Religious Exploration

In Greek Tragedy

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I, Angela Paschini, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

Abstract

My research project focuses on Greek tragedy's specific contribution to fifth-century debate on issues of theodicy and on theological questions concerning the existence and nature of the gods, and their role in human lives. The relationship between the human and the divine as represented and explored in Greek tragedy is discussed with special attention to the problems inherent in the different forms of contact between deities and mankind. The dissertation is structured thematically: each of the three chapters deals with a specific religious theme and focuses on the analysis of a couple of paradigmatic plays.

This project starts by studying one of the closest forms of contact between gods and mortals depicted in Greek tragedy, namely the stories of sexual intercourse between a male deity and a mortal girl (Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Ion*). The second chapter concerns the opposition between human and divine knowledge in Sophocles' *OT* and Euripides' *Bacchae*, whereas the third addresses the topic of divine intervention in human life by analyzing the dramatic portrayal of the gods on stage in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Orestes*. This research aims to show how religious exploration in ancient Greek tragedy is tied up with a number of competing discourses informed by advances in medicine as well as by contemporary philosophical and political questions. Each chapter follows a similar methodology of close reading of the plays connecting the linguistic and thematic analyses of emblematic passages to broader fifth-century theological concerns.

Impact Statement

This research can have an impact in two main areas:

1) Academic study on Greek tragedy: it aims to extend and deepen understanding of the function of Greek tragedy and of its interfaces with the contemporary world, with a specific focus on contemporary religious experience. More specifically, this study approaches the understanding of tragic plays through gathering evidence about their connection to the larger cultural and historical contexts as well as their engagement with contemporary religious anxieties, philosophical inquiry and socio-political concerns such as gender and civic definition. Drawing on the findings of my research, I have prepared some papers which have thus far been delivered orally at conferences and seminars intended for academic audiences: Lyceum Classics Community Seminar (UCL 16 November 2015); Departmental Research Seminar (UCL 18 November 2015); the Postgraduate Workshop 'Euripide. Storia, testi, drammaturgia. Giornata di studi sulla tragedia greca' (University of Padua, 13 September 2016); the Greek Drama V International Conference (University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 5-8 July 2017).

2) Teaching and learning of Ancient Greek Drama at secondary school.
The findings of my research can be used to improve the educational experience of secondary students and to shape their thinking on the classical world and on how drama, arts and society influence each other. It redefines not only knowledge of this topic amongst secondary students, but also the ways in which they learn about Greek tragedy. I have given two presentations of my work targeted at secondary school

students in Italy (Liceo classico 'J. Stellini', Udine, 22 March 2016 and 4 April 2018). Participants read and discussed selections from the tragic plays chosen for analysis and were asked to interpret the plays, comparing and contrasting tragic passages with other sources addressing or depicting the same topic (e.g. philosophical texts; Athenian vase-paintings). Such an inductive and interdisciplinary approach facilitates the students' engagement with, and better insight into, ancient Greek drama and of its relevance to fifth-century Athenian life.

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3. Divine Intervention in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' Orestes. An Analysis of How the Physical Presence or Absence of the Gods on Stage Influences Human Agency and Conveys Different Worldviews.

Acknowledgments

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Notes on Texts and Translations

All the Greek passages quoted in this work are taken from the Oxford Classical Texts edition, whereas I have used the Loeb edition for the translations, unless otherwise stated.

Abbreviations for Greek and Latin sources are based on Liddell – Scott – Jones' *Greek – English Lexicon*.

0. Introduction

> 'A crucial frontier defined by tragedy is that between man and god. […] The Athenian citizen distinguished himself by his earthly habitat and mortality from the immortals. But the citizen also emphatically distinguished himself, as an inhabitant of a πόλις, from the primitive peoples and wild beasts without thought or language who lived in the untamed countryside beyond the boundaries of civilisation and the laws of the civic community.'[1]

This study discusses the relationship between gods and mortals as represented and explored in Greek tragedy, with special attention to the role played by the gods in human lives and to the problems inherent in the different forms of contact between deities and mankind. Fifth-century Athenian citizens defined themselves in opposition to both gods and beasts. Greek drama not only illustrates the various aspects of the hierarchical god – man – beast relationship that underlies the world order but also provides a space for addressing problems that may affect such a relationship. In fact, in tragic plays the world order is often overthrown or confused, and chaos threatens to erupt.[2]

A first kind of disruption affecting the tragic world concerns the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals. A terrifying confusion of boundaries between human and divine springs from excessive intimacy between a male god and a mortal heroine: as a result of such an excessively close contact with a deity, the mortal girl is often forced to regress to a bestial state, as is exemplified by Io's transformation into a heifer (Aeschylus' *Suppliants* – Euripides' *Ion*). The tragic hero also dangerously crosses boundaries when either commits bestial crimes like

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[1] Hall (1997), 96-7.
[2] Segal (1986a), 58.

matricide or incest (e.g. the myths of Orestes and Oedipus respectively) or strives for some form of godlike power and honour (e.g. Agamemnon's walking on the carpet in Aeschyus' *Agamemnon*; the godlike honours paid to Oedipus in Sophocles' *OT*; Orestes' bold resolution to take the position usually occupied by the *deus ex machina* in Euripides' *Orestes*).[3]

Chaos also threatens to intrude on human lives at the limits of human intellectual abiities, that is, when an extraordinary event challenges human cognitive capacity, and man finds no other way to make sense of that event but by resorting to explanations from religious and mythical thought. To give an example, catastrophic natural phenomena such as a plague (Sophocles' *OT*) or an earthquake (Euripides' *Bacchae*) can be interpreted on stage as evidence that the relationship between the gods and mortals has been perturbed in some way. Both plays investigate factors which may have caused a disruption in the communication between deities and men, and raise the question of how humans can gain true insight into divine will.

Finally, in Geertz' words, 'another challenge to the proposition that life is comprehensible and that humans can, by taking thought, orient themselves effectively within it' is a sort of 'intractable ethical paradox'.[4] The most glaring example of an 'ethical paradox' found in Greek tragedy is the myth of Orestes and, especially, the paradoxical representation of the matricide both as a pious and righteous act carried out following Apollo's command and as an impious and reprehensible crime which

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[3] Such crimes are defined as 'bestial' because they do not conform to the laws that separate man from beast, thus blurring the boundary between the human and the animal.
[4] Geertz (1973), 100.

must be punished by the Erinyes, the goddesses of vengeance and retribution (Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Orestes*).

The focus of this research is tragedy's exploration of these manifestations of a disturbance in the relation between man and god. More particularly, this study is concerned with the representation on stage of human reactions to the inscrutability of the divine will and to the gods' apparently unjust and uncaring behaviour towards their mortal protégés. In studying the ways in which Greek tragedy explores these religious issues, I shall not treat tragic plays as sources of evidence for either specific rituals or the actual beliefs of the playwrights and the Athenians. On the contrary, I am primarily concerned with the representation of the divine in the texts of the tragic plays and with the role played by the gods in the characters' lives. However, I shall not study tragic plays as mere aesthetic objects; I will rather delve into the ways in which the narrative and the dramatic techniques of the plays are used to complicate the discussion of theological problems which represented real-life concerns for fifth-century audiences.

As I shall now discuss in further detail, current research has seen a diversification of perspectives in the study of Greek tragedy and of its relationship with the larger cultural and religious contexts in which it was produced: there have been literary readings of the plays as well as studies which have put emphasis either on the political aspect of Greek drama or on its religious nature and ritual origins. This work is an attempt to adopt a broader and unifying perspective on the study of Greek tragedy with a specific focus on religious exploration. This study is not limited to the study of religion as represented in the plays; it rather explores the ways in which, in dramatic terms, tragedians engage with the religious concerns of

the audience on a broader level. My aim is to study how religious exploration in Greek tragedy interweaves with socio-political matters and philosophical questions, such as epistemological and ethical ones, and how these different themes are defined through this interplay. Thanks to this broader focus, the study of the divine in Greek drama will not be studied in isolation from the larger cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts. Furthermore, such a wider perspective will help us gain a better understanding of how, and to what extent, Greek tragedy problematizes the god-man relationship and, more specifically, divine behaviour, as I shall now show by an example drawn from Euripides' *Ion.*

Scholars are divided as to the meaning and function of Ion's refusal to believe that he is of divine origin and that Apollo mated with a mortal girl (E. *Ion.* 338-341). Some critics interpret Ion's scepticism as a dramatic representation of the fifth-century rationalizing tendency and argue that in the play the myth of Apollo's union with Creusa is brought into question by means of reference to avant-garde philosophical speculation against divine anthropomorphism.[5] Others, on the other hand, point out that the narrative itself rebuts Ion's scepticism. For Athena eventually confirms Apollo's paternity: it follows that Ion's expressions of disbelief must not have been taken too seriously by the audience given that they are downplayed by the ignorance afflicting the hero.[6] My argument, by contrast, is that these interpretations are both potentially misleading since they analyse the *Ion* from a narrow perspective. The first view fails to take into account the significance of the characters' critical statements within

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[5] For the influence of contemporary philosophical investigation on Euripidean drama, see Conacher (1998); Ostwald (1999), 33-49; Allan (1999-2000), 145-56; Dillon (2004), 47-73; Susanetti (2007), 230; Whitmarsh (2014), 109-126.
[6] Cf. Burnett (1962); Lefkowitz (1987) and (1989); Mastronarde (2002) and (2010).

their dramatic contexts: are these expressions of doubt, complaint and criticism eventually resolved in the development of the plot, thanks to the way in which the events take place and end? The second interpretation, on the other hand, by focusing only on dramaturgical considerations that are internal to the play, runs the risk of giving a view of tragedy's treatment of religious problems that is too reassuring.

In the first chapter of this study I will argue that in the *Ion* the myth of Apollo's sexual intercourse with a mortal girl is called into question not simply as a risible story in the wake of contemporary philosophical speculation against divine anthropomorphism but rather on a different and deeper level: by analysing how in the play religious exploration is strictly interwoven with broader socio-political inquiry, I will show that Apollo's behaviour is criticized on several grounds, that is, not only for its negative impact on the heroine's life but also because it negatively affects the order and harmony of the city of Athens. For instance, I will argue that Apollo's behaviour undermines gender balance by inflicting a serious blow upon the authority of Xuthus, the head of the royal household, and it jeopardizes the Athenians' claim to hegemony over other Greek cities by weakening the prestige of the royal dynasty of Athens.[7] This is an example of how the nature and scope of tragedy's religious problematization can be more deeply understood by analysing the extent to which religious problems (such as the danger of an excessively close contact with the deity) are interrelated with, and intensified by, social and political matters of public concern.

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[7] See *infra*, Chap. 1.

My research does not adopt a single approach to the study of religious exploration in Greek plays but rather an eclectic one, drawing from a range of different perspectives. I will now briefly look at the main approaches that have been taken by scholars to the study of Greek tragedy, and will outline what aspects of each of them I find most useful and effective.

In scholarly literature on Greek drama there has always been broadly speaking a tension between formalism and historical anthropology: to quote Goldhill, 'the studies that grow out of anthropologically based perceptions of theatre as social drama are often self-consciously and explicitly opposed to the traditions of criticism which place tragedy narrowly within the category "literature".'[8]

The focus of formalist critics is the text: in studying any work of literature, attention must be paid to the analysis of its themes and interpretative issues, and such analysis is to be carried out through close reading of the texts.[9] In scholarly literature concerning Greek tragedy, those scholars who have drawn inspiration from the formalistic approach have therefore focused their studies on tone, verbal patterns and imagery with the aim of understanding the relation between the poetic language and the intellectual armature of tragic plays.[10]

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[8] Goldhill (1997), 336.

[9] Formalist critics exclude the author's intention, the reader's response and the historical and cultural background from their analysis. Many similarities have been detected between the methodological principles of formalist literary criticism in the Classics and those of New Criticism, an Anglo-American movement in literary theory which developed in the US in the mid-twentieth century: see Goldhill (1997), 324-331. On New Criticism, see Eagleton (1983), 17-53; Culler (1988), 3-40.

[10] Two examples are Knox (1957), *Oedipus at Thebes. Sophocles' Tragic Hero and His Time*, New Haven- London, and Goheen (1951), *The Imagery of Sophocles'* Antigone. *A Study of Poetic Language and Structure*, Princeton. Cf. also Rutherford (2001).

One of the criticisms levelled against the formalistic approach is that it tends to isolate the play in a cultural vacuum, as if it were completely divorced from its historical and cultural context. For instance, the critics who interpret Greek tragedy from an aestheticized perspective argue that the worldviews of the play, as well as the gods, are merely literary constructs which have little relationship with the real life of fifth-century Athens.[11] Parker summarizes the main arguments of this theory, which he intends to rebut, in the following words:

> 'The worldview of a literary work is a function of genre and plot. […] The heroes of tragedy, it can be argued, do not suffer in order to illustrate theological truths; the plays acquire a theology […] in order to illustrate the sufferings of the heroes. If Phaedra is to be wretched, Aphrodite must be cruel. Again, theology has a narratological function, as a way of conferring shape and cohesion (or a planned incoherence) on a sequence of events.'[12]

Parker calls into question this view by maintaining that, even though tragedies are not religious treatises, beliefs inevitably impose certain constraints upon plots:

> 'If the misery of Phaedra, caused by the cruelty of Aphrodite, is to be credible, must not the cruelty of Aphrodite fall within the range of forms of divine behaviour acknowledged by Greek belief?'[13]

According to the scholar, not only does the religion of theatre bear some relation with the practiced religion of fifth-century Athens, but Greek tragedy also operates as a framework for exploration and explanation of contemporary religious experience.[14]

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[11] One of these critics is Mikalson (1991).
[12] Parker (1997), 145.
[13] Parker (1997), 145.
[14] Parker (1997), 159.

The aim of this research is precisely to investigate how and to what extent Greek tragedy, in the wake of recent advances in intellectual life, participates in contemporary debates over the following religious issues: the proper relationship between gods and mortals, the nature of the divine, the interpretation of an event as the work of a divine agency as opposed to a more rational explanation according to natural laws.

What my method has in common with formalism is the methodology of close reading, as well as the attention paid to language. On the other hand, my method is also informed by Parker's approach to the study of Greek tragedy. My decision to analyse individual words in especially meaningful passages is not motivated by a philological interest for its own sake. On the contrary, word analysis aims not only to show how language can illuminate the meaning and significance of specific passages and, more broadly, of themes in the play as a whole but also to examine the mutual interaction between tragedy and its historical and cultural contexts.

