeth.
Archemoros and funeral games are instituted in his honor. It seems that the Seven then compete at these funeral games, as do the sons of Hypsipyle, whose reunion with her is somehow brought about in connection with the games.

While Amphiaraus plays an important role in *Hypsipyle*, he does not seem to hold the main interest, which lies rather with the title character, her life of slavery, her liability for the death of the infant Opheltes, and her reunion with her sons. Amphiaraus acts as something of a plot device in all of this by motivating the actions of Hypsipyle and other characters. This is why the play ends not with Amphiaraus’ departure to Thebes but with the reunion of Hypsipyle and her sons. Amphiaraus is important and interesting, but he is not the subject of the play.

This explains why Euripides appears to have left some potentially powerful dramatic material unexploited – which Sophocles then explores more fully through the figure of Polyniceis. The circumstances of Polyniceis in *Oedipus at Colonus* and Amphiaraus in *Hypsipyle* are similar in several respects, though, as far as we can tell, Euripides does not fully develop some of the ideas raised in his play. Amphiaraus and the Sophoclean Polyniceis both have foreknowledge of their own demise, but Sophocles gives the point greater prominence by focusing on how Polyniceis comes by his knowledge and what he does with it. Amphiaraus already knows before the play begins that he will die if he marches on Thebes with the rest of the Seven; that he does so anyway is due more to his wife’s treachery than to his tragic heroism. If his attitude toward his own destiny was explored more deeply (probably in the first episode, where he describes the bribery of Eriphyle to Hypsipyle), we can no longer see the details. At

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97 Dionysus also appeared *ex machina* and must have said something about the Seven and his native Thebes, but given that Amphiaraus had already departed at this point, Dionysus probably gave more space to arranging Hypsipyle’s return to Lemnos (perhaps) and Euneus’ future in Athens.

98 Amphiaraus narrates his past in fr. 752K, which, according to the generally accepted reconstruction of Cockle 1987 (see e.g. *TrGF* V, CCG), belongs to the first episode.
the same time, though he resents being forced to leave home with the expedition (fr. 752h.15-20), his attitude is not one of hopelessness, and he is still concerned to maintain good relations with the gods (esp. fr. 752k.20-1) and to requite those who have helped him (fr. 757.868-73). When he takes his leave of his newfound φίλοι (Hypsipyle and her sons) at the end of the play, we are surely meant to remember that despite the happy outcome for some of the play’s characters, Amphiaraus is departing to certain death at Thebes. But Euripides apparently does not develop this angle, since he has chosen to focus instead on Hypsipyle’s reunion with her sons.

It is not clear whether Euripides explains how the rest of the Seven learned of Amphiaraus’ interpretation of Opheltes’ death. If we stop and think about it, we can infer that they must have found out at some point; could they really compete in the funeral games without knowing whose death was being honored and why? Euripides may have passed over the point entirely as something too obvious to bother explaining or as an unnecessary detail that stood outside his main theme; or he may have mentioned it in passing without making it into a moral dilemma for Amphiaraus. Euripides’ story, after all, is really about how Hypsipyle, her sons, and Eurydice respond to the death of Opheltes. Amphiaraus’ interpretation, while significant for the larger scope of mythical events, is more immediately a means of appeasing Eurydice and saving Hypsipyle, just as the funeral games are meant to facilitate the reunion of Hypsipyle and her sons. Euripides has little reason to bring the rest of the Seven on stage, and may not care to explain how they learned of the omen or how they reacted to it (courageous resolve or hubristic

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99 Hypsipyle and Euneus wish him well with unintentional irony (fr. 759a.1590-2).

100 A more extensive scene in which Amphiaraus describes the omen to his allies (for which we have no evidence) would seem dramatically superfluous, since the omen has already been interpreted for Eurydice.
defiance or something else).\textsuperscript{101} When Amphiaraus departs to rejoin the expedition, we know that their mission will be fatal, but we do not know if they know it; no tragic point is made out of the matter one way or another.

But Sophocles noticed these ideas and developed them further through the figure of Polyneices. The theme of an unexpected prophecy of doom coupled with the question of how one bears the burden of knowledge that affects many other people as well is not at all evident in \textit{Phoenissae}, where Polyneices and Eteocles have done their best to forget about Oedipus and the family curse; each departs merely hoping to kill the other, not expecting to die himself,\textsuperscript{102} and neither seems especially troubled at the prospect of large-scale casualties among their followers. Amphiaraus provides a much better model for the Sophoclean Polyneices, though Euripides broaches the tragic issues without exploring them.\textsuperscript{103}

The Sophoclean Polyneices is brought on stage for his own scene and as a character of psychological and emotional interest for his own sake, and not merely as a mover of the action. In contrast to Amphiaraus, Polyneices learns of his fate during the play when he receives Oedipus’ curse instead of his blessing, and we in the audience can witness his immediate reaction; additionally, Polyneices must decide whether to share the bad news with the rest of the Seven or keep it to himself. The dialogue with Antigone that closes his scene fleshes him out as

\textsuperscript{101} Of course, we do not have all of this play, but since Euripides is centrally concerned with Hypsipyle and her sons (not the Seven, who never appear on stage, except for Amphiaraus), it is possible that he did not find it necessary even to mention how or whether the rest of the army learned about the omen.

\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, the curse in \textit{Phoen}. seems to be that the brothers will divide their inheritance with the sword (68), which does not necessarily equate with mutual fratricide.

\textsuperscript{103} The Aeschylean Eteocles also knows that he will kill his brother and be killed by him. But Oedipus’ curse does not become an issue in Aeschylus’ play until the moment when Eteocles suddenly realizes its full meaning and goes off to face Polyneices anyway; that is, we are not prompted to wonder whether he has told anyone else about the curse or whether he has a moral duty to do so. Unlike Polyneices and Amphiaraus, Eteocles has no reason to believe that his death will have any negative effect on the Theban war effort. The fate of the other six Theban champions does not rest on him, and in any case, he knows that he himself will successfully defend the seventh gate (even if he dies in the process).
a character by exploring various Euripidean questions. How does one deal with the sudden knowledge of one’s own death? How does one deal with the knowledge of a much grander failure that will affect many other people as well? How does one balance fate with honor? When we see how Polyneices answers these questions – that he will face his fate willingly, that he will bear the burden of knowledge by himself, and that he will sacrifice himself and his cause to honor – he becomes a deeper figure. While much of Sophocles’ scene is modeled on the first episode of *Phoenissae* and much of Polyneices’ characterization in *Oedipus at Colonus* is either deliberate imitation or deliberate reversal of the Euripidean figure, the Sophoclean Polyneices remains distinct and interesting primarily because of his final dialogue with Antigone. Elements drawn from *Phoenissae* make him sympathetic, flawed, and human; hints of Amphiaraus from *Hypsipyle* make him tragic and heroic.

The degree of sympathy to be accorded to Polyneices has long been a matter of debate; it is remarkable that, while the Euripidean Polyneices displays some of the same faults (short-sightedness, selfishness), he has not provoked nearly as much controversy as his Sophoclean counterpart. This is of course because in *Phoenissae* the contrast with Eteocles makes the issue seem completely black and white; there is no doubt which of the two brothers is more right and thus more sympathetic. The Sophoclean Polyneices is contrasted with Creon in a similar way, but since those two characters do not appear in the same scene, the effect of the contrast is weaker. We appreciate Polyneices’ honesty after Creon’s duplicity, but a more immediate effect is created by the confrontation of Polyneices and Oedipus. There is a contrast here as well (between Polyneices’ hope for forgiveness and Oedipus’ insistence on justice), but there is also a great deal of similarity, both in their circumstances and in their attitudes toward those who have

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done them wrong. This prevents the spectator of Sophocles’ *agon* scene from making an easy choice between contestants. Both are simultaneously sympathetic and repellent, and often for the same reasons. Thus, Polyneices remains a deeply problematic figure throughout the *agon*, as Sophocles explores the ethical questions raised by his plight, and the audience’s sympathy for him is won – insofar as it *is* won – chiefly by the manner of his entrance and departure. But in the end, this is what we expect of Sophocles and Euripides: their respective treatments of the myth are similar in many respects, but Euripides’ is more explicit in its impact and the ideas more bluntly juxtaposed.

**Oedipus, Power, and Pollution**

Two other well-known themes in *Oedipus at Colonus* spring from Euripidean roots. On the one hand, the theme of control, especially the control of Oedipus by one of his sons and his determination to remain autonomous, is widely recognized. On the other hand, his great speeches in defense of his own past seem to inform the play in an essential way and have prompted scholars to study the play as a reflection on the revelation of Oedipus’ crimes in Sophocles’ earlier *Oedipus Tyrannus*. But it is not usual to connect these two themes with each other, nor to derive their inspiration ultimately from Euripides’ *Phoenissae*, rather than *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In brief, I will argue that the theme of control (κράτος) of Oedipus is an extension of a different theme – the quest for political power – which runs through both tragedies. The theme of controlling Oedipus is naturally attended by the question of his guilt and the nature of

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106 κράτος and its cognates are important terms in *OT* as well, but more diffuse in meaning and application than in *Phoen* or *OC*. The most pertinent passages are probably *OT* 237 and 1522-3, which respectively identify Oedipus as a ruler and an ex-ruler, thus exemplifying the magnitude of his fall. See Zeitlin 1986: 122 n. 20 for κράτος and ἀρχή as quintessential Theban themes.
his pollution, which is a central theme in *Phoenissae* and then carefully recast and reversed in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Winnington-Ingram (1980: 261) speaks for many when he says that “one wonders at first why Sophocles should have handled the topic in this way and at such length, especially since the acceptance of Oedipus by Theseus is not conditioned by any argument as to his guilt or innocence;” indeed, Oedipus’ speeches are not directed at Theseus but at those who attack or doubt him on the basis of assumptions about him that have been developed in *Phoenissae*.

The question of who will control Oedipus (both alive and dead) is of course the central issue of Sophocles’ play and is thematized most noticeably in the use of the word κράτος and its cognates. This language is most concentrated in a passage from the first episode, when Ismene arrives from Thebes bringing a report of a new oracle and the Thebans’ plans to recover Oedipus from exile (396-408):

Iσ. καὶ μὴν Κρέοντά γ’ ἵσθι σοι τούτων χάριν ἥξοντα βαιοῦ κούχι μυρίου χρόνου. 
Οι. ὅπως τί δράση, θύγατερ; ἐρμήνευε μοι. 
Iσ. ὡς σ’ ἄγχι γῆς στήσοσι Καδμείας, ὅπως κρατῶσι μὲν σοῦ, γῆς δὲ μὴ ὑμβαίνης ὥρων. 
Οι. ἢ δ’ ὑφέλησις τις θύρασι κειμένου; 
Iσ. κεῖνοις ὁ τύμβος δυστυχῶς ὁ σὸς βαρύς. 
Οι. τοῦτον χάριν τοῖνοι σε προσθέσθαι πέλας χώρας τῆλωσι, μηδ’ ἢν’ ἂν σαυτοῦ κρατῶις. 
Οι. η’ καὶ κατασκιῶσι Θῆβαια κόνει; 
Iσ. ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐδ’ τοῦμνον αἰμά γ’, ὁ πάτερ. 
Οι. οὐκ ἂρ’ ἐμοῦ γε μὴ κρατήσωσιν ποτε.

Iσm. Yet know that because of this Creon will come to you not after a long time, but soon. 
Oed. To do what, my daughter? Explain to me! 
Iσm. So that they can establish you near the Cadmean land, where they can control you without your entering its bounds.

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107 Winnington-Ingram 1954 (substantially reprinted in Winnington-Ingram 1980): 16 n. 7 compares the repetition of κράτος and κρατεῖν to the repetition of τροφ- words in the same episode and comments that “[t]his could … be shown to be a characteristic Sophoclean use of words.” For this type of repetition, see esp. Easterling 1973.
Oed.  But what help do they get from my being outside their country?
Ism.  If things go wrong with it, your tomb will cause them trouble.
Oed.  Even without a god to tell one, one might know that by guessing.
Ism.  Then that is why they wish to place you near them, and not where you would be your own master.
Oed.  Will they even shroud my body in Theban soil?
Ism.  But the shedding of kindred blood does not allow it, father!
Oed.  Then they shall never gain power over me!

This brief passage illustrates both the Thebans’ determination to gain possession of Oedipus (and why: 402) and Oedipus’ even greater determination not to let them get their hands on him. The only thing Oedipus really wants, other than proper burial, is protection from those who would take away his freedom.\(^\text{108}\)

What is perhaps less frequently observed is the distinct use of the same vocabulary even a few lines preceding the passage cited above. When Ismene reports that her brothers have broken their previous agreement in favor of contending for the Theban throne, she says that they both wish ἄρχης λαβέσθαι καὶ κράτους τυραννικοῦ (373). Again, when she explains why they would need Oedipus for their safety (εὔσοια, 390), she says ἐν σοὶ τὰ κείνων φασὶ γίγνεσθαι κράτη (392). In the same passage she mingleς two meanings of κράτος: control of Oedipus, but also control of the Theban throne, i.e. political power,\(^\text{109}\) and Polyneices also uses the same language of his mission (1332). Both meanings are collapsed at 1381-6 (the last time κράτος and its cognates occur in the play), when Oedipus rejects Polyneices’ suppliancy, declares that κράτος belongs to his curses, and condemns Polyneices μήτε γῆς ἐμφυλίου δόρει κρατῆσαι.\(^\text{110}\) Oedipus simultaneously refuses to put himself in another’s control and dooms Polyneices’ quest for political power.

\(^{108}\) Similar uses of κράτος/κρατέω also at 646 (Oedipus’ resolve to turn the tables and gain κράτος over his enemies), 1207 (Oedipus afraid that Polyneices might seize him).

\(^{109}\) For κράτος as political power, see also 68 (of Theseus) and Jebb 392n.

\(^{110}\) Or, with Reiske’s conjecture (adopted by Dawe 1996): μήτε γῆς ἐμφυλίῳ δόρει κρατῆσαι.
Throughout the tragedy, then, control of Oedipus is tantamount to control of Thebes, both being described in terms of κράτος. That this is not accidental may be demonstrated by a glance at the use of an apparent synonym. In this play, νίκη and its cognates are never used of the war of the Seven against Thebes. Rather, they occur when somebody wins an argument or when one person gets his own way instead of another. νίκη is an expression of straightforward victory, of the fact that somebody has won and somebody has lost; but it does not imply anything about what is to be gained from that victory (such as political power). In short, in Oedipus at Colonus, νίκη is the neutral word for victory, κράτος the word for power, control, dominion – all the things which Polyneices and Eteocles want to get for themselves and which will be guaranteed if they can only get control of Oedipus.

The idea of control or power, also represented by the word κράτος, is also found in Phoenissae; if anything, it is more fundamental to Euripides’ play, which is after all centrally concerned with the war itself. Throughout, κράτος is consistently used of the brothers’ personal quarrel and the power that each hopes to win. That is, Eteocles and Polyneices seem to view the war as a manifestation of their own struggle for the throne; they do not seem to realize or care that others are also involved, and that victory for either side will have serious consequences for the Theban citizenry and the Argive soldiers. This is the lesson Jocasta tries to impress upon her sons in the first episode (especially Polyneices, who repeatedly labels Thebes φίλος but seems not to have thought about what victory by conquest must entail). As the argument between the brothers in the first episode escalates, both reassert their claim to political power and material wealth, and both pledge to make good their claims by killing each other on the battlefield. What

111 In fact, the only time it is used of military victory in general is 1088 (with reference to Theseus’ rescue of Antigone and Ismene).
they both aim at is κράτος, the combination of victory and power, but they give little thought to the countless other people who must fight and die and suffer along the way.  

Given that the war and victory are of primary importance in *Phoenissae*, it is reasonable to conclude that Sophocles derived his usage of κράτος from that play. *Oedipus at Colonus* continues to use κράτος of the brothers’ struggle for power in Thebes, but the concept of νίκη is watered down by being consistently applied to non-military victories. The consequent isolation of κράτος as the primary term for victory in the war (and the power it brings) allows Sophocles to extend its range and introduce a new theme (control of Oedipus). Sophocles thus balances the Euripidean concept of κράτος (the power that attends victory) with κράτος over Oedipus.

However, once Sophocles has introduced the idea that Oedipus’ presence is an essential component of victory, he must deal with an additional problem. As a man guilty of committing the most horrific crimes against members of his own family, Oedipus is polluted, perhaps an object of divine wrath, and possibly even dangerous to be near. This is exactly the attitude toward him in *Phoenissae*. Though he only appears on stage at the very end of the play, the figure of Oedipus is fundamental to the conception of human and divine causality in *Phoenissae*. In this respect *Phoenissae* is akin both to epic, which is perhaps best known for employing “double determination,” and to the Aeschylean trilogy, which constructs a family curse or

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112 In *Phoen.*, the language of νίκη, used especially by those outside the brothers’ feud (including Jocasta, Creon, and Antigone), seems to describe the war as such – that is, a deadly contest between opposing armies with the fate of a city and its inhabitants at stake – and to reveal a concern not for who wins the throne but for who wins the war and which side suffers the consequences of defeat.

113 On pollution (including an illustrative discussion of *OC*), see Parker 1983: 317-21. Cf. Segal 1981: 390: “[Oedipus’] foul garments have associations with Oedipus’ miasma as the visible mark of the curses on his house. They are a reminder of his power to continue those curses through his deadly imprecautions upon his sons.” For Segal, one of the play’s most important themes is Oedipus’ separating himself from his past pollution and suffering in order to become a hero.

114 Michelini 1999/2000 (on generic interaction in late Euripides) has brief remarks on *Phoen.* on p. 43; see also Michelini 2009.
history of divine wrath in the background of the play and traces different stages of the curse’s
development through the family’s history. In Aeschylus’ own trilogy about the house of
Oedipus, for instance, the three plays portrayed the death of Laius (resulting from his
disobedience of an oracle), the revelation of Oedipus’ crimes, and of course the war of the Seven
against Thebes.\textsuperscript{115} In each generation, the family curse\textsuperscript{116} plays itself out to disastrous effect.
Though \textit{Phoenissae} seems not to have belonged to a “true” trilogy like Aeschylus’,\textsuperscript{117} it similarly
adumbrates the calamity that perpetually surrounds the Labdacids so that we feel the crimes of
the past pressing down on the present generation. This dramatic strategy is perhaps best
exemplified in Aeschylus’ \textit{Agamemnon}, which devotes a significant amount of space to
reconstructing the crimes of the past as they relate to the story being dramatized. Choral odes
and Cassandra’s prophetic insight are the playwright’s chief tools for sketching a history of
divine wrath and human corruption that motivates the action on stage.

Perhaps even more so than an Aeschylean trilogy, \textit{Phoenissae} illustrates the concept of
multiple causality, continually accumulating human and divine explanations for the events
playing themselves out without any attempt to reconcile or distinguish one from another.\textsuperscript{118}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[115] Hutchinson 1985: xvii-xl has a good discussion of Aesch. \textit{Sept.} and its tetralogy.
\item[116] I use the term “curse” loosely to refer equally to an actual curse, divine wrath, or a familial tendency to
“Oedipus is both the dangerous and powerful presence that Creon takes him to be and the very present and concrete
link in the chain of familial misfortune from Laius to Eteocles and Polyneices.”
\item[117] Many have thought, following $\Sigma$ \textit{Ar. Ran.} 53, that \textit{Phoen.} was produced together with one or more of the
plays named there (\textit{Antigone} and \textit{Hypsipyle}); \textit{Oedipus} is another possible companion play. In these cases, the
trilogy would be thematically coherent, but would not portray a single version of the myth (as in Aeschylus), since
the other plays make different mythical assumptions from \textit{Phoen}. (e.g. Antigone \textit{does} marry Haemon; Oedipus goes
into exile with Jocasta).
motivation expressed in terms of \textit{daimonion}, \textit{tyche}, or \textit{ate} intersects with human or naturalistic motivation expressed
in terms of \textit{miasma} or \textit{alastor} arising from Oidipous’ parricide, and \textit{ara} the curse he set on his sons … \textit{Eris} ‘strife’
and \textit{Erinyes} ‘curse’ which may be abstract nouns or personified as minor goddesses lie between divine and human
will … Justice is involved in divine influence, but not central to it.” Various characters and the chorus offer the
\end{footnotes}
Oedipus represents a nexus of these forces: the family curse, the crimes antecedent (and presumably preparatory) to the mutual fratricide, and the pollution that infects all of his incestuous family. Eteocles and Polyneices have shut him up in the palace in an attempt to forget all that he signifies about themselves and their future (64-5), but throughout the play we are reminded that he still lurks in the darkness of the palace, muttering curses against his sons (e.g. 66-8, 327-36). Simply not thinking about the family curse does not make it go away.

Euripides’ Oedipus is imagined to bring ruin in two basic ways. First, he destroys his sons by being their father, corrupting the family line, continuing a tradition of intrafamilial crime, and cursing them. Second, he brings sorrow to the city of Thebes simply by being in it. When Creon exiles him at the end of the play, he cites a prophecy given by Teiresias to the effect that Thebes can never flourish while Oedipus resides there (1590-1). His curse and his role as a link in the Aeschylean chain of inherited disaster motivate his sons’ fratricide, while the pollution he bears as a result of his crimes brings divine anger down upon the city as a whole in a war that destroys many citizens and most of the ruling family. I have pointed out already how the man himself, when we finally meet him in the exodos, seems grossly incommensurate with the image painted of him throughout the play, and this is a typically Euripidean disjunction of appearance and reality. Oedipus is a blind, pathetic old man who mourns for his cursed sons and his faithful mother-wife, who is dismayed at being cast out from his homeland, and who

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following possible causes/agents of Labdacid ruin: Oedipus’ curses (66-8, 1051-4, 1355, 1425-6), Furies (253-5, 1306-7, 1503-7, 1593-4), the gods (257-8, 1612-4), iron (350), Eris (351, 798-800, 811-3, 1495), Oedipus and his crimes (351, 1504-7), τὸ δαίμονιον (352), incest (379-81, 814-7), pollution (1050), the family curse (1611).

119 See Lamari 2010: 54-5 for Oedipus’ continual presence (even while physically absent) throughout the play.

120 As many have noted, Teiresias has not said anything quite like this in the play itself; this would be quite a serious distortion of 886-8, so it may be that Creon is be referring instead to a prophecy delivered before the dramatic action.
anticipates an early, even immediate death alone in exile. But he is who he is, and by his very nature he brings destruction to those closest to him.

According to Euripides’ conception, then, there is no meaningful distinction between Oedipus as sufferer versus criminal, as one who bears pollution versus one who curses his own sons. Oedipus is the physical manifestation of everything that destroys his family. Where Euripides makes the idea of Oedipus central to his play, Sophocles brings the character into the spotlight and explores his different roles. He allows Oedipus to defend himself and his past on multiple occasions, but reaffirms the potency of his curses. In Sophocles, Oedipus is only destructive in his role as avenger of the wrongs committed against him, and this role is most clearly manifested in his curses on Creon and on Polyneices and Eteocles.