For instance, in the *OT* language reveals a fundamental opposition between human intelligence and divine knowledge: it is especially telling that Oedipus' method of investigation is described by means of terms belonging to fifth-century philosophical discussion and scientific procedure, such as ζητεῖν ('to investigate'), σκοπεῖν ('to examine'), ἱστορεῖν ('to inquire into something'), τεκμαίρεσθαι ('to form a judgment from evidence'), εὑρίσκειν ('to find after search').[15] Subtle wordplays, however, call into question the effectiveness of Oedipus' rational research

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[15] Knox (1957); Di Benedetto (1983).

method by undermining the value of these scientific terms through the process of reversal. To give just one example, a kind of reversal consists in the transformation of an active verb into the passive voice: Oedipus makes great efforts to discover (εὑρίσκω at vv. 68, 120, 440-1) the murderer of Laius but, in the end, it is him who is discovered 'as base and of base birth' (εὑρίσκομαι at 1397, 1421). The agent directing the search for truth becomes both the object of the investigation and the thing discovered.[16] Wordplays of this kind might be an indication of the play's pessimistic view of the contemporary procedure of scientific discovery and, more generally, of the role played by human knowledge in the lives of mortals.[17]

A similar accusation of radical disjunction between the tragic world and that of everyday life has characterized another approach to the study of Greek tragedy, that is, the study of the stagecraft of tragic plays. The first investigations into the performance of Greek drama were carried out in the 1960s, and Taplin's *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (1977) was pivotal in this new approach to the study of Greek tragedy, which tried to supersede previous text-centred scholarship.[18] Soon after the publication of Taplin's landmark work, a number of studies on specific stagecraft issues were published,[19] and in the following decade a theoretical debate developed among critics over the function of performance criticism. Goldhill (1986) and Wiles (1987), while acknowledging the value of Taplin's analyses, criticized the scholar's idea of the immutability of the meaning of a text,

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[16] Knox (1957), 128-31; Di Benedetto (1983), 90-1. Knox highlights that the verb εὑρίσκω is typical of scientific discovery: for examples from Thucydides, Gorgias, Hippocrates, see *ivi*, 128-9.
[17] Further examples of how linguistic analysis can enhance our understanding of the plays will be given in the following chapters.
[18] Taplin developed his analysis of the stagecraft of Greek tragedy in Taplin (1978). For a brief overview of the history of performance criticism, see Harrison – Lliapis (2013), 2-6.
[19] Hamilton (1978), Mastronarde (1979), Bain (1981), Halleran (1985).

which is to be communicated to the audience, as well as his lack of interest in the specific context in which the plays were performed.[20]

This study, and especially the last chapter which is devoted to stagecraft techniques in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and in Euripides' *Orestes*, to some extent draws inspiration from Taplin's method, in that my investigation is not merely concerned with how the plays were stage-managed but rather with the meanings that could be conveyed by the staging of them: my aim is to delve into the ways in which stage events, like the characters' movements and their shifting spatial relationships, are shaped into meaningful patterns and complicate the discussion of various topics, such as the religious theme of the opposition between human and divine agency.[21] For instance, in analysing Euripides' *Orestes*, I will discuss the meaning of Orestes' appearance on the roof of the royal palace, a place generally reserved for the deities, and I will stress the significance of his decision to act as the *deus ex machina* of his own plot.

On the other hand, my approach is in line with works that reject the concept of the immutability of the text and, on the contrary, stress the role played by the spectators in the process of creating meaning and interpreting what they see on stage.[22] An eloquent example of the audience's role in the production of meaning is that given by Goldhill in his analysis of the palace-miracle scene in the *Bacchae*: the scholar argues that, if the *skene*-building does not really fall down as a result of the earthquake caused by Dionysus or if there is only a minor alteration of the building's façade, the disjunction between what the chorus proclaims (*Ba.*

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[20] Wiles and Goldhill do not agree on all issues: Wiles (1987) attacks Goldhill (1986) for putting the theatrical text before performance. See Goldhill's response (1989).
[21] Taplin (1978), 4.
[22] Goldhill (1986), 265-86; Goldhill (1989), 180 ff; Wiles (1987), 139 ff.

582-603) and what the spectators see on stage must have given rise to doubts of interpretation. Is the chorus merely deluded by Dionysus' power? Or is the audience expected to imagine by dramatic convention the event not represented on stage as taking place? To quote Goldhill, 'the audience come directly under the power of Dionysus' theatrical illusion, as they experience in some way what has not really occurred. The scene thus becomes an expression of the linkage of Dionysiac ecstasy and the theatrical experience, in which the audience is directly implicated in the functioning of the text.'[23] In the first chapter of this study I will discuss an additional example which shows how the narrative of the *Ion* directly engages the audience in assessing scepticism surrounding the story of Creusa's intimate contact with Apollo by making the spectators reflect on the specificity of any theatrical performance, that is, the tension between the real and the mythical.[24]

Secondly, I agree with Goldhill's argument that, to deepen our understanding of dramatic performance, due consideration must be given not only to the system of dramatic conventions, expectations defined by specific dramatic techniques, and transgressions of dramatic codes, but also to the historical and cultural background of each play. To put it in the scholar's words, 'on the one hand, the language and transmission of a play cannot be understood in a (cultural, historical, intellectual) vacuum […]. On the other hand, any attempt to read an ancient play must broach the difficult questions of the (philological) constitution, comprehension and semantics of the text'.[25] That Greek drama is to be interpreted as the product of a particular culture is an important methodological principle

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[23] Goldhill (1986), 280.
[24] See *infra*, Chap.1.
[25] Goldhill (1997), 327-8.

derived from historical anthropology, the aim of which is to study Athenian drama in its cultural context, as a performance which took place in the Panhellenic festival of the Great Dionysia.

Within this line of research, however, scholars disagree on whether the Great Dionysia is to be primarily interpreted as a religious or civic festival. On the one hand, critics like Sourvinou – Inwood stress the cultic context of the festival and argue that 'Greek tragedy was perceived by fifth-century audiences not as a theatrical performance, simply framed by ritual, but as a ritual performance.'[26] According to a different line of interpretation, the tragic plays were deeply engaged with religious exploration but were not themselves forms of ritual.[27] The former view, the so-called ritualistic approach, asserts that the discourse of religious exploration articulated in the tragic plays was part of the religious discourse of the πόλις; as a consequence, the playwrights' treatment of religious issues was likely to be subject to religious constraints set by the πόλις.[28] The latter, by contrast, holds that 'the constraints imposed on the playwrights were far more obviously political rather than religious' given

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[26] Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 1. For Sourvinou-Inwood's discussion of the theory of the ritual origin of Greek tragedy, see *ivi*, 67-196; contrast Scullion (2005). This theory traces its origins back to the studies carried out by the school of Cambridge Ritualists in the early 20th century: cf. Harrison (1912) and Murray (1912). The belief of this school that tragedy must be studied as ritual has influenced the works of Girard (1977) and Burkert (1983). For a ritualistic approach to Greek tragedy, see also Seaford (1994).

[27] Scullion (2002), 134-135. Tragedy can represent, manipulate, and distort ritual patterns but is not itself ritual. For instance, the murder of Agamemnon is represented as a corrupted sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: Zeitlin (1965). To give an additional example, Vernant's study of the *OT* argues that the scapegoat ritual underlies the narrative of the Oedipus myth: Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 113- 140. For further examples of perverted rituals in Greek tragedy, see Segal (1986a), 50 ff.

[28] Sourvinou – Inwood (2000) and (2003), 1 ff.

that the Great Dionysia was first and foremost a civic festival funded by the πόλις of Athens.[29]

One of the criticisms levelled at the ritualistic approach is that it provides a limited perspective on the topic of religious exploration in Greek plays.[30] By depicting Greek tragedy as re-enacting, or providing the aetiology for, rituals, this mode of research runs the risk of focusing on religious practices, while neglecting the issue of religious beliefs and concerns.[31] Owing to the idea that theatrical performances are deeply embedded in the religious framework of the πόλις, it may also incur the danger of ruling out the possibility that the religious discourse developed in Greek tragedy contains not only serious thinking about the gods but also a calling into question of divine nature and divine agency.[32] By contrast, my main interest in this research is to discuss the searching questions about religious problems posed by the narrative of the tragic plays and to delve into the meaning and significance of the elements of criticism in the tragic representation of the divine realm.

Greek drama enjoyed some degree of autonomy in addressing theological problems for two reasons.[33] The first lies in a central feature of ancient Greek religion:[34] since Greek religion had no dogma and no sacred

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[29] Scullion (2002), 134-135.

[30] Scullion (2002); Allan (2004); Versnel (2011); Kindt (2012); Whitmarsh (2014).

[31] Versnel (2011); Kindt (2012).

[32] Kearns (1995), 525-6; Scullion (2002), 134-5; Whitmarsh (2014), 115.

[33] Pelling (1997), 213-235.

[34] Two major syntheses of archaic and classical Greek religion are Burkert (1985) and Bruit-Zaidman - Schmitt-Pantel (1992). Their research, however, has been criticized 'for drawing on information from a wide range of sources derived from a wide array of *poleis* and for presenting this information in the form of a unified, coherent and authoritative account of archaic and classical Greek religion as such': Kindt (2012), 4. To avoid the danger of oversimplification inherent in the holistic approach to Greek religion, other critics have preferred to adopt a local perspective focusing on the religious system of

texts, religious issues were subject to negotiation. In fact, the authority of religious practices and beliefs was partly based on oral oracular responses and traditions, and partly on written texts expounding ancient myths.[35] Both served as source materials from which the Greeks could learn about the histories of the gods, their main attributes and prerogatives, and the origins and purposes of specific festivals.[36] Such a lack of a canon of scripture left ample room for religious exploration: a large variety of sources, such as lyric and epic poetry, philosophical works, drama and historiography, thus concerned themselves with problems of theodicy and theological questions concerning the existence and nature of the gods, and their role in human lives.[37]

The second reason why the tragic genre was particularly suitable for investigating sacred matters is that, as opposed to other genres, it had some license by virtue of one of its main characteristics, namely its double perspective.[38] Thanks to the setting of the plays in the heroic age, the tragic world was perceived by the fifth-century Athenians as both distant from their present reality and part of it.[39] This double perspective, which is a

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archaic and classical Athens: Parker (1996), (2007), Humphreys (2004), Deacy (2007), and Hedrick (2007). My research has an even more specific focus since its analysis is limited to Athenian religion in the fifth century, as represented and explored in Greek tragedy.

[35] Parker (2011), 13-6.

[36] Hesiod's *Theogony*, for instance, can be considered as an attempt to give a systematic representation of the divine pantheon. The works of both Homer and Hesiod could have played a role in transmitting a common set of myths among the ancient Greeks.

[37] Two introductory guides to Greek religion which focus on literary sources are Gould (1985) and Kearns (1995). Cf. also Harrison (2007). On the religion of Greek tragedy, see Yunis (1988); Mikalson (1991); Sourvinou-Inwood (1997), (2003); Parker (1997), (1999), (2007); Scullion (2005); Calame (2015).

[38] See the analysis of the differences between tragedy and oratory ('censored speech') in Parker (1997), 105-25.

[39] The world of fifth-century Athens was shaped by events which occurred in the heroic age (e.g. Theseus' synoecism): Sourvinou – Inwood (2003), 15-6. The double perspective also works in 'non-heroic age settings': for instance, in Aeschylus' *Persai* the world of the play is 'geographically distanced' (*ivi*). Cf. Zeitlin (1990).

typical feature of almost all extant plays,[40] allowed the playwrights to address problematic issues that were relevant to the audience at a safer distance, as if they belonged to a remote past and distant places. Furthermore, even though there undoubtedly were religious constraints placed upon the way a story could be represented on stage, the malleability of myths enabled Greek tragedians to modify them in order to stress those elements most fit for purpose in the treatment of sacred matters.[41]

To give an example, in Euripides' *Andromache* Neoptolemus goes to Delphi to ask Apollo's forgiveness for his previously arrogant attitude towards the god but he is killed by some men while he is praying to the deity. Both Orestes and Apollo are accomplices to this sacrilegious crime committed in the course of a ritual: the messenger explicitly blames the prophetic god for taking part in the murder and for holding a grudge against a worshipper who had repented his wrongdoing (1161-5). It has been claimed that this expression of criticism uttered by the herald has no bearing on Apollo for two reasons.[42] First of all, the audience is likely to have considered Neoptolemus' chastisement as inevitable given that he is traditionally depicted as the hybristic perpetrator of the impious murder of Priam at Zeus' altar.[43] What is more, Apollo's connivance in a violent act polluting a sacred place is probably less serious than it may at first appear due to the fact that Apollo's shrine has already been desecrated by the very presence of a person guilty of impiety, namely Neoptolemus. However, a weakness of both arguments is that they fail to acknowledge

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[40] A notable exception is Phrynichos' *Capture of Miletos.*

[41] Allan (2000), 4-39. For the notion of the malleability of myth, see also Gould (1985), 219-21; Bremmer (1987), 1-7.

[42] Sourvinou – Inwood (2003), 332-8.

[43] *Il. Pers.* 62. 9-10 D.; *Il. Parv.* Fr. 17 D; E. *Tr.* 16-7; *Hec.* 23-4.

that the slaying of Priam is never mentioned by any character nor is it ascribed to Neoptolemus; on the contrary, Achilles' son is portrayed positively throughout the play.[44] In the eyes of the spectators, this change in Neoptolemus' characterization must have been especially striking precisely because they are likely to have initially associated him with an abhorrent crime. Euripides' reshaping of the Neoptolemus' myth highlights the problematic aspects of Apollo's vindictiveness and, as a consequence, raises theological issues about divine behaviour.[45]

What makes the study of religious issues in tragic plays particularly interesting is precisely the fact that, thanks to the relative freedom enjoyed by the playwrights, Greek tragedy can provide valuable insight into the overlap and synergy between unofficial and official modes of religious expression.[46] Greek tragedy thus gives us a perspective on fifth-century Athenian religion which differs from the one given by the influential model of πόλις religion formulated by Sourvinou-Inwood.[47] According to this model, religion was embedded in every aspect of culture: [48] there was

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[44] Allan (2000), who discusses the general improvement of the character of Neoptolemus in detail, calls Neoptolemus' transformation 'the most radical reworking of myth' (25).

[45] Allan (2000), 35.

[46] To give an example, Euripides' *Bacchae* has been interpreted as a play representing the fifth-century Athenians' reaction to a new form of religiosity, which distances itself from the established religious practices and presents some traits resembling the henotheistic features typical of the new cults of the 4th century: Versnel (1990); Allan (2004); Versnel (2011).

[47] Sourvinou-Inwood (1990), 295-322. The influential model of πόλις religion elaborated by Sourvinou-Inwood is already present *in nuce* in the works of Burkert (1985), Bruit-Zaidman - Schmitt-Pantel (1992), and the so-called Paris school: Vernant (1980), Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988). These scholars tried to 'explain the principles and practices of ancient Greek religion by referring to an internally coherent cultural system, conceived as the archaic and classical Greek πόλις': Kindt (2012), 3. For a discussion of the indebtedness of the theory of πόλις religion to the structuralist conception of religion as a universal system of signs [Gould (1985), influenced by Geertz (1963], see Kindt (2012), 13-15.

[48] See Sourvinou-Inwood (1990), (2000), (2003); Bruit-Zaidman - Schmitt-Pantel (1992), 1ff; Parker (1996), 1-2; (2007), 452; Bremmer (1999), 1-4; Price (1999), 89. For a critical

no separate notion of religion as a distinct sphere of activity or belief.[49] As a consequence, in the absence of a church and priesthood, religious activity was controlled and mediated by the πόλις. Sourvinou-Inwood argues that 'the πόλις was the institutional authority that structured the universe and the divine world in a religious system, articulated a pantheon with certain particular configurations of divine personalities, and established a system of cults, particular rituals and sanctuaries, and a sacred calendar.'[50] One of the limitations with the model of πόλις religion, however, is precisely the fact that it fails to take into consideration all those competing religious discourses which run parallel to the religious activity sanctioned and mediated by the πόλις: due to the emphasis put on the official aspects of religion, it runs the risk of giving an incorrect description of Greek religion as a coherent and consistent system.[51]

A further disadvantage of the ritualistic approach is its lack of sense of proportion: owing to its focus on cult, it overlooks the importance of other essential components of the Athenian dramatic festivals, such as the political dimension and the general civic context.[52] My approach is in agreement with the interpretation of Greek tragedy as an experience involving deeply religious meaning. Yet, this study distances itself from the ritualistic approach in that it aims to set tragic plays in a broader

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evaluation of the concept of the embeddedness of Greek religion, see Nongbri (2008), 440-60; Kindt (2009a), (2012); Whitmarsh (2015), 3-12.

[49] For a discussion on the legitimacy of using the terms 'beliefs' and 'believe' in the study of Greek religion, see Feeney (1998), 12-46; Versnel (2011), 539-59; Kindt (2012), 30-1; Harrison (2015), 21-28.

[50] Sourvinou-Inwood (1990), 295-322.

[51] This interpretation of archaic and classical Greek religion has been challenged by several scholars. For instance, Gould (1985) stresses the improvisatory nature of Greek religion, which found no difficulty in accommodating new cults: see also Allan (2004). Veyne (1988) and Versnel (2011), on the other hand, point out inconsistencies within the ancient Greek religious system. See, more generally, Kindt (2012), 20-25.

[52] Scullion (2002), 134-5.

context than the cultic one and to view fifth-century Athenian drama as a part not only of a religious festival but also of a socio-political institution.[53]

Scholars who hold that the Great Dionysia was first and foremost a civic festival funded by the πόλις of Athens are divided as to how the festival itself is to be interpreted in terms of the civic ideology of the πόλις.[54]

In an important study devoted to the social, political and ideological context of Athenian drama, the collection of essays *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?*, two contributors have laid emphasis on the patriotic elements of the festival.[55] On the one hand, Longo, in the essay entitled 'The Theater of the *Polis'*, claims that the aim of the Dionysian contests was to consolidate social identity.[56] On the other hand, Winkler's paper 'The Ephebes' Song: *Tragoidia* and *Polis*' puts emphasis on the didactic function of tragedy: the plays, thus conceived, invite the spectators to meditate on the topics of proper and improper civic conduct.[57] According to both scholars, the Great Dionysia was a medium of propaganda to celebrate the power and values of democratic Athens and to strengthen cohesion among the citizens. By contrast, in another essay anthologized in

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[53] Euben (1986), 22-3.

[54] I follow the definition of 'ideology' given by Gellrich (2011), 40: 'a system of ideas or mental habits that both determine and coexist with social practices.'

[55] Winkler – Zeitlin (1990). This view is challenged by Griffin (1998), 39-61 and Rhodes (2003), 104-19. Both scholars maintain that the political aspect of tragic plays did not consist in either promoting democratic values or making specific references to recent historical events; Greek tragedy rather addressed broader socio-political issues (such as the right to asylum and burial, and the consequences of war) which were not specific to the political reality of a democratic city. Cf. also the collection of essays edited by Carter (2011), the aim of which is to stress Greek tragedy's 'political relevance to the classical Greek πόλις in general' (*ivi*, 10), not specifically to fifth-century democratic Athens.

[56] Longo (1990), 12-19.

[57] Winkler (1990a), 20-62. For a discussion of the didactic function of Greek drama, see also Croally (2005), 55-70.

the same volume, Goldhill's 'The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology',
Greek tragedy is interpreted not simply as a didactic medium but also as a
questioning one: the critic specifies that 'rather than simply reflecting the
cultural values of a fifth-century audience, […] tragedy seems deliberately
to make difficult the assumption of the values of the civic discourse'.[58]

A similar view is held by Vernant and by the French tradition of
structuralist anthropology: drama does not authenticate the values and the
institutions of society but rather reveals subsurface conflicts and inherent
tensions underlying power and gender relations in the πόλις.[59]
Structuralism approaches the mental and social context of Greek drama as
a system of binary oppositions and argues that the function of mythic
thought is precisely to mediate contradictions in human lives. On the one
hand, tragedy expresses the anxieties of its audience by calling into
question human and divine justice and by subverting the normative codes
of the social order; on the other hand, it eventually reaffirms the social
order by showing the dangers of impiety, of violence, and of the crossing
of boundaries. As Euben puts it nicely, 'the tragedians validated the city's
institutions *and* called them into question; they reaffirmed its structure of
order *and* pushed the mind beyond that order to face the chaos those
structures had exorcised.'[60]

Insights derived from structuralist anthropology, such as the notion
that gender differences can be explained by binary oppositions
(male/female, active/passive, public/domestic, and so on), have influenced
gender studies and especially those works analysing the conceptual

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[58] Goldhill (1990b), 124. Griffin (1998), *contra.* Cf. also Goldhill (2000) and Seaford (2000).
[59] Vernant (1980), (1991); Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988); Segal (1982a), 221-34 and
(1986a), 43-75.
[60] Euben (1986), 29.

structures which underlie the tragic and mythical representation of women and its relation to the socio-political context of fifth-century Athens.[61] In the course of this research I will point out how in tragic narratives (e.g. A. *Supp., Eu*; E. *Ion; Or.*) gender issues are closely connected with political issues, such as the discourse of citizenship and the need to preserve both the city's autochthony and the household's perpetuation through legitimate male heirs. The tragic world order is often represented as being jeopardized by women's subversive behaviour and by their refusal to submit to male power and male sexuality: Greek tragedy subverts rigid gender roles by putting 'feminized males' and 'masculinized women' on stage.[62] According to a widely held hypothesis, however, the aim of such inversion of gender roles is not so much to challenge the dominant androcentric ideology as to validate it by showing the negative impact of the threat of women's power on the social order.[63]

This hypothesis concerning gender role reversals in tragic plays may be conceived as part of a broader view according to which Greek tragedy's distortion of any kind of familiar patterns of order (whether they be social, linguistic, political, sexual, spatial, and so on) ultimately serves the purpose of reaffirming the socio-political, civic, and ritual order of the city by showing dangers resulting from the derangement and inversion of the normative codes.[64] This view is based on the premise that playwrights and audiences shared the same conceptual filters through which tragedies were written and made sense of, and that these filters were in turn shaped

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[61] Foley (1981); Loraux (1986) and (1993); Zeitlin (1996); Zelenak (1998).

[62] For a study of ancient Greek sexuality, see Halperin – Winkler – Zeitlin (1990); Winkler (1990b); Bowlby (2007).

[63] According to Zeitlin (1996), in the plays women play the role of the 'radical other', a category that helps men define and reassert their masculine identity. cf. also Mossman (2005).

[64] Cf. Segal (1986a), 47 ff.

by the contemporary socio-political reality and by the cultural assumptions framing it.[65] A weakness with this view, however, is that it tends to posit the context as an objective entity which is chronologically and logically prior to the production and performance of the plays: Greek drama is thus interpreted as reflecting the cultural and historical background in which it was produced 'even, paradoxically, when it seems to deflect it.'[66]

Other scholars, by contrast, maintain that Greek drama cannot be conceived as simply reflecting and validating the social order, albeit by means of a paradoxical reversal of it. On the contrary, attention must be drawn to the fact that Greek drama, thanks to its polyphonic form, gives voice to marginal groups (like women, foreigners, and slaves): the resistance of these marginal voices to the dominant cultural discourse thus opens up fissures in the dominant system. In Gellrich's words, if we ignore these fissures, we suppress 'the capacity of literature to operate in ways that cast doubt on the self-consistency of ordinary assumptions about personal roles and identities.'[67]

To give an example, the *Oresteia* puts on stage an androgynous queen who defies the male-dominated hierarchy by breaching the marriage bond and by trying to usurp kingly power but, in the end, the law of the father is founded anew and the rule of the male over the female

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[65] Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988); cf. Sourvinou- Inwood (2005), 293-304.

[66] Gellrich (2011), 41. The scholar is critical of the contributions collected in the anthology *Nothing to Do With Dionysus*: cf. the preface to Winkler – Zeitlin (1990), 4: 'We will consider how individual plays or groups of dramas directly or indirectly pertained to the concerns of the body politic, which were reflected or deflected in the complex conventions of the stage.'

[67] Gellrich (2011), 49. Cf. Hall (1997).

is re-confirmed.[68] However, as I will show in the last chapter of this study, the apparently harmonious resolution of the Atreid saga leaves the audience with a set of uncomfortable questions regarding the effectiveness of human and divine justice, and the opposed ways in which female and male moral agency are judged on stage: the troublesome question of why a female act of vengeance upon a man should be judged differently from a similar act of revenge carried out by the male upon a female may be one of the factors contributing to the human jurors' indecisiveness.[69] By giving voice to marginal groups that in real life were not allowed either to express their opinion in public or to take political action, the multi-vocal form of Greek tragedy goes beyond the cultural assumptions and the socio-historical reality of its own production.[70]

That Greek drama does not simply reflect contemporary reality and ideology but rather transcends them is a methodological principle derived from New Historicism, a form of literary theory that criticizes an earlier positivist historicism for treating the text as a mere mirror of its context.[71] A strength of this approach is that it warns against the fallacy of interpreting the context as a normative given: the context is rather 'a text that itself requires interpretation.'[72] According to this interpretation, Greek

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[68] Zeitlin (1996), 87-119; Foley (2001), 201-234.
[69] I will discuss gender issues especially in the first chapter (when I analyse Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Ion*), and in the last one, which is devoted to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Orestes.*
[70] Hall (1997), 125.
[71] The chief exponent of New Historicism is Greenblatt: cf. his introduction to Greenblatt S. (1982), *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the English Renaissance,* 3-7 (*Genre* 15).
[72] Gellrich (2011), 45.

drama has the potential for influencing its cultural context rather than being merely influenced by it.[73]

In studying the relation between Greek tragedy and its background, my research distances itself from the historicist effort to detect references to specific historical events in the plays; my interest rather lies in investigating the extent to which Greek tragedy is part of, and contributes to, the intellectual and socio-political developments of the fifth century. In this sense, my study is informed by insights derived from New Historicism, which describes the relation between a text and its context as a two-way process of interaction and negotiation. An important point worth stressing when trying to understand the function of Greek tragedy is precisely that Greek drama forces the mind to reach beyond the familiar social, ritual, and mental structures. In the course of this research I will show that the ways of thinking about the gods found in a text do not merely map onto the audiences' real-life religious experience; on the contrary, texts can have a creative and moulding force.[74]

In the first chapter, for instance, I will analyse how Greek tragedy, as opposed to earlier sources, plays down the laudatory aspects of the sexual encounters between gods and mortals and puts emphasis on their dangerous potential by showing their negative impact on the socio-political order of the city and on the preservation of the bloodline. The

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[73] Examples of how the methodological principles of New Historicism has been applied to the study of Greek literature, and especially of Greek tragedy, can be found in Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 29-48, who interprets Greek drama as the turning point between heroic ideals on the one hand, and legal and political modes of thought on the other hand; Foley (2011), 131-50; Goff (2011), 1-37; Gellrich (2011), 38-58; Hall (1997), 93-126. See also Feeney (1998), esp. 142 and (2004), 18-20, who discusses the ways in which Roman literature and Roman religion interact with each other.
[74] Feeney (*ibid.*); Pelling (1997), 213-235.

narrative of the plays thus challenges an earlier, celebratory view of a heroine's intimate relationship with a deity by addressing the concerns of their audiences in matters not specifically related to religion. Similarly, in the second chapter I will argue that the problem of the opposition between human and divine knowledge is bound up with a discourse on the changes that can and do occur at the level of cultural codes shaping people's beliefs and their ways of making sense of the world. By putting on stage characters, like Oedipus and Pentheus, who do not initially interpret diseases and natural catastrophes according to the commonly held cultural codes (that is, as manifestations of divine anger) but rather view these phenomena as the products of unseen natural forces operating in the world and inside the body, Sophocles' *OT* and Euripides' *Bacchae* encourage the audience to think of alternative frameworks of interpretation in the wake of recent medical speculation and historical investigation.[75] Finally, the third chapter shows how the problems of human responsibility and of Orestes' madness are framed in terms of a new concept of the human subject developed thanks to the advent of law and to advances in contemporary medical inquiry, which stress the human agent's capacity to make autonomous decisions, to undertake actions, and to control those unseen forces operating in the cavity inside the body.[76]

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The present study is divided into three thematic units, each of which focuses on a different religious topic and investigates the ways in which it is developed in different plays. A couple of tragedies have been

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[75] Lloyd (1979), 15-29; Vegetti (1983); Cambiano (1991); Thomas (2000), 28 ff; Holmes (2010).

[76] Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 62-3; Holmes (2010), 275 ff.

chosen for closer analysis in each chapter but, when necessary, references have been made to additional plays. The first and last chapters discuss the topic under investigation by comparing the ways in which either the same myth (e.g. the myth of the Atreidae in Chap. 3) or the same type of stories (e.g. the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals in Chap. 1) are treated by Aeschylus and Euripides. In the first chapter I will deepen the investigation into the tragedians' reworking of myth by looking at the representation of sexual encounters between male gods and mortal girls in pre-tragic poetry as well. Differences and similarities in the treatment of the same myth by different playwrights and in different kinds of sources will be analysed with the aim of pointing out that the scope of religious problematization differs according to what elements of the story are either stressed or overlooked. In the second chapter, by contrast, I will study how the same religious theme (that is, the opposition between human and divine knowledge) is developed differently by Sophocles and Euripides through the telling of various myths.

This project starts by studying one of the closest forms of contact between gods and mortals depicted in Greek tragedy, namely the stories of sexual intercourse between a male deity and a mortal girl. By comparing how these myths are treated in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Ion* to the way in which they are represented in pre-tragic poetry, the first chapter aims to evaluate the validity of the thesis put forward by Parker that in the hands of tragedians such myths partly lost their dignifying character and became problems of theology.[77] I will first examine the negative consequences of a liaison with a god on the lives of the mortals directly involved in the sexual relationship: we will see that it

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[77] Parker (2007), 143-4.

causes endless suffering and, in the case of Io, it even results in the transformation and degradation of the heroine into a bestial state. I will then deepen the investigation into this topic by showing that in both plays the religious problematization of these myths is closely connected with, and partly intensified by, the discussion of several socio-political issues which were of great concern to ancient Greek society, such as gender roles, legal matters concerning citizenship and legitimacy, and problems relating to the city's relationship with foreign countries and its preservation of its own identity and autochthony.

The second chapter concerns the opposition between human and divine knowledge: by comparing Sophocles' *OT* with Euripides' *Bacchae*, it discusses both the extent to which men can trust their intellect when transferring knowledge into action and the question of whether it would be more advisable to rely on the insight into reality given by the gods either directly (*Bacchae*) or through prophecies (*OT*).

I will argue that the aim of both plays is neither to celebrate human intellect nor to show that it is always defective in comparison to divinely inspired knowledge. The *OT* and the *Bacchae* rather articulate a discourse on the key role played by emotions in both human inquiry and in that special mode of knowing which is granted as a privilege to very few humans through divine revelation. My argument is that the two tragedies show that human intelligence and the revealed knowledge of the seers can have either positive or negative results depending on the purpose for which one has recourse to either mode of knowing. In addition to this, I will demonstrate that emotions affect cognition indirectly through influencing a person's ability to focus attention and can also serve more

directly as an unconscious instrument for guiding or stopping one's search for information.

This chapter comprises two parts: the first section analyses the process of the human search for knowledge, whereas the second raises religious questions regarding the extent to which men can gain insight into divine will and divine nature. In each of the two parts I will further develop the discussion of the opposition between human and divine knowledge by investigating how in both plays epistemological issues are interwoven with political discourse (Section 2.1) and with some of the most recent enquiries carried out in contemporary medical speculation and historical investigation (Section 2.2).

Finally, the third chapter addresses the topic of divine intervention in human life through the analysis of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Orestes*: more specifically, it investigates how the different forms of divine intervention represented in the two plays (the gods' physical presence and active involvement on stage in the Aeschylean tragedy as opposed to the remarkable absence of the deities in the Euripidean one) are closely linked to the gradual evolution of the concepts of human agency and responsibility from a religious conception of human actions as preordained by supernatural forces to a new view, introduced thanks to the advent of law, which lays emphasis on the intention of the human agent.

The last chapter is mainly concerned with the non-verbal elements of a theatrical representation (such as the actors' movements as indicated by implicit stage directions, exits, entrances) and aims to demonstrate that these theatrical techniques are not merely structural devices but rather

have the important function of conveying different views on human nature, society, politics and religion. I will argue that, by putting Olympian and chthonic deities on stage for most of the play, Aeschylus in the *Eumenides* frames the problem of the matricide as a cosmic affair; by contrast, in the *Orestes* the Atreid saga is seemingly reduced to a purely human matter. I will point out how the remarkable absence of the gods for almost the whole Euripidean play allows the playwright to introduce innovative frameworks for interpreting Orestes' violent actions. Finally, I will discuss the extent to which the analysis of different forms of divine intervention in the *Eumenides* and in the *Orestes* can shed some light on the socio-political issues raised by both playwrights.

This study does not claim to be comprehensive, but merely illustrative of Greek tragedy's intermingling of religious exploration with contemporary socio-political themes, philosophical investigation and medical inquiry. As far as the criteria for selecting the plays for closer investigation are concerned, I have chosen those tragedies that I believe will best stimulate the discussion prompted by the question which my investigation raises: to what extent is the discussion of theological problems complicated, problematized and pushed to its extreme by means of Greek tragedy's direct engagement with other not specifically religious issues which were of relevance to fifth-century audiences?