Oedipus defends himself at length three times in the play, twice before the chorus (258-91, 522-48) and once before Creon (960-1013). The first of these concentrates on Oedipus’ rights as a suppliant and Athens’ duty to respect those rights, but also introduces all of the major arguments about Oedipus’ past: he is not wicked (270); it is unreasonable to fear his dreadful appearance and reputation (265-6, 285-6); his “crimes” were mostly passive, and at any rate he was ignorant of the identity of his “victims” (266-7, 273-4); he acted as any normal person would have if placed in a similar situation (271-2). In this case, the defense is prompted by the chorus’ sudden command that he leave their country, evidently because they, like Euripides’ Creon, fear that his pollution might bring divine wrath down upon the people who shelter him (234-6, 256-7). Sophocles’ Oedipus must demonstrate to the chorus that he is not so terrible as his reputation would have them believe, and he successfully responds to their fears by drawing attention to the logical fallacy of equating appearance with reality and by casting his crimes as

121 For a thorough analysis of these passages from a narrative perspective, see Markantonatos 2002: 29-53.
passive sufferings rather than premeditated cruelty. Since his past cannot prove him to be guilty, wicked, or destructive (since he is not the one responsible for his crimes), a refusal to accept him would make a mockery of Athens’ own reputation for piety.\textsuperscript{122}

The second passage is a lyric exchange with the chorus, who simply want to satisfy their curiosity about Oedipus’ past. In the scene immediately preceding this one, they have advised Oedipus on how to propitiate the Eumenides, and he has sent Ismene off to take care of it (461-509). Even though we may feel that propitiation is superfluous in light of Oedipus’ evident affinity for the Eumenides and the prayer he offered immediately upon arriving in the grove (84-110), he still pays careful attention to the chorus’ detailed instructions; his willingness to perform the ritual anyway demonstrates his moral purity (despite his ritual pollution) and settles the chorus’ anxieties on that count.\textsuperscript{123} Instead, since Oedipus’ previous speech drew attention to his terrible reputation, they now want to know how true his reputation is. Since the question is one of facts, Oedipus cannot avoid admitting what he has done, but he can and does continue to emphasize the role played by his own ignorance (522-6, 537-41) as well as the idea of justifiable self-defense (545-8). The juxtaposition of these scenes – the propitiation of the Eumenides and Oedipus’ legalistic argument – not only shows the chorus’ fears about Oedipus being laid to rest one by one but also underscores the disjunction between Oedipus’ past acts and his personal ethic and religiosity. In \textit{Phoenissae}, these facets of Oedipus’ characterization are all different ways of saying the same thing, and Sophocles’ chorus is initially inclined to share that view; but Oedipus methodically disassembles all the elements that combine to make him who he is, showing that each one can be defended and that none affords any reason for fear.

\textsuperscript{122} For Oedipus’ terribleness (with a particular focus on his similarity to the Eumenides), see Mills 1997: 166-8.

\textsuperscript{123} For Oedipus and the Eumenides, see esp. Henrichs 1983. One need not be morally pure to propitiate a deity (witness Clytemnestra), but since Oedipus \textit{belongs} in the sacred grove, he has done nothing that requires propitiation; his offering is a gesture of goodwill to the goddesses (cf. 498-9) for the sake of the chorus.
In both of these passages, Oedipus argues that he is legally innocent of his crimes and therefore not morally repugnant; similarly, his use of hypothetical arguments helps to normalize him as a person and bring him back to the level of his interlocutor(s). Though others charge him with pollution – which he does not deny (see esp. 1132-6) – Oedipus distinguishes the social stigma of pollution from his personal moral integrity, which can be defended by rational and legally based argumentation. The idea that pollution itself is destructive is effectively refuted by the oracle that Oedipus’ presence will bring victory and his pledge to benefit Athens.

Creon’s accusation of Oedipus before Theseus recalls the chorus’ first reaction to him. Creon claims that Oedipus is unworthy of a god-fearing state like Athens, and that he is actually doing the Athenians a favor by removing a potential source of divine disfavor and restricting his pollution to his own household. Oedipus in turn accuses Creon of deceit and shamelessness, and while Creon’s arguments may have some force (especially since they parallel the chorus’ concerns in the parodos), the juxtaposition of the clearly villainous Creon and the sympathetic Oedipus gives the latter the moral high ground. We come upon this scene ready to view Oedipus as righteous, and indeed, he gives more weight to his claims of virtue in this speech (966-8, 988-90) than in previous ones. At the same time, he makes the fullest case yet for his legal innocence (963-5, 969-73, 983-4, 986, 997-9), deploying as well a hypothetical argument designed to demystify and normalize his actions (992-6).

Though these three speeches use and reuse particular arguments, they have different functions within the overall dramatic structure. To put it roughly, Oedipus’ first speech persuades the chorus that his reputation, appearance, and religious pollution are not sufficient grounds for fearing him (while his readiness to propitiate the Eumenides gives them a positive reason to trust in his piety), the second argues that he is not legally guilty for the specific crimes
he has committed, and the third shows him to be morally upright, or at least not κακός, like Creon.\textsuperscript{124} The helplessness of Oedipus and his daughters against physical assault illustrates more vividly his passivity in suffering and his inability to do harm to others. He is not dangerous or despicable for any of the specific reasons alleged against him; and it is my contention that his repeated arguments were inspired by the cumulative characterization of Oedipus in \textit{Phoenissae}, where such distinctions are meaningless and Oedipus is always understood as a source of ill fortune.

Oedipus’ chief reason for defending himself at all is his desire to stay in Colonus; if Theseus and the chorus believe that he is wicked or dangerous, they will not allow him to stay there or anywhere in their territory. The Thebans apparently think of him in the same way as the characters in \textit{Phoenissae}, and they attempt to resolve the apparent paradox between an Oedipus whose presence is dangerous and an Oedipus whose presence will bring victory by deciding to plant him at their border, far enough away that his pollution cannot infect them but near enough for them to exercise control over him and his tomb. But Oedipus himself demonstrates that there is no paradox, and the Athenians accept his arguments. His presence is straightforwardly beneficial, and those factors that make him seem dangerous are imaginary or without substance.\textsuperscript{125}

Indeed, the only means of defense Oedipus has in this play is his words, especially curses (cf. 873). As these curses are directed only at specific individuals who have done him wrong

\textsuperscript{124} This last point is particularly apt, if the popular attribution of Eur. fr. 554a (from \textit{Oedipus}) to Creon is correct: Creon treats Oedipus precisely as a wicked person who therefore deserves to be treated wickedly, even as a suppliant. Cf. Burian 1974: 414: “Pollution remains, of course, making a whole range of normal human contacts inaccessible to Oedipus (cf. 1130-1135), but pollution cannot void his claim of justice for his deeds, nor excuse injustice against him.”

\textsuperscript{125} The idea of Oedipus as simultaneously dangerous (because of his terrible wrath) and beneficial is of course also in line with his death and transformation into a hero; for hero cult in \textit{OC}, see esp. Burian 1974, Edmunds 1981.
(Creon, his sons), it seems that Oedipus can actually be dangerous only to those who harm him, which simply means he has a right to requital, like all men. The tragedy of Oedipus lies in the fact that his curses spread in their effect beyond their intended targets. Thus Creon’s old age will indeed be characterized by suffering (if we think of Antigone), but only through the deaths of Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice, and even Megareus and Menoeceus (if we think of Antigone 1303-5 and Phoenissae). Likewise, his curse on Eteocles and Polynieces seals their doom but also leads ultimately to the death of Antigone. Perhaps it is to be expected that the curses of a soon-to-be hero might get out of control. But on Euripides’ terms, Oedipus stands absolved of destroying his family and former city through wickedness and pollution.

**Distorted Reflections**

Sophocles views the figure of Antigone, I have argued, through a Euripidean lens of maidenliness and heroism. However, what were conceived as opposites in Euripides are reconciled in Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone is able to be both parthenos and hero simultaneously. At the same time, her function in the Sophoclean play is analogous to that of the Euripidean Jocasta. Though Antigone as a character manages to find a balance between heroism and maidenliness, she is not obviously more successful than either the Euripidean Antigone or Jocasta at influencing events or reconciling her quarreling family members. A tension remains between Antigone as a coherent maiden-hero and a failed Labdacid peace-maker. Sophocles’ character combines a number of Euripidean ideas and functions in one, resolving some conflicts while producing others.

The agon between Polynieces and Oedipus appears to reflect quite closely the first episode of Phoenissae – first in its progression as an agon rather than a supplication scene, and
then in its redeployment of visual details and mythical elements. The mirroring of the first episode of *Phoenissae* constitutes acknowledgement of Euripides’ innovations, as well as preparing the audience for another reassessment of Polyneices’ character and motivations. Though Sophocles’ Polyneices is more clearly problematic in his appeal to Oedipus than Euripides’ is in his argument with Eteocles, Sophocles takes care to give his figure a sympathetic arrival and departure, the latter being also a development of Amphiaraus’ circumstances in *Hypsipyle*. In the figure of Polyneices, then, there is straightforward imitation and recognition of Euripides’ approach in *Phoenissae*, but also a tendency to problematize the ethical situation and create tragic depth through exploration of tragic and moral ideas raised but unexploited in Euripides’ *Hypsipyle*.

In the figure of Oedipus, we see the most extensive expansion and reworking of Euripidean material. Sophocles adopts the theme of κράτος as political power (specifically that which falls to the victor in the fraternal feud) but combines it with a variant of this theme, κράτος as control of Oedipus. This extension of the Euripidean theme encapsulates the central problem of the play but also brings Sophocles into contact with another, seemingly unrelated Euripidean motif, the pollution of Oedipus. Sophocles gives his hero a chance to defend himself against the charges raised in *Phoenissae*, thus allowing “control of Oedipus” to be a beneficial thing and creating a figure of surprising strength and authority over against the unexpectedly frail Oedipus who appears in the exodos of *Phoenissae*. Here especially we may observe the creative potential inherent in Sophocles’ exploitation of others’ dramatic material: his Oedipus is not only a response to Euripides’ (on his own terms) but also a vehicle for developing old themes and producing new ones.
This chapter has attempted only a partial survey of this material and what can be gained from studying it closely. I have chosen to focus my main discussion on particular characters and on the ideas developed through them primarily in *Phoenissae* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. This approach, an obvious way to relate plays which feature a number of the same characters, also provides an element of stability in comparison of different scenes or themes and seemed to me to offer the best chance for fruitful analysis of large portions of Sophocles’ play. My purpose has not been to describe exhaustively how *Oedipus at Colonus* engages with *Phoenissae* but to open up the topic by surveying a few important points of contact. By the same token, I have not intended to discredit Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* as providing one useful dramatic context for study of *Oedipus at Colonus* but only to draw attention to the previously neglected context of Euripides’ recent Theban plays.

It seems to me that these two contexts furnish us with the means of studying *Oedipus at Colonus* from two rather different angles. *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* contribute to character development primarily by serving as reference points for past and future mythical events; that is, knowing what Oedipus *used to be* and what Antigone *will become* colors our understanding of what they are *now*. Why has Oedipus changed since his revelation and fall? How will Antigone become the heroine of her namesake play? Even if Oedipus and Antigone are still recognizable under the terms of the earlier plays, they are different in significant ways, and those differences between then and now are often the whole point. Sophocles uses his earlier plays to explore how time and events affect both characters.

If *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* adumbrate the past and future, *Phoenissae* is more of a mirror to current events, providing a distorted reflection of the actual themes and situations in
Oedipus at Colonus. The particular circumstances in each play are obviously very different (one is set in Thebes, the other at Colonus; in one Oedipus resides in the palace, in the other he is in exile; and so on), but both plays put their characters in situations that require them to behave in similar ways and make the same types of decisions. In both plays, Antigone is a proper parthenos called upon to perform unmaidenly duties; how will she handle the situation? What happens when Labdacids try to reconcile their differences? What is Polyneices’ personal morality, and what is his motivation for doing what he is doing? What is the meaning of Oedipus’ crimes and sufferings to himself and to those around him – regardless of whether he is shut away out of sight or standing at center stage? Euripides’ answers to these and other questions are not the same as Sophocles’, and these differences lend irony or pathos to the dramatic situation. The distorted reflection in Phoenissae allows a glimpse into an alternate universe, suggesting how things could have gone differently.

That scholars have been eager to relate Sophocles’ last play to his earlier treatments of the same myth is not surprising or inappropriate. Nor is it surprising that Oedipus at Colonus has so often been viewed as Sophocles’ redemption of his most famous hero, as the poet’s last advice to his audience and polis, as a meditation on old age or the end of empire, as a dedication to the poet’s hometown, or as a profound religious testament. These are all, to varying degrees, legitimate contexts in which to study the play, and general scholarly interest in exploring these contexts makes it all the more strange that Oedipus at Colonus is so infrequently read in the context of Euripides’ Theban plays, especially his fully extant Phoenissae. The primary purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate that the immediate (Euripidean) dramatic context is every

126 Chronologically, OC is a reflection of Phoen., but as we read OC in light of Phoen., we can use the earlier play as an interpretative mirror for the later.
bit as critical for our understanding of *Oedipus at Colonus* as the other, more popular contexts and to explore some of the interpretative possibilities of reading Sophocles’ last play in this light.

*Phoenissae* and *Oedipus at Colonus* together provide an excellent example of what I have been calling extreme dramatic interaction. *Phoenissae*, like its near cousin *Orestes*, is intensely intertextual, drawing perhaps most significantly on older works such as Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* and Sophocles’ *Antigone*; but it is also a part of Euripides’ recent collection of Theban plays and finds inspiration for one of its most famous scenes (the attempted reconciliation in the first episode) in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*. All of these plays also stand, directly or indirectly, behind *Oedipus at Colonus*. Poets of the late fifth century found reason to be interested in their own work and that of others, earlier plays and more recent ones, tragedies as well as comedies – and these interests intertwined and built on each other as the poets continued to develop new themes, new questions, and new ideas.
Previous chapters have focused on how Sophocles made use of what he found in the “pool” of available dramatic material, though we have also had something to say about how other playwrights responded to his work (especially in our discussion of Euripides’ *Orestes*), and this is the topic which we will address in the present chapter. We are also leaving behind purely tragic intertextuality to study fifth- and fourth-century comic poets’ use of Sophoclean drama. In other words, this chapter attempts to show what sort of context Sophocles provided for comic playwrights, how they interpreted and reacted to his work, and how all of this squares with what we already know about Aristophanes’ treatment of Euripides. In addition to describing how Sophocles was perceived by his comic contemporaries, then, this chapter continues to explore seldom-recognized similarities between Sophocles and Euripides. That such a study has not been undertaken before speaks volumes about the way we understand both Sophocles and Euripides, for a sustained relationship with comedy is perceived to be one of the things that most distinguishes these two poets from each other. Euripides is generally seen as bold and provocative, and thus an easy and appropriate target for comic parody, while Sophocles is traditional and conservative, the very paragon of good tragedy; surely comedy could have nothing to say about him. Indeed, the absence of any extant comedies that are centrally
concerned with Sophocles, as *Thesmophoriazusae* is with Euripides, seems to support this conclusion.

Very little work has been done on ancient parody of Sophoclean drama, and for reasons that are easy to find. Aristophanes’ most conspicuous parodies offer sufficient material for those interested in comic treatments of Euripides while also providing a useful body of evidence for scholars working in various other areas: in theories of parody or generic interaction, in Aristophanes’ attitude toward comedy versus tragedy, or even in Aeschylus’ comic reception. In other words, we already have enough material to discuss most of the major questions about paratragedy on the scholarly agenda. But comic exploitations of Sophoclean drama have generally been overlooked except for a handful of recent articles focusing on specific points of contact and the commentaries, which rarely do more than note that there is a reference to Sophocles. My primary purpose in this chapter is to demonstrate that Sophocles’ work did in fact stand in a meaningful relationship with the comic genre, one fundamentally comparable to the relationship between Euripides and Aristophanes.

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2 Pieters 1976 focuses on the exploitation of Aesch. *Eum.* in Cratinus’ *Ploutoi*; Bakola 2010: 118-79 expands on Cratinus’ interest in (usually Aeschylean) tragedy. Others have discussed Euripides’ and Aeschylus’ use of comedy or comic elements (Knox 1970 (reprinted in Knox 1979: 250-74), Seidensticker 1982, E. Segal 1995, Gregory 1999/2000; Sommerstein 2002). The closest such study we have for Sophocles is a chapter in Seidensticker 1982 (pp. 76-88) and Meltzer 1991/2 on the guard in *Antigone*.

3 Rau 1967 deals with Aristophanic parody of all types, including select Sophoclean passages, and his appendices provide more complete collections of material; my debt to Rau will be evident throughout this chapter. Articles on comic treatment of Sophocles include Dobrov 1993 (reprinted in Dobrov 2001), Castellani 2010, Compton-Engle (in preparation). Weissenberger 2008 is more interested in the original conception of *Frogs* than what it has to say about Sophocles specifically. Lefèvre 2001: 279-88 connects Sophocles to Menander on the basis of the τύχη theme and happy endings. Griffith 2006 also links Sophoclean satyr play to New Comedy thematically, but dissociates it from Old Comedy linguistically; Zagagi 1999 finds comic themes in *Ichneutai*, though this is taken as a generic similarity between comedy and satyr play. Lada-Richards 1997 discusses the degree of identification between actor and character in tragedy versus comedy using Soph. *Phil.* as the tragic standard. Cairns 2005 considers – and rejects – Pollux’ statement that Euripides and Sophocles experimented with parabases.
Quotations, references, and reminiscences of Sophoclean drama are scattered throughout the comic poets of the fifth and fourth centuries, including both fragmentary and extant plays of Aristophanes. I draw on comedy of this period (i.e. Old and Middle Comedy) because the poets writing then were close enough in time to Sophocles still to consider him as a fellow dramatist, rather than a canonized classic. Furthermore, the tendency of Old and Middle Comedy to treat contemporary figures and mythical subjects means those comic poets may have been more ready to engage with a tragedian, while the romanticized, domestic, and apolitical plots of New Comedy had less reason to be interested in classical tragedy.

Some of the examples I examine in this chapter are humorous, others serious; some make fun of Sophocles or tragedy as a genre, others do not; some draw on Sophoclean satyr play rather than tragedy. Such a range of material and dynamics may seem to pose a challenge with regard to terminology. Bakola’s approach to the same problem provides a helpful starting point:\(^4\)

“in his discussions of comedy’s use of tragedy, Silk distinguishes between ‘paratragedy’ and ‘parody (of tragedy)’, suggesting that ‘paratragedy is the cover term for all of comedy’s intertextual dependence on tragedy, some of which is parodic but some is not’, whereas parody, as ‘any kind of distorting representation of an original’, ‘is essentially negative: it works by recalling a more or less specific original and subverting it’. In Silk’s essays, parody has connotations of ‘criticism’ or even ‘polemic’. Whereas Silk’s distinction is valuable as a concept, we should take into account that modern literary theory has recognized parody as a flexible and inclusive term, whose semantics have changed constantly through the ages. Although the phenomenon can be on occasion ‘negative’ and ‘subversive’ (in Silk’s terms, critical or polemical), it is not necessarily or consistently so. Because parodies are often written in admiration, affection, or even in a playful spirit, taking ‘subversion’ as an essential principle of parody would be misleading, unless we read ‘subversive’ as something more than ‘critical’ or ‘polemical’. On the other hand, distortion is a fundamental feature of parody and is achieved by exaggeration, displacement, or transformation of either manner, matter, or both. In our discussion, the term ‘parody’ will have a wider and more inclusive application. Thus ‘paratragedy’ and ‘parody (of tragedy)’ are used as largely interchangeable terms, meaning the distortive representation of a tragic original with a humorous or playful effect without any preconception as to the intention underlying this representation.”

\(^4\) Bakola 2010: 120-1. My project is also to some extent counterpart to that of Bakola, who means to expand our understanding of comic paratragedy on the comic side by moving beyond Aristophanes.
Bakola makes an important point regarding the tone of parody, which need not be critical or subversive – or even humorous, especially if the comic poet is using tragedy to lend weight or authority to his own work. Like Bakola’s, this study is concerned with particular comic and tragic passages rather than a theory of parody, so there is less to be gained from a careful differentiation between terms. However, not every comic passage I will be discussing has a specific tragic model; that is, the comic poet may be composing freely in what he imagines to be Sophocles’ tragic style or imitating a Sophoclean type of song without drawing on any specific example. It is reasonable, therefore, to speak of both parody and paratragedy – where “paratragedy” is an all-encompassing term for comedy’s exploitation of tragedy and “parody” refers to an exploitation of a specific tragic model\(^5\) – in some discussions of individual passages.

Except for the final section, which also describes thematic and structural patterns, the evidence treated in this chapter consists almost entirely of verbal correspondences between comedy and Sophoclean drama (whether tragedy or satyr play). This is of course what we normally look for in studies of intertextuality, but in this particular case we are also dependent on the ancient citers (primarily scholia, lexicographers, and Athenaeus) to inform us about specific connections between plays. In many cases, both the Sophoclean play and the comedy are lost except for fragments where (we are told) the comic poet meant to evoke Sophocles; sometimes the tragedy is extant but not the comedy or vice versa. Where we must rely on fragmentary evidence, the argument is necessarily limited, for a citation of Sophoclean drama may have resonated much more widely than can now be seen. By the same token, we risk falling prey to the citers’ mistakes and vagaries, which cannot be checked against other evidence. But that is

\(^5\) These are the definitions used by Silk 1993; cf. Robson 2009: 103-19.
the nature of the topic, and even with these dangers we can usually be confident in asserting a direct relationship between texts on the basis of direct quotation.

I organize my case-studies into three broadly defined sections, each representing a range along a conceptual spectrum and therefore also overlapping to some extent with its fellow(s) to either side; these levels are not meant to be exclusive or rigid, only to lend some structure and coherence to a large body of disparate evidence. Roughly put, these levels address the intertextuality between Sophocles and comedy in terms of 1) collision of high and low registers, 2) appropriation and manipulation of ideas, and 3) integration into the larger comic passage or scene; more thorough descriptions of these levels will be provided as we come to each section. Discussion in the text will center on those cases which I consider most secure and illustrative, especially those that involve direct quotation (as opposed to loose allusion). My argument is a cumulative one; I hope that my main points about Sophocles’ relationship with comedy will still stand even if some individual examples are found to be less convincing than others.

At the most basic level, direct quotation demonstrates that the comic poet had Sophocles in mind when he wrote. The quotation may be completely unconscious on his part, though then we can still argue that nothing in the poet’s mind distinguished Sophoclean drama from any other source. Some quotations are little more than banal representations of tragic language, while others tend toward the gnomic; I have omitted such passages from my discussion when they appear to be incidental rather than conscious references to Sophoclean drama. With these set aside, I may take most quotations discussed here as the product of the comic poet’s purpose.

In addition to the question of authorial intent, it is important to consider whether the audience would have recognized a Sophoclean quotation as such, and if so, whether they would have grasped its full implications. Some help on this point is provided by Martin Revermann’s
article on the competence of theater audiences. Undoubtedly different spectators comprehended comic jokes and intertextuality in varying degrees, and it is unlikely that everyone interpreted each passage as thoroughly as I am about to do. However, I think that higher levels of meaning were often available to those able to find them, and that some spectators were indeed able to do so. In a sense, then, the levels which I use to describe comedy’s interaction with Sophocles may be understood in two ways: they sketch, in increasing complexity, the comic poets’ use of Sophoclean drama in their plays; but they also correspond roughly to the level of competence required of spectators in order to recognize tragic references and understand their implications. Thus, most spectators would be expected to perceive level 1, which represents a fairly simple engagement with Sophocles, while fewer and fewer would perceive all of the dynamics at work in levels 2 and 3. For simplicity, I will refer broadly throughout this chapter to “the audience’s” reactions, but it should be understood that composition of “the audience” constantly changes, depending on the degree of dramatic complexity involved in each example.

**Level 1: Collision of Registers**

The most fundamental way for a comic poet to capitalize on tragic quotation is through a collision of high and low registers. Even without a clear marker to indicate the source tragedian or tragedy, most tragic quotations are identifiable as such because of their relatively higher language and diction. Tragic markers may include tone, word choice, phrasing, style (e.g. omission of the definite article), and metrical features (e.g. “heavy” iambic trimeter), and it is not unlikely that actors sometimes struck a tragic pose when delivering such lines. 

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when elements like these appear in a comic context or are closely juxtaposed with clearly comic language. Linguistic collision at its most basic is designed to produce humor through juxtaposition without necessarily lending any deeper meaning to the passage in question or even requiring that the audience recognize the tragic quotation specifically. Sometimes the comic poet simply inserts a tragic fragment into a comic passage; at other times, he manipulates the tragic fragment just a little, replacing a word or phrase with something blatantly comic to increase the sense of collision and perhaps create a *paraprosdokian* joke. These two categories, which ultimately describe the same phenomenon with the same effect, may be summarized as “collision *between* a tragic fragment and the comic context” and “collision *within* a tragic fragment” – and of course the two are not mutually exclusive.