In the first chapter Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Ion* have been selected as the object of analysis because both problematize the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals by showing how in the tragic world an excessively close contact with a deity may create the same threats to gender balance, to the socio-political order, to the purity of an autochthonous city, and to the preservation of bloodlines as the ones to

which the playwrights' contemporary society felt to be particularly vulnerable. Similarly, in the second chapter I have chosen the *Bacchae* by Euripides and the *OT* by Sophocles for closer analysis because, out of the total tragic output constituted by the surviving plays, these best illustrate the interrelation between epistemological inquiry, religious queries and political matters, and help frame the problem of the opposition between human and divine knowledge in an interesting way. Finally, to address the issue of human agency and of the role played by supernatural factors in the human decision-making process, in the third chapter I have opted for Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Orestes* for a twofold reason. On the one hand, both plays specifically deal with Orestes' vicissitudes after the matricide and thus make it easier to compare how differently the matricide is judged on stage in Aeschylus' and Euripides' treatments of the same myth. On the other hand, the two tragedians set the story of Orestes in different worlds and, by virtue of their divergent choice of setting, present diverse views on the process which led the hero to commit matricide and on the consequences of Orestes' violent actions. In fact, the *Eumenides* is set in a world still characterized by the primitive system of private vendetta, which at the end of the play is replaced by the law courts established through a divinely sanctioned procedure. By contrast, the *Orestes* is set in a context where legal procedures to judge criminal acts are already in effect and are depicted as entirely human. These plays can thus constitute a rich source of information about the ways in which Greek tragedy represents the changes in the conceptions of human agency and responsibility brought about by the advent of law. Still, all of this does not

take away that the research could be expanded to include the analysis of other extant tragedies addressing the topics chosen for analysis.[78]

The common thread of this work is to show how religious exploration in ancient Greek tragedy is tied up with a number of competing discourses informed by advances in contemporary political, philosophical and medical discourse. The analysis of such an interrelation of themes can give us insight into the process whereby, on the one hand, the ancient Greeks made sense of the external world through religion and, on the other hand, their religious perspectives were shaped by discourses on matters not specifically related to religion. It also enhances our understanding of the extent to which Greek tragedy, by capturing underlying anxieties in contemporary society and by grasping the most recent tendencies in intellectual thought, informed the context of its production, here understood as the expectations and cultural assumptions of its audiences. Greek tragedy pushes the mind to think beyond the familiar structures and the boundaries of the audience's contemporary reality and, in doing so, paves the way for changes in worldviews, including the concepts of human and divine agency, the different forms of contact and communication between gods and mortals, and the nature of the gap between the human and the divine.

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[78] To give a couple of examples, the analysis of Euripides' *Heracles* and Sophocles' *Trachiniae* could fruitfully deepen the study of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals (Chap.1) and of the opposition between human and divine knowledge (Chap. 2) respectively. Similarly, an investigation into Sophocles' *Ajax* could enhance our understanding of the tragic representation of divine intervention in human lives (Chap.3).

1.   The Problematization of the Myths of Sexual Intercourse
between Gods and Mortals in Greek Tragedy

1.0 Introduction

The gods play a major role in Greek plays: either they appear on stage as characters or their will is revealed through portents and oracles. They intervene in human lives, and their actions influence the course of events. The closest contact between gods and mortals is represented by the myths regarding sexual intercourse between them. As Parker argues, 'such myths of sexual contact between man and god were by origin myths of a kind of grace, an ennobling contact between the perishable and the divine. The tragedians transformed them […], and they became in their hands living and breathing problems of theology.'[1]

In what sense did they become 'problems of theology'? What are the elements of criticism in the depiction of these myths and of the consequences of such unions on human lives? By addressing such questions, this chapter aims to discuss to what extent, and on what grounds, the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals are problematized in Greek tragedy.

The chapter falls into five main sections. The first (1.1) examines Athenian attitudes towards men's and women's engagement in extramarital sexual activity. In exploring how these crimes were treated in Athenian law I shall point out the fundamental differences between

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[1] Parker (2007), 143-4.

contemporary and ancient Greek perspectives on rape and adultery. In this regard, particular attention will be paid to the notion of female consent, which seems to have played no role in the Athenian regulation of sexual offences. After exploring the issue of extramarital sex in the human sphere, I will go on to investigate attitudes towards the myths of divine rape/seduction in Greek tragedy and earlier sources (1.2). In the third and fourth sections I shall further discuss the problematization of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals in Greek tragedy by looking more closely at two plays, namely Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (1.3) and Euripides' *Ion* (1.4). Differences and similarities in the representation of such myths in Greek drama versus earlier sources will be highlighted and discussed throughout Sections 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 with the aim of assessing the extent to which Greek tragedy distances itself from pre-tragic poetry in calling into question the gods' sexual encounters with mortal girls.[2] Finally, the concluding section of the chapter (1.5) will give some final thoughts on tragedy's specific contribution to this debate.

To investigate the problematization of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals in Greek tragedy, I have formulated the following set of research questions. First of all, are these sexual encounters represented as forcible or consensual unions? If the intercourse between a god and a girl is depicted as an act of rape, is the violence of the act one of the grounds on which such myths were problematized or not? To put it another way, did the lack of female consent somehow affect the way in which these myths were perceived by the ancient Greeks? This

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[2] For the sake of convenience I include under the term 'pre-tragic poetry' the *Homeric Hymns,* the Hesiodic corpus, the Homeric corpus and lyric poetry in its broadest sense (Gentili, 1995a, 42-68), although the Greek word ποίησις is not attested before the 5th century BC (Ford, 1992, 13-56).

question was triggered by the fact that, according to the commonly held view, in ancient Athenian society there was no distinction between consensual and non-consensual intercourse. The aim of the first section on Athenian legislation is precisely to show that this thesis has been influenced by the Athenian law of adultery and rape and that, at least as far as legal and social sanctions against female rape victims/adulterers are concerned, the ancient Greeks did not consider female consent as a matter of no importance. We can thus hypothesise that on stage a victim of divine rape might have drawn greater sympathy from the audience.

On the other hand, if the sexual union was consensual are there any other grounds on which these myths were problematized? What are the consequences of such sexual transgression not only on the heroine's life but also on the community as a whole? The grounds on which a god's union with a mortal girl is called into question in Greek tragedy are not necessarily similar to the legal reasons why an extra-marital sexual union is punished in human society given that human laws do not usually apply to divine actions. However, we shall see that the *Ion* intensifies the critique of Apollo's behaviour precisely by means of references to specific Athenian laws, which either limit divine actions or are broken by the god.

1.1 Attitudes Towards Human Rape and Seduction

The question of what constitutes adultery and rape has developed throughout history. In order to understand what the ancient Greeks thought about rapists and seducers, it is necessary accurately to determine differences and similarities between the standard contemporary and ancient Greek meaning of both concepts.

Whereas the Greek notion of 'adultery' (μοιχεία) substantially corresponds to the contemporary one,[3] the ancient concept of 'rape' is far more nebulous and difficult to define. In contemporary definitions of sexual violence the most important criterion is the lack of consent of either party,[4] while in ancient Greek society both seduction and sexual assault were felt as being serious offences not so much against the unwilling woman as against her husband or her male guardian (κύριος) since such sexual acts were believed to damage a citizen's honour and to threaten his bloodline.[5] It may thus be argued that female consent was not an important factor in the Athenian regulation of sexual offences. In ancient Greek language there is not even a single and specific term for 'rape'. The Greeks used either the word βιασμός (lit. 'violence')[6] or ὕβρις (lit. 'wanton violence/ outrage'),[7] although its meaning was not limited to forced sex. At other times they pointed to the violent nature of the sexual act simply by adding the word βία ('by force') to neutral terms expressing sexual activity.[8] Nevertheless, as Sommerstein puts it nicely, 'the absence of a lexeme does not automatically imply the absence of the conceptual/semantic distinction it would have marked'.[9]

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[3] The only difference is that the contemporary concept of 'adultery' refers to any sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, one or both of whom are married to other people, whereas the ancient Greek notion of μοιχεία is broader because it encompasses any sexual union between a man (either married or unmarried) with a woman in someone else's charge (either her husband or her κύριος): Foxhall (1998), 132; Cohen (1991a), 98-109, *contra*. For a rebuttal of Cohen's thesis, see Cantarella (1991), Foxhall (1991), Omitowoju (1997). Cf. also Scafuro (1990), 134.

[4] Rape is defined as 'sexual intercourse initiated by a person against another person without valid consent': Smith (2004), 169–170.

[5] Lys. 1. 4, 17, 25.

[6] See, for instance, Men. *Epit*. 236, Satyr. *Vit. Eur*. fr. 39 vii 8.

[7] See, for instance, Pi. *P*. 2. 28, Lys. 1. 2.

[8] Cf. E. *Ion.* 10-11: Scafuro (1990), 128. αἰσχύνω (Lys. 1. 32; Paus. 1. 21. 4) and ἀτιμάζω (E. *Hipp*. 885-6) are also used with reference to an act of sexual violence: Harris (1990), 373.

[9] Sommerstein (2006), 245, n. 6.

The thesis that in ancient Greece there was no distinction between consensual and non-consensual intercourse has been heavily influenced by Athenian law on rape and adultery.

That female consent was not taken into consideration to determine the penalties of sex offenders has been put forward as evidence that the ancient Greeks did not distinguish between rape and seduction. However, there has been much debate as to whether these crimes were actually treated similarly by Athenian law or whether adultery was considered a more heinous crime than forcible sex. The following subsection (1.1.a.) retraces the main lines of this debate with the aim of investigating the role played by female consent in determining the penalties for both male rapists and seducers. I will then discuss the extent to which the lack of female consent both reduced the negative consequences suffered by women in the aftermath of assault and affected the reputation of both the perpetrators and the victims (1.1.b.).

<u>1.1.a.</u>

Before the 90s it was widely agreed that for the ancient Athenians rape was a less heinous crime than adultery on the basis of a passage of Lysias' speech *On the Murder of Eratosthenes* (1. 32), in which Euphiletos argues that 'the lawgiver considered that those who use force deserve a less penalty than those who use persuasion; for the former are hated by the persons forced, while the latter corrupt thereby their victims' souls, thus making the wives of others more closely attached to themselves than

to their husbands, […] and causing uncertainty as to whose the children really were'.[10]

In 1990, however, the validity of this shred of evidence was challenged by Harris, who argued that the reliability of this source is compromised by Euphiletos' intent to defend himself against a charge of murder.[11] He thus presents adultery as a far more outrageous crime than rape so as to convince the jury that his killing of Eratosthenes is an act of justifiable homicide and therefore not punishable. In order to emphasize the seriousness and dangerousness of adultery, he distorts the meaning of the Draconian law by implying that it 'inflicts the death penalty on adulterers, while it only specifies what constitutes lawful homicide'.[12] Furthermore, he does not take into account that this law is not limited to the punishment of adulterers but also applies to rapists.[13] Finally, he omits to mention that the γραφή ὕβρεως decrees capital punishment for rapists too.[14] Therefore, according to Harris, rapists and adulterers suffered much the same consequences and the reasons why rape and adultery were treated similarly by Athenian law are precisely the lack of importance of female consent in the regulation of sexual behaviour and the overriding concern shown for the preservation of bloodlines.[15]

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[10] See, for instance, Dover (1973), 62 and (1974); Cole (1984), 101 ff.

[11] Harris (1990), 370-7.

[12] Harris (1990), 371. Cf. also Cole (1984), 103.

[13] According to the Draconian homicide law (D. 23. 53) the murder of the offender caught in the act is judged 'justifiable homicide', whether he is a rapist or an adulterer. Cf. Cole (1984), 100-1; Harris (1990), 371.

[14] Harris (1990), 373; Ogden (1997), 28, 30. For a discussion of the private and public prosecutions (δίκη βιαίων and γραφή ὕβρεως respectively) which could be brought to try a man charged with the crime of rape, see Cole (1984), 99-100 and Ogden (1997), 25-42; Dover (1978, 36), *contra.*

[15] In support of Harris's thesis see also Brown (1991), 533-4; Lefkowitz (1993), 20-21.

Five years after the publication of Harris' paper, the traditional position was defended by Carey, who maintained that, although Lysias' text is clearly guilty of distortion, 'the extreme position of Euphiletos rests on a real distinction drawn by the Athenians. To argue that a distinction between rape and adultery is exaggerated is not to invalidate the distinction altogether.'[16] For Euphiletos quotes two statutes: the Draconian law on homicide in I. 30, which merely includes the murders of both a rapist and a seducer in the list of justifiable homicides, and another law in I. 28, which states that death is the statutory penalty for adultery. Carey suggests that the latter should be identified with a post-Draconian law specifying legal procedure in cases of μοιχεία. Should this hypothesis be proved true, it would also resolve the problem of the evidence of Plutarch's *Solon.* 23, in which it is clearly stated that an adulterer could be legally killed, whereas a rapist had only to pay a fine.[17] Consequently, although the right to kill a rapist was still legally available under the Draconian law on justifiable homicide, the probability that the Athenians later issued a further law specifically on the penalties for adultery can be advanced as a piece of evidence indicating that μοιχεία was treated as a more serious crime than rape.[18]

To conclude, although it is still far from certain whether post-Draconian legislation treated adultery as a more heinous crime than rape or not, it is probable that μοιχεία was at least considered as a more dangerous sexual offence. In the ancient world it was impossible for a man to know for sure whether a child was his legitimate son or not. This is the

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[16] Carey (1995), 410.

[17] The problem of the evidence of Plu. *Sol*. 23 has been resolved differently by Ogden (1997), 25-42.

[18] Carey (1995), 412.

reason why both adultery and rape were considered as crimes. Nevertheless, rape was thought to have less serious consequences because it was an isolated incident, and therefore pregnancy resulting from the rape could be easily detected. On the other hand, seduction could lead to a long-term adulterous relationship, and thus raise doubts about the legitimacy of any children born to a married couple.[19]

1.1.b.

The Athenian laws on adultery and rape thus aimed at safeguarding the interests and honour of the males by protecting bloodlines.[20] This is the reason why adultery was probably punished more severely. However, it is one thing to acknowledge that μοιχεία was considered a more dangerous offence than rape given that it was believed to put at greater risk a family's bloodline. It is another thing to claim that female consent did not matter at all.

First of all, to argue that female consent was a matter of no importance, it should also be shown that rape victims were treated in the same way as seduced women.[21] It has been argued that both the victim of rape and the female adulterer were regarded as polluted on the basis of two passages from Demosthenes and Menander.[22] Yet whereas pollution is likely to have been the reason why a female adulterer could no longer participate in religious ceremonies,[23] the passage from the *Epitrepontes* by

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[19] Lacey (1968), 115; Harrison (1968-71), i. 32; Cole (1984), 106; Carey (1995), 416.

[20] Ogden (1997), 26; Harris (1997), 483-96.

[21] Sommerstein (2006), 233.

[22] Ogden (1997), 27 ff on the basis of D. 59. 87 (with regard to a female adulterer) and Men. *Epit*. 894-900 (with regard to a raped girl).

[23] See D. 59. 87. Furthermore, according to Plutarch (*Sol.* 23), a female adulterer could even be sold into slavery under Solon. See Lacey (1968), 115; Ogden (1997), 25-42; Seaford (1990), 160.

Menander cannot be advanced as proof that pollution befell rape victims as well. For Charisios defines himself as ἀλιτήριος ('villain', 'offending against sb' 894) when he acknowledges his own past sexual transgression: this adjective merely refers to the wrongness of the act of sexual violence committed and does not imply that the rapist, let alone the victim of rape, is polluted.[24] What is more, the passage of Demosthenes clearly indicates the legal implications affecting the life of a female adulterer, while we have no evidence of similar sanctions against a raped girl.[25] Although a raped girl was also likely to remain unmarried due to her loss of virginity,[26] it is significant that pecuniary compensation was granted to the κύριος of a rape victim only.[27] The purpose of a monetary penalty for rape was probably to compensate the victims for the negative consequences of the crime.[28] In contrast, no compensation was given to the husband/κύριος of a woman who consented to an illicit sexual affair.

Secondly, to understand Athenian attitudes towards rape and adultery fully, social sanctions must also be taken into consideration because they are likely to have been an equally effective non-legal enforcement mechanism. Athenian law only informs us about the legal treatment of extramarital unions, and says nothing about the reputation of sexual offenders in the social sphere. To put it another way, the criteria according to which the seriousness of a criminal act is judged by the law are not necessarily equivalent to those according to which the perpetrator

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[24] Harris (1997), 483-96.

[25] Carey (1995), 414.

[26] The plays by Menander suggest that a raped girl might get married to her aggressor but this solution might be merely comic fantasy. See Cole (1984), 106; Pierce (1997), 163-84.

[27] Plu. *Sol.* 23.

[28] Scafuro (1990), 136. The scholar points out that remuneration would help the κύριος to sustain his unmarried daughter.

and the victim of such an act are judged more or less severely by the social group they belong to. Even if the penalties for rape were probably lighter than those for adultery, this does not mean that the act of raping a girl was socially condoned. In this regard, it is significant that Herodotus depicts rape negatively as the typical behaviour of either barbarian soldiers or the tyrant.[29] In Greek society male lust and violence against free women were considered as negative forms of sexual interaction.[30] As far as the rape victims are concerned, it is undeniable that an extramarital sexual union, whether voluntary or involuntary, was a source of shame for females. Nevertheless, from several sources it seems probable that those women who consented to an extramarital sexual affair had a worse reputation than the victims of sexual violence because they had an active role in the sexual activity.[31]

To conclude, in Athens female consent was not an important factor in determining the penalties for male rapists/adulterers but it did play a role in influencing the legal sanctions against female rape victims/adulterers and the social sanctions against perpetrators and victims of both sexual crimes.

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[29] Hdt. II. 131; III. 80. 5; IV. 3; VIII. 3. See also Clearch. *FHG* 2. 307 = Ath. 541C-E; Plu. *De mul. vir*. 253C-E. For a discussion of the passages and for further references, see Cole (1984), 112 ff; Harrison (1997), 185-208.

[30] Just (1989), 153-93; Zelenak (1998), 29; Wiles (2000), 73; Papadopolou (2011), 52. For a study of the triumph of the ethic of self-regulation during the age of Perikles, see Dover (1973), 69-73; Zeitlin (1986), 129-31; Stewart (1995), 74-90.

[31] Sommerstein (2006), 233-53 has used the evidence of Greek tragedy (E. *Hip*. 715-21, 885-6; *Tro*. 914-1032) to show that a raped girl was judged less harshly than a female adulterer, whose sexual passion was regarded as unforgivable. For a discussion of the reasons why female erotic passion was considered more reproachable and dangerous than male lust, see Cole (1984), 106 ff and Foxhall (1998), 132 ff, esp. 133.

1.2 Attitudes towards divine rape and seduction

The overview of Athenian law on rape and adultery in the previous section has revealed that in ancient Greek society these kinds of sexual transgression were considered legally punishable acts, and that a stigma was attached to both crimes. Whereas any sexual offence carried out by a human is always condemned, the issue becomes more complex whenever gods and goddesses are involved in the sexual act. The myths of sexual contact between gods and mortals are usually stories of erotic pursuits which culminate in sexual intercourse between the fleeing human and the divine pursuer.[32] The heroine's flight can be interpreted either as an indication of her effort to escape sexual assault or merely as the mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between two lovers. Sub-section 1.2.a. addresses the issue of whether the intercourse between a male deity and a mortal woman is to be considered as an act of sexual violence or not. I will then examine whether the (forcible) sexual act was somehow criticized (1.2.b.).

<u>1.2.a.</u>

Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether the gods' sexual acts with mortal women are forcible unions or not. For some scholars sex between gods and girls is to be classified as rape, and the aim of these myths is to assert men's power and control over women.[33] In contrast, for others such unions are pleasant for the mortal girl and, therefore, must be

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[32] The focus of this chapter is limited to the myths of the erotic pursuits of mortal girls by male deities. However, divine amours also comprise tales involving either a male deity pursuing a young boy or a goddess abducting a boy.

[33] Brownmiller (1975); Keuls (1985); Passman (1993); Stewart (1995); Deacy (1997).

labelled as 'acts of abduction/seduction' rather than 'acts of rape'.[34] Due to the ambiguity surrounding the depiction of these myths in ancient Greek pottery, pre-tragic poetry and tragedy, the same scenes or the same passages have sometimes been adduced as evidence to support opposing theses.

To begin with, fifth-century Athenian vase-paintings depicting scenes of divine pursuits typically show a god brandishing a weapon while he pursues a fleeing woman. The sexual act is never depicted but there is sometimes physical contact between the two of them: the god either apprehends the girl or grabs her clothes or touches her shoulder/arm, whereas the woman holds one or both hands towards the chaser and looks backwards.[35] The backward glance has been adduced as a proof that the pursued girl is seduced by the deity rather than raped: since in ancient Greece eyes are believed to be the channel of erotic passion,[36] this interchange of gazes is an indication that the fleeing woman has started feeling attracted to her pursuer.[37] A serious weakness with this argument, however, is that the same stereotyped gestures are also used to depict violent tales, such as the scene representing Orpheus running away from a Thracian woman with an axe.[38] In this case, the eye-contact expresses anxiety only: it is typical of a fleeing person to look back at times in order to check the distance between him/herself and the chaser.

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[34] Burnett (1962); Zeitlin (1986); Lefkowitz (1993); Rabinowitz (1993).

[35] The motif 'grabbing the girl' can have sexual connotations: Sourvinou- Inwood (1987), 137. For a detailed account of this type of painting, see Keuls (1985), Stewart (1995), Kilmer (1997), Kilinski (1998). See also Kaempf – Dimitriadou (1979).

[36] A. R. 3. 253; Theoc. 2. 82-6; Pl. *Phdr.* 251 69ff. Buxton (1992), 84, 112-3; Seaford (1990), 84; Sourvinou-Inwood (1991), 68-9.

[37] Lefkowitz (1993), 22, n. 16.

[38] San Antonio Museum of Art 86. 134. 65. This incongruity has been noted by Kilinski (1998), 42, n. 100.

Similarly, the gesture of outstretched hands is more likely to express fear and protest rather than consent and desire.[39]

Just as in Athenian vase-paintings the gestures performed by either the divine pursuer or the pursued girls are subject to opposite interpretations, so are most of the accounts of sexual encounters between gods and mortals. To give an example, a fragment from Aeschylus' *Kares/Europa* has been advanced as evidence proving that violence is not a characteristic of female mortals' encounters with the gods: Europa boasts of her pregnancy and defines her abduction by Zeus as 'a toilless trick' (κλέμμα ἄμοχθον, 2-3).[40] From this it may be inferred that Zeus abducted the girl without any struggle, meaning that she did not offer any resistance. However, it has been rightly pointed out that this does not prove at all that the intercourse was consensual. It merely means that, thanks to his clever trick, Zeus did not need to pursue the girl, implying that, 'had it not been for the trick, attempted resistance would have ensued.'[41]

As far as the accounts of these myths are concerned, however, a distinction must be made between different kinds of sources. It is true that in both Greek tragedy and pre-tragic poetry the precise nature of the sexual relationship between gods and mortals is usually kept unclear:[42] the

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[39] Keuls (1985), 50; Stewart (1995), 79; Deacy (1997), 43-63.

[40] A. fr. 99 R. Lefkowitz (1993), 24-5.

[41] Deacy (1997), 45. In addition to this, in Europa's discourse about her heroic offspring each eulogistic comment on her children is soon afterwards lessened by a negative element (vv. 10 ff; for a reconstructing hypothesis concerning the lacuna which follows line 10 see Sommerstein, 2008c, 113). Therefore, this fragment can be more properly defined as 'Europa's lament' (as Gantz, 1981, 23 calls it) rather than 'Europa's boasting'.

[42] For a thorough analysis of the ambiguity as between rape and seduction in Euripides' *Alope, Antiope, Melanippe Sapiens, Melanippe Captiva*, see Scafuro (1990), 136-8;

most common verbs used to describe the sexual act are neutral terms such as μείγνυμι,[43] which occurs either alone[44] or in association with the expressions ἐν φιλότητι 'to join in love with somebody'[45] and ἐν ἀγκοίνησι 'to lie in the arms of somebody'.[46] Yet in earlier sources words belonging to the semantic field of violence are almost never used to describe the intercourse between a male deity and a mortal woman. Sometimes stress is laid on the gentleness of the union: Evadne is said to have 'first touched the sweets of Aphrodite beneath Apollo's embrace' (ὑπ᾽ Ἀπόλλωνι γλυκείας πρῶτον ἔψαυσ᾽ Ἀφροδίτας),[47] and Apollo's union with Cyrene is called 'sweet' (ἐπὶ γλυκεραῖς εὐναῖς).[48] Other times either the abduction (ἁρπάζω)[49] or the taming of the girl (δαμάζω)[50] is highlighted, but no violence is involved in such acts: for instance, Zeus is

Sommerstein (2006), 237-40. Note the use of φθείρω in E. *Melanipp. Sap.* fr. 485 N²: the verb 'to undo' can refer to seduction but a violent connotation is often implicit.

[43] For a discussion of the way in which Pindar uses the verb μείγνυμι to describe 'the human commingling with the divine', see Hoey (1965), 235-62. Other verbs with a neutral connotation are εὐνάομαι 'to be bedded with' (Hom. *Il.* 16. 176: Spercheius - Polydora) and παραλέχομαι 'to lie with' (Hom. *Il.* 16. 184: Hermes – Polymele; Hom. *Od.* 11. 242: Poseidon – Tyro).

[44] Hes. fr. 140 M-W: Europa – Zeus; Pi. *O.* 6. 29: Pitane – Poseidon; Pi. *O.* 9. 59: Protogeneia – Zeus; Pi. *P.* 3. 14: Coronis – Apollo; Pi. *P.* 9. 13, 68, 84: Cyrene – Apollo, Alcmene – Zeus. The verb μείγνυμι occurs in tragedy as well, but sometimes the violent nature of the sexual union is subsequently highlighted in a more detailed account of the sexual act (for instance, A. *Pr.* 735-8; E. *Ion.* 338 cf. 437 ff and 859 ff). See also A. *Supp.* 295; E. *Antiope* Fr. 223. 72 Collard-Cropp (2008), VII. cf. Sommerstein (2006), 239.

[45] Hes. *Th.* 940-44: Alcmene – Zeus, Semele – Zeus; Hes. fr. 30 M-W: Tyro – Poseidon; Hes. fr. 141 M-W: Europa – Zeus; Hes. *Sc.* 35: Alcmene – Zeus. For a discussion of the concept of reciprocity inherent in this phrase, see Calame (1992), 30 ff.

[46] Hom. *Od.* 11. 266-8: Alcmene - Zeus; Hes. fr. 43 a: Eurynome – Poseidon.

[47] Pi. *O.* 6. 35. Transl. by D. A. Svarlien.

[48] Pi. *P.* 9. 12.

[49] ἁρπάζω: *Hymn to Aphrodite.* 5. 203-4 (Zeus – Ganymede) and 218 (Dawn – Tithonos); Hom. *Od.* 15. 250-1 (Dawn – Cleitus); Pi. *O.* 1. 40-1 (Poseidon – Pelops); Pi. *O.* 9. 58 (Protogeneia – Zeus); Pi. *P.* 9. 10 (Cyrene – Apollo). ἀναρέπτομαι: Hes. *Th.* 990 (Aphrodite – Phaethon); Hom. *Il.* 20. 234 (Zeus – Ganymede); Pi. *Pae.* VI. 136 (Zeus – Aegina).

[50] Hes. fr. 43 a M-W: Mestra – Poseidon; Hes. *Sc.* 48, 53: Alcmene – Zeus; *Hymn to the Dioscuri.* 17. 2-4: Leda – Zeus; Bacch. 9. 63-4: Asopus' daughters.

said to have lain with Protogeneia 'peacefully' (ἔκαλος, P. O. 9. 58) after carrying her off (ἀναρπάσαις, 58).[51]

In contrast, there are tragic passages in which the heroines more or less explicitly blame the gods for the sexual assault. In Section 1.3 I will give another example of the ambiguity surrounding the depiction of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals in Greek tragedy by analysing the way in which the Danaids insert an implicit reference to the violence suffered by Io in the account of her beatifying union with Zeus (Aeschylus' *Suppliants*). Furthermore, Section 1.4 will discuss Creusa's explicit critique of Apollo's violent behaviour (Euripides' *Ion*). These plays have been chosen for analysis because they are specially indicative of the differences between the ways in which Greek tragedy and earlier sources represent such myths.

Before proceeding in the discussion, it should be noted that the only case in pre-tragic poetry where the abduction is explicitly said to have been carried out by force is the story of Persephone and Hades, which is recounted in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: the god forcibly (βιαζομένης, 68) carries off (ἁρπάξας, 19) the unwilling girl (ἀέκουσαν, 19, 72; ἀεκαζομένην, 30, 432) to the Underworld.[52] It may be argued that Greek tragedy returns to this moment of violence and terror in the hymn (see, for instance, E. *Ion.* 941 ἄκουσα ≈ H. *Hom.* 2. 19, 72 ἀέκουσαν; E. *Ion.* 11, 437 βία ≈ H. *Hom.* 2. 68 βιαζομένης) and intensifies it by stressing the negative consequences of such an illicit liaison on the heroine's life and by making the critique of divine behaviour harsher.

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[51] Gerber (2002), *ad loc.*

[52] *H. Hom.* 2. 19 (ἁρπάξας δ᾽ ἀέκουσαν); 30 (τὴν δ᾽ ἀεκαζομένην ἦγεν); 68 (ὥς τε βιαζομένης); 72 (λαβὼν ἀέκουσαν ἀνάγκῃ); 431-2 (φέρων ὑπὸ γαῖαν ἐν ἅρμασι χρυσείοισι/ πόλλ᾽ ἀεκαζομένην).

In fact, the myth of Persephone as recounted in the *Homeric Hymn* differs in more than one aspect from the tragic accounts of sexual intercourse between gods and mortal girls, which are the focus of my analysis, and moves towards a more positive outcome. One obvious difference is that it concerns two deities and, as we shall now see in further detail, has cosmic implications. Second of all, Persephone's sexual relationship with Hades is not represented as a one-off sexual intercourse but rather as a marital union sanctioned by the will of Zeus: Zeus 'gave' (δῶκεν, 3) Persephone to Hades without the consent of the bride and of her mother Demeter (3-9).[53] As Foley argues, 'the Demeter/Persephone myth became a paradigm in Greek art and literature for human marriage as a rite of initiation; in marriage the bride could be thought to undergo a symbolic death before a symbolic rebirth and reincorporation into a new household as wife and mother'.[54] The period of separation between Demeter and her daughter suggests that the young girl is on the threshold of adulthood and is thus ready to gain some independence from her mother.

It is true that the *Hymn* highlights the problematic side of marriage by representing Persephone's abduction as a deceptive and violent trick foisted on an idealized mother/ daughter relationship and by framing it on the divine level as a conflict of genders.[55] However, it must also be borne in mind that the story ends with a happy outcome: Persephone is allowed to spend more time with her natal family than with her husband and, in

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[53] Foley (1994), 105 categorizes this form of marriage, which is common in the human realm whereas is new to Olympus, as 'a patriarchal and virilocal exogamy, that is, a marriage between members of two different social groups arranged by the father of the bride in which the bride resides with her husband'.

[54] Foley (1994), 104.

[55] Foley (1995), 114-5: Demeter, supported by Hekate and Persephone, challenges the patriarchal politics of Zeus, with whom Helios and Hades side.

compensation for her stay in the Underworld, she receives her own τιμαί separate from those of Demeter in her new role as the queen of the Underworld. The fortunate denouement of the Demeter/Persephone story has also important cosmic implications.[56] Firstly, Persephone, thanks to her connection both to her husband in the realm of the dead and to her mother in the worlds of earth and Olympus, joins the spheres of the κόσμος, which the divine brothers Zeus, Hades and Poseidon have previously divided among themselves. Moreover, Demeter's painful experience of loss and reunion with her daughter results in the foundation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, which foster a new and more beneficent relationship between mortals and the divine powers above and below by giving the initiates hope for a better destiny after death.