On a slightly higher level are citations for which a familiarity with the tragic model is required, at least for them to have their full effect. (It should be stressed again that even where the audience does not understand every level of humor operating in a given instance of intertextuality, the basic level of collision through juxtaposition nearly always remains.) Such citations may involve a collision of ideas or images drawn from a tragic (or satyric) model – often a sort of “visual collision” rather than strictly linguistic. Then there is the effect achieved through transfer of words originally spoken by a particular tragic character in a particular tragic context to a new, comic character and context. While the transfer of the tragic to the comic lies at the heart of any collision of generic registers, a tragic quotation may be appropriate or inappropriate within a *specific* comic plot in varying degrees, and the result either way is usually humorous. With collision of tragic and comic registers (whether linguistic collision, visual collision, or transfer of tragic language), the ultimate goal is generally simple absurdity or

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7 For gestures and other questions of performance style, see e.g. Taplin 1977 and 1978, Green 2002, and Valakas 2002 (with discussion of previous scholarship).
perhaps bathetic deflation of the tragic expression or situation; the point of the quotation lies in
the juxtaposition itself and not in any commentary on the tragedy per se.

Antiphanes fr. 1 (= Soph. fr. 754, cited by Athenaeus) offers an example of collision
between tragedy and comedy, though the specific points of contrast are lost. Speaker A claims to
quote four and a half lines of Sophoclean tragedy; the title of the Sophoclean play is unknown.8
Even if the lines were freely composed by Antiphanes himself in what he imagined to be
Sophoclean style, the effect is still one of generic collision:9

(A.) καὶ πρῶτα μὲν
αἵρω ποθεῖνὶν μᾶζαν, Ἰνν φερέσβιος
Δηό βροτοίς χάρμα δωρεῖται φίλον
ἐπειτα πνικτά τακερά μηκάδον μέλη,
χλόθην καταμπέχοντα σάρκα νεογενή.
(B.) τί λέγεις; (A.) τραγῳδίαν περαίνω Σοφοκλέους.

(A.) And first I lift
the much-longed-for loaf, the gift to mortals of Deo,
bringer of our livelihood, a well-loved delight;
and then the baked tender limbs of bleaters,
embracing green vegetables, the meat of young ones.
(B.) What are you saying? (A.) I’m reciting a tragedy of Sophocles!

The language is consistently elevated or at least unobjectionable in tragic diction,10
except for the fourth line; πνικτά is never found in tragedy and τακερά only once,11 which makes

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8 Pearson 1917 suggests Triptolemus, presumably because of the reference to Deo, but there is no reason to
think that the story of Triptolemus was concerned with full meals (including meat), as opposed to grain.

9 It is also possible to think, with Kock, that the tragic quotation belongs to the younger Sophocles, though
given the fame of the elder poet, it seems more likely that his name would be used without a modifier than his
grandson’s (Sophocles III, according to Sutton 1987: 15-6); see also Nesselrath 1990: 246 n. 15. Antiphanes’
williness to exploit the work of the elder Sophocles is demonstrated by Antiphanes fr. 228 (discussed below, pp.
247-9).

10 Elevated vocabulary includes φερέσβιος, Δηό (three others in comedy), χάρμα, βροτός (not solely, but
overwhelmingly tragic), μηκάς (one other in Antiphanes). καταμπέχω occurs only twice through the fourth century
– the one cited here, and another in Antiphanes (fr. 174, from Omphale). According to Gomperz, only Ἰνν – φίλον is
certainly Sophoclean. Pearson 1917 (who follows Gomperz in giving Sophocles φερέσβιος – φίλον) states ad loc.
that “the tragic vocabulary seems to have been placed in a ludicrous setting…. In this connexion it is material to
observe that, while the writers of the Middle Comedy were especially prone to direct parody…they also followed
with zest the practice of describing homely objects in the grandiloquent style of poetry.” The allusion to EI. 1173 at
it unlikely that this particular line derives entirely from Sophocles. Rather, Antiphanes himself has inserted at least one blatantly comic word in order to create collision within the fragment as well as around it. Though he gives no details, speaker B seems puzzled or surprised at his companion’s words, which then have to be explained by being labeled Sophoclean, and the combination of tragic language with the internal collision in the fourth line makes this explanation both believable and absurd. Thus, even though we have nothing of the surrounding context (and the title of the play, Ἄγροικος, tells us little\textsuperscript{12}), it is safe to suppose a collision of registers both within and between the tragic quotation and whatever came before it. Presumably there was something humorous in seeing one comic character strike a tragic pose only to be met with his companion’s total unfamiliarity with the tragic source.\textsuperscript{13}

In the case of Antiphanes, we can be fairly sure that a collision of the tragic and comic genres is intended, even if we can no longer perceive all the details. Passages of Alexis and of Aristophanes’ \textit{Lysistrata} activate a similar collision, incorporating as well a move from tragic generality to comic specificity.\textsuperscript{14} Each of these passages exploits one particular example of a more widely represented tragic idiom: a gnomic generalization about a certain πᾶν γένος (whether an ethnic group or some other), usually in the form of a negative stereotype. \textit{Antigone} 1055 and Soph. fr. 587 (from \textit{Tereus}) are two examples, though such statements are not limited

\textsuperscript{11} Though τακερός is used occasionally by the lyric poets, it occurs elsewhere in tragedy only in Eur. fr. 65.38 in Austin 1968 (= Eur. fr. 370.38 \textit{TrGF}): τακερά μέλεα; but τακερά here is conjectured by analogy with Antiphanes fr. 1, and \textit{TrGF} prints .ακ.α μέλεα.

\textsuperscript{12} Nesselrath 1990: 246 thinks that Speaker B is the titular Ἄγροικος and compares Antiphanes’ use of Sophocles to Axionicus’ use of Euripides in his Φιλευριπίδης.

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. the interplay in \textit{Thesm.} between the parodic Euripides and his Kinsman on the one hand and the over-literal, unliterary Critylla on the other.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Eupolis fr. 234: Soph. \textit{Ant}. 388.
to Sophocles. In comedy, this tragic idiom is picked up by Alexis fr. 67, which possibly draws on Soph. fr. 587 above all:

Soph. fr. 587: φιλάργυρον μὲν πᾶν τὸ βάρβαρον γένος
For the whole race of barbarians loves money

Alexis fr. 67: ἀεί φιλόμυρον πᾶν τὸ Σάρδεων γένος
The whole race of Sardians is always fond of unguents

The phrasing of these two passages is very similar and perhaps features a deliberate play on φιλάργυρον / φιλόμυρον. Alexis retains the basic word-order of fr. 587, replacing φιλάργυρον and identifying the particular type of barbarians (Sardians). At the same time as he makes his statement more specific, Alexis emphasizes the universality inherent in all stereotypes by including ἀεί as well as πᾶν; the statement is simultaneously broadened and narrowed to the whole of the Sardian race all the time. φιλόμυρον also plays into a stereotype arguably less severe than that of the Sophoclean fragment. We do not know in what sense the Thracians of Tereus were φιλάργυρον, but in Antigone, Creon accuses Teiresias of accepting bribes in exchange for negative prophetic answers – a fairly serious charge between two important men. Alexis’ φιλόμυρον is likely to denote luxury rather than political bribery, and seems to have been associated with the Sardians in particular. This is a fairly simple conversion, then, from the graver and more generalizing tragic sententia to the more specific and perhaps slighter criticism of Sardis; though Sophocles fr. 587 appears to be Alexis’ most immediate model, the audience

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15 E.g. Eur. Andr. 173, Phoen. 356, IA 520 (though the second does not appear to be a negative stereotype).

16 The translation is mine. Soph. fr. 587 is cited by Stobaeus, Alexis fr. 67 by Athenaeus (from a play called Ἐκπωματοποιός).

17 See PCG II ad loc.; Ant. 1037-8 associates Sardis specifically with electrum, for which Jebb 1073f.n. also cites Hdt. 1.50.
need only recognize a tragic habit rather than a specific passage in order to appreciate the conversion.

An early passage of *Lysistrata* uses another variation of this tragic idiom that recalls Sophocles fr. 945 (which unfortunately cannot be placed in any play). As Lysistrata struggles to win the other women over to her plan for a sex-strike, she eventually throws up her hands in frustration over the lasciviousness of womankind (137-9):  

Soph. fr. 945:  

| ὥθνητον ἀνδρὸν καὶ ταλαίπωρον γένος, | O mortal and miserable race of men, |
| ὡς οὐδὲν ἐσμέν πλὴν σκιαῖς ἕοικότες, | since we are nothing but creatures like shadows, |
| βάρος περισσὸν γῆς ἀναστρωφώμενοι | walking about as a superfluous burden upon the earth! |

Ar. Lys. 137-9:  

| ὡς παγκατάπυγον θῆμέτερον ἄπαν γένος. | Oh what a low and horny race are we! |
| οὐκ ἔτος ᾧ ἡμῶν ἐσιν αἱ τραγῳδίαι. | No wonder tragedies get written about us: |
| οὐδὲν γάρ ἐσμέν πλὴν Ποσειδῶν καὶ σκάφη. | we’re nothing but Poseidon and a tub. |

Instead of the more usual third-person statement about another race, the speaker in each of these passages apostrophizes his or her own race and explains the reason for the pessimistic exclamation using the phrase οὐδὲν ἐσμέν πλήν. That these features are absent from the other examples in Sophocles and Alexis, as well as Euripides, allows us to connect *Lysistrata* 137-9 with Soph. fr. 945.

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18 The fragment is preserved by Stobaeus; scholia to *Lys.* 138 and 139 detect a reference to *Tyro*, and on this basis, Nauck (followed by Pearson 1917) suspects that the Sophoclean fragment is also from *Tyro*. See *TrGF IV ad loc.* for other possible reminiscences of the fragment outside of drama.

19 We are told that two other apostrophes, *El.* 86 and 289, were parodied by Pherecrates (fr. 141) and Aristophanes (fr. 175), though the parodies themselves do not survive.
An internal collision of registers is achieved immediately by the insertion of παγκατάπυγον. In the middle line, instead of continuing the pathetic exclamation, Lysistrata speculates further about the results of feminine lust; the mention of tragedy prepares for the joke on Ποσειδῶν καὶ σκάφη in the final clause. Line 138 both flags the surrounding lines as tragic and provides a link between Lysistrata’s assessment of the female race and Sophocles’ treatment of Tyro, which is collapsed into two keywords, Ποσειδῶν καὶ σκάφη, the implication being that that play exemplified female behavior such as is currently being demonstrated on the Aristophanic stage. As in the previous example, Aristophanes’ manipulation of the tragic apostrophe is accompanied by a move from general to specific; θημέτερον ἄπαν γένος pokes fun at the generality of tragic sententiae by simultaneously broadening and narrowing the subject of discussion to the whole of the female race. What began as a tragic lament about the human condition has become a comic cliché describing women’s promiscuity, with specific jabs at Sophocles’ Tyro and his habit of dramatically stereotyping a πᾶν γένος of one kind or another.

This passage from Aristophanes’ Lysistrata achieves a simple collision of registers by concentrating on a particular mannerism of Sophoclean and tragic drama; it also relies in part on a visual theme of the Tyro plays (the exposure of the twins in a boat and perhaps their later

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21 That Tyro was raped has no bearing on Aristophanes’ comic program; as the scholion explains, Poseidon and the skiff are taken jointly to represent a woman’s wantonness (here, sleeping with someone other than her husband) and guile in escaping responsibility (by exposing her illegitimate children). Cf. Sommerstein 1990 ad loc.: “To the disillusioned Lysistrata all women now seem to resemble Tyro in their lustfulness (“Poseidon”) and their irresponsibility (“a tub”…”).

22 A version of the πᾶν γένος idiom is also incorporated into Ar. Av. 1240, which plays with another Sophoclean expression (the mattock of Zeus, also found in Aeschylus, but attributed by the scholion here to Sophocles’ Chryses fr. 727).
recognition through that token\textsuperscript{23}). Aristophanes creates a similar “imagistic” collision with what must have been a memorable scene in Sophocles’ \textit{Inachus}, probably a satyr play, which serves as the subtext for a passing joke at \textit{Ecclesiazusae} 79-81.\textsuperscript{24} One of the women has come to the meeting armed with a staff belonging to a man named (or nicknamed) Lamius.\textsuperscript{25} The man’s name and staff together easily identify him with the female bogey Lamia.\textsuperscript{26} Praxagora carries the monster imagery a step further by comparing the man to Argus, who was an actual character in Sophocles’ play:

\begin{quote}

\textit{νὴ τὸν Δία τὸν σωτῆρ’, ἐπιτήδειος γ’ ἂν Ἰπτὴρ τὴν τοι διαφέρον διμμένον εἰπερ τις ἄλλος βουκολεῖν τὸν δήμιον.}

By Zeus the Savior, if he wore
old All-Eyes’ leather jacket he’d be the very man
to provide fodder for the public executioner.
\end{quote}

The thought is rather obscure, but Praxagora seems to imagine Lamius wearing the same leather garment as Argus; this particular mode of dress, combined with his stick and his suggestive name, would somehow make him an appropriate person to attend the executioner, whatever that means.\textsuperscript{27} A simple collision of registers resides in the word \textit{βουκολεῖν}, which properly refers to

\textsuperscript{23} See Arist. \textit{Poet.} 1454b25 for the recognition by means of the σκάφη.

\textsuperscript{24} This passage is listed in \textit{TrGF} IV as Soph. fr. 281. Scholia to Eccl. 80 and 81 note the allusion to \textit{Inachus}; Nauck relates this to 281a (which describes Argus’ appearance on stage).

\textsuperscript{25} For Lamius see Sommerstein 1998: 77n.

\textsuperscript{26} Sommerstein 1998: 78n. Other features that identify Lamius with Argus are the farting mentioned in line 79 and the fact that he was caught napping by the woman who took his staff. \textit{Ar. Ach.} 390 (cf. Soph. fr. 269c.19-20) and Cratinus fr. 161 (significantly, from his \textit{Panoptai}) may also be visual reminiscences of \textit{Inachus}; if so, they would push back the \textit{terminus ante quem} of Sophocles’ play considerably. For other possible echoes of Sophoclean scenes, cf. \textit{Nub.} 256-7: Soph. \textit{Athamas}, Antiphanes fr. 189.8-12, 23: Soph. \textit{Epigonoi}. \textit{Nub.} 555-6 suggests that Phrynicus parodied a scene from an \textit{Andromeda}, possibly Sophocles’ (so Webster). \textit{Lys.} 563-4 draws on a recent depiction of Tereus armed like a Thracian, probably Sophocles’, since he seems to have been the first to make Tereus a Thracian (see below, pp. 273-5); by contrast, Ar. fr. 936 speaks of the “Daulian nightingale,” apparently not alluding to the Sophoclean version.

\textsuperscript{27} Sommerstein 1998: 81n. thinks that τὸν δήμιον denotes one suitable to be executed, but the scholion suggests that either Lamius or Argus is to be imagined as a prison guard (ἀνίθηται δὲ ὡς ὄντος ὁτὸν δεσμοφύλακος). On
cowherding; it could have been used literally in *Inachus*, where Io was turned into a cow and subsequently entrusted to Argus, who thereby became a cowherd and possibly a δήμιος. Since Praxagora is not talking about actual cowherding, the word must now be taken metaphorically and probably jars with the modern, civic context of the comedy; δήμιος, too, if it was used in *Inachus* with a meaning other than “executioner,” must now be taken as a fifth-century civic term. Thus, two ideas that may have fit together well enough in Sophocles (βουκολεῖν, δήμιος) are made to collide with one another, with βουκολεῖν still firmly attached to its mythical and satyric context and δήμιος suddenly importing contemporary Athens.

This example is intriguing insofar as it deals with Sophoclean drama in a manner almost exactly opposite to comedy’s usual method: where tragic imagery is often literalized and concretized, here a satyric character is relegated to the imagination and literal language taken metaphorically. Argus was an actual character in Sophocles’ play, literally πανόπτης with his hundred eyes,28 and we are told that he appeared on stage singing (fr. 281a), which simultaneously gives good reason to believe that this play was satyric rather than tragic and explains why Argus was memorable enough for Aristophanes to use him in a comedy. As there was certainly something humorous about his first appearance on the Sophoclean stage, so Aristophanes’ appropriation of this figure cannot operate straightforwardly in terms of juxtaposition and deflation. He does not bring Argus back on stage, for instance, partly because there is no place for that in his comedy but also because it has already been done; Argus cannot

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be concretized or even trivialized because Sophocles (and perhaps Cratinus\textsuperscript{29}) seems to have done just those things to him. What Aristophanes can do instead is use his audience’s visual recollection of that memorable scene to create a passing joke about a contemporary Athenian. The mental images of Lamius on the one hand and Argus on the other are conjured up side-by-side and the audience invited to compare the two – and to find them remarkably similar. Thus Lamius is made (though only in our imagination) to look as silly as Sophocles’ Argus undoubtedly did. Rather than being the target of deflation, Sophocles’ character is deployed constructively (albeit on the premise that he was silly to begin with) to make Aristophanes’ character look even sillier.

\textit{Frogs} 665 moves beyond simple linguistic and imagistic collision to exploit the humor latent in both appropriate and inappropriate applications of tragic language. The line in question is a quotation from Sophocles’ \textit{Laocoon} (fr. 371, cited by the scholion to line 665), here placed in the middle of the scene in which Aeacus beats Xanthias and Dionysus by turns as a test of divinity. Both victims cry out as they are struck, but immediately devise some spurious justification for their cries. Dionysus first claims to be quoting from Hipponax (a prayer to Apollo, as it happens), and then resorts to Sophocles (664-6):

\begin{quote}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\text{Δι.} & Πόσειδών – \\
\text{Ξα.} & ἰληγησέν τις. \\
\text{Δι.} & δὸς Αἰγαίου προιόνς ἤ γλαυκὰς μέδεις \\
& ἀλός ἐν βένθεσιν.\textsuperscript{30} \\
\text{Di.} & Poseidon!
\end{tabular}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} One could legitimately ask why Cratinus would have brought Argus on stage after Sophocles’ treatment (as the title of his play suggests he did). Perhaps a plurality of Argus-figures (Panoptai) was a sufficiently humorous extension of what Sophocles had done. Unfortunately, Bakola 2010 has nothing to say about this play.

\textsuperscript{30} The final three words may or may not belong to Sophocles; the scholion quotes the fragment in full as Πόσειδών, δὸς Αἰγαίου νέμεις πρόνας ἤ γλαυκὰς μέδεις εὐανέμου λίμνας ἢ ὑπηλαξις σεῖλας σπηλάδεσσι ἵστομάτων. Following Hermann, van Leeuwen 1968a reverses the speakers and transposes the last three words to the end of 664 (which completes the trimeter, but still leaves 665 up in the air metrically); see Rau 1967: 119 for refutation of this position. See also Pearson 1917 \textit{ad loc.} for the textual difficulties with this fragment and the Aristophanic text.
Xa. Somebody felt that!
Di. –who hold sway
on the cape of Aegae or in
the depths of the deep blue sea.

As a result of this Sophoclean completion, Aeacus finally gives up and decides to take the two culprits inside to let Hades and Persephone determine which is the god.

The use of this tragic quotation falls into line with the other jokes in this scene, in which a character must devise on the spot a specious explanation for his interjections. But the tragic quotation would stand out as a foreign element in the comic context most immediately because of the change of meter;\(^{31}\) it is no longer iambic trimeter, as the Hipponactean line was, and this makes it unnecessary for Aristophanes to name the source: the collision of high and low registers is even more obvious with a lyric quotation than an iambic one. In addition, the transfer of this quotation to the comic Dionysus is both appropriate and inappropriate to his character. It is manifestly appropriate that the god of the theater should be able to quote from a tragedy off the top of his head, and one could even argue that this serves as a sort of shout-out to Sophocles as the preeminent poet of the theater, the one tragedian Dionysus should quote off the top of his head. At the same time, there is something inherently ridiculous about the idea of a god praying (or pretending to pray) to another god,\(^{32}\) as Dionysus does here to Apollo and then Poseidon. In terms of the dramatic action, Aeacus could have taken either of these facts as proof of Dionysus’ mortality or immortality: mortality, in that he prays to the gods; immortality, in that (as the god of drama) he is so ready to quote from tragedy. Perhaps that is why Aeacus chooses this moment

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\(^{31}\) Syncopated iamb? Snell (TrGF IV) suggests that the meter of the original may have been something like: \_pher cr \_cr ia ia \_ia \_pher\, but Aristophanes’ rearrangement of the language and the textual difficulties surrounding the last three words (see previous n.) make it difficult to puzzle out the intended comic meter. Schlesinger 1936: 305 puts it in class 4 (passages identifiable by vocabulary), but he considers meter a less reliable criterion in general.

\(^{32}\) Cf. Ar. Av. 1614, where Poseidon interjects an oath by himself, and possibly Pax 433-59, where Hermes pours a libation to himself and several other gods (though not all editors have attributed these lines to Hermes).
to throw up his hands in despair and turn the matter over to Hades. Aristophanes’ comedy profits from both appropriate and inappropriate applications of the tragic line.

A very similar dynamic may be at work in *Thesmophoriazusae* 870, an intriguing example since it falls in the midst of one of the most extensive parodies of Euripides in extant Aristophanes. The Kinsman has just begun to play “the new Helen.” He gives his identity, parentage, and current location, ignoring the critical reactions of Critylla; as he tells of his fear for his “wretched husband, Menelaus” and hope of rescue thence, he slips in a hemistich from Sophocles’ *Peleus* (fr. 493, cited by the scholion to line 870):

34

Kinsman Yet something, as it were, tickles at my heart; deceive me not, o Zeus, in my nascent hope!

According to the scholion, Sophocles’ original line ran μὴ ψεύσον, ὦ Ζεῦ, μὴ μῆ ἐλπὶς ἄνευ δοροῦ; possible speakers are Peleus himself or perhaps more likely Neoptolemus, and at any rate, given the spear, the line must have been delivered by a male warrior-figure – quite unlike the Kinsman in his current guise.

As it stands in Aristophanes, the quotation is not especially conspicuous, and for spectators unacquainted with that particular part of *Peleus*, the quotation would have sounded much like its surrounding Euripidean context. If they remembered the Sophoclean scene, however, or recalled how the line ended – we cannot know just how memorable this passage

33 *Thesm.* 21 may be another such example. The Kinsman responds to Euripides’ intellectual pretentiousness with an allusion to tragedy; the scholion insists that it is from Sophocles’ *Locrian Ajax* (fr. 14), though Euripides may also have written something similar and it is attributed to him at Ar. fr. 323. It would be appropriate for the Kinsman to quote Euripides on this point; it would be ironic to quote Sophocles.

34 These lines are simply labeled paratragic by Schlesinger 1937: 295 n. 4 – perhaps because they are not flagged as Sophoclean?
was – then they might have appreciated an extra gender-bending joke that contributes a little to the Kinsman’s characterization. Dressed as he is in a woman’s garb, emulating the most beautiful woman in the world, the Kinsman’s eye for feminine paratragedy falters and his mind veers toward a more “masculine” scene in which a warrior prays, as it appears, to go down fighting. But he catches himself after the first hemistich and closes with something more appropriate to his pretended situation as Helen, dispensing with the spear in favor of “hope;” the fact that the tragic quotation ends at a punctuated caesura (here marked by a comma, in the fragment by a high dot) suggests that the Kinsman would pause after Ζεῦ, creating a moment of suspense for the audience as they wait to see whether he will give himself away by completing the quotation correctly. Fortunately for the Kinsman, Euripides shows up at line 871 and saves him from the need for further improvisation.