Persephone's myth reflects the archetypal scheme of virgin girls's initiation into sexuality and womanhood and is relevant to the study of tragic stories of rape/seduction because it is often used by ancient Greek tragedians to evoke the connection between marriage and death, both conceived as rites of passage from one status to another. The most glaring examples are Euripides' *Helen* and *Alkestis*, which have been called '*anodos* drama' since they are built upon the mythical story pattern of Persephone's descent (*kathodos*) to the reign of her bridegroom and her subsequent ascent (*anodos*) to the upper world.[57] In both plays a tragic heroine, after being carried off either to the Underworld (Alkestis) or to a realm of symbolic death (Helen in deathlike Egypt), is finally rescued. The heroine's experience of death, grief and separation ends with a reduction of past suffering, a symbolic remarriage with her lost husband and a

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[56] Richardson (1974); Foley (1995).
[57] Foley (2001), 301-331.

newly acquired reputation as a chaste and loyal wife. Furthermore, in a parallel fashion with Persephone's myth, both Helen and Alkestis will be worshipped in Spartan cults linked with youthful initiation.[58]

In Section 1.3 I will analyse another tragedy, the *Suppliants* by Aeschylus, which dramatizes the Danaids' resistance to matrimony and motherhood. The play exploits the thematic connection between marriage and death inherent in the archetypal myth of Persephone but subverts the traditional pattern, at least initially. As I will show, the fifty young daughters of Danaus, instead of undergoing a symbolic death before being reborn in a new identity as wives and mothers, invoke the god Hades only because they intend to bring violent deaths on their bridegrooms on their wedding night.

1.2.b.

So far we have seen that, with the notable exceptions of few Greek plays, the accounts of the myths of intimate contact between a male deity and a mortal woman avoid specifying whether the sexual act is consensual or non-consensual. Whether or not the mortal woman eventually acquiesces to sexual interaction, another question arises: was the (forcible) sexual act between gods and mortals somehow criticized? The depiction of the consequences of sexual transgression is the area in which the treatment of such myths in Greek tragedy differs most substantially from that in earlier sources.

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[58] Alkestis will be celebrated at the Carneian festival in Sparta et in Athens (E. *Alc.* 445-54), whereas Helen will preside over the initiation of virgin girls into womanhood (E. *Hel.* 1465-78).

Lefkowitz has argued that a stigma was attached to the women seduced by mortal men only, whereas in Greek mythology divine seduction brings no disgrace.[59] The examples given by the scholar to support her thesis, however, come from epics: both Polymele and Tyro, after being impregnated by Hermes and Poseidon respectively, get married and their new husbands even allow them to bring up the children born of their previous union with the god.[60] In contrast, if we look at the extant Greek plays we will see that only once is it predicted on stage that the female protagonist will find another husband who will care for her previous children as well: at the end of the *Melanippe Desmotis*, Poseidon is likely to have appeared as a *deus ex machina* in order to urge Metapontos to marry Melanippe.[61]

Furthermore, even if in most cases the heroine and her child are eventually rescued by divine intervention, Greek tragedy focuses on the horrible misfortunes and the severe punishment to which an unmarried motherhood leads: the young mother is typically forced to expose her child and sometimes even risks her own life. To give an example, Euripides' *Antiope* dramatizes the heroine's flight, the exposure of her illegitimate children and her persecution by Dirce: all these events have

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[59] Lefkowitz (1993), 22-26.

[60] Polymele gets married to Echecles (Hom. *Il.* 16. 173-92), whereas Tyro to Cretheus (Hom. *Od.* 11. 236-59).

[61] See Collard – Cropp (2008), VII. 567, 588 with references. There are other examples of girls (Creusa, Tyro and Antiope) who get married despite having been raped/seduced, but in all three cases the pregnancy is kept secret from the groom: their marriage cannot thus be advanced as an argument to support the thesis that the sexual affair between a god and a mortal girl does not bring disgrace upon the heroine. As regards the myth of Antiope, we do not know for sure whether Epaphus is aware of her bride's pregnancy or not, but he is more likely to be unaware of it: Antiope gets married with him soon after being impregnated by Zeus and fleeing from her father, and she gives birth to Zethus and Amphion only after her husband is killed by Lycus (Hyg. *Fab.* 8; Apollod. 3. 5. 5). According to other sources, Antiope was either carried off (Paus. 2. 6. 1-4) or violated by Epaphus (Hyg. *Fab.* 7).

been triggered by Antiope's rape by Zeus.[62] In contrast, in the *Odyssey* there is no mention of the problems resulting from the illicit sexual affair: it is only said that Antiope 'boasted (εὔχετ᾽) that she had slept even in the arms of Zeus, and she bore two sons, Amphion and Zethus, who first established the seat of seven-gated Thebe'.[63] Therefore, in earlier sources the focus always lies on the positive consequences of such union,[64] whereas tragic characters usually complain about the repercussions of that event.[65]

On the one hand, tragic heroines typically express their resentment against the gods by blaming them for their lack of interest in the wretched condition of their nearest and dearest.[66] A girl's intercourse with a god results in suffering rather than personal gain and glory. The heroines' feelings of anger and betrayal are usually triggered by their evaluation of a situation where their rights are apparently broken: they feel entitled to special treatment on the ground that they have experienced intimacy with a god. Their inference is in turn based on one of the cornerstones of

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[62] See Collard – Cropp (2008), VII. 170 ff. with references.

[63] Hom. *Od*. 11. 260-3. The verb εὔχομαι is a typically Homeric term. See Chantraine (1970), s.v. As opposed to Greek tragedy, the motif of the exposure of illegitimate children occurs just once in earlier sources (Pi. *O*. 6. 29-58) but is treated in a different way (see Section 1.4).

[64] Hom. *Il*. 16. 185-6; Hom. *Od*. 11. 254-7; Hes. *Th*. 940-44: Hes. *Sc*. 52; Hes. fr. 43 a M-W; Hes. fr. 141 M-W, 1-32; Pi. *O*. 6. 41, 70, 8 ff.; Pi. *O*. 9. 64 ff. cf. also Pi. *P*. 9. 5 ff.

[65] Euripides' *Heracles* is the exception: the Euripidean character of Amphytrion, who boasts of sharing his wife with Zeus (1-3), would fit perfectly into a lyric poem, were it not for the fact that he later harshly blames Zeus for being uncaring and unjust (339-47).

[66] See A. *Supp*. 315, *Pr*. 576-88, 640-86, 735-46, 759 (the myth of Io); A. fr. 47a R (*Diktyoulkoi*: the myth of Danae); S. *Tr*. 1264-9; E. *HF*. 339-47, *Ion*. 10-11, 355-8, 437-8, 445, 505, 939, *Alope* fr. 107 K , *Antiope* fr. 208, 210 K .

ancient Greek religion, namely the belief that there exists a relationship of reciprocity between gods and mortals.[67]

According to the ancient Greeks' religious beliefs, a claim on divine protection can be established especially by three categories of worshippers: the pious devotee, who has earned divine goodwill by means of generous offerings and reverent attitude; the suppliants, who put a deity under an obligation as soon as they take refuge at his/her altar; all mortals that enjoy a preferential relationship with the Olympians due to their ties of kinship or sexual ties with a divinity.[68] Although the principle of reciprocity governs human relations with the gods, the human-divine relationship is always unbalanced: whereas the benefits accorded by the gods in return for sacrifices and votive-offerings are essential to men, the worshippers can give gods only honours.[69] Moreover, deities cannot be literally forced to reciprocate men's favours and sometimes can even reject a prayer or an offering.[70] In any case, the gods are not only eager to be venerated, but they can also be negatively affected by the lack of honours:[71] if a god fails to perform the function expected of him, his own cult is put at risk.[72] This is the reason why several examples of demands with menaces, which are typical of an ancient kind of

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[67] The ancient Greeks used to offer sacrifices, festivities or other votive-offerings to the gods either to thank them (Bremmer 1998, 127-37) or to ask for divine help in return (Dover 1974, 250; Yunis 1988, 38-58; Parker 1998, 105-25).

[68] Yunis (1988); Parker (1998); Bremmer (1998).

[69] Parker (1998), 122-4.

[70] Parker (1998), 116-7.

[71] Dover (1974), 76 gives the example of the story told by Aristophanes in Pl. *Smp.* 190 C: Zeus gives up his intent to destroy the human race because, if he did so, the gods would be deprived of their honours.

[72] From Plutarch (*Nic.* 26. 6; cf. Th. 7. 86. 5) we are informed that a religious crisis spread among Athenian soldiers when Nicias, despite having lived a pious life, died a horrible death at Syracuse. For other examples, see Mikalson (1991), 152 ff.

prayers,[73] are found in Greek tragedy where characters often threaten the Olympians that they will stop offering sacrifices to them unless their demands are met.[74]

Human response to divine indifference is much harsher if the neglected individuals have either mated with a deity or are the offspring of such unions.[75] The gods' apparent betrayal, as well as the pain suffered by the individuals directly involved in the sexual relationship, is one of the grounds on which the myths of sexual affairs between gods and mortals are problematized in Greek tragedy: the characters seem to believe that it would have been preferable not to be granted the privilege of such a close relationship with a god and to conduct, on the contrary, an ordinary life. In the *Prometheus Bound* the Titan asks Io: '[…] By the talking oaks of Dodona you clearly, and in no riddling terms, were saluted as the renowned bride-to-be of Zeus: is any of this pleasing to you?' (832-5). Io never answers this question: she rushes away while complaining about the bite of the gadfly, which keeps tormenting her (876-86). Soon afterwards the Oceanids proclaim their wish that they may never unite 'with any partner from among the heavenly ones' (897).[76]

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[73] Whitman (1951), 122 ff.

[74] See, for instance, A. *A.* 581-2, 821, *Ch.* 255-7, 791-3; S. *El.* 457-8; E. *Tr.* 1059-80. For a discussion of these passages, see Parker (1998), 108. For a discussion of Zeus' problematic betrayal of the city of Troy (προύδωκας, 1061), see Yunis (1988), 65-99; Mikalson (1991), 134-64; Parker (1997), 151, 154.

[75] See A. *Supp.* 315, *Pr.* 576-88, 640-86, 735-46, 759; A. fr. 47a R (*Diktyoulkoi*); S. *Tr.* 1264-9; E. *HF.* 339-47, *Ion.* 10-11, 355-8, 437-8, 445, 505, 939, *Alope* fr. 107 K , *Antiope* fr. 208, 210 K .

[76] Lefkowitz (1993), 29-31 claims that they are not refusing the sexual act per se with a god but are simply rejecting the transition from girlhood to womanhood (30). A weakness with this argument, however, is that they explicitly state at vv. 901-3: 'For me, when marriage is on my own level, it inspires no fear; but I do fear that the eye of a superior god, from which one cannot flee, may look on me with desire'. Therefore, they are unequivocally rejecting the union with a god only. Cf. Simonides, fr. 216 Bergk = schol. *Il.* 9. 556.

Similarly, it is worth noting how differently the divine origin of the offspring born to such unions is judged in Pindar's *Isthmian* 3 and in Euripides' *Ion.* In the Pindaric ode it is represented as a blessing: 'Only the children of the gods are unwounded'.[77] By contrast, in the *Ion* it is rather regarded as cause of ruin. The chorus comments on Creusa's sad story: 'I have never heard it told that children from the gods ever meant for mortals a share of blessing'.[78] The mentality according to which the intercourse between a god and a girl is to be considered as a privilege and as an honour is thus called into question.

On the other hand, this sort of belief, which plays down the celebratory aspect of an intimate relationship with a deity, may merely reflect the limited human perspective, which is confined to the joys and sorrows of one's brief existence. It cannot thus grasp the gods' purposes, which go beyond the finite temporal dimension of human life. In fact, in most cases mother and son are eventually rescued and reunited.[79] Furthermore, from a broader perspective the sexual encounters between male deities and girls 'have lasting consequences for civilization':[80] just as in earlier sources the extraordinary qualities of the heroes born to such unions are usually praised,[81] so in Greek tragedy stress is usually laid on their glorious fate.[82] One could thus argue that in Greek tragedy the sexual unions between gods and mortals are at first represented as being

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[77] Pi. *I*. 3. 19.

[78] E. *Ion.* 506-7. Cf. Owen (1939) and Lee (1997), *ad loc*; Swift (2010), 99 ff.

[79] There are, however, at least two examples that unequivocally show that the god has abandoned at least one of them to their fate: Euripides' *Heracles* (1087, 1129) and *Alope* (the heroine is put to death by her father Cercyon). See Collard-Cropp (2008), VII. 116.

[80] See Lefkowitz (1993), 21.

[81] Hom. *Il*. 16. 185-6; Hom. *Od*. 11. 254-7; Hes. *Th*. 940-44: Hes. *Sc*. 52; Hes. fr. 43 a M-W; Hes. fr. 141 M-W, 1-32; Pi. *O*. 6. 41, 70, 8 ff.; Pi. *O*. 9. 64 ff. cf. also Pi. *P*. 9. 5 ff.

[82] The offspring of divine origin usually become either civilising heroes (e.g. Heracles) or famous eponyms (e.g. Ion) or the ancestors of important royal lineages (e.g. Ephaphus).

dangerous for both the girl and her offspring, but are then shown to be beneficial to the community.

From this hypothesis two conclusions could be drawn. First, the treatments of these myths in Greek tragedy and in earlier sources differ from each other in their focus of interest, which is in turn prompted by their different generic function.[83] They highlight different parts of the same myth while overlooking others: for instance, the victory odes tend to omit all the unpleasant elements of the myth, which are not suitable for their eulogistic purpose.[84] By contrast, the Greek tragedians' interest in representing the hardships overcome by a mortal girl as a result of her intercourse with the god can be interpreted as a characteristic of the tragic genre, which typically focuses on human suffering. Similarly, in chapter 3 I will analyse one of the most significant examples of Greek tragedy's reworking of myth, that is, Aeschylus' and Euripides' treatments of the myth of Orestes as opposed to the Homeric version: I will show that Orestes' revenge against Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra, which in the *Odyssey* is presented as an exemplary model for Telemachus' future vengeance upon the suitors, in the hands of tragedians becomes an intractable ethical paradox. Even though the principles of patriarchal marriage and of the punishment of sexual transgressors is operative in both treatments of the Orestes myth, the difference in genre changes the ethical question raised by the tragic plays: the Homeric laudatory model of heroic vengeance is undermined by the morally problematic nature of matricide and by the ethical issue of Orestes' accountability.

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[83] For a discussion of issues of genre, see Rossi (1971); Herington (1985); Winkler – Zeitlin (1990); Ford (1992); Harvey (1955); Griffin (1998); Rutherford (2001); Rhodes (2003); Scott (2005); Swift (2010), 35-60; Clay (2011); Agócs – Carey – Rawles (2012).
[84] Gentili (1995a), 165-211; Swift (2010), 121-39.

On the other hand, the scope of the critique of the gods' behaviour may be attenuated by pointing out that such expressions of criticism are not to be taken too seriously given that they are usually proffered by the victims of rape/seduction in a moment of great despair. The heroines are still unaware of the positive impact that their intercourse with a god will have on their offspring's fate and, more broadly, on the entire community in the long run. The second conclusion one could draw from this line of argument is that the glorifying elements of a god's union with a mortal girl, which are usually praised in earlier sources, are in the end acknowledged in Greek tragedy as well once a broader rather than an individual perspective is adopted to assess the consequences of the sexual act.

In the following sections, however, I shall argue that such sexual affairs are called into question on both the personal and the socio-political levels: not only do they cause an individual to endure overwhelming adversities but they also become a source of destabilization for the socio-political order of the entire community. This in turn raises important theological issues that cast doubt on the very belief that the sexual encounters between gods and mortals provide any benefit. It follows that it is not merely a matter of choosing a different focus of attention: Greek tragedy explores a set of traditional beliefs and, to a certain extent, challenges them. Therefore, not only the representation but also the implications of these myths in Greek tragedy differ from those in earlier sources. In analysing Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Ion,* I shall show that the religious problematization of a god's union with a mortal girl is intertwined with issues which were of great concern to ancient Greek society, such as gender roles, the theme of autochthony, the

concepts of citizenship and legitimacy, and the problem of the city's relationships with other countries.

1.3 Aeschylus' *Suppliants*

Aeschylus' *Suppliants* is about the Danaids' flight from Egypt to Argos in an attempt to escape a forced marriage to their Egyptian cousins. They seek refuge in Argos because they can claim Argive origins through their descent from the Argive priestess Io. Although it occurred before the action of the play begins, Zeus' rape of Io is of great relevance to the development of the plot of the *Suppliants*, for it is put forward by the Danaids as an argument in defence of their right to reject marriage with the Aigyptiads and to obtain special protection from Zeus, their divine progenitor. What is more, the heroines take advantage of their ancestry to make their request for help against their suitors more pressing. The Argives' decision to protect them in turn brings about negative consequences for the stability of Pelasgus' reign. This section discusses in more detail the impact of this sexual affair both on Io's life and on the gender and the social-political orders of the city of Argos.

As far as Io's story is concerned, there is much debate among scholars as to whether her intercourse with the god is to be interpreted as a rape or as a consensual union. Such uncertainty about the nature of Io's relationship with Zeus is accentuated by the confusion surrounding the depiction of this myth in other literary sources. The violent nature of the union between Zeus and Io seems to emerge from the *compressit* by Hyginus (*Fab*. 145. 3), the ἔφθειρε by Pseudo-Apollodorus (II. 1. 3) and the

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βίαιος εἶναι of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (737).[85] Zeus' portrayal by Nonnus of Panopolis, on the contrary, is positive: in the *Dionysiaca* the sexual act is described as a tender loving caress (ἀκηρασίων ὅτι κόλπων/ Ἰναχίης δαμάλης ἐπαφήσατο θεῖος ἀκοίτης/ χερσὶν ἐρωμανέεσσι III. 285). Finally, the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid uses neutral terms to describe the intercourse: Zeus is simply said to have prevented the girl's escape and have carried off her shame (*tenuitque fugam rapuitque pudorem,* I. 600). Even though Ovid's rapes are not usually sexually explicit, such characteristic 'does not hamper the poem's use of violence'[86] and, as we shall see in a moment, does not attenuate the heroine's suffering resulting from the illicit union.

Turning back to Aeschylus' treatment of Io's myth, the ambiguity of the Greek text and the absence of the protagonist's own voice make it more difficult to determine whether violence was involved in the sexual act.

Some scholars argue that the sexual act is entirely voluntary for both parties:[87] the blame for Io's suffering falls upon Hera alone, whereas Zeus is her rescuer because he put an end to her interminable wandering and gave her the gift of a child as a reward for the pains she endured.[88] Several passages have been put forward in support of this thesis: the Danaids call Zeus "rescuer" (σωτήρ v. 26), praise his balanced and just

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[85] Cf. also A. *Pr.* 759 (ἐκ Διὸς πάσχω κακῶς).

[86] For an analysis of divine rapes in Ovid's metamorphosis, see Richlin (1992), 162 who argues that, 'whereas a rape is normally not explicitly described, the text makes up for this in the metamorphosis. It is as if there were an analogic relationship between rape and mutilation. Indeed, several women are transformed as punishment' (165).

[87] Belfiore (2000), 47-8 and references; Papadopolou (2011), 44-6, *contra.*

[88] A. *Supp.* 162-5, 306-8, 540-2, 556-64.

power,[89] and present the god's union with Io under an almost beatifying light, as a breath and touch with rescuing properties.[90] Yet since Io's myth is told by the Danaids to support their case, it cannot be excluded that their account is either a misinterpretation or a modified version of the story.[91]

A different interpretation maintains that the sexual relationship between Zeus and Io involved some violence, although the god is euphemistically said to 'have made force kindly' (εὐμενῆ βίαν κτίσας, 1067). A lexical study by Whittle of this drama has highlighted the fact that the Danaids, at the very moment in which they exalt Zeus' power by remembering his healing touch of Io, use a word (ῥυσίων, v. 315) which has a violent connotation.[92] Given that all occurrences of the word ῥύσιος and its derivatives refer to a violent seizure, [93] the scholar maintains that this term is more likely to derive from the verb ῥυσιάζω ("plunder, seize as a booty") rather than from the commonly accepted ἐρύω ("release, save"). According to this interpretation, an ironic parallel between Zeus' "making prize" of Io and the enforced marriage dreaded by the Danaids is developed in the play: both Io and her descendants are prey chased by a dreadful predator.[94]

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[89] At v. 90 the chorus sings that Zeus 'never uses violence' (βίαν δ' οὔτιν' ἐξοπλίζει v. 98).

[90] A. *Supp.* 16-7, 44-5, 577. For a discussion of the role of both touch and breath as agents of conception, see Zeitlin (1996), 149-53; Vasunia (2001), 43-7.

[91] Zeitlin (1996), 123-71; Papadopolou (2011).

[92] Whittle (1964), 1-7. In this regard, I think it is worth noting that the same word is used to describe both the Egyptian suitors' intention of grabbing the Danaids as a prize (ῥυσίων ἐφάπτορες, v. 728) and Zeus' behaviour when, by seizing Io, he fathered Epaphus (καὶ Ζεὺς γ'ἐφάπτωρ χειρὶ φιτύει γόνον, v. 313).

[93] A. *Supp.* 412, 424, 610, 728.

[94] Whittle (1964), 2-4. Belfiore (2000), 48, *contra.*

It must also be taken into account that the heroine 'shed tears with sorrowful shame' (δακρύων δ᾽ ἀποστάζει πένθιμον αἰδῶ, 578-9) as soon as Zeus restored her to human form. The text does not specify what has prompted Io's feeling of shame, but it is likely to have been both her recollection of the pain endured in the recent past[95] and Zeus' present display of erotic desire for her.[96] In this respect, it is significant that shame is also experienced in the *Ion* by Creusa, namely by another victim of divine rape. In both cases αἰδώς does not necessarily apply to one's blameworthy actions only, but can also be triggered by something that one has endured.[97] It follows that this emotion cannot be put forward as evidence in support of the thesis that Io consented to the sexual union.

Such ambiguity inherent in the sexual act between the god and the mortal girl may refer to the reticent behaviour that is typical of any virgin on the threshold of womanhood: an amount of symbolic violence is needed to tame the nubile girl and to persuade her to submit to the yoke of marriage.[98] Similarly, Io's transformation into a cow and her subsequent recovery of human shape may symbolize those female puberty rites in which adolescent girls are disguised as wild animals for a period before marriage.[99] For instance, in the Arkteia at Brauron, a female ritual the aim of which is to prepare young Athenian girls for the transition to

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[95] This is supported by the *scholium* on 578-9, which explains Io's shame in this way: ἐννοῦσα ὃ πέπονθεν.

[96] For the double prospective/retrospective aspect of αἰδώς, see Cairns (1993), 187-8. Cf. Johansen – Whittle (1980), on 578-9, *contra.*

[97] Cairns (1993), 307-8. E. *Ion.* 288 (αἰσχύνη), 336 (αἰδούμεθα), 341 (αἰσχύνεται), 367 (αἰσχύνεται). We shall discuss in further detail Creusa's attitude towards the act of sexual violence she has suffered in the following section.

[98] Seaford (1987); Zeitlin (1996), 124; Vasunia (2001), 54-5; Bowlby (2007), 87; Papadopolou (2011), 51-2. For the interpretation of Io's madness as the disease of virgins, see Zeitlin (1996), 154-5; Bachvarova (2013), 423-30. cf. also the Hippocratic treatise *On Diseases of Virgins*. 8. 466-70.

[99] Robson (1997), 70 ff.

womanhood, the participants dress up as bears (ἄρκτοι). Their symbolic disguise identifies them as wild animals who are to be tamed by males through marriage in order to get rid of their savage nature: if they were not put under proper male control, their feminine wildness could threaten the social order. This is the reason why a girl's transformation into an animal in the myths of bestial rape could be interpreted as the means whereby a god punishes a virgin for refusing sexual activity with him.[100]

In the myth of Io, however, it is Hera who turns the heroine into a cow out of jealousy (295-9). Therefore, in this case Io's metamorphosis cannot be interpreted as the punishment for rebelling against male sexual dominance. Her loss of human form is first and foremost a mere act of revenge performed by Zeus' betrayed wife. Additionally, on a broader level, Hera's harsh chastisement of Io represents the transgressive nature of her union with Zeus: not only has the Argive priestess had sex out of wedlock but she has also overstepped the boundaries separating gods and mortals by sleeping with a male deity.[101] Such a sexual transgression must be punished since it has led to the disruption of order: the hierarchical relationship between gods, humans and animals has been jeopardized.[102] As retribution for such a close contact with a deity, the heroine is downgraded by being transformed into a lower life-form: she is

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[100] Robson (1997), 76.

[101] A belief in the female tendency to go out of bounds underlies the myths of a girl's transformation into an animal. Halperin – Winkler – Zeitlin (1990), 135-69; Sourvinou-Inwood (1991), 47-51.

[102] Interestingly, in Plato's *Republic* (9. 571b-d) sex with a god, as well as sex with an animal, is classified among the unnecessary (μὴ ἀναγκαίων) and lawless (παράνομοι) pleasures. See Winkler (1990b), 38-9; Forbes- Irving (1990), 62 ff; Zeitlin (1996), 157.

temporarily removed from the human world and forced to regress to a bestial state.[103]

The physical transformation into an animal is undoubtedly a degrading experience given that it deprives the mortal girl of uniquely human abilities, namely the capacity to speak and express her own emotions: emphasis is put on on Io's loss of speech both in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, where the heroine is said to be unable to control her tongue (γλώσσης ἀκρατής, 884), and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which describes the grief felt by Io/the heifer as soon as she realizes that she cannot communicate with her father Inachus but must limit herself to licking his hands (I. 645-648).[104] Io's dehumanization is made even more painful and demeaning by the fact that the girl is turned into a maddened heifer tormented by a gadfly (A. *Supp.* 306-308). The animal's frenzy reflects the heroine's insanity, which has been caused by the pollution springing from the illicit liaison.[105] As a result of an encounter with a deity, Io temporarily loses her human identity and has to endure toilsome and endless wanderings. The heroine is eventually restored to human form by Zeus and gives birth to glorious offspring. Nevertheless, the very fact that she had to undergo a bestial metamorphosis and hence suffered unbearable pain highlights the dangers inherent in any close contact between a mortal and a deity.

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[103] For an analysis of human metamorphosis as a degrading experience involving regression to bestial or vegetal form (cf. Daphne in Ov. *Met.* I. 525-30), see Thumiger (2014), 2 ff and Richlin (1992), 158-79. Whereas the girl's metamorphosis involves degradation, the same is not true for the gods: Thumiger (2014), 4. Cf. Robson (1997), 75-6.

[104] Cf. Thumiger (2014), 8-11; Richlin (1992), 158-79.

[105] Forbes-Irving (1990), 14-5.

The breaking of boundaries between humans, animals and deities, to which Zeus' union with a mortal girl has led, not only affects the life of Io but also has negative side-effects on the following generations. The *Suppliants* juxtaposes two similar acts of female resistance to male sexual dominance: one involves human characters only, whereas in the other the male protagonist is a god. Although several generations separate the Danaids from their ancestress, a tight link connects their tribulations with Io's vicissitudes: for, the Danaids' actions are shaped by their subjective interpretation of the benefits that Io's special relationship with Zeus has bestowed on her and that, in their opinion, should be shared by her descendants. Both the fifty sisters and their ancestress resist male sexual dominance, thereby posing a threat to the social order. There is, however, a major difference between the two stories.

In Io's case such a danger is accentuated by the fact that Io eventually mates with a god and thus dangerously crosses the boundaries between gods and mortals. As far as the myth of Io is concerned, the negative impact of this sexual transgression seems nevertheless to be confined to the heroine's life. There is no real danger of subverting either the cosmic or the gender hierarchy because Io's status is temporarily downgraded and the heroine eventually resigns herself to the sexual act. Furthermore, as compensation for the suffering she has endured, Zeus rewards her with the gift of a glorious child: childbirth reconciles Io to her socially ascribed role as mother. Therefore, when it comes to a deity's sexual transgression, it seems that the potentially negative consequences of this act are easily kept under control and offset by divine agency. Despite Io's initial resistance to male dominance and her subsequent excessively close contact with a male deity, in the end the power

relationship between gods and humans as well as gender relations are effectively rebalanced.

By contrast, the Danaids stubbornly refuse their suitors and even dare to kill them on their wedding night. What prompts them to such a dreadful act? Apart from the loathing of their suitors, a major role in this event is played by their erroneous belief that they have the right to ask Zeus for special treatment by reason of the bond of their distant kinship. Therefore, the negative impact of Zeus' union with Io turns out to be long-lasting: it is not limited to Io's lifetime but rather reverberates across generations. For, as we shall see a little later, the Danaids defend their right to reject marriage with their cousins precisely on the grounds that they can trace their origins back to Epaphus' miraculous conception by Io and Zeus. Their ancestor's extraordinary birth is thus adduced as evidence in support of their act of rebellion.

Once an exceptional event such as sexual intercourse between a god and a girl is transposed into the human realm and used by a group of virgins to their advantage, the negative effects of that original sexual transgression on both human society and divine order become far more difficult to contain. At the end of the trilogy, balance is once again restored thanks to divine intervention. Yet before things are finally sorted out, the Danaids' firm belief that they enjoy Zeus' favour by virtue of their family tie causes much trouble, which I shall now discuss more fully; in brief, it results in gender conflict, excessive worship of one god at the expense of others, pollution and political crisis.

I shall begin by analysing the reasons for the Danaids' refusal to marry their cousins. Several hypotheses have been advanced, such as

congenital misandry,[106] the condemnation of endogamy in favour of exogamy,[107] the pathological sexual psychology of the protagonists,[108] and the theory of the oracle.[109] The most likely view is the one according to which the Danaids reject their suitors because of their ὕβρις: the Aigyptiads' arrogant behaviour subverts the positive model of male sexuality, represented both by Pelasgus and by Zeus.[110]

On the one hand, Pelasgus himself warns the Egyptian herald that 'he may take the Danaids so long as they consent (ἑκούσας, 940) with friendly heart, if pious words should persuade (πίθοι, 941) them'. This passage is an indication of the opposition between marriage by force and marriage by consent, which is one of the main themes of the play. To achieve marital harmony, there must be reciprocal persuasion and desire.[111] The Egyptian suitors' lust and violent behaviour thus contrast with the moderate attitude and self-control that are expected from any good Athenian citizen.[112]

On the other hand, as previously mentioned, Io's myth is employed by the heroines as an argument in support of their right to reject a marital

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[106] Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1914), 13-5.

[107] Thomson (1949), 410 ff.; Macurdy (1944), 95-100. Cf. also MacKinnon (1978).

[108] For the theory of the Danaids' obsessive attachment to their father, see Caldwell (1974), 45-70. For the Danaids' presumed erotic desire for Zeus, see Zeitlin (1996), 153-60. For a synopsis of all of the psychological interpretations, see Belfiore (2000), 40-41; Zelenak (1998), 52-3.

[109] Sicherl (1986), 81-110; Rösler (2007), 180-3; Sommerstein (1995), 111-132; Sommerstein (1996), 141-152.

[110] Robertson (1936), 105; Johansen – Whittle (1980), 13-4. See also Zeitlin (1996), 123-71 and Sommerstein (1996), 163. For the debate on whether the heroines do not want to get married to their cousins only or whether they reject marriage with any man, see more recently Vasunia (2001), 55; Sandin (2003) on 8.