My final example comes from Aristophanes’ Birds and contains most of the dynamics which I have discussed in this first section: collision of registers with the comic context and within the quotation, juxtaposition of tragic and comic images, paraprosdokian humor, and even mockery of Sophoclean style through free composition. At Birds 851-8, after Peisetaerus has

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35 For the memorability of even simple phrases, consider the resonance of “Frankly, my dear…” or “I’ll be back” in almost any modern cinematic context. The rare grammatical oddity of μή with the aorist imperative, noted by the Antiatticist, may have contributed to this passage’s memorability.

36 Pearson 1917 ad loc. considers possible interpretations of ἄνευ δορός: “The meaning might conceivably be ‘don’t slay me unarmed,’ as in Hom. Φ 50 γομνόν, ἄτερ κόρυθος τε καὶ ἀσπίδος, οὐδ’ ἐχεν ἔγχος: but, apart from other objections, δόρο was a weapon of offence. We should interpret rather ‘without (using) the sword,’ i.e. far from battle; it is the prayer of the old warrior to hear once more the clash of arms…. On the other hand, δόρο has not yet reached the meaning ‘war’ or ‘battle’ so decisively as e.g. in Eur. Ion 997…” I am not sure how he can make this last statement, since Peleus is undated (the terminus ante quem being 424 B.C.); still, it is true that the phrase ἄνευ δορός generally refers to an actual spear rather than figurative “violence” (Aesch. fr. 132c.4, Sept. 399, Eum. 289, Soph. frr. 210, 941), though Thuc. 1.128.7 uses ἔλειν δορί to mean “capture by force of arms.” It has been suggested to me that μή μ’ ἔλειν ἄνευ δορός could be idiomatic for “do not deceive me” (deception being the chief way to capture or destroy someone without using a spear). Aside from the fact that this would be redundant coming after μή ψεῦσον, I have not found a parallel use of ἔλειν ἄνευ δορός to confirm this usage, and it seems unlikely that the audience could take the meaning if it were not well established as an idiom.
given his city a new name and patron deity, he proclaims an initiatory sacrifice. As he waits for
the necessary equipment, the chorus sings a short strophe:

وهاρθῶ, συνθέλω,
συμμαρανέσας ἐγώ
προσοδία μεγάλα σεμνά προσιέναι θεοῖ-
σίν, ἀμα δὲ προσέτι χάριτος ἐνε-
κα προβάτιον τι θάνειν.
ἴτω ἴτω ἴτω δὲ Πυθιὰς βοά,
συναιλείτο δὲ Χαῖρις ὕδα.

I am with you, I concur,
I hereby endorse your advice
to approach the gods with grand and solemn hymns
as we curry their favor as well
by sacrificing a wee sheep.
Up up up with a Pythian cry,
and let Chaeris pipe as we sing.

Scholia on these lines indicate that the passage draws on Sophocles’ Peleus. More
specifically, the scholion to line 851, keyed to the word ὁμορροθῶ, reads Σοφοκλέους ἐκ
Πηλέως, while those to 855 (προβάτιον)37 and 857 (Πυθιὰς βοά) read simply τοῦτο ἐκ Πηλέως.
Radt recognizes two fragments in this passage (lines 851-2 = fr. 489; 857 = fr. 490),38 and while
we cannot be certain, they may originally have occurred quite close together, as they do here.
That none of the scholia actually quotes the original tragic passage causes immediate difficulty in
determining just how much of this passage is really Sophoclean. Except for several elements in
lines 853-6, the language is Sophoclean,39 which could mean equally that it was written by
Sophocles or that Aristophanes did a good job composing in the manner of Sophocles. But (as

37 προβάτιον is Bentley’s metrically necessary correction of προβάτινον. As a diminutive is highly unlikely in
tragedy, Radt (TrGF IV) suggests that the scholion to this line was misplaced and should have been at line 857
instead.

38 See TrGF IV for other proposed attributions of the opening lines to Sophocles (from ὁμορροθῶ, συνθέλω
alone to ὁμορροθῶ...θεοῖσιν). Several editors relate frs. 489 and 490 closely, and it is possible that both belong to
the same ode as fr. 491. If so, Av. 851-8 might also exploit the implications of a Sophoclean hyporcheme; see
below, pp. 261-4.

39 Dunbar 1995 ad loc. notes the paratragic quality of the meter (esp. the syncopated iambic dimeters).
with Antiphanes fr. 1 above), the point of the parody remains either way, since the passage plays with a Sophoclean style of writing.

Both the content and the style of the tragic language fit well with the comic context: that is, the sentiments of enthusiastic unanimity and celebratory sacrifice are appropriate to the dramatic action of *Birds* at this point, and particulars of the language suit the avian chorus nicely. Additionally, a bit of Aristophanes’ own free composition between the two fragments exaggerates certain aspects of Sophocles’ lyric style.

Stylistically, the passage gives a strong overall impression of amplification. The first two lines express the same idea three times through verbs with prefixes expressing “togetherness.” Sophocles’ actual use of these words in other plays supports the idea that this type of repetitiveness and pleonasm might have been considered characteristic of his style.\(^40\) ὁμορροθέω in combination with at least one συν-compound occurs elsewhere in Sophoclean drama at *Antigone* 536-7 (Ismene’s attempted confession, in which she uses three verbs to claim a share of the blame; she uses ξύμπλουν at 541).\(^41\) The relatively rare word συμπαραινέω appears again in Soph. fr. 576,\(^42\) while the periphrastic construction of ἔχω with a participle is a particularly familiar feature of Sophoclean diction\(^43\) – all of which may explain why Radt attributes the first

\(^{40}\) Cf. also the repetition of ὅ πόλις πόλις at OT 629 and Phil. 1213, mimicked by Ar. *Ach.* 27 and Eupolis fr. 219. The comic poets may also have been interested in this phrase as an apostrophe; cf n. 19 above. For repetition in a different ode of Sophocles, see Stokes 1979.

\(^{41}\) Griffith 1999 *ad loc.* notes that “the prefixes (ξυμ-μετα-) belong with φέρω too.” The only other occurrence of ὁμορροθέω in fifth-century drama is Eur. *Or.* 530. Cf. also ξυπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάση at 41, συνθάπτειν θέλω καὶ ξυμπονεῖν at Soph. *Aj.* 1378-9; Euripides has similar repetitions, e.g. at *Hel.* 1067-8. For Sophocles’ fondness for συν- compounds, see Stanford 1963: 265 n. 11.

\(^{42}\) Elsewhere in fifth-century drama only at Ar. *Ran.* 687.

\(^{43}\) Noted by Rau 1967: 197 and Dunbar 1995 *ad loc.*
two lines in their entirety to Sophocles\textsuperscript{44} (while the scholion, strictly speaking, only comments on ὀμορροθῶ). Though the middle three lines look less tragic or paratragic,\textsuperscript{45} the repetition of προσ- and προ- may be a similar commentary on Sophoclean style, counterpart to the parody of συν- compounds in the first two lines, and at any rate, excessive alliteration and homoioteleuton effectively deflate the tragic tone.\textsuperscript{46} Of the final two lines, the first is given to Sophocles by Radt as fr. 490, minus two ἵτω’s; in fact, it might be reasonable to give him one more ἵτω (as Dunbar suggests\textsuperscript{47}), for the doubling of that verb is also attested twice in Antigone (1328, 1331). Though the last line must be Aristophanes’ own composition, at least as far as the name Chairis goes,\textsuperscript{48} it almost appears that he has arranged 857-8 as a rhyming couplet, and correspondences between individual words (ἳτω ἵτω/συναυλείτω; δὲ/δὲ; Πουθώ／Χαῖρις; βοά／ψδα\textsuperscript{49}) in each line carry the normal Greek taste for parisosis and antithesis to an extreme. So while the scholia give us reason to attribute some of these features directly to Sophocles in Peleus, there may also be deliberate allusion to Sophoclean mannerisms more generally. Even if there is no specific

\textsuperscript{44}See Dunbar 1995: 851-8n. for other judgments on how much of this passage is really Sophoclean.

\textsuperscript{45}But Dunbar 1995: 853-4n. feels that Aristophanes “is probably boldly extending, in the lyric manner, the fig. etym. πρόσοδον προσέρχομαι.” The high style is then broken by 856 (where προσέτι and προβάτιον are alien to tragedy). For a similar combination of unmarked quotation and free paratragic composition, cf. e.g. Ar. Thesm. 177-80.

\textsuperscript{46}One must of course expect a certain degree of homoioteleuton in an inflected language, but the close placement of words with common endings (e.g. προσόδια μεγάλα σεμνά), the inclusion of indeclinable words that happen to have that same ending (ἄμα, ἔνακο), and the alliteration of p’s suggest that the feature is not accidental here. For both repetition and rhyming cf. Ar. Plut. 637 (in a Sophoclean context): λέγεις μοι χαράν, λέγεις μοι βοὴν.

\textsuperscript{47}Pearson 1917 ad loc. also gives Sophocles two ἵτω’s, but adds θεῷ at the end of the line; the codd. read τῷ θεῷ, but other editors follow Dindorf in deleting these words. Though Eur. El. 879 (ἀλλ’ ἵτῳ ἕξυναυλος βοὰ χαρᾷ) may also lurk behind 857-8, we have no reason to doubt the scholion’s attribution to Sophocles’ Peleus, and in fact συναυλείτω here is Hermann’s conjecture for συναδέτω.

\textsuperscript{48}Schlesinger 1937: 300 n. 30 thinks that the line is Sophoclean except for Χαῖρις.

\textsuperscript{49}With all due caveats regarding our ignorance of Greek pronunciation (e.g. ἄ versus ἄ), the similarities of word type and formation are remarkable.
reference to his style, the excessive repetition on all levels still has the effect of over-decorating the tragic lines to the point of absurdity.

If Aristophanes *is* going out of his way to make the song sound Sophoclean, then we may ask why. One might argue that quoting tragedy lends dramatic weight to the birds’ support for Peisetaerus. However, parodic intent seems clear: lines 851-2 emphasize the redundancy of tragic tricola and words compounded with the same prefix, while 857 takes advantage of a recognizable Sophoclean tendency to duplicate the word ἵτω. The tragic lines are surely deflated by being transferred to a chorus of birds who seem to delight in hyperbolic expressions of anger or approval. The three lines in the middle contribute to the deflation through internal juxtaposition of registers, sandwiching lower, more mundane language between the elevated diction, which is made to look all the more grandiose by comparison. On the level of “visual collision,” Aristophanes toys with the common description of an oared ship as “flying;” the image, here implied by the birds’ use of the word ὅμορροθῶ, is peculiarly concretized and subverted by the presence on stage of birds who might actually “row” in unison with their wings. If the original Sophoclean chorus was agreeing to something more grave, 853-5 here may function as a sort of *paraprosdokian* joke: the birds agree wholeheartedly with Peisetaerus’ decision – to sacrifice a sheep (and a diminutive sheep at that!). Lines 856-7 operate the same

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50 For similar duplication, see *Aj*. 627, 694-5; *Trach*. 96, 98, 221-2, 655; *OT* 1098.

51 Cf. their negative reaction at 310ff. to the two strangers and Tereus’ complicity in their scheme.

52 There is similar deflation through juxtaposition in the “Euripidean” lyrics of *Frogs* (see e.g. Silk 1993).

53 And the word may well have applied originally to sailors. Though the literal meaning of the word may not have been foremost in a hearer’s mind, there is no reason to think that it could not have been evoked in an appropriate context; cf. Mitchell-Boyask 2007: 111: “[a]n altered context can allow dead metaphors to be resurrected and inhabit human discourse with new force.” For the association of flying and sailing, see e.g. Hes. *WD* 627, Pherecrates fr. 23, Ar. *Av*. 1203 (with Σ), 1229.
way: Πυθιὰς βοά\textsuperscript{55} recalls the lofty tone of a paean but turns unexpectedly into a joke on the aulete Chairis, and this in turn leads Peisetaerus to remark on the absurdity of a bird playing the aulos, which effectively caps off Aristophanes’ project of deflation.

**Level 2: Appropriation and Conversion**

I have chosen the terms “appropriation” and “conversion” to describe the scenes treated in this section because they involve a process of change and assimilation, as opposed to simple collision. In order for a thing to be taken over for a new purpose, to be converted into something else, it needs to lose certain elements and gain certain others. We have already seen some of this at work in the last section, especially where the comic poet wanted to create juxtaposition within a tragic quotation; presumably there was not already a collision of registers within the quotation, so the comic poet had to change something to make that happen. But the tragic quotations discussed in the last section function primarily as vehicles for creating amusing collisions. In the current section, we will examine tragic quotations that hold some interest for the comic poet outside their loftiness of tone or diction. These are passages contain a tragic idea that it was worthwhile to activate and adapt in more thorough and subtle ways than we saw in the previous section.

The process of recasting or redeploying a tragic idea necessarily entails transfer as well as change, and so in a sense we have already seen some of this as well. But transfer at its most basic is just a type of juxtaposition – the mental juxtaposition of Lamius and Argus, for example.

\textsuperscript{54} Sommerstein 1987: 856n.: “on so important an occasion as the foundation of a city one might have expected an ox (if not several). This anticlimax, however, is at once capped by another as the victim proves to be an even cheaper one, a goat.” The diminutive is untragic, but in fact πρόβατον is also foreign to tragedy (though it does appear occasionally in Pindar).

\textsuperscript{55} Πυθιὰς is strange in this context as well, since Peisetaerus has just established new bird-gods for his city in place of the Olympians, a theme which will be elaborated more fully in subsequent passages.
The passages discussed in this section involve both transfer and adaptation; they seem to presume that the audience will not only recognize the quotation’s relatively higher register but also its source and perhaps even some of the implications it had in its original context. So while the fundamental tragic idea is transferred straightforwardly to comedy, many of its attendant details and implications are recast to suit the new context. One rather surprising result of this – and another reason for treating these passages as a step up from the ones before – is the complete reversal or subversion of the original idea. Even while the core is retained, its meaning is significantly altered and often expressed in comic terms (e.g. a political image becomes a description of food and drink).

Several of the passages in this section deal with imagery or the visual aspect of performance. Two important methods of conversion that bear on this visual aspect are concretization and what I will be calling “mundanization.” The first of these is a regular comic technique and requires little in the way of explanation: the comic poet realizes and often puts on stage something that was only thought about or described in tragedy. Mundanization takes this dynamic a step further by not only making the metaphor (say) a visual reality but even bringing it specifically into the “real world.” In other words, the comic poet carries the metaphor to its extreme logical conclusion and thereby subjects it to whatever humble, mundane circumstances that might entail. In all of these cases – conversion through adaptation, concretization, or mundanization – the comic poet appropriates the tragic idea and puts it to work somehow, redeploying it in such a way that it becomes no longer tragic at all but entirely comic.

My first example is a series of comic passages that all quote the same Sophoclean examplar; they begin by effecting simple collisions of registers and paraprosdokian humor, but they also use the quotation to create a quintessentially comic feature, the comic list.
Sophocles fr. 890, from his *Epigonoi*, belongs to an anapaestic description of Argos as it prepares for war against Thebes:56

\[c. 5\omega . [c. 3] \pi . . [\]
\[. . . \omega \varphi \sigma t\{. . \} . \omega n \delta \varepsilon i a . . [\]
\[\pi \rho i t i s . [. . .] \theta i o u b r \acute{\iota} k o u s a . . [\]
\[. . \nu r e i \delta a . . \nu \eta s \pi \acute{a} s i . . [\]
\[\theta \eta \gamma o u s ' \alpha i o [w] o \nu a s i d \eta r o n .\]
\[\acute{a} f a l o i \delta e k u n a i k [. . .] k r a n [\]
\[\phi o i n i k o b a f e i z s s e i [o] w s i \lambda \omega [f o u s ,
\theta o r a k o f \acute{o} r o i s i \delta ' \acute{a} f a n t i [r e s\]
\[k i n o u s i s o f i \acute{h} k s k e r k \acute{i} o c s \acute{u} \acute{n} o u s ,
\[\acute{h} t o u c e u \delta o n t a c s \acute{e} g e i r e i .\]
\[k o l l \acute{a} \delta ' \acute{a} r m a t o c s [\acute{h} \nu] [t u] [\gamma a [\]
\[\beta ] l \acute{e} t r o n \theta ' \acute{a} g i d a [c. 5] o n [\]
\[c. 5] \nu p [c. 3] . [c. 7] . . [\]
\[c. 5] . \tau . [c. 11] . . [\]

For the sharp saw [is passing through
tree-trunks (?)], making a gnashing noise [like the roar of the sea(?)], and [the effort (?)] of every wh[etst]one is engaged (?)
in sharpening the glittering steel;
and helmets without covering plates [      ]
are shaking their crimson-dyed crests,
and for the wearers of corslets the weave[rs]
are making the clever shuttle raies its song,
which wakes men from sleep:
and [the carpenter] is gluing the chariot’s [r]a[i]l,
and its linchpins, and its wheel-rims…

The passage clearly contains a number of colorful and distinctive words (e.g. \(\phi o i n i k o b a f e i z s , \theta o r a k o f \acute{o} r o i s i\)), and so it is striking at first that the one line that interested the comic poets is seemingly the least interesting of all: \(\acute{h} t o u c e u \delta o n t a c s \acute{e} g e i r e i .\) But it is quoted or adapted no fewer than three times: Eupolis’ *Ἀστράτευτοι* (fr. 41), Aristophanes’ *Ὀλκάδες* (fr. 427), and Aristophanes’ *Wealth* (535-47).57

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56 Only κερκίδος…ἐγείρει (with two corrupt words preceding) is listed among the unplaced fragments in *TrGF* IV (preserved by Σ V Ar. Plut. 541), but a recently discovered papyrus has filled in some of the text; see ST ad loc., whose text and translation I have printed, and who also offer arguments that the fragment belongs to *Epigonoi* and that that play is the same as *Eriphyle*.

57 Eup. fr. 41 is preserved by Athenaeus, Ar. fr. 427 by Eustathius and Pollux, all without reference to Sophocles. The translation of Eup. fr. 41 is mine.
Eup. fr. 41:  μήποτε θρέψω παρὰ Περσεφόνη τούνδε ταῦν, ὃς τοὺς εὐδόντας ἐγείρει.  Never will I raise at Persephone’s this sort of peacock that wakes those who are sleeping.

Ar. fr. 427:  σπυρίς οὐ μικρὰ καὶ κωρυκίς, ἥ καὶ τοὺς μάττοντας ἐγείρει a sizeable creel and a punching bag, such as wakes up even the kneading-boys

Ar. Plut. 535-47:  σὺ γὰρ ἂν πορίσαι τί δύναι’ ἁγαθὸν πλὴν φῶδον ἐκ βαλανεῖον καὶ παιδαρίων ὑποπεινῶν καὶ γραϊδίων κολοσυρτόν; φθειρόν τ’ ἄριθμον καὶ κοινώπων καὶ ψυλλῶν οὐδὲ λέγοι σοι ὑπὸ τὸ πλῆθους, αἱ βομβοῦσαι περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν ἀνίῶσιν, ἐπεγείρουσαν καὶ φράζουσα “πεινήσεις· ἀλλ’ ἐπανίστω.” πρὸς δὲ γε τούτους ἁθ’ ἱματίου μὲν ἐγείρει δ’ ἄντι κλίνης στιβάδα σχοίνων κόρεων μεστήν, ἢ τοὺς εὐδόντας ἐγείρει καὶ φορμὸν ἐχειν ἀντὶ τάπητος σαπρόν· ἢ τοὺς προσκεφαλαίου λίθον εὐμεγέθη πρὸς τῇ κεφαλῇ· στείπθαι δ’ ἢ τοὺς ἄρτους μαλάχης πτόρθους, ἢ τοὺς μαζὰς φυλεῖ’ ἢ τοὺς φωλιαῖ’ ἡμασθικάνων, ἢ τοὺς παλιάν στάμνοις κεφαλῆς κατεαγότος, ἢ τοὺς κρατέρας διακάκην πλυρών ἐρωγυϊὰν καὶ ταύτην, ἢ τοὺς παλιὰν ἀγαθὸν πάσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀποφαίνω σ’ αἴτιον οὖσαν; What benefits can you provide, except blisters in the bathhouse and masses of hungry children and old ladies? Not to mention the lice, gnats, and fleas, too numerous to enumerate, that annoy us by buzzing around our heads and waking us up with the warning, “get up or you’ll go hungry!” And on top of that, you have us wearing rags, not coats, and sleeping not on a bed but a bug-infested twine mat that doesn’t let you get any sleep, under threadbare burlap instead of a blanket, with our heads not on a pillow but a hefty stone. And to eat, not bread but mallow shoots, not cake but withered radish leaves. We sit not on chairs but on broken crocks, and instead of a kneading trough we get one side of a barrel, and that’s broken too. Now haven’t I revealed the many blessings you bring to all humanity?

The first of these suggests the basic reason for the comic poets’ interest in this phrase. As a floating relative clause, ἥ τοὺς εὐδόντας ἐγείρει leaves the subject completely open and thus allows the comic poet, merely by changing the gender of the relative pronoun if necessary (as here), to be creative in imagining what might wake people up when they are sleeping. Eupolis chose a peacock; the first Aristophanic passage changes both the subject (to σπυρίς καὶ κωρυκίς)
and the object (by replacing one participle with another), so that the topic is no longer loud noises at night, much less preparations for war, but the hustle and bustle of the kitchen.

These changes operate in accordance with the principles outlined in the first section of this chapter but also anticipate the larger dynamic at work in the passage from Wealth. I have quoted much more extensively from this play in order to provide necessary context; Chremylus is lamenting the hardships that attend a life of poverty (soon to be rectified by the healing of the god Wealth), but his argumentation breaks down into a comic list, marked especially by repetition of the phrase ἀντὶ δέ. The Sophoclean line belongs to a different kind of catalogue, a tragic list as it were. As in the first two comic reminiscences, Aristophanes has used the line to create a sort of low comic humor (here it is bedbugs waking people up), but in a sense his passage also draws on the spirit of the Sophoclean passage – the busy-ness and excitement of military activity throughout the city – and converts that into a typically comic list of pathetic experiences with bedbugs and other pests. The quotation itself is signalled by an inappropriate switch from the singular to the plural: the one languishing in poverty is no longer a hypothetical “you” (σύ) but a third-person “they” (εὕδοντας); the relative pronoun also lines up imperfectly, given that it is not so much the pallet that wakes people up but the bugs in the pallet. These small irregularities make obvious a quotation that probably already would have been known to the audience by this point (since Eupolis fr. 41 and Aristophanes fr. 427 had made it into something of a running joke), and this encourages the audience to compare the tragic and comic passages broadly and to appreciate Aristophanes’ attempt at converting Sophoclean lyric into a comic list.

My next example of this second level involves manipulation of a sententious statement about reciprocity and the image that lies behind it (Ajax 522):
χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστιν ἡ τίκτους' ἀεὶ
for it is always one kindness that begets another

The context of this statement is Tecmessa’s appeal to Ajax to respect her helpless situation, repay the pleasure (τερπνόν) she has brought him, and refrain from suicide. A line from a fourth-century comedy by Anaxandrides (fr. 69) almost completely reverses the sentiment:

οὐχὶ παρὰ πολλοῖς ἡ χάρις τίκτει χάριν
not among many does one kindness beget another

The repetition of χάρις in sententious contexts is of course common, but the image of one χάρις giving birth to another is not and allows us to make the connection between Sophocles and Anaxandrides.

I have included this example in the second level because, rather than effecting a simple collision of registers (in fact no collision is evident), Anaxandrides has borrowed a Sophoclean idea and modified it according to his own purposes. The point of the quotation does not lie in a juxtaposition of high and low elements (be they words, mental images, or costumes) but in what Anaxandrides has decided to do with the meaning of Sophocles’ words. And what he has done, I think, is render the thought cynically realistic. Tecmessa’s appeal was couched in language which she thought would resonate with Ajax’ absolute and idealistic approach to Greek ethics.

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58 There is some difficulty with the lemma in Stobaeus where this fragment is preserved. The same quotation is attributed elsewhere in the work to Apollonius. It is equally possible that Apollonius quoted Anaxandrides on this count or that the attribution to Apollonius is mistaken; cf. also PCG V, p. 424.

59 The translation is mine.

60 Jebb 522n. also compares δίκη δίκην ἐτίκτε καὶ βλάβην βλάβη (Zenobius 3.28). Nesselrath 1993 (esp. 190-3) argues that, together with Aristophanes, Anaxandrides was chiefly responsible for conveying elements of Euripidean tragedy to Menandrian New Comedy by way of tragic parody (of both Euripides and Sophocles).

61 For more straightforward appropriations, cf. Ar. Eq. 84: Soph. fr. 178, Ar. fr. 652: Soph. fr. 954, Antiphanes fr. 263: Aj. 518. Soph. fr. 811 was manipulated in various ways by Philonides (fr. 7) and Xenarchus (fr. 6), and the imagery of Cratinus fr. 258 may be inspired by Soph. OT 873.
We are led to believe that up to this point Ajax has had a very black-and-white view of the world, which for him was divided straightforwardly into friends and enemies and in which one good turn begat another, just as one bad turn begat another of its kind. The crisis of the play revolves around his realization that human relationships and human morality are much more complex than that. But since Tecmessa does not perceive his inner crisis, she addresses him as she would the old Ajax who would have agreed with her sententia and who in fact still wants to be an εὐγενὴς ἀνήρ, but in a very different way than she imagines.

So when Anaxandrides denies that χάρις begets χάρις he is in essence rejecting the tragedy’s notionally idealistic view – “notionally” because Sophocles’ purpose in this play is precisely to problematize such idealism. But when the sententia is considered in isolation from Tecmessa’s rhetoric and Ajax’ self-discovery (as we must assume that it is in Anaxandrides’ comedy, since we have nothing left of its context), it becomes a tool to create a dichotomy between tragedy and comedy whereby the former deals in ideals and absolutes, while the latter considers human conduct more realistically. If this interpretation is correct, then Anaxandrides’ commentary (unfair though it may be) on Sophoclean tragedy can be seen to play into a subtle polemic between the two genres, even in the fourth century.

Where Anaxandrides reverses a Sophoclean image, a passage in Aristophanes’ *Birds* can be seen to remove the meaning from a tragic citation through a process of concretization and mundanization. At *Birds* 275, right before the parodos, Peisetaerus and Euelpides watch four

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62 Blundell 1989: 60-105 demonstrates Ajax’ devotion to honor but also emphasizes the one-sidedness of his ethics (harming enemies to the exclusion of helping friends) throughout his crisis. Davis 1986: 148 speaks of Ajax’ “excessive morality” in which everything is purposive and “the best man always wins.”
birds enter just ahead of the chorus. The cock’s entrance is marked by a slightly altered quotation from Sophocles’ second Tyro (fr. 654, cited by the scholion to line 275):

Ευ. ἐτέρος ὤρνις οὔτοσι.
Pε. νὴ Δί' ἐτέρος δῆτα χωῖς ἐξεδρὸν χρόαν ἔχων.

Ευ. Here’s another bird!
Pε. Oh yes, that’s another one all right, and he’s also garbed in eccentric color.

According to the scholion, what Sophocles actually wrote is τίς ὤρνις οὔτοις ἐξεδρὸν χρόαν ἔχων; The changes in Aristophanes’ version are slight: the tragic line has been divided among two speakers and turned into statements rather than a question (“what bird is this with…” versus “here’s another bird with…”). More significant is the change from χώραν to χρόαν. As a technical term of augury, ἐξεδρὸν χρόαν denotes an unfavorable quadrant of the sky for a bird to appear in. It is therefore perfectly natural for a prophet or seer to ask what type of bird is flying in this inauspicious quadrant. On the other hand, it is also perfectly natural, especially for people in Peisetaerus’ and Euelpides’ position, to exclaim over a bird’s ἐξεδρὸν χρόαν. This is not humor through juxtaposition, since ἐξεδρὸν χρόαν is a legitimate thing for two bird-watchers to say; rather, it relies on the audience’s recognition that ἐξεδρὸν χρόαν is a pun on a technical term with a very different meaning. The effect is again one of mundanization: what was once used of an omen, no doubt in a suitably tragic or heroic situation, is now being applied to just a

63 Or some other crested bird; see Dunbar 1995: 277n.

64 The MSS give χώραν (where the scribe may have been led astray by ἐξεδρὸν), but the antiquity of χρόαν is confirmed by its appearance in the scholia. Dunbar 1995 thinks that χρόαν, as a more elevated form, would be more appropriate to the paratragic context. But given the concretization and deflation of the Sophoclean line, it might be in Aristophanes’ interest to import something of a lower register here near the end of the line. Sommerstein 1987, however, prefers to read ἐξεδρὸν χώραν on the grounds that “exedros ‘aberrant’, lit. ‘away from its proper abode’, makes a most unnatural adjective to describe a colour.” But ἐξεδρὸς is not unlike English “exotic,” and the scholion seems to understand it just this way, with reference to color.

65 See Pearson 1917 (with ancient sources), Sommerstein 1987, and Dunbar 1995 ad loc.
real bird with fancy plumage – and in fact becomes a means for Aristophanes to compliment himself on the quality of his costumes. He adopts the Sophoclean idea – augury, divination, profundity in the appearance of a bird in a particular place – and quite deliberately empties it of any serious meaning.

Both of these processes – reversal and removal of meaning – operate in two comic reminiscences of Antigone 712-4. The Sophoclean passage falls in the middle of Haemon’s speech in which he tries to convince his father that the citizens of Thebes sympathize with Antigone and find her announced punishment to be excessively harsh. Haemon opens this part of his speech with an appeal to Creon’s authority and wisdom (710-1); his first goal is simply to gain a fair hearing, and he plays to Creon’s pride by saying that a wise man should always be eager to learn. Then he says (712-4):

> ὁρᾶς παρὰ ἔτθροις χειμάρρους ὁσα
> δένδρων ὑπείκει, κλώνας ὡς ἐκσάγεται,
> τὺ δ’ ἀντιτείνοντ’ αὐτὸπρέμ' ἀπόλλυται.

You see how when rivers are swollen in winter those trees that yield to the flood retain their branches, but those that offer resistance perish, trunk and all.

The essence of his message to Creon is bound up in the image that follows of water rushing among trees, uprooting some and leaving others undamaged. Creon is urged to heed Haemon, who has access to the opinions of the citizenry in a way that Creon does not, and in effect to bend before he breaks. Implicit in this image is a difference in size; though not spelled out, most will probably think of willows or other smallish trees bending under the force of the water, while large trees like oaks break or are uprooted. Accordingly, Creon must adopt a more humble

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66 The very next line of this passage is from Aesch. Edonians, which is probably being misapplied in similar fashion.

67 Indeed, as far as trees go, only a smallish one would bend. Jebb 713n. (followed by Griffith 1999) cites a fable of Babrius that features a reed and an oak.
attitude, to “think human thoughts,” as the Greeks might say. To continue to resist his own family, citizens, and gods is hubristic and physically dangerous.\textsuperscript{68}

The image also relates to other major themes and events of the play. Creon, like the large trees, is in a position of resistance against a force that threatens to overwhelm him, and eventually does. The smaller trees that bend succeed at saving not only themselves but their branches as well (κλῶνας ὡς ἕκσωφ' \textsuperscript{68}ἐκσῴζεται); by refusing to bend, Creon will lose all of his little branches (i.e. his entire household). Even the adjective αὐτόπρεμνος emphasizes the isolation and supposed self-sufficiency of individual trees, perhaps hinting that Creon, by willfully alienating his friends, bears the blame for his own downfall.\textsuperscript{69}

Contrast Eupolis’ watered-down version of the same image (fr. 260.23-5\textsuperscript{70}):

(\textbf{B}) \textit{You see how whenever by the banks [of the lawcourts the one who gives in to speech, is saved, but the one who resists is destroyed from top to bottom?}

Though this passage retains some of the original language, it is rather bland and actually removes most of the imagery. The only remnants of Sophocles’ vision of the natural world are ῥείθροισιν and αὐτόπρεμνος, and these seem out of place without any mention of trees, branches, or the type of stream that is being imagined; even ἀντιτείνων is less vivid when it means merely “resisting” instead of “stretching/straining against.”\textsuperscript{71} Where for Sophocles safety is to be found

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{68} Ajax’ attitude is typical of the “heroic temper” as described by Knox 1964.

\textsuperscript{69} Cf. αὐτόνομος at 821 of Antigone’s self-destructive personality.

\textsuperscript{70} Preserved on papyrus. The fragment belongs to his Prospaltians (probably produced in 429), though little can be said of its context.

\textsuperscript{71} Cf. Griffith 1999: 712-18n.: “here [in \textit{Ant.}] the victim contributes to the calamity by actively ‘straining’ against elemental forces.”}
in yielding to the power of nature, for Eupolis it results directly from obedience to verbal commands.\textsuperscript{72} Sophocles’ passage is thus reduced to a dictate of compliance, one which would have been unadvisable for Haemon in his diplomatically delicate position. It appears that Eupolis has retained just enough of the original language to make the passage recognizable to his audience. This suggests that he expected them to be sufficiently familiar with the Sophoclean passage to remember it with only a little prompting. In this case, quoting the Sophoclean opening and a few keywords (even if they have little bearing on the imagery used in the rest of the comic passage) would be enough to resurrect the original, naturalistic image in his audience’s minds, allowing Eupolis to compress his description or focus on other elements instead. The audience would be able to compare the Eupolidean result to its Sophoclean model and appreciate the naturalistic overtones of an otherwise political image.

This passage of \textit{Antigone} also caught the attention of the fourth-century playwright Antiphanes (fr. 228),\textsuperscript{73} though his appropriation and conversion result in a point-by-point subversion of the tragic text. Antiphanes retains more of Sophocles’ naturalistic language than his comic predecessor, and as he was writing in the fourth century, perhaps as much as a hundred years after the premiere of \textit{Antigone}, it may have been necessary to keep more of the tragic language in order to identify his model clearly. Alternatively, we shall see that he was interested in exploiting and subverting certain features of the image, and the similarity of the language may point up the difference in meaning.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. Eur. fr. 654.2: ὁ μὴ ἄντιτείνων τοῖς λόγοις σοφότερος.

\textsuperscript{73} Cited by Athenaeus; Eustathius labels it a parody of Sophocles. It might be suggested that Eupolis rather than Sophocles provided the model for Antiphanes, but the combination of extensive exact quotation and selective adaptation (resulting in a precise reversal of the Sophoclean image) indicates that Antiphanes did in fact have Sophocles in the forefront of his mind.
Antiphanes’ introduction to the image is very different from Sophocles’. Where Haemon spoke modestly and made concessions to Creon’s authority, Antiphanes’ character seems to be musing in pseudo-philosophical terms:

τὸ δὲ ζῆν, εἰπέ μοι,
ti ἔστι; – ὦ – τὸ πίνειν φήμ’ ἐγὼ
ὅρας παρὰ ρεῖθροις χειμάρροις ὅσα
δένδρων ἄει τὴν νύκτα καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν
βρέχεται, μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος οἷα γίνεται,
tὰ δ’ ἀντιτείνοντ’ {οἰονεὶ δίψαν τινὰ
ἤ ξηρασίαν ἔχοντ’} 75 ἀυτόπρεπον ὑπόλλυται

Tell me, what is life?

[...] and I say it’s drinking.
You see along the resounding riverbanks the trees
That are watered night and day
How they increase in beauty and size,
But the ones that resist {as those that are
thirsty and dry} are destroyed utterly.

His opening question sets a tone of profundity, which is promptly punctured by the answer in the next line (τὸ πίνειν φῆμ’ ἐγὼ) before being resumed again by the Sophoclean quotation. Here the image allegorizes not familial conflict, political wisdom, religious insight, or any of the serious matters integral to the debate in Antigone, but the benefits of drinking. So in the first place, Antiphanes has done the same thing we have seen already in the first section: he has inserted an otherwise serious passage into a lower, obviously comic context.76

But closer examination of the fragment indicates that Antiphanes is playing fast and loose with Sophocles’ image and in fact reversing it entirely. For Antiphanes, the rushing water and resistance to it are incidental, retained as a part of the original Sophoclean passage. What he is

74 Antiphanes’ career began in the 380s and extended to the 330s; at any rate, Dem. 19.247 demonstrates that Soph. Ant. was reperformed in the fourth century.

75 The bracketed portion was deleted by Naber; see PCG II ad loc.

76 In a sense, this is a simple conversion of a tragic image into its comic counterpart: the tragic image consists of water, trees, etc. and is concerned with serious affairs; comedy’s way of expressing the same basic things is to turn the water into wine (so to speak) and trivialize anything serious – but the image remains fundamentally the same.
really interested in is wet (or bibulous) versus dry trees; those that are “watered” night and day become big and beautiful, while the dry ones are destroyed. For Sophocles, resistance to an overwhelming force was key, and the image of a surging stream was meant to demonstrate that survival requires humility. Though Sophocles did not make the relative size of his trees explicit, it is natural to imagine the smaller ones surviving while the larger ones do not, and Antiphanes’ description of the latter as “big and beautiful” shows that he is thinking in terms of large/small as well as wet/dry. But for Antiphanes, size is a positive result of being well-watered, not a sign of hubris, and there is no suggestion that the large trees will be destroyed. The dry trees, presumably, are not touched by the water at all and as a result remain puny and thirsty; in fact, since no tree actually resists watering (as a human might resist drinking), Antiphanes is also suggesting that it is natural to drink and unnatural to resist.77 In Sophocles’ use of the image, on the other hand, a dry tree would have no real point, no reason either to bend or to break, and rather than being puny, the smaller trees are the humble survivors. So even while he apparently retains the tragic image intact, Antiphanes has brought Sophocles’ image into a more mundane context, deemphasized significant elements and replaced others, and ultimately turned the image’s meaning completely on its head. And given the extensive and exact quotation of Sophocles, it stands to reason that Antiphanes expected his audience to recognize the source and appreciate his manipulation of it.

The same may be said of a passage in Aristophanes’ Knights, which adopts a Sophoclean line simple in meaning but striking in collocation.78 Rather than turning it on its head or draining it of meaning, Aristophanes redefines it subtly to suit the new comic context. As the Sausage-

77 I owe this point to Alan Sommerstein.

78 The three-word line must have been especially memorable for the coinage γερονταγωγῶ (Pearson 1917, Sommerstein 1981 ad loc.; the word is also used more literally at OC 348). Schlesinger 1936: 299 puts this quotation in his fourth class (identifiable by vocabulary).
seller and Paphlagon compete with each other at inventing favorable oracles, Demos finally awards the victory to the Sausage-seller (1097-8):

καὶ νῦν ἐμαυτὸν ἐπιτρέπω σοι τουτονὶ γερονταγωγεῖν κἀναπαιδεύειν πάλιν.

I hereby request that you be my own steward, “to guide me in my old age and retrain me.”

The second line is a slightly adapted quotation of Sophocles’ Peleus (fr. 487, cited by the scholion to line 1098). The tragic original seems to have been spoken by a servant woman or perhaps a female relative of Peleus, and she goes on to explain the apparently oxymoronic combination of γερονταγωγεῖν and ἀναπαιδεύειν in a third line.79

Πηλέα τὸν Αἰάκειον οἰκουρὸς μόνη γερονταγωγόν κάναπαιδεύω πάλιν· πάλιν γάρ αὖθις παῖς ὁ γηράσκων ἄνήρ

I alone keep the house and tend the old age of Peleus, son of Aeacus, and retrain him; for as a man grows old he becomes a child once more.

As far as we can tell, Aristophanes does not do much with the transfer of these lines from one character to another; it is perhaps a touch ironic that a servant’s words are now being spoken by the master, Demos.

More significant, however, is the precise connotation of those words in their new context. The Sophoclean character meant them in a straightforward sense: since Peleus is an old man and therefore no longer in possession of his (mental, physical) faculties as he once was, he needs someone to take care of him. Though Demos is also an old man, he is only pretending to be

79 This fragment is also cited by Clement of Alexandria (Stromata) together with other similar expressions; it is parodied again at com. adesp. 740 (Rau 1967: 189). Since the final line became proverbial (Pearson 1917 ad loc. with further citations; the image occurs, though in rather less pithy form, already in Aesch. Ag. 74-82), echoes at Ar. Nub. 1417, Cratinus fr. 28, and Theopompos fr. 70 may have no specific connection to Sophocles. On the other hand, Soph. fr. 201h (καὶ γάρ Ἀργείδεος ὀρὸ) also became proverbial, though in this case we know that it originated with him; cf. Alexis fr. 157, Aristophon fr. 5.4, Philonides fr. 11, and possibly Ar. fr. 60 (the citers connect Sophocles’ phrase, perhaps wrongly, to a stereotype of Argive thievery; for possible meanings of the original Sophoclean line, see ST: 68-70.
foolish and frail, as he reveals about twenty lines after this passage (1121-30), and he is not after simple care-tending. He wants to be bribed lavishly, and that he is actually the one in control of this whole situation is implied by the active verb ἐπιτρέπω and the hint of command in his words: if he can choose who will “take care” of him, he cannot be that helpless, nor in need of the kind of care described in the Sophoclean passage. Kindly nurture has been transformed into political bribery, and language that originally described a more or less helpless character now applies to a devious political mastermind – though the audience can only fully appreciate this irony when they hear Demos’ manifesto a little later. Aristophanes’ deflation of the tragic thought is not made obvious in the immediate context of the quotation, but it resonates further and relies for its full effect on a later twist in the comic plot. In this respect, it is similar to the examples I will discuss in the next section.

**Level 3: Integration**

Now we turn to the highest level of generic interaction, which I will be calling integration. What I have in mind here are those tragic passages which resonate more widely in the action of the comedy, affecting interpretation of the larger ode, scene, or even the play in which they stand. In these situations, Aristophanes uses a tragic quotation to introduce certain motifs or deploys a recognizably Sophoclean pattern to establish (and sometimes frustrate) audience expectations regarding the direction the action will take. These passages demonstrate how Sophoclean tragedy could inform Aristophanes’ work more fundamentally and contribute to a deeper level of meaning.

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80 But as Demos’ manifesto comes only twenty-three lines after his citation of Peleus, the audience would still remember his plea for care-tending and be able to notice the contrast in his attitude.
I say “Aristophanes” because his comedies are the only ones from this period that are complete enough for this type of investigation. The fragments of the other comic poets are insufficient – whether too short or lacking in context – to illustrate a more extensive use of Sophoclean tragedy than those we have already examined. Therefore, all examples in this section will be Aristophanic. That does not mean that similar passages did not exist at one time in the fragmentary playwrights, and the titles of certain comedies suggest that they did; perhaps if we had Strattis’ *Troilus* or Autocrates’ *Tympanistae* we could say more about large-scale treatment of Sophocles by the fragmentary comic poets.® As it is, we must turn to Aristophanes for precise dynamics.

I begin with *Birds* 1337-9, which quotes three lines from Sophocles’ *Oenomae* (fr. 476, cited by the scholion to line 1337). This passage is very like those in the previous section, as it employs several strategies we have already studied – collision, concretization, manipulation of imagery – but its impact is not confined to the quotation alone. Rather, the tragic lines provide a starting point for the scene, which in turn builds on and modifies the Sophoclean idea.

At this point in *Birds*, we have just been informed that all mankind has gone bird-mad, and Peisetaerus is preparing to receive potential new citizens with baskets of wings and feathers. The scene is a variation on a comic motif according to which a series of shifty characters attempt (with greater or lesser degrees of success) to share in the hero’s good fortune. In the play’s earlier exploitations of this theme, a poet, oracle-monger, overseer, and decree-seller arrived, annoyed Peisetaerus, and were promptly sent packing.® This later scene opens with a near-

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® On Strattis’ play, see Orth 2009. Miles 2009. For an attempt at reconstruction of Sophocles’ play (using a fragment of Strattis), see SFT. It would of course be risky to reconstruct Sophocles’ tragedy on the basis of Strattis’ comedy and then use the results to determine the relationship between the two plays.

®® The priest also annoyed Peisetaerus and was sent away, but he was not an intruder like the others, since he was initially invited to lead the sacrifice.
reversal of the theme. A would-be parricide enters wishing to become a bird so that he can abuse his father in accordance with the birds’ custom. Rather than dismissing him with insults or violence, as he had done to the others, Peisetaerus reasons with him, corrects his understanding of avian piety, and outfits him with wings and a beak so that he can put himself to better use fighting the Thracians. In spite of being an unsavory figure, then, the parricide is not rejected outright; though he is sent away, he is in some sense accepted as someone of use to the new city.83

The parricide’s tragic opening lines express in elevated language the wish to become an eagle and fly high over the sea:

γενοίμαν
αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτας,
ὡς ἀμποταθείην ὑπὲρ ἄτρυγέτου
γλαυκᾶς ἐπ᾽ οἴδιμα λίμνας. 84

Would that I could become
a high-flying eagle,
so that I could fly beyond the barren ether
over the waves of the gray sea!

The original context of this quotation is not known, though there are two likely possibilities. On the one hand, these lines strongly resemble a common type of ode in which one or more singers describe an ideal place, often a place of peace or solitude over against the turmoil in which they currently find themselves, and express the desire to escape to there from their current situation of

83 It has been pointed out to me that any fighting in Thrace would have be on behalf of Athens, since we are not told that Cloudcuckooland has any interest in that region. On the other hand, it is not obvious why, in the world of the play, Peisetaerus would send somebody off to fight on Athens’ behalf, while his new city is in some respects a replica of his old one. On the cultural tension between fathers and sons in the fifth century, see Dunbar 1995: 1337-71n. and Strauss 1993 (163-5 on this scene); see M. Griffith 1998 for the importance of this tension in Greek tragedy (esp. Aesch. Pers.).

84 For the textual and interpretative difficulties surrounding ὑπὲρ ἄτρυγέτου and ἐπ᾽ οἴδμο, see TrGF IV and Dunbar 1995 ad loc.
pain, toil, violence, etc. On the other hand, the lines could belong to an ode in which the chorus wishes to travel to the scene of some important event and witness the excitement; in the case of Oenomaus, that would undoubtedly be the chariot race between Oenomaus and Pelops. And given the thematic similarities between these two types of ode, it is always possible that Aristophanes meant for his audience to think of the more common “escape” odes, even if the quotation originally stood in a Sophoclean “exploration” ode.

The Sophoclean lines, in which a human wishes to become a bird, are obviously relevant to the general theme of the comedy, so on the simplest level, it looks as though Aristophanes has used this particular ode because its content happens to fit well with the rest of his play. A generic collision is immediately effected through the high-style vocabulary, change of meter, and lyric Doric alphas, and is especially jarring since it comes on the heels of a quintessentially comic slave-beating sequence.

Additionally, depending on what type of ode we think the original was, the content of the quotation anticipates the reasons given by the parricide and others for wanting to become birds. In essence, the parricide wants to escape from his own society and join one in which parental abuse is considered legitimate. Kinesias needs to fly high in order to find something — inspiration for his high-flown poetry. The sycophant plans to use his new wings to issue summonses among the allies on the islands more efficiently and ruthlessly; with wings, he will

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85 Cf. Eur. Hipp. 732-51, IT 1089-1152, Tro. 197-229, Ion 796-9, Bacch. 402-16, Hel. 1478-94, as well as Soph. fr. 730d.6 (which looks like choral wish), and see Swift 2009 for discussion of these and other Euripidean choral fantasies with a particular focus on the erotic qualify of the locus amoenus.

86 Cf. OC 1081-4 and Pearson 1917: 1337-9n.: “For the general sense, no doubt a prayer of the Chorus to be transported to the scene of the victory of Pelops;” this seems to be the interpretation favored by ST: 89, 99, 105-6. For yet another meaning of becoming “an eagle in the clouds,” cf. Ar. Av. 978, Eq. 1013, 1087.

87 Lines 1300-3 suggest as much.

88 It appears to be dactylo-epitrite with an ithyphallic clausula (so Dunbar 1995 ad loc.), though Wilson’s colometry in the first line suggests rather bacchiae + hemiepes.
be able to cross large expanses of sea quickly and thus gain an advantage over his victims. But
the parricide is welcomed into the new community and ultimately sent off to face the Thracians.
If the Sophoclean singer(s) wanted to fly out to see something exciting, then the parricide is also
given his wish; if the Sophoclean passage was an escape ode, it is perhaps in ironic contrast to
these original intentions that the parricide’s desire for escape is satisfied by a relocation to
violence and battle (though it is also appropriate to this comic character’s aggressive nature).
And as we have seen in previous examples, Aristophanes uses this subversion of the tragic
sentiment to humorous effect.

First is the common Aristophanic concretization of what was meant to be merely an
image or metaphor. It is highly unlikely that Sophocles’ singer(s) actually wanted to become an
eagle; rather, the eagle imagery was a vivid way of describing feelings of loss, desperation, and
helplessness, or eagerness and excitement. But Aristophanes recognizes the comic potential in
such an image and duly literalizes it. This singer really does want to become a bird, and he
really succeeds at it. In his redeployment of these lines, Aristophanes mocks this type of ode
(whether it originally expressed a desire for escape or for exploration) as a tragic convention by
focusing on a particularly vivid example: not every tragic wish for escape or knowledge is put in
terms of ornithological metamorphosis.89

But we can go further. The image from Oenomaus is not only concretized, but also
brought into the harsh real world (insofar as Birds depicts a version of the “real world”) and
subjected to its mundanities and vicissitudes. No longer is this ode sung by a noble or tragic
figure, or even a horrified or excitable chorus, but by a minor character with questionable

89 Of those listed in n. 74, Hipp. 732-51, IT 1089-1152, Hel. 1478-94 contain bird imagery, and only in the first
does the chorus wish to become birds.
intentions. Through his comic characterization of this figure, Aristophanes systematically undermines the ode’s original tragic mode while yet retaining the core of its ideas.\textsuperscript{90}

Finally, a rather odd feature of this scene is that the parricide is not abused and driven out, as we might expect. Instead, he is lectured by Peisetaerus and set straight morally before being given his wings. His original, wrong-headed intention is corrected by the Aristophanic hero. Can we say the same of Sophocles? It is risky to identify the parricide too closely with his initial song, since he and the Sophoclean figure(s) invest these words with such different meanings and purposes. Nevertheless, the preconceptions of both are unceremoniously debunked by the comic hero. In his ornithological ignorance, the parricide imagines that birds are allowed to abuse their fathers, and though he is granted his request for birdhood, it does not turn out to be the means to the end he had envisioned.\textsuperscript{91} So also Sophocles imagined (perhaps) that an eagle would be able to fly over the sea and escape human troubles on the land. In fact, the wings Peisetaerus doles out in this scene are used to fly over the sea only to reach Thrace, and arrival in Thrace means a commencement of warfare and violence – just the type of thing Sophocles’ singer(s) may have been trying to avoid. The comic hero both corrects the parricide’s bird lore and demonstrates just how empty the original Sophoclean wish was: becoming an eagle would not deliver what is desired, but only its opposite.

\textit{Oenomaus} is integrated into the action of the comedy in a relatively limited way. The Sophoclean lines anticipate all three intruders but only apply directly to the first, and so their

\textsuperscript{90} Unless the parricide is somehow recognizable from his costume, we do not learn what he is until 1348. Thus, our first impression of him is probably one of puzzlement or curiosity: who is this person singing so loftily about eagles and flying over the sea? The frank revelation of his purpose in 1348 clashes with the previous line (\textit{μάλιστα \ddot{ο}τι καλὸν νομίζεται}) as well as the earlier Sophoclean lines, which must then be reinterpreted in retrospect.

\textsuperscript{91} He does succeed at a) escaping from home and b) flying out to see new things, and he is allowed to expend his aggressive energies against the Thracians. But these are not the things he expressed interest in doing when he first arrived in Cloudcuckooland.
resonance does not extend even for an entire episode. In the next two examples, Aristophanes puts Sophoclean tragedy to work on his own behalf in parabases. Though the citations themselves are localized, Aristophanes works them into his larger program of comic agonism.

The chorus of *Clouds* remains nominally in character as they perform the parabasis, and when they get to Cleon, they have this to say (581-3):

εἶτα τὸν θεοῖσιν ἔχθρον βυρσοδέψην Παφλαγόνα
ηνίχ’ ἥρεισθε στρατηγόν, τὰς ὀφρὺς ξυνήγομεν
κύποιοῦμεν δεινά, βροντῇ δ’ ἐρράγη δι’ ἀστραπῆς.

Furthermore, when you were about to elect as general
the godforsaken tanner Paphlagon, we furrowed our brows
and carried on dreadfully: thunder crashed amid lightning bolts…

It seems that the clouds benefit the city primarily by giving warning when the Athenians are about to do something ill-advised. When Cleon stood to be elected general, the clouds reacted with stormy weather, thunder, and lightning (and by covering the sun and moon, as described in subsequent lines\(^92\)). The final clause of line 583 is a rather compacted version of Soph. fr. 578 (cited by the scholion to line 583):

οὐρανοῦ δ’ ἀπο
ηστραψε, βροντῇ δ’ ἐρράγη δι’ ἀστραπῆς.

And from heaven came lightning, and through its flash burst thunder.

The fragment derives from *Teucer*, and though little is known of this play, it is most likely that fr. 578 referred to actual stormy weather.\(^93\) In fact, since this short quotation is almost painfully redundant as it stands, Nauck may be correct in suggesting that Sophocles actually wrote δι’

\(^92\) See Dover 1968: 584n. on bad weather versus eclipses.

\(^93\) Pearson 1917 *ad loc.*: “The reference is to the storm which scattered the Greek fleet on its return from Troy,” an opinion held by several other editors and commentators; cf. fr. 576. Schlesinger 1937: 300 puts this passage in his sixth class (unflagged parody) and continues, “It is worth noting that this passage definitely belongs to the first edition of the play, as performed in 423;” see also van Leeuwen 1968b: 581-94n.
αἰθέρος rather than δι’ ἀστραπῆς;\(^\text{94}\) if so, then Aristophanes, in the process of transferring an apt tragic description to his own personified clouds, has replaced ἡστραψε with κἀποιοῦμεν δεινά and then reintroduced the lightning at the end of the line, since lightning is more appropriate to the business of his clouds in this passage than aether is.

At the same time, it would be superficial merely to understand this passage as clouds speaking of themselves as clouds. κἀποιοῦμεν δεινά at first glance may seem a rather colorless substitution for the more exciting οὐρανὸς δ’ ἅπο ἡστραψε, but in fact Aristophanes had good reason for inserting this phrase. The parabasis is not only the clouds’ speech to their negligent worshipers; it is also Aristophanes’ defense of himself as a playwright.\(^\text{95}\) κἀποιοῦμεν δεινά thus means something more like “I wrote a clever play” than simply “we did terrible things.” The clever play is surely his Knights, which lambasted Cleon and immediately after which Cleon was elected general. Though Knights won first prize in the dramatic competition, the Athenians ignored the substance of Aristophanes’ advice in that play.\(^\text{96}\) Describing his poetry in terms of portentous storm clouds lends gravity to the audience’s past errors and builds up Aristophanes’

\(^{94}\) For interpretation of δι’ ἀστραπῆς, see Pearson 1917 ad loc. Even with Nauck’s conjecture, the passage still borders on redundancy with both οὐρανός and αἰθήρ, though that is not as harsh as a pair of cognate words for “lightning.”

\(^{95}\) That the clouds remain in character does not mean they cannot speak for Aristophanes as well; cf. Dicæopolis in Ach. 498-508, 515-6 and the parabasis at Av. 1102-7 (where the chorus remains in character while discussing dramatic competition). Sifakis 1971: 41-4 points out that the chorus always speaks as a comic chorus or from the perspective of its dramatic identity; but he also grants that different choral viewpoints may shift or meld with each other. I have suggested that κἀποιοῦμεν δεινά may be read as “I wrote a clever play,” but it may be that the chorus is in fact speaking as a comic chorus: “we put on a clever production;” though ποιέω is not the usual word for production (as opposed to composition), it may be the best one to describe choral activity without unwelcome ambiguity (such as would be produced by e.g. ἐδιδασκόμεθα). It is also possible that the abnormality here is due to the incompleteness of the revision (which is especially noticeable in the parabasis; see the next n.).

\(^{96}\) The audience also failed to appreciate the cleverness of Aristophanes’ next play (the original Nub). Though the revision is incomplete, it may be that the epirrhema, which belonged to the original version, has been retained so that the point about Eq. (which was successful dramatically but not politically) might balance the point already made in the parabasis proper about the original Nub. (which was not successful in any respect).
own poetry as a communicator of serious ideas and warnings; bolstering that description with a suitable tragic quotation raises Aristophanes’ poetic endeavors to the level of tragedy.\textsuperscript{97}

The other parabasis is that of Aristophanes’ clever play, \textit{Knights}. At first glance, lines 498-500 are unremarkable:

\begin{verbatim}
ἀλλ’ ἵθι χαίρων, καὶ πράξειας
κατὰ νοῦν τὸν ἐμὸν, καὶ σε φυλάττοι
Ζεὺς Ἀγοραῖος
Go, and good luck, and may you accomplish
our aims, and may Zeus of the Marketplace
watch over you!
\end{verbatim}

But they are also identical to Sophocles fr. 469 (cited by a scholion to line 498), attributed to a play called \textit{Oicles} or perhaps \textit{Iocles}, though the tragic provenance of the first three words may be doubted. Since \textit{ἀλλ’ ἵθι χαίρων} is used elsewhere by Aristophanes to open a parabasis,\textsuperscript{98} it is perhaps most likely that the tragic quotation does not begin until \textit{καὶ} or thereabouts. If so, then the most striking parts of this fragment are probably the idiom \textit{πράττω κατὰ νοῦν} and \textit{Ζεὺς Ἀγοραῖος}. Zeus in this guise is singularly appropriate to the despicable Sausage-seller,\textsuperscript{99} to whom these words are addressed, and so on the lowest level the transfer of that epithet to comedy constitutes a severe deflation of the tragic invocation. Whatever Zeus’ role in the tragedy, it was not symbolic of the worst elements of the Athenian agora, as in \textit{Knights}.

Of greater interest for a larger scale interpretation is \textit{πράξειας κατὰ νοῦν}. This phrase is surprisingly uncommon in fifth-century literature, and it is significant that it appears again at the end of the chorus leader’s speech, where the subject is Aristophanes himself: ἵν’ ὁ ποιητὴς ἀπίη

\textsuperscript{97} Aristophanes puts his own work on par with tragedy more famously at \textit{Ach. 500}.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Nub. 510, Pax 729; Sommerstein 1981 ad loc.} Pearson 1917 (who gives Sophocles \textit{ἀλλ’ ἵθι – ἐμόν}) is aware of the phrase’s comic provenance, but can also cite similar phrases from tragedy. See also Rau 1967: 188 for citations of \textit{ἀλλ’ ἵθι χαίρων}; following van Leeuwen, he also deduces that the scholion refers primarily to \textit{καὶ – Ἀγοραῖος}. Bakola 2010: 128 notes that anapaests are often used paratragically.

\textsuperscript{99} Zeus \textit{Ἀγοραῖος} has already been mentioned in this play (l. 410), though there in connection with Paphlagon.
χαίρων κατὰ νοῦν πράξας, φαιδρὸς λάμποντι μετώπῳ (549).\(^{100}\) Though this is not known to be a tragic quotation, the echo of κατὰ νοῦν πράξας links the sentiment to the one expressed exactly fifty lines earlier, making the overall scheme of this section of the parabasis look something like this: Aristophanes, through his chorus, prays for the Sausage-seller’s success, then discusses his own poetic career vis-à-vis several of his rivals, and finally appeals to the audience for his own success in the dramatic competition. Aristophanes uses Sophocles as a vehicle for identifying himself with his protagonist by linking them both to victory in their respective contests.\(^{101}\) Or more properly, the Sophoclean quotation provides an idiom with which Aristophanes both introduces and caps his agonistic commentary. The repetition of this idiom creates a nexus of Aristophanes, the Sausage-seller, and victory; further, the Sophoclean quotation heightens the seriousness of the Sausage-seller’s mission before the council (against Paphlagon) and so also of Aristophanes’ struggle with Cleon. Aristophanes is raised to the same level as his protagonist, both of them engaged in epic (or tragic?) contests against powerful opponents.

In fact, these parabatic dynamics appear again when Paphlagon finally admits defeat. Allusions both to the parabasis and to tragedy crop up thickly at lines 1248-52:

οἴμοι, πέπρακται τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ θέσφατον.
kulivôdet’ éisw ton ón doudai móna.
ǒ stêtíanes, chaírons ápith kai σ’ úkōn égho
leípō σε δ’ ἄλλος τις λαβών κεκτήσεται,
kleptîs meûn ouk ãn mullôn, éutuqîs δ’ Íswos.

Ah me, the god’s own fateful prophecy has come to pass!
“Roll me inside, utterly ill-starred!”
Begone and farewell, my crown; against my will do I abandon you. “Some other man will take you as his own, no greater thief, but luckier perhaps.”

\(^{100}\) The connection between these two passages of Ar. Eq. is noted by Nauck. πράττειν κατὰ νοῦν is used elsewhere at Ar. Pax 762 and twice in Plato (including one from his Letters), whose work was written later; cf. also OC 1768.

\(^{101}\) In the parabasis at Ar. Ran. 357, Sophocles (fr. 668) is used more aggressively to characterize Aristophanes’ old rival, Cratinus.
The first line of this passage is identified by the scholion as Sophoclean (fr. 885a, unfortunately without attribution to a specific play), the second parodies Bellerophon’s request at Eur. fr. 311 to be carried inside, and the last two lines imitate Alcestis’ farewell to her marriage-bed at *Alcestis* 177-81. Though the jab at the conventional use of the ekkyklema in line 1249 lends a touch of melodrama to the passage, the tragic quotations, all drawn from highly dramatic points in the action of their respective plays, raise the overall tone. A tragic gravity attends the downfall of Paphlagon/Cleon and, by implication, the victory of the Sausage-seller/Aristophanes; that we are meant to think of the outcome on both levels is signaled by the phrase χαίρων ἀπίθι, an echo of 498 and especially 548 in the parabasis – only now the address is not to a would-be victor but to the crown itself as it proceeds to a new owner.

In studying the dynamics at work in the parabasis of *Knights* and Paphlagon’s defeat, we have already begun to move from tragic passages that are integrated into only part of a comic scene to those that resonate more widely. Another such example is provided by a late passage of *Clouds*, which recalls a type of ode often specifically associated with Sophocles. When Strepsiades must finally face his creditors, he returns to the Phrontisterion to find out whether Pheidippides has learned the skills necessary to get his father off the hook. Socrates informs him that Pheidippides is capable of arguing his way out of anything at all, whereupon Strepsiades breaks into spontaneous song (1154-63):  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{βοάσομαι τάρα τάν ύπέρτονον} \\
\text{βοάν. ἵω. κλάετ', ὀβολοστάται} \\
αὐτοὶ τε καὶ τάρχαία χοῖ τόκοι τόκων
\end{align*}
\]

102 Strictly speaking, comedy uses the ekkyklema to bring characters inside, while tragedy only does so if the ekkyklema has already brought them out in tableau (which seems to be the sort of scene Paphlagon is attempting to recreate here; cf. e.g. Ajax’ withdrawal at Soph. *Aj* 593). On this passage, see also Sommerstein 1980b: 53-4.

103 It is possible that this fragment belongs to the same ode as frs. 489 and 490 (discussed above, pp. 232-7). Line 1162 also seems to be Sophoclean in style; the scholion states πρὸς τὴν ὀνοματοσημίαν. τὸν Σοφοκλῆν χαρακτηρίζει λέγοντα, and then quotes fr. 887 (Ζεδὸς νόστον ἄγω τῶν νικομάχων καὶ παυσανίαν καὶ ἀτρείδαν).
οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄν με φλαῦρον ἐργάσαισθ’ ἔτι,
οἷος ἐμοὶ τρέφεται
τοῖσδ’ ἐνὶ δώμασι παῖς,
ἀμφήκει γλώττῃ λάμπων,
πρόβολος ἐμός, σωτὴρ δόμοις,
ἄμφοτεροις σωτὴρ, ἐχθροῖς βλάβηι,
λυσανίας πατρῴων μεγάλων κακῶν·
ὅν κάλεσον τρέχων ἔνδοθεν ὡς ἐμέ.

Then I’ll shout a fortissimo shout!
Hah! Mourn, you moneylenders,
you and your principal and the interest on your interest!
No longer can you do me any harm,
with a boy like mine
being reared in these halls,
his double-edged tongue gleaming,
my fortress, savior of my domicile, bane of my enemies,
his father’s rescuer from heavy woes!
Run inside and tell him to come out to me.

The underscored portion is cited by the scholion to 1154b as a quotation from Peleus (fr. 491),
though the Sophoclean line ended with ιόν πολαισιν η τις δομοις rather than ιόν, κλάετ’,
ὁβολοστάται. Rau rightly notes the similarity between this song and the so-called
hyporcheme or joy-before-disaster ode, which appears five times in extant Sophocles, and he
suggests on this basis that the fragment too comes from that type of song. I will attempt to
take this observation a little further and then link this passage to similar sequences in Wealth and Peace.

104 See Rau 1967: 148–9 for the scholiastic confusion on the point of authorship of this fragment and reasons for attributing it to Sophocles rather than Euripides. Phrynichus also quoted fr. 491 in his Satyrs (fr. 48), but we know nothing of its comic use or context.

105 Properly speaking, a hyporcheme is a song accompanied by a dance; it is formally contrasted with the stasimon, supposedly a stationary song, though it is likely that even stasima involved some sort of choreography (Dale 1969: 34–40). It is more usual to define a hyporcheme as an ode in which the chorus makes reference to the dance that it is currently performing (since this is the only way we have of deducing that such a dance happened at all); this is the angle taken by Heikkilä 1991 and Henrichs 1994/5.

The ode’s basic similarity to the Sophoclean hyporcheme is plain. Strepsiades thinks that he has a foolproof plan which will cause all of his troubles to vanish – but being shortsighted and naïve, he fails to anticipate the changes wrought in Pheidippides and ends up defending himself from his own son rather than being defended by him against the creditors. Rau compares this ode to two particular Sophoclean exemplars (Ajax 693-718 and Trach. 205-24), presumably because these two have stronger expressions of joy than the others. I would add that Trach. 205-6 is especially similar in terms of phrasing: ἀνολολοξάτω δόμος ἐφεστίοις ἀλαλαγαῖς. Like fragment 491, this ode opens with a futuristic (here, an imperative) verb calling for a celebratory cry and completes the idea with the cognate noun ἀλαλαγαῖς in the very next line, as in the combination βοάσομα...βοάν. The close connection between a joyous shout and a δόμος in both of these passages perhaps lends additional weight to Rau’s contention that fr. 491 comes from a hyporcheme.

If this is true, then fr. 491, by virtue of being the very first words of Strepsiades’ joyous ode, immediately sets the tone for the passage as a whole: we can suspect that Strepsiades’ confidence will turn out to be ill-founded for some reason and that disaster will ensue. This feeling is intensified by further echoes of scenes in Ajax in which Ajax speculates about Eurysaces’ future; prominent in both passages are the father’s desire to have his son brought to him (Aj. 530, 538; Nub. 1163), the description of the son as a prospective warrior and defender (Aj. 574-6; Nub. 1160-1), and the father’s concern that his son show the quality of his lineage and upbringing (Aj. 545-7, 550-1, 556-7; Nub. 1158-9). This context of familial protection and the significance of Eurysaces in particular as one who needs his father’s protection now but

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107 In view of the preceding discussion of Av. 851ff. (pp. 16-20), we may also notice the repetition inherent in this kind of phrasing.

108 Dover 1968 calls τοῖσδ’ ἐνὶ δόμασι in 1159 “highly tragic.”
will someday be great enough to defend others with his namesake shield lends pathos to Strepsiades’ expectation of the same from his son.

On the one hand, then, the various tragic texts and contexts which Aristophanes has arrayed behind Strepsiades’ joyous ode impart a sort of tragic weight and enable the spectators to understand and appreciate the ultimate hollowness of his rejoicing. As a protagonist who sings about himself, Strepsiades collapses the roles of tragic hero and chorus into one, so we may see him either as a gravely mistaken one-man chorus or as a tragic hero who falls after we have been led to expect the opposite. On the other hand, Strepsiades is not very much like a typical tragic chorus, which usually looks forward to a resolution of hostilities, release from fear, or even rescue from certain death; on the contrary, Strepsiades anticipates cheating his creditors of the money he owes them.

The clash between the tragic chorus’ optimism and the comic hero’s greed is underscored in the second line of the ode, where Aristophanes has changed Sophocles’ words to ἱώ, κλαέτ’, ὃβολοστάται – effectively a thumb in the creditors’ collective eye. In spite of the tragic tones that follow and Strepsiades’ attempt to characterize his situation as a tragic hero’s, we already know what “salvation” means in this case and can recognize just how far short of a tragic hero Strepsiades falls. Thus, the Sophoclean hyporchematic form provides a counterpoint and complement to the comic situation and prevents us from feeling as sorry for Strepsiades as we otherwise might have.

While Clouds appears to offer an Aristophanic play on a Sophoclean device, the joy-before-disaster ode, there is some evidence that the broader pattern of joy before disaster, not necessarily featuring a choral ode, was also perceived to be peculiarly Sophoclean. This may be

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109 Rau 1967: 149 notes the untragic quality of Strepsiades’ downfall (which of course is appropriate to his untragic circumstance and intent). For a similar attempt at heroic characterization, cf. the echo of Soph. Ant. 678 at Ar. Lys. 450 (see Rau 1967: 199).
the dynamic intended at *Wealth* 806-20, where the slave Cario emerges after the title character’s rehabilitation to enumerate his household’s newfound blessings. The entire passage is included in *TrGF* IV as Soph. fr. 275, since the scholion to line 806 states that (πάντα) δὲ ταῦτα παρὰ τὰ ἐν Ἰνάχῳ Σοφοκλέους, ὡτε τοῦ Διός εἰσελθόντος πάντα μεστὰ ἄγαθῶν ἐγένετο. Though it need not all be verbatim Sophocles, we have no reason to doubt that it at least echoes *Inachus* in a general way. The passage consists mostly of an exaggerated catalogue of riches, and if Aristophanes has altered the original text in any way, we cannot see it. But perhaps it did not need altering. *Inachus* was probably a satyr play, and so comic exaggeration (for example) would not be precluded from appearing there. Like the Aristophanic passage, the Sophoclean speech described a god’s arrival in the house, and may even have been delivered by a slave (like Cario), in which case Aristophanes has transferred the passage wholesale, not only its language but also its approximate context. In the absence of any other clear motivation for such an extensive imitation, it seems reasonable to follow Sommerstein *ad loc.* in adducing the pattern of joy before disaster in *Inachus*. As Sommerstein points out, Zeus’ arrival (which according to the scholion causes the sudden explosion of wealth) is soon followed by a slew of troubles: Io is raped, transformed into a cow, and handed over to the hundred-eyed Argus. “Well-informed spectators may therefore be led to suspect, wrongly, that some misfortune or danger may yet be

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110 πάντα is included only in MS V. Schlesinger 1936: 309: “the schol. note this as a situation-parody of Soph. *Inachos.*” He also puts it in class 6 (unflagged, possibly unintentional parody), perhaps because it would be difficult to distinguish the language of comedy and satyr play in this situation. Pearson 1917 *ad loc.*: “The word παρὰ is used in scholia much in the same way as a modern commentator would say ‘compare (confer).’ Thus it is employed as well when it is desired to illustrate a single phrase. … Here there is a comparison of the whole description in the two plays (cf. fr. 273); but we need not infer that Aristophanes was closely imitating or parodying the language of Sophocles.” But cf. *TrGF* IV: *cave tamen ne scholiastae verba de Sophoclis imitatione ad solos versus 806/7 referas.*

111 There may be some preparation for this at lines 627-40, where Cario seems to be cast as a tragic messenger and the chorus responds to his initial announcement in joyful doechmiacs (with ἀναβοάσομαι at 639; cf. βοάσομαι at *Nub.* 1154 above (pp. 261-2); see Rau 1967: 166-7.
in store for Chremylus.”\textsuperscript{112} Where in Clouds Aristophanes took advantage of the Sophoclean hyporcheme as a way of directing his audience’s expectations straightforwardly and manipulating their sympathies (or lack thereof) for the main character, here he uses the broader Sophoclean pattern to establish an expectation which he does not intend to realize.

Aristophanes may have found special inspiration for this passage of Wealth in Sophocles’ Electra (1232-87). During the recognition scene between Orestes and his sister, Electra continually bursts into joyous song which Orestes attempts to hush lest she give the game away. In the end, Orestes succeeds in quieting her exclamations, and Electra’s tears of joy are put to good use (indistinguishable as they are from tears of sorrow).\textsuperscript{113} Orestes is able to put a stop to the joy-before-disaster pattern before it reaches a head, and the revenge goes off without a hitch.

Common to Wealth and Electra, then, is the hint of foreboding latent in excessive rejoicing which nevertheless turns out to be unfounded. Both plays do end happily (at least ostensibly so) and the joyous outburst is not after all succeeded by a disaster of any sort. Similar to Electra in a different way is Peace 301-60. Though the passage in question is not an ode,\textsuperscript{114} it features a chorus whose rejoicing is premature and even dangerous. Having discovered where Peace is imprisoned, Trygaeus calls the chorus out to help him drag her back into the light. But the chorus is altogether too excited, and Trygaeus repeatedly pleads with them not to make so much noise or else they will draw the attention of War or ὤ κάτωθεν Κέρβερος (309-10, 313-5, 318-9).\textsuperscript{115} This can be read as a sort of veiled commentary on the basic pattern of action

\textsuperscript{112} Sommerstein 2001: 802-18n.

\textsuperscript{113} Even here there is a resemblance to the more usual choral song in Electra’s use of dochmiacs and other lyric meters.

\textsuperscript{114} The parodos of this play consists of a choral dialogue with Trygaeus in trochaic tetrameters catalectic.
common to Sophoclean hyporchemes: if a chorus is singing joyously, there must be a disaster pending. Like every good spectator of tragedy (and like Orestes), Trygaeus knows this, and therefore tries to stop the chorus’ performance before it is too late; he is allowed to give the warning that must be on every spectator’s mind when watching a Sophoclean hyporcheme (337-9):

μή τί μοι νυνί γε χαίρετ’· οὐ γὰρ ἴστε πω σαφῶς·
ἀλλ’ ὅταν λάβωμεν αὐτήν, τηνικαῦτα χαίρετε
καὶ βοᾶτε καὶ γελᾶτ…

Please don’t rejoice just now; you can’t be certain yet. But when we’ve got her, then you may rejoice and yell and laugh…

Using language that may have a Sophoclean flavor, Trygaeus is allowed to point out the folly of every hyporchematic chorus, and what is more, he succeeds. Because he recognizes the danger, he is eventually able to put a stop to the chorus’ carrying on and to organize them into an effective team. In the end, they successfully recover Peace and the expected disaster does not take place after all – perhaps because the perceptive Trygaeus was there to balance and counteract the chorus’ mindless optimism.

One of the most sustained Aristophanic engagements with Sophoclean drama is to be found in his Wealth of 388 B.C.; this is intriguing, given that Aristophanes’ obsession with tragedy (especially Euripidean tragedy) is traditionally dated to the years 425-405.

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115 *El.* 1309-13. Also comparable on different grounds is the parodos of Eur. *Or.*, where Electra attempts to silence the singing and dancing chorus while her brother sleeps.

116 See Olson 1998: 338-40n.: “The combination of ὅταν and τηνικαῦτα is found elsewhere in the dramatic poets only in Sophocles (*El.* 293-4; *OT* 76; *Ph.* 505).”

117 In addition to the hyporchematic pattern, it is generally agreed that Sophocles’ satyr play *Pandora* lies behind the rescue of Peace, though it is more difficult to disentangle this source from others. See Harrison 1900, Robert 1914, Olson 1998: xxxv-xxxviii, and Dobrov 2007; for a skeptical attitude, see Bakola 2010: 109-10. Aristophanes was mocked by other comic poets for this scene (Eup. fr. 6, Pl. Com. fr. 86, Sannyrion fr. 5), and one wonders whether that has anything to do with Aristophanes’ handling of his sources.
Nevertheless, his focus in this comedy does not seem to be primarily parodic. In addition to the allusion to *Inachus* at 806-20 (discussed above), the comedy picks up motifs from two other plays, *Oedipus at Colonus* (passim) and *Phineus* (fr. 710 = Plut. 636).\(^{119}\) *Oedipus at Colonus* is of course the latest extant Sophoclean play, produced in 401 after its author’s death, but still a matter of thirteen years before its treatment in *Wealth*; *Phineus* is undated. As the dynamics surrounding this nexus are investigated in a recent article by Gwen Compton-Engle,\(^ {120}\) I limit my discussion here to a few important points that bear particularly on my larger argument.

At the lowest level, *Wealth* uses *Oedipus at Colonus* in a visual game of misdirection regarding the identity of the title figure: the comedy opens with a blind old man clad in dirty rags being followed by two other characters (Chremylus and Cario). Various clues (most of them visual), such as the old man’s physical appearance, his blindness,\(^ {121}\) his connection to a Delphic oracle, his ability to benefit whoever possesses him, and an ensuing scuffle on stage all suggest that this character is the Sophoclean Oedipus, or as Compton-Engle puts it (6), “It is as though Oedipus has kept walking off the stage of *Oedipus at Colonus* and onto the stage of *Wealth*.”

In this respect, the deployment of *Oedipus at Colonus* and of *Inachus* in this comedy is similar: in both cases, the audience is led to expect something (that the blind man is Oedipus, that disaster will attend Wealth’s rehabilitation) which turns out to be incorrect. But whether or

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\(^{118}\) E.g. Silk 2000b: 49: “The prolonged engagement [of Ar. with tragedy] seems in fact to have lasted a good twenty years, beginning with *Acharnians* (425 BC), where Euripides lends Dicaeopolis his stage properties and his lines in the cause of peace, and ending with *Frogs* (405 BC), where Euripides competes with Aeschylus before the god of tragedy, Dionysus, himself.” The footnote (22) on this passage reads: “We know of no play outside this period with any substantial tragic presence.”

\(^{119}\) Cited by scholia to lines 635 and 636. Sophocles wrote two *Phineus* plays, one of which may have been a satyr play, though the two cannot be usefully distinguished in their fragments (only 711 and 712 look positively satyric).

\(^{120}\) Forthcoming in *CW* 106. I am grateful for the chance to see advance drafts of this article.

\(^{121}\) Which must have been evident from his mask and is in any event explicitly mentioned at line 13.
not we are ultimately surprised to learn that the old man is actually the god Wealth and not Oedipus. Aristophanes’ use of key Sophoclean themes and stage action encourages the audience to make an identification between these two characters, and that identification in turn informs the rest of the comedy. Like the heroized Oedipus, Wealth is in a sense restored to honor and able to benefit mankind if treated properly. Of course a comedy cannot end the way the tragedy does, with the old man dying after he has cursed his sons to mutual fratricide, so instead, in true comic fashion, Wealth is successfully healed of his blindness and showers humanity with abundance. In other words, the disaster foreshadowed by the allusion to Inachus at 806-20 does not play out in the end because Wealth turns out to be a more propitious and more identifiably comic figure than Oedipus. Thus Aristophanes successfully works a whole nexus of Sophoclean ideas into a comedy without either making a mockery of the tragedy or betraying the atmosphere of his own genre.

While there are echoes of Oedipus at Colonus throughout the play, they are definitely concentrated in the beginning, when the audience is still trying to guess the identity of the blind man and forming expectations of the subsequent dramatic action on that basis. However, Oedipus at Colonus can provide a model only for a decrepit Wealth who is restored to power. It appears to be Aristophanes’ own strikingly original move to heal Wealth of his blindness, and though the blind Oedipus gains a mysterious inner vision that enables him to lead the other, sighted characters from the stage at the end of the tragedy, he is never truly healed. Rather, that motif is drawn from a different model, the Sophoclean Phineus, whose blindness is apparently healed by Asclepius, just as Wealth’s sight is restored after incubation in the Asclepieion.

122 If comic titles were announced at the proagon, as tragic titles were, then the audience may have been able to guess the blind man’s identity, but as Compton-Engle points out (1), we cannot say whether Wealth had ever appeared on stage as a character before.

123 Compton-Engle (forthcoming): 1 n. 2.
Sophocles’ importation of Asclepius into his story is itself an important innovation; traditionally, Jason was responsible for restoring Phineus’ sight. That Wealth is also healed by Asclepius points specifically to the Sophoclean play but also suits the world of the comedy in several ways: 1) Asclepius is the one we would expect anyway, since he had become the standard healing god by the early fourth century, 2) as a god, Asclepius (as opposed to Jason) is really the only suitable healer for another god, 3) using Asclepius provides the opportunity for Cario’s very comic description of incubation in the Asclepieion.

A paratragic tone is set at line 627 with Cario’s dramatic arrival from the Asclepieion and the chorus’ excited dochmiacs; together with these features, the quotation of *Phineus* casts the healing of Wealth in elevated terms, and the whole passage is somewhat akin to a tragic messenger scene with the chorus’ joyful reaction to the messenger’s good news. The tragic tone of these lines adds momentousness to the miraculous healing of Wealth but the gravity soon collapses when Cario’s “messenger speech” turns out to be full of stock comic material. In this comedy, Sophocles’ three plays afford a basis for simple collisions of registers, provide Aristophanes with impetus for his own dramatic innovations, and lend significance, tension, or intensity to key moments in the action.

I said in the beginning of this chapter that Greek comedy treats Sophoclean drama in all the same ways as it treats Euripidean drama. Accordingly, the one thing that seems to be missing so far is explicit parody of Sophoclean tragedy. But there is a good example in

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124 Sophocles was thought by the ancients to have had a personal connection to Asclepius, whom he supposedly received into his house; see above, p. 21 n 6.

125 Cited by scholia to lines 635 and 636.

Aristophanes’ Bird, which makes complex use of the title figure of Sophocles’ Tereus.\footnote{Ar. Av. was produced in 414, which provides a \textit{terminus ante quem} for Tereus. The date may be pushed back further, as this tragedy also seems to have been used by Cantharus (below, n. 148, and see SFT: 157-8 n. 56) and by Eupolis in his Taxis (fr. 268 = Soph. fr. 595b); the usual date of Taxis is 428 or 427 (but see also Storey 2003: 246-8). Sometime between Tereus and Av., Philocles wrote a Pandionis which evidently featured the same story as Tereus. Aristophanes notes Sophocles’ priority in a passage immediately preceding the parodos, where the Hoopoe claims to be the father of Philocles’ hoopoe, which suggests that Sophocles’ treatment was not only earlier but also more influential – influential enough to “beget” another hoopoe of the same type, not to mention Aristophanes’ own Hoopoe. That Philocles’ is downgraded to mere offspring indicates that his version was relatively insignificant in Aristophanes’ view, perhaps little more than a reiteration of the Sophoclean Tereus.} Gregory Dobrov has written extensively on the “contrafactual” relation between these two plays,\footnote{Dobrov 2001: 105-26 (reprinting Dobrov 1993), with further bibliography at 193 nn. 2 and 3.} and while I do not agree with all of his points (especially regarding the Sophoclean Tereus), his discussion allows me to be relatively brief here. Instead of contrafact, I will focus on a few of the ways in which Aristophanes turns Tereus to both humorous and constructive uses.

Aristophanes’ Tereus is a bird-man. When he first appears, Peisetaerus and Euelpides laugh at his crest and his beak (probably his most recognizeable features\footnote{The meaning of πτέρωσις in this context is unclear. It may refer to Tereus’ wings, which would arguably be a hoopoe’s next most prominent feature, after his crest and beak, or it may refer to the fact that he actually has no feathers.}), whereupon he tells them “this is what Sophocles did to me in his tragedy” (100-1). The connection with a specific tragic source is as explicit as it could be.\footnote{The reference to οἱ Κραναί at 123 may also be a gesture to Sophoclean style; see Rau 1967: 185-6.} Most commentators have suspected that Aristophanes is pulling one of his usual tricks by concretizing something that was only discussed in tragedy; that is, the transformation of the Sophoclean Tereus was described or predicted verbally, while the Aristophanic Tereus actually appears as a bird, and what was originally left to the audience’s imagination is brought on stage in full costume.
Tereus’ outfit cannot be a complete surprise for Aristophanes’ audience. We have already been informed that Tereus is now a hoopoe, and the servant-bird who greets the protagonists at the door is the first to appear in an avian costume. He gives the game away, so to speak, and now we know that other bird-characters, including Tereus, will wear feathers, wings, beaks, etc. We expect Tereus to be a bird-man; we expect a hoopoe.

And we get a hoopoe, but maybe not quite the one we anticipated. At line 103 Peisetaerus asks Tereus where his feathers are; the Hoopoe responds that all birds lose their feathers in the winter and then regrow them later in the year, and after answering this question, he promptly changes the subject. It is difficult at first to see the dramatic or comic point of this exchange about feathers, but the reference is probably to an aspect of Tereus’ costume, namely a lack of feathering. It is debatable just how many (or few) feathers Tereus actually wore, but at any rate he is surely not what we expected after seeing the servant-bird. We thought that Aristophanes would concretize the Sophoclean figure of Tereus the Hoopoe, and he has, but he has also stopped short of giving Tereus a full-blown spectacular costume. Instead, he has brought Tereus into the ugly real world by taking the concept of the bird-man to its logical conclusion: if Tereus is a bird, then he must molt, and birds in molt may look lopsided and ill-fashioned (and comic birds especially so). The Aristophanic Tereus is thus simultaneously grandiose (with his crest, beak, and πτέρωσις ) and laughably ragged – a clear collision of tragic and comic worlds.

131 Lines 46-7, even if 16 is excised.

132 It is generally assumed that part of the fun of a play like *Av.* lies in visually spectacular ornithological display (where, for instance, each member of the chorus represents a different species and wears a different costume).

133 We have already been told by the servant (line 82) that Tereus eats μύρτα and σέρφοι, as any good bird should.
While humorous in its own right, Aristophanes’ Tereus also brings out some of the apparent illogicalities or weaknesses of Sophocles’ play. Sophocles seems to have made at least two important changes to the details of the myth as it stood in the fifth century: though our evidence is spotty, we have no sign that Tereus was a Thracian or transformed into a hoopoe before Sophocles. More usually, he was Phocian and was ultimately transformed into a hawk of some type, perhaps a sparrowhawk. This version of the myth of Tereus makes sense as an aetiology of the hawk’s pursuit of smaller birds (like the nightingale and swallow into which Proene and Philomela are changed). Hoopoes, on the other hand, are much less assertive around other birds, and relatively tame toward humans.

Though we cannot be certain of the nature of his τριλοφία, it must reflect the hoopoe’s highly distinctive crest, at least in part. When Peisetaerus and Euelpides laugh at these features, Tereus offers Sophocles’ tragedy as an explanation.

The original myth also makes sense in cultural terms: as a Phocian Greek, Tereus was a natural match for an Athenian princess and one who would already understand her language. Cast as a barbarian, he suddenly becomes savage by nature, and a non-native speaker of Greek. Though these traits might suit tragedy well in some respects, given the loathsome acts committed by the mythical Tereus, they could also impede some basic dramatic presumptions (such as why an Athenian king would marry his daughter to a Greekless foreigner). Further, the change from hawk to hoopoe wrecks the avian aetiology as well as being at odds with the stereotypical

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134 And possibly some sort of military equipment, if Dunbar 1995 is correct.


136 Thucydides goes out of his way to make this point, leading some to conclude that Sophocles is his imagined interlocutor – though he also notes that Phocis was inhabited by Thracians at the time. On the types of bird, see Dunbar 1995: 15n.

137 See Dunbar 1995 ad loc. for speculation.
Aristophanes’ version brings out these disparities: his Tereus is a barbarian warlord, perhaps equipped with a crested helmet and later accompanied by spearmen, but at the same time dressed in an unevenly feathered costume with comically over-large beak. The humor lies not only in imagining what a bird-man would actually look like but in thinking about what it would mean for a barbarian warlord to become a timid, molting bird. And though Sophocles did not present Tereus in quite this light, the implication is that he has inflicted precisely this ignominious fate on the mythical king.

But Aristophanes’ purpose is not only to mock Sophocles’ dramatic decisions. He points out that much of what Sophocles has done is in fact not very tragic; but that means that it is, potentially at least, very useful comic material. In addition to the humor created by his portrayal of Tereus, Aristophanes also uses the Sophoclean material as a sort of support or plot device for the dramatic action. The specific combination of barbarian king and hoopoe is actually quite perfect for Aristophanes’ own rather different story. In his scheme, men and birds are at odds for the very plausible reason that men kill, eat, and otherwise exploit birds as a natural resource. In order for the dramatic action to proceed, this conflict must be resolved, and the best way to effect a resolution is through some sort of arbitration, here provided by Tereus. It is thus very helpful indeed for Aristophanes to have at his fingertips a mythical figure who represents both sides, men and birds – but that was the case with Tereus anyway. What makes the Sophoclean Tereus especially useful to Aristophanes?

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138 Cf. e.g. fr. 587: φιλάργυρον μὲν πᾶν τὸ βάρβαρον γένος. Dunbar 1995: 15n. cites evidence that the sparrowhawk and hoopoe were once thought to be the same bird at different times of the year; but nothing compelled the tragedian to make that connection in his play, especially if it resulted in a less tragic figure!

To begin with, his being a hoopoe instead of a hawk means that he will be less fierce, less aggressive, less confrontational – in short, a better peacemaker. Further, as a barbarian he is well-acquainted with the birds’ twittering language to which the Greeks were so fond of comparing foreign tongues. We are told that the Hoopoe has taught the birds to speak like men (199-200), though their speech still contains a generous smattering of chirps and twitters; being a native speaker of chirps and twitters, the Thracian Tereus would be more at home with them in the first place, better at communicating with them, and better at teaching them human speech. So even though Tereus the Thracian Hoopoe throws awry the traditional myth and aetiology and threatens to undermine tragedy’s elevated tone (or so Aristophanes would have us believe), he fits very well in the world of Aristophanic comedy, where he is not only a source of humor but also a necessary mover of the dramatic action.  

Conclusion: A Glance at Aristophanes and Euripides

In the introduction to this chapter I noted a basic disparity in our evidence for comedy’s use of Euripides versus Sophocles: Aristophanes’ treatment of Euripides (especially in Acharnians, Thesmophoriazusae, and Frogs) is more explicit and more extensive than anything we see for Sophocles. We cannot acquire a proper appreciation of comedy’s deployment of Sophocles by measuring it against Aristophanes’ parodies of Euripides; that is, as long as we hold Thesmophoriazusae to be the standard for tragic parody, we are destined to be disappointed with the results for Sophocles. A better approach is to describe the relationship between Sophocles and comedy on its own terms, and then to compare it to what we know of the

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relationship between Euripides and comedy. In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate the various dynamics and devices through which the comic poets engaged with Sophoclean drama, and a brief survey will suffice to show that Aristophanes deals with Euripides according to all of the same dynamics and devices.

As with Sophocles, Aristophanes uses short, unflagged passages of Euripides to create a collision of generic registers, whether internally or between the tragic quotation and its comic context; he also exploits the transfer of lines from a tragic Euripidean figure and situation to his own comic ones. For example, at Acharnians 893-4, Dicaeopolis prepares to cook the eel he has recently acquired from the Boeotian, and his address to it alludes to Euripides’ Alcestis 367-8:

\[
\text{ἀλλ’ εἴσφερ’ αὐτήν· μηδὲ γὰρ θανών ποτὲ σοῦ χωρίς εἴην ἐντετευτλιωμένης.}
\]

Now place her on her bier, “for even in death may I never be parted from you,” enshrouded in beet!

Aristophanes retains Euripides’ language up to the final hemistich, where he replaces τῆς μόνης πιστῆς ἐμοί with the comic coinage ἐντετευτλιωμένης.\(^{141}\) This word creates a *paraprosdokian* joke dependent on both the collision of linguistic registers and on the contextual collision of Alcestis’ funeral with Dicaeopolis’ celebratory feast. For those who remember Alcestis, the quotation evokes the image of the dying Alcestis (a visual reminiscence of Euripides’ play) alongside the (mental or actual) sight of the beet-green-wrapped eel – an effectively ridiculous combination of both emotional and generic extremes. Aristophanes’ adaptation of the final words of the original jars with the rest of the quotation and thus creates a collision of registers *within* the tragic quotation, in addition to the collision *between* its funerary language and its surrounding culinary context. Finally, even disregarding ἐντετευτλιωμένης, the passage is made

\(^{141}\) The manuscripts read ἐντετευτλιωμένης, but Blaydes conjectures ἐντετευτλιωμένης; see Olson 2002 *ad loc.* for discussion.
amusing by the transfer of the tragic lines from one pair of characters to another: words originally spoken by a grieving husband to his dying wife are now being spoken by the delighted and economically savvy comic hero to his next meal. Though these lines have no dramatic or parodic resonance beyond the moment of their utterance, collision of tragic and comic registers still results in several layers of humor. All members of the audience would find something to like here, and those who know *Alcestis* could appreciate the intertextuality a little more than those who do not.

Aristophanes’ mockery of Euripides’ supposedly philosophical or Socratic ideas is well known, though in such cases the comic poet generally selects a Euripidean passage to mock more because it is Euripidean than out of any real interest in the idea or image it conveys; the passage is taken on its own terms, as it were, but not truly appropriated or converted. The fun lies either in taking a sophisticated-sounding line out of context, in which case a certain foreignness to the comic genre is presumed, or in exaggerating those sophisticated elements. While these passages are more personalized than the ones we have been discussing, they operate according to the same principles of collision of registers and stylistic imitation that we examined in the first section of this chapter. But Aristophanes does sometimes find a real use for Euripidean *ideas*, and not just the idiosyncrasies of their expression.

One instance is the argument between Pheidippides and his father in *Clouds*, which draws on a particular line of argument used also by Pheres to Admetus in Euripides’ *Alcestis*. At *Clouds* 1415, Pheidippides argues for the justice of father-beating with a line adapted from *Alcestis*; the sentiment is almost the reverse of the original:

_Alc. 691:_  
χαίρεις ὁρῶν φῶς· πατέρα δ’ οὐ χαίρειν δοκεῖς;  
You enjoy looking on the light. Do you think your father does not?
278

Aristophanes has converted a delight in life into wailing as the result of physical discipline. But more to the point is his manipulation of the logic underlying Euripides’ line and his reapplication of it – illegitimately – to the comic context. Pheres’ point was based on a simple statement of fact: both he and his son enjoy life. But Pheidippides implicitly recasts it into a normative conclusion about what should be the case, rather than what is; because children get beaten, fathers should be beaten as well. Euripides’ logic was different, but the basic strategy of drawing out the similarity between fathers and sons allows Aristophanes to appropriate the Euripidean line and stretch it further than it was intended to go. The effect is not only a superficial strengthening of Pheidippides’ position through his ability to cite an outside authority, but also a jab at Euripides as one of the “sophists” (like Socrates) responsible for this new type of argumentation – even though he did not attempt any such thing in the passage being alluded to! By sleight of hand, Aristophanes successfully appropriates a perfectly legitimate tragic line and modifies it for an outrageous comic situation without appearing to have changed anything except the word χαίρω. As in Antiphanes’ subtle subversion of Antigone 712-4, the general idea remains intact and only after a moment’s thought do we realize that it has been disingenuously reapplied or turned on its head altogether.

Various techniques of conversion are evident in Wasps 111-2, which quotes briefly from Euripides’ Stheneboea (fr. 665). Xanthias, explaining the household’s troubled situation to his fellow-slave, sums up Philocleon’s attitude and reaction to attempts to restrain him thus:

τοιαῦτ’ ἀλύει· νουθετούμενος δ’ ἀεὶ
μᾶλλον δικάζει.

He goes on two lines later to cite the proverb (also used in fr. 487 of Sophocles’ Peleus, discussed above, pp. 249-51) that old men are like children again.

142
That’s how crazy he is, and the more you reason with him, the more cases he hears.

The context of the Euripidean passage was Stheneboea’s ἔρως which similarly refused to be quieted and continued to crush her (πιέζει). The change of πιέζει to δικάζει creates a paraprosdokian joke operating on an internal collision of registers; external collision is prepared by the more specific description of Philocleon’s obsessive activities which immediately precedes the tragic quotation and culminates in his habit of collecting a beach’s worth of pebbles to use in voting. Mad indeed, and the metrical change to heavier iambic without resolutions (in contrast to previous lines) would signal the shift to a higher register of poetry even if the audience did not recognize the source of the quotation.

Aristophanes adapts the image in this quotation to the comic world by means of the word δικάζει (though it is more specific to this comic plot than to the genre in general): in tragedy, people are crushed; in comedy, they sit in court. A subtler change is the application of the participle νουθετούμενος to Philocleon himself, where it originally described ἔρως. Euripidean love, a personified abstraction or perhaps a force of nature, balked at instruction and admonishment. Aristophanes transfers this incorrigibility, appropriately, to a person instead of an abstraction, thus making the interplay of admonishment and madness more concrete and specific. It is not abstract love but a particular person being restrained from mad activities, and when that restraint fails, the subject – goes back to judging cases. The mundanity and absurdity of Philocleon’s obsession are brought out by their contrast with the seriousness of Stheneboea’s.

Just about two hundred lines later, during an exchange between the chorus-leader and his son, is a double quotation from Euripides’ Theseus (frr. 385-6). The boy has asked his father to buy figs (apparently a treat); the father refuses because his only income is his juror’s fee, which
pays just enough money for them to get by on. There follows a paratragic lament on the subject of hunger (309-15):

Χο. ἀπαπαὶ φεῦ, ἀπαπαὶ φεῦ
μὰ Δί’ οὐκ ἔχω γε νῦν ὁδ’,
ὁπόθεν γε δείπνον ἔσται.
Πα. τί με δῇ’; ὦ μελέα μήτερ, ἔτικτες;
Χο. ἵν’ ἐμοὶ πράγματα βόσκειν παρέχῃς.
Πα. ἀνόνητον ἄρ’, ὦ θυλάκιόν, σ’ εἶχον ἄγαλμα.

Ch. Alas and ah me!
I surely don’t know
where our dinner’s coming from.
Boy Why then, miserable mother, did you bear me?
Ch. So that I’d have the problem of feeding you!
Boy Ah shopping bag, it seems you’ve been
a useless ornament to carry!

Line 312 is a direct, unchanged quotation of Euripides (fr. 385), though the original tragic speaker cannot be determined. Lines 314-5 are not so much a quotation as an adaptation of Eur. fr. 386: ἀνόνατον ἄγαλμ’, ὦ πάτερ, οἶκοισι τεκὼν.

The chorus-leader’s cry of ἀπαπαὶ φεῦ begins the paratragic language, but when the boy attempts to join in at line 312, the chorus-leader immediately lowers the tone by cynically answering what was surely meant to be a rhetorical question. The boy nevertheless resumes the parody, but without bringing the language all the way back up to the tragic register, for now he is addressing his food-bag (with the diminutive θυλάκιον) which has shown itself to be an ἀνόνητον ἄγαλμα by being empty. In Euripides, ἄγαλμα was figurative: children adorn a household, and a wretched child makes a poor adornment for any family. Aristophanes both concretizes and mundanizes the image, so that the ἄγαλμα is no longer a person but a thing, and at that a mere sack for carrying food, which, though it is worn like a physical adornment, is hardly a tragic item and hardly a thing someone would ever wear for the sake of beauty or family

143 The scholion to line 314a says that fr. 386 is spoken by Hippolytus, but that cannot be the case if the play treated Theseus’ youth. The scholion to line 312 much more plausibly attributes fr. 385 to the Minotaur’s intended victims, which may also be true of fr. 386 and would be appropriate to Aristophanes’ play with hunger here.
pride. And yet, in spite of the deflation, Aristophanes’ own scene is not entirely humorous. The man and his son are hungry because his only gainful employment is in the courts, and their difficulty is symptomatic of a larger problem affecting society. But they are hungry, and this hungry child might be considered an ἀνόνητον ἁγάλμα, a wretched adornment for his household, on the same grounds as his tragic counterpart. There must be something pathetic in the boy’s empty food-bag and his father’s aporia about where their next meal will come from. Though Aristophanes’ juxtaposition of the tragic situation with the comic shows the latter to be more mundane, it is perhaps just as serious, and this also is brought out formally by their tragic lamentation.

As we continue to move up the scale of Aristophanic-Euripidean intertextuality, we turn next to Peace and the parody of Euripides’ Bellerophon, which lies behind some eighty lines of the comedy (76-155). Though this parody clearly belongs at the third level of intertextuality and the audience would be left in little doubt as to which tragedy is being mocked, it still stands a step below parodies like those of Helen and Andromeda. The tragic model for Peace 76-155 is less immediately identified, and less use is made of direct quotation or even close paraphrase; as far as we can tell, there are only two quotations from Euripides’ tragedy, the first at 76 (= Eur. fr. 306) and the second at 154-5 (= Eur. fr. 307), bracketing the parody. Instead, the source is identified obliquely by references to Trygaeus’ tragic appearance (136) and to lame Euripidean heroes (147-8), and the impact of the parody relies primarily on the stage action, especially the flight on the mechane, rather than adaptation and mockery of the original tragic language.

Hints of Euripides’ Bellerophon are sprinkled throughout the lines leading up to the parody proper. We hear of Trygaeus’ “new madness,” and he cries aloud from backstage,
wondering despairingly what Zeus will do to the Greeks (56-63). At 76-7, the slave, still repeating his master’s words, offers up a rough paraphrase of Euripides fr. 306:

Eur. fr. 306: ἄγ’, ὃ φίλον μοι Πηγάσου ταχὺ πτερόν.144
Come, my dear Pegasus with your swift wings…

Peace 76-7: “ὁ Πηγάσιόν μοι,” φησί, “γενναῖον πτερόν, ὅπως πετήσει μ’ εὐθὺ τοῦ Διὸς λαβών.”
“My little Pegasus, my thoroughbred wings, you must pick me up and fly me straight to Zeus.”

Aristophanes’ language is not especially close to Euripides’, but that we are to imagine Trygaeus in the role of Bellerophon is signaled by his desire to fly “straight up to Zeus” and of course his address to “Pegasus” (repeated at 135-6, where Trygaeus’ scheme is explicitly linked to tragedy). Some in the audience would no doubt recognize this as an allusion to the Euripidean line, while others would simply understand it as a reference to the story of Bellerophon and his flying horse,145 but the specifically tragic parody no doubt becomes plainer when Trygaeus appears mounted on his dung-beetle on the mechane. Trygaeus’ flight from behind the skene, with the hero urging on his beetle in anapaestic dimeters (82-90), visually evokes a similar and no doubt memorable scene from Bellerophon.146 Though the paratragic language continues, the only other sure quotation of Bellerophon is at 154-6:147

Eur. fr. 307: ἵθι, χρυσοχάλιν’, αἵρων πτέρυγας…
Go, my golden-bridled one, lift your wings…

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144 The scholion to line 76 reads Πηγάσου πτερόν; the Suda adds ταχὺ.

145 Kaimio 2000: 59-60 elides the difference between the myth of Bellerophon and Euripides’ particular treatment(s) of it.

146 Olson 1998: 80-1n.: “The stage-mechanics are doubtless borrowed in the first instance from E. Bell.” Anapaestic dimeters were also used in the corresponding tragic scene (fr. 307-8).

147 Olson 1998 characterizes 114-7 as “a loose pastiche of tragic tags and diction;” Euripides’ Aeolus may lie behind this passage and 119. 124-6 is Euripidean, though the balance of evidence seems to tilt in favor of Stheneboea. Allusion to this play points more to the story in general than to specific scenes in Bellerophon. Lines 147-8 connect the scene to the “standard” lame and ragged Euripidean hero.
Peace 154-6: ἀλλ’ ἄγε, Πήγασε, χώρει χαίρων, χρυσοχάλινον πάταγον ψαλίων διακινήσας φαιδροίς ὠσίν.

Now giddyup, Pegasus, and bon voyage; strike up the rattle of curb chains on your golden bit, with ears laid back.

Again, there is not a very close correspondence between comic and tragic passages, except for the word χρυσοχάλινος and the general theme of departure. Aristophanes is most concerned to link Trygaeus’ endeavor to the flight of Bellerophon, which he can do visually rather than linguistically and which also allows him to have a little fun with the operation of the mechane in subsequent lines.

As with his redeployment of Sophocles’ Inachus in Wealth, Aristophanes may be using Bellerophon to lead his audience astray with a false anticipation of the action. Bellerophon wanted to fly to heaven, but instead he was thrown from his mount and injured, thus becoming “a tragedy for Euripides,” as the Ποῖς puts it. If the spectators identify Trygaeus as a second (Euripidean) Bellerophon, then they may suspect that he too will fall or be otherwise punished. That this does not happen after all is Aristophanes’ own dramatic twist as well as emblematic of the difference between the tragic and comic genres: where the hubristic tragic hero falls and suffers pathetically, the comic hero (aided by a suitably comic mount) succeeds on an incredible scale, not only reaching heaven but also winning the help of Hermes and eventually rescuing Peace from her prison for the benefit of all mankind. A fate more opposite than Bellerophon’s can hardly be imagined.

The best known Aristophanic parodies of Euripides go farther than what we have seen for Sophocles in this chapter. At the same time, even these parodies of Euripides involve many of the basic dynamics I have sketched here – collision and juxtaposition, appropriation and
conversion, integration into the comic scene or plot – only more openly and on a larger scale.\textsuperscript{148} Though shorter than some of its fellows in \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, the parody of Euripides’ \textit{Palamedes} (765-84) provides a good example of this more explicit brand of parody. After the Kinsman has been captured, he attempts to send a message to Euripides (who has promised to rescue him) using a device from his \textit{Palamedes}, named outright in line 770. He is unable to find the oarblades that featured in Euripides’ tragedy and must settle for some other tablets, probably votives; in anapaestic song, he describes the difficulty of scrawling a written message on wood before finally scattering the tablets into the “sea” to float off to Euripides. When Euripides has still failed to show himself after the parabasis, the Kinsman concludes that he is ashamed of his “frigid” play and turns to “the new Helen” instead. The parody of \textit{Palamedes} thus openly appropriates a Euripidean scene, and in particular the idea of sending a message via oarblade, makes fun of that scene by placing it in an entirely incongruous setting (the Kinsman’s captivity, with neither oarblades nor sea anywhere nearby), mundanizes it by considering just what it would be like to carve a message on wood, and thereby mocks its tragic potential through deflation. The parody creates humor and tension just before the parabasis, before we can find out whether or not Euripides will respond to the message, and on a broader scale, it introduces the theme that will run through the end of the play: Euripides’ failed attempts to rescue his Kinsman using devices from his own tragedies.

\textsuperscript{148} It seems likely that certain comedies homonymous with Sophoclean tragedies were in fact engaged centrally with those tragedies. In the fifth century, Cantharus wrote a \textit{Tereus} (and Aristophanes’ use of the Sophoclean tragedy demonstrates that it was influential), and Autocrates wrote a \textit{Tympanistae} (perhaps related to the Sophoclean satyr play). In the same period, Diocles and Strattis wrote a comic \textit{Thyestes} (Sophocles had three) and \textit{Troilus} (the only play of that name, besides Sophocles’); these both deal with topics that might be considered adventurous for comedy in their own right, and one of the two surviving fragments of \textit{Troilus} contains a tragic quotation. Aristophanes’ \textit{Cocalus} is also thought to have drawn on the Sophoclean \textit{Camici}. Much more cannot be said about these comedies, but it remains possible at least that they dealt with Sophoclean tragedy as extensively as \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} deals with Euripidean tragedy.
Aristophanes’ uses of *Palamedes* and *Tereus* are very similar. In both cases, the comic poet openly cites a tragic model, which he simultaneously deflates and incorporates into the larger fabric of his plot. The difference between these and the parodies of *Helen* and *Andromeda* (say) is one of quantity rather than quality. Just as several of Aristophanes’ “favorite” Euripidean plays are cited multiple times in his comedies (e.g. the hostage scene of *Telephus*, *Hippolytus* 612, numerous scattered passages of *Alcestis*), so he had favorites within the Sophoclean corpus as well. *Peleus* is quoted more than any other Sophoclean play in a variety of contexts, and Aristophanes shows particular interest in *Inachus* as well. Outside of the Aristophanic corpus, *Antigone* 712–4 seems to have been a popular image and scenes from *Electra*, *Tereus*, and *Inachus* again continued to interest comic playwrights in both the fifth and the fourth centuries. That some parodies of Euripides, like those in *Thesmophoriazusae*, are more extensive than anything we have for Sophocles I have already conceded in the beginning of this chapter. But this disparity in the comic treatment of Sophocles and Euripides at the highest level is exactly what we should expect. Ever since Cratinus, it has been recognized that Aristophanes’ interest in Euripides is extreme and idiosyncratic. We would be ignoring that simple fact if we expected Sophoclean intertextuality – or intertextuality with any other poet – to manifest itself to the same degree. We already knew that Aristophanes treated Euripidean drama at the highest possible level of generic interaction; we already knew that that pair stood at the farthest point on one end of the spectrum. What is remarkable is how much of that spectrum Euripides shares with Sophocles. The fact that we do not have a *Thesmophoriazusae* featuring

149 I set aside the *agon* of *Ar. Ran.*, since it engages with tragedy on different terms than other parodies, discussing and evaluating passages of Aeschylus and Euripides as external literary works rather than working them into the fabric of the comedy; for similar reasons, I set aside the references to Sophocles as a person at *Pax* 698, *Ran.* 82, and Cratinus fr. 17.
Sophoclean tragedy is no reason to disregard the evidence we do have for the comic poets’ use of Sophocles, appearing as it does at several levels of complexity and in many different guises.

This chapter has sought to fill an important gap in modern scholarship regarding the comic poets’ use of Sophoclean drama and thus to establish the importance of Sophocles’ work as a part of the dramatic context of the late fifth century for playwrights other than Euripides. We have seen that the comic poets found Sophoclean drama to be useful for many purposes and that they exploited it in essentially the same ways as Euripidean drama; the comic poets’ interest in paratragedy was no doubt due in part to the creativity and innovation of both tragedians. Moreover, since it is simplistic to reduce paratragedy to mere criticism or correction of the tragedian’s dramatic decisions, we should see comedy’s engagement with Sophocles in terms of productive intertextuality: it is the comic poet’s own inventive wit, when applied to a rich tragic environment, that brought about such diverse and effective paratragedy.
General Conclusion: Sophocles Θεατρικός

This study has surveyed some of the ways in which playwrights of the late fifth century interacted with each other in their plays and has described, if only partially, how drama happened in that period; it has also sought to say something about the style of Sophocles in particular by bringing him into contact with Aeschylus, Euripides, and the comic poets. Our attempt to flesh out the immediate dramatic context of individual plays has provided an opportunity to explore connections that have generally been overlooked and to offer new readings of the plays from that angle. In situating Sophocles firmly within the infinitely creative, constantly evolving world of late-fifth-century drama, we have challenged popular views of Sophocles as isolated, homogeneous, or conservative. Instead, we have seen that he was willing to learn from other poets, keen to find dramatic potential in their ideas, and able to contribute original and interesting work to the pool of dramatic material and thus to inspire further innovation and development.

In each of his late plays, Sophocles reworked other poets’ earlier ideas (as well as his own). As we saw in chapter 2, he noticed the potential in Aeschylus’ conjunction of divine powers in Choephoroi and experimented with the opposite strategy, combining a decidedly un-Aeschylean fragmentation of the divine world with a Sophoclean tendency to keep the gods at a
mysterious distance. The result is a tragedy in which the gods are not only distant but possibly even absent, in which the poet’s “humanism” takes a psychological turn into the motivation behind people’s religious beliefs and their attempts to justify questionable moral behavior. Far from rejecting Aeschylus’ version, Sophocles uses it as impetus to explore new dimensions of the story.

Again, in chapters 3 and 4, we see Sophocles joining Euripides in a conversation about dramatic performance and production or using Euripides’ innovative characterization to build on his own previous treatments of Labdacid myth. *Philoctetes* picks up Euripides’ interest in the roles of poet, actor, and spectator in creating a successful dramatic performance and develops these ideas further, extending them throughout the play and raising new questions (such as the ethical and dramaturgic difficulties that arise from a conflict between an actor’s nature and his role). *Oedipus at Colonus* shows Euripidean influence in the presentation of some of Sophocles’ most famous figures (Oedipus, Antigone, and Polyneices). These figures are not simply extensions of earlier Sophoclean versions nor even representations of what each was like before or after the impact of familial disaster – though they are both of these things. But they also draw significantly on their counterparts in Euripides’ *Phoenissae* and even *Hypsipyle*. Oedipus, for instance, is simultaneously an older, wiser, more bitter version of the hero of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and an amalgamation of two themes in *Phoenissae* (pollution and κράτος). Both poets’ Theban plays belong to the “immediate dramatic context” of *Oedipus at Colonus* insofar as Sophocles’ own previous work on a topic was always immediately relevant for him, while Euripides’ plays were recent and mythically as well as dramaturgically innovative. The characters and themes of *Oedipus at Colonus* do not derive from one group or the other but both at once – and this complexity of poetic interaction was essential to the inspiration and composition of Attic drama.
But putting Sophocles in context means showing not only how he responded to others’ ideas but also the importance of his work for contemporary poets’ conception and composition of their own plays; this side of the coin emerges especially in chapters 3 and 5. Chapter 3 argues that *Philoctetes* both engages Euripides’ self-conscious discussion of dramatic performance in *Helen* and the other “romances,” and makes room for Euripides’ extreme formulation of the same problems in his “most Euripidean” tragedy,¹ *Orestes*. In chapter 5, we see several generations of comic poets experimenting with Sophoclean material in many different ways. Sometimes they create fairly simple humor (whether at the expense of the tragedy or of the comic figure) from the juxtaposition of tragic and comic language, action, or ideas. But they also adapt Sophoclean material more thoroughly for their own purposes, by converting a promising idea into a quintessentially comic one or using Sophoclean assumptions as the basis for an entire comic scene or plot. These comic poets, from Aristophanes to Strattis to Antiphanes, did not consider Sophocles “too tragic” to be mocked; and they did not stop with mockery but found dramatic potential of all kinds in his tragedies and satyr plays. Sophoclean drama gave both tragic and comic poets new material to work with.

While this study has been concerned to relate Sophocles to a variety of dramatic contexts, we have been continually preoccupied with Euripides, who remains for us the most visible and the most controversial tragedian of the late fifth century. By observing Sophocles’ close interactions with Euripides, we have been able to find some (perhaps unexpected) similarities between the two. We have seen Sophocles developing Euripidean material and contributing to his “untragic” experiments (chapter 3); we have seen how even material often considered fundamentally Sophoclean derives in part from Euripidean sources (chapter 4). Where Euripides

¹ Zeitlin 1980: 51.
provokes his audience by giving them dubious characters or unconventional religious views, where Euripides comments self-consciously on his own art and discusses the creation of dramatic meaning, where Euripides reworks a myth and its characters in unexpected ways – we have seen Sophocles doing the same kinds of thing. Sophocles and Euripides continually fed on each other’s innovations, and when two poets spend several decades borrowing each other’s ideas, developing them, and experimenting with them, it is unlikely that they can be entirely dissimilar.

I have posited that what we have seen of Sophocles’ engagement with his dramatic context can be extended in essence to all playwrights of the fifth century. Though many poets produced plays less frequently than Sophocles did, it is likely that anyone with the leisure to write tragedy also attended the festival performances regularly; and even an amateur writer of tragedy would probably be more tuned in to technical innovations and dramatic strategies than his fellow spectators. It is hard to imagine that someone like this could produce a tragic tetralogy (or a duology at the Lenaea) without being influenced by what he saw in the theater every year. Indeed, the statement about “Sophocles the honeybee” in the ancient Life is clearly wrong on one count:

καὶ ἄλλοι μὲν πολλοὶ μεμίμηται τίνα τὸν πρὸ οὕτων ἢ τὸν καθ’ οὕτως, μόνος δὲ Σοφοκλῆς ὡς ἐκάστου τὸ λαμπρὸν ἀπανθίζει· καθ’ ὁ δὲ καὶ μέλιτα ἐλέγετο.

And many others have imitated one of those before them or in their own time, but only Sophocles gleans what was splendid from each; for this reason he was also called “honeybee.”

Sophocles was not the only tragedian to draw on multiple sources at once; we need look no further than the elaborate combination of Aeschylean, Homeric, Euripidean, and Sophoclean material in Orestes. However, the Life does claim that other poets engaged with the poetic tradition (including both older and more recent material) but in a more limited way than

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2 The translation is mine.
Sophocles did, and certainly playwrights who were less active in the theater may have been less aware of recent experiments and innovations. Nevertheless, it is likely that their basic approach was fundamentally similar to Sophocles': they drew on recent plays and famous plays (especially those which had recently been reproduced); they experimented with the ideas they found in those plays; and their new creations became available for still other poets to build on or rework. While Sophocles was more successful in competition and remains more visible to us now, his methods and experiences were, I think, essentially representative.

For a long time it was usual to equate the end of the fifth century with the end of classical drama. Even if we no longer blame Socrates or Euripides for the “death of tragedy,” we still often feel that tragedy was becoming less serious and less recognizable as tragedy in this period. This is in part because we read Euripidean tragedy with an awareness that it eventually gave rise to New Comedy. But critics have been uncomfortable about more than the unexpected light-heartedness of tragedy in the late fifth century. The variety and degree of dramatic experimentation has seemed to reflect a desperation to find original twists in an old genre, and the chaotic innovation of a play like Orestes becomes a sort of last gasp before the tragedians finally run out of ideas. The deaths of Sophocles and Euripides, whose work was produced as “old” drama at the City Dionysia only about twenty years later, marks the moment when the golden age of Greek tragedy became only a memory.

But quite aside from the fact that tragedy (and comedy) continued to be produced in the fourth century and was actually enormously popular,\(^3\) I would argue that the rampant dramatic innovation and experimentation at the end of the fifth century reveals that drama was not only alive but thriving. The poets were intensely and creatively involved in their theater; and even if

\(^3\) The continuing popularity of tragedy in the fourth century is attested by Arist. Poet., the inscriptional records of dramatic and histrionic competitions (esp. IG ii\(^2\) 2318-2325), and the rise of celebrity actors.
Aristotle’s contention that tragedy drew on fewer and fewer myths is correct,⁴ the pool of material could not help but grow as poets continued to produce plays with new ideas and new techniques. Every innovation, far from being a “last gasp” of any kind, could only offer a basis for further experimentation and development. Literature dies out, it seems to me, when it is abandoned by its authors and audiences, when no one is interested in taking the next step or trying new techniques just to see how they will work. The atmosphere of extreme dramatic interaction ensured that tragedy remained vital and strong through the final decades of the fifth century.

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