[111] Cf. A. fr. 44 R.

[112] Just (1989), 153-93; Zelenak (1998), 29; Wiles (2000), 73; Papadopolou (2011), 52. For a study of the triumph of the ethic of self-regulation during the age of Perikles, see Dover (1973), 69-73; Zeitlin (1986), 129-31; Stewart (1995), 74-90.

union that is the exact opposite of the positive form of sexual act experienced by their ancestress.

This statement seems to contradict what had been argued earlier, namely that, in approaching Io, Zeus blended force and kindness together. To understand on what grounds the fifty daughters are able to use this myth belonging to their family history as the basis for their claim, it is worth looking more closely at lines 531-7 and 590-4 from the first *stasimon*.

> τὸ πρὸς γυναικῶν δ᾽ ἐπιδὼν
> παλαίφατον ἀμέτερον
> γένος, φιλίας προγόνου γυναικὸς
> νέωσον εὔφρον᾽ αἶνον·
> γενοῦ πολυμνήστωρ, ἔφαπτορ Ἰοῦς·
> Δῖαί τοι γένος εὐχόμεθ᾽ εἶναι
> γᾶς ἀπὸ τᾶσδ᾽ ἐνοίκου.[113]
> (A. *Supp.* 531-7)
>
> τίν᾽ ἂν θεῶν ἐνδικωτέροισιν
> κεκλοίμαν εὐλόγως ἐπ᾽ ἔργοις;
> <αὐτὸς> ὁ πατὴρ φυτουργὸς αὐτόχειρ ἄναξ
> γένους παλαιόφρων μέγας
> τέκτων, τὸ πᾶν μῆχαρ, οὔριος Ζεύς.
> (A. *Supp.* 590-4)

Look benignly upon the women's cause, look upon our γένος[114] *ancient in story, and renew the happy tale of our ancestress, the woman of your love; show that you remember all, you who laid your hand upon Io. We boast that we are of the* γένος *of Zeus, springing from an inhabitant of this land.*

On what god could I appropriately call on account of actions that give me a juster claim? The Lord and Father himself, with his own hand, was my

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[113] I accept Headlam's correction of ἔνοικοι (ME) to ἐνοίκου. Cf. Johansen-Whittle (1980) on 537. The scholar argues that Headlam's reading (γᾶς ἀπὸ τᾶσδ᾽ ἐνοίκου) 'is intrinsically vastly superior not only to the transmitted text but also to other emendations so far proposed': for instance, γᾶς ποτε τᾶσδ᾽ ἔνοικοι (Burges, Page) 'makes the Danaids claim that they once inhabited Argos, which is false'.

[114] The reasons why I preferred to keep the Greek word γένος rather than accept the Loeb edition's translation 'race' will be explained in the following paragraphs.

engenderer, the great, wise, ancient artificer of my γένος, the all-resourceful one, Zeus who grants fair winds.

The Danaids ask Zeus to watch over (ἐπιδὼν) their γένος. This term, which is connected with a root meaning 'engender' as in γίγνομαι or *gigno*, does not have an exact equivalent in English. The word 'race', for instance, cannot properly convey what the ancient Greek meant by γένος, namely, a group of people into which one enters by the fact of birth.[115] Since we no longer accept the notion that a nation or people share a common descent, the closest equivalent for γένος, term that implies common origins, is 'descent-group'.[116] In fact, the Danaids make their request sound much stronger by reminding him that they are the descendants of the woman he loved (φιλίας προγόνου γυναικὸς, 533; Δῖαί τοι γένος εὐχόμεθ᾽ εἶναι, 536). 'The use of the verb εὔχομαι ('to boast') is especially meaningful since it indicates that the archaic mentality, according to which divine origin is a mark of honour in spite of the potentially violent aspect of the sexual intercourse, is still at work.[117]

It is precisely by virtue of this family bond with Zeus that the chorus expects him to help them: they specify that there is no other god they could call on more appropriately (εὐλόγως, 591). The adverb εὐλόγως, which literally means 'with a good reason', refers to the role of reciprocity in the relationship between gods and mortals: the Danaids think that they are entitled to divine protection due to the intimacy experienced by their ancestress in the physical contact with the god. Just

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[115] Jones (1996), 316-7. Moreover, 'race' is a by-product of Darwin's biological determinism that has been distorted in the service of racist doctrines. Nowadays it is widely agreed that 'races', as a biological and physiological concept, do not exist: Isaac (2004); McCoskey (2012).

[116] Jones (1996), 317; Isaac (2004), 1-52.

[117] Cf. A. *Supp.* 19. In Section 1.2.b. we have seen that this kind of boasting is typical of pre-tragic poetry (*Od.* 11. 260-4). See also Liddell-Scott-Jones, *ad loc.* (εὔχομαι).

as Zeus loved Io (φιλίας, 534), so he should show a loving attitude towards his lover's descendants. They should be given special care and attention.

At v. 535 the Danaids urge him to be 'much-remembering' (πολυμνήστωρ): this phrase hints at the practice defined by Lysias as 'reminders of sacrifices'.[118] The ancient Greeks used to make their supplications more compelling by appealing to past sacrifices offered to the Olympians. In this case the heroines appeal to Zeus' special connection with their γένος and remind him that he was the one who delivered Io from her suffering: soon afterwards they invoke him with the epithet ἐφάπτωρ 'toucher'. As soon as he touched Io, he brought her back into fully human form and stopped her pain. The Danaids thus ask Zeus to 'renew the happy tale of their ancestress', namely to treat them as kindly as he treated Io. Just as Io, because of Zeus' love, was goaded by the gadfly sent by Hera, so they are chased by their cousins' ἵμερος. Therefore – by extending the parallel – just as Zeus in the end guaranteed her a fortunate destiny, so he should also bring to an end the sufferings of his beloved's descendants with a happy outcome.

The fifty daughters identify themselves with their ancestress, but there is a contradiction in the analogy established between their story and that of Io: since their ancestress was eventually forced to have sexual intercourse with her suitor, why should the Danaids escape the marriage with their cousins? The Danaids' request 'to renew the happy tale of their ancestress' refers to Io's final rescue only: they thus omit Io's suffering and overlook Zeus' partial responsibility for the adversities she was forced to

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[118] Lys. 2. 39. See Parker (1998), 106.

face. These omissions mean neither that they misinterpret the meaning of Io's myth[119] nor that they idealise her intercourse with the god as an asexual/spiritual union.[120] For, as we have seen earlier, it is clear from their account of Io's story that they are well aware that their ancestress had a sexual relationship with Zeus which probably involved some sort of (symbolic) violence. Nevertheless, there is a huge difference between the (symbolic) violence of sexual penetration, which can metaphorically be linked to a virgin's resistance to her passage into womanhood, and the Aigyptiads' generally abusive behaviour.[121] Whereas the βία of the defloration is tolerated, the marriage with Aegyptus' sons cannot be accepted by the Danaids since their suitors' violent attitude will negatively affect every aspect of their lives, including their sexuality.[122]

Even if the Danaids' case must initially have aroused sympathy among the audience, the heroines' attitude cannot be condoned because resistance to sex is always potentially transgressive given that it may involve denying the social role of spouses and mothers.[123] This in turn results in a gender conflict which jeopardizes the institution of marriage and destabilizes the social order.[124] This is the reason why Zeus does not

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[119] The thesis of the misinterpretation of Io's myth is put forward by Murray (1958), 69-70.
[120] According to Zeitlin (1996), 155-8 and Sommerstein (1996), 163, it is as if they fancied that Io has always remained a virgin. Cf. Papadopolou (2011), 39-49 and references.
[121] The Egyptian suitors are both violent towards their cousins and impious towards the gods. What is more, they respect the authority neither of Danaus nor of Pelasgus (9, 30, 81, 104, 225, 426, 487, 528, 751, 757-8, 798, 817, 845, 839, 880-1, 884, 893-4, 904, 909, 914-22).
[122] In this regard, it has been pointed out that the suitors' violent lust is called ὕβρις (81, 104, 426, 487, 528, 817, 845, 881), which is also the legal term for the crime of rape. See Zelenak (1998), 51; Vasunia (2001), 49; Bowlby (2007), 82; Papadopolou (2011), n. 12, 134.
[123] The Danaids are meaningfully likened to the Amazons, the female warriors who used to kill their male offspring (287): Papadopolou (2011), 53. These heroines have also been considered as 'a band of proto-feminists who claim their right to dispose of their own body': Bowlby (2007), 82, 87.
[124] For a discussion of the extent to which gender conflict is bound up with ethnicity, see Zelenak (1998), 45-58; Wiles (2000), 73 ff.

grant the Danaids' desire to avoid marriage despite their supplications and their bond of kinship.[125] Although Zeus does not directly put male power at risk by fulfilling the heroines' wishes, his intercourse with Io has a negative impact on the social order: for, not only do the Danaids take advantage of this story to justify their act of rebellion but their firm belief that they have the right to demand Zeus' protection against their suitors also exacerbates their obstinacy.[126] Their attitude is well-exemplified by the following passages from the *parodos*:

> σπέρμα σεμνᾶς μέγα ματρὸς εὐνὰς
> ἀνδρῶν, ἒ ἔ,
> ἄγαμον ἀδάματον ἐκφυγεῖν.
> εἰ δὲ μή, μελανθὲς
> ἡλιόκτυπον γένος
> τὸν γάιον,
> τὸν πολυξενώτατον
> Ζῆνα τῶν κεκμηκότων
> ἱξόμεσθα σὺν κλάδοις
> ἀρτάναις θανοῦσαι,
> μὴ τυχοῦσαι θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων.
> (A. *Supp.* 151-61)

> καὶ τότ᾽ αὖ δικαίοις
> Ζεὺς ἐνέξεται ψόγοις,
> τὸν τᾶς βοὸς
> παῖδ᾽ ἀτιμάσας, τὸν αὐ-
> τός ποτ᾽ ἔκτισεν γόνῳ,
> νῦν ἔχων παλίντροπον

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[125] He only defends the suppliants' right to asylum in Argos in his role as Zeus Hikesios (346, 385, 479, 616). For the reverence that even the gods owe to the suppliants, see A. *Supp.* 815 (σεβίζου); *Eu.* 92-3 (σέβει…σέβας).

[126] In this respect, it is interesting to compare this play with Euripides' *Hippolytus.* In this drama Poseidon did grant Theseus three wishes by virtue of their biological tie (Hansen, 2002, 215; E. *Hipp.* 45-6), but his mortal son misused them: for he used one of them against his innocent son, thereby causing his death (E. *Hipp.* 882ff, 1166 ff, 1313-24, 1412-14). Consequently, it is once again shown that any kinship relation between gods and men is dangerous because a mortal is not able to understand and make good use of the privileges that may be bestowed upon him by his/her divine begetter.

ὄψιν ἐν λιταῖσιν
 (A. *Supp.* 168-74)

[…] that the mighty race of our august mother may escape the embrace of men (ah me), unwedded, unsubdued. And if not, this dark-skinned sun-beaten race will supplicate the underworld Zeus, the ever-hospitable Zeus of the dead, in death, with nooses instead of olive-branches, if we have not secured the aid of the Olympian gods.

Then my just reproaches will catch Zeus out, for he disowns the child he himself once begot of the heifer, turning his glance away from our prayers.[127]

The heroines wish that they may remain 'unwedded' (ἄγαμον, 153) and 'untamed' (ἀδάματον, 153). The adjective ἀδάματος is especially telling since it denies the process of sexual union and marriage through which women were, according to the mentality of the ancient Greeks, domesticated by men. Therefore, the Danaids are potentially dangerous elements in society since they stubbornly refuse to submit to male power.[128] They are confident that they can be victorious over men because they are convinced that Zeus is obliged to stand by them by virtue of their descent from the woman he loved (151). From the Danaids' perspective, if the god dishonours (ἀτιμάσας, 171) them (the children of the heifer), he can be accused of unjust behaviour.

The Danaids also issue a veiled threat by saying that, besides not granting him the praise and honours due to the gods, they may turn to a more hospitable god, Hades (154-61).[129] The god of the Underworld is

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[127] Here I follow the translation of Burian (1991) since the text translated in the Loeb edition differs from the Oxford Classical Texts edition.

[128] A. *Supp.* 392-3, 1068. For an analysis of the imagery linked to man's taming of woman, see Vasunia (2001), 56.

[129] In the previous section we have seen that demands with menaces are typical of an ancient kind of prayers and are proof of the ancient Greeks' belief that there existed some sort of reciprocity between gods and mortals: Whitman (1951), 122 ff; Parker (1998), 108. See, for instance, A. *A.* 581-2, 821, *Ch.* 255-7, 791-3; S. *El.* 457-8; E. *Tr.* 1059-80. For some

called "the Zeus of the dead" (Ζῆνα τῶν κεκμηκότων, 157).[130] In this case, their invocation to Hades simply means that the girls are even prepared to commit suicide in order to avoid an unwanted marriage.[131] In the following play, however, once they realize that they must get married to their cousins, they feel betrayed by Zeus and thus decide to take the law into their own hands and confer masculine power upon themselves.

There is a fragment (fr. 5 R), probably belonging to the *Aigyptioi*, in which the expression 'the Zeus of the dead' (τὸν Δία τῶν κεκμηκότων) occurs: it is likely that in the second play of the trilogy the Danaids once again invoke Hades when they realize that the Egyptian army has the upper hand in the war against Argos but this time the Danaids direct their violent intentions not against themselves but rather against their bridegrooms. On their wedding night, namely at the very moment in which men should subjugate women, the fifty brides stab their grooms to death. The Danaids' feeling of being treated unfairly by the very god who in their opinion should have protected them may have played a role in triggering their violent reaction.[132]

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examples describing how a god's cult can be put in danger by lack of sacrifices and honours, see Dover (1974), 76; Mikalson (1991), 152 ff.

[130] Johansen-Whittle (1980) on 157, 158. See also Seaford (1980), 23-9 on 'black Zeus/ Hades' in Sophocles' *Inachos*.

[131] For the associations between marriage and death, see Rehm (1994) and Vasunia (2001), 48-51. As the scholars point out, funerals and wedding rites share common elements: ritual purification, the cutting of hair, the veiling of both the bride and the corpse, the movement from one's (paternal) home to a new house (either the grave or the house of one's husband).

[132] Their feeling of betrayal springs from the fact that they expect Zeus to protect them against the suitors. To give an example, they interpret the favourable winds and lack of thunderstorms during their navigation as indications of Zeus' support and favour (134-7). Significantly they assert that so far they have had no reason to complain (οὐδὲ μέμφομαι, 137) and urge Zeus to bring about a propitious conclusion. This utterance implies that, if their navigation had not been good, they would have blamed it on their divine progenitor. The problem is that they misinterpret Zeus' will and overvalue their

Therefore, the negative impact of Zeus' union with Io is not limited to Io's lifetime because in the long run it is partly responsible for the social disorder resulting from the Danaids' refusal of marriage. The audience is likely to have gradually lost sympathy for the Danaids' cause, as the violence of the heroines' intentions becomes increasingly clear throughout the trilogy. The victims of male violence have become executioners and, consequently, represent a threatening deviation from the positive model of feminine behaviour required by ancient Greek society.

What is more, the Danaids' special connection with Zeus induces them to commit another act of ὕβρις: they assign too much power to him while neglecting the other Olympians, especially Aphrodite.[133] In this respect, it significant that, at the end of the play, the secondary chorus warns the fifty girls that there must be no excess in the worship of the gods (1061). The Danaids' excessive commitment to Zeus is one of the repercussions of the erotic encounter between the male deity and their ancestress: just as that excess of contact with the divine exceeds the proper bounds of the god-man relationship, so the Danaids do not render the gods proper worship.

Only at the end of the trilogy is the power of Aphrodite reaffirmed thanks to Hypermnestra, who is the only Danaid to spare her husband.[134] The harmonious union between Lynkeus and his wife restores the gender

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tie of kinship. In the exodus the secondary chorus points out their misunderstanding by asking them provocatively: 'Why did the sons of Aegyptus get good sailing in their swift-sped pursuit?' (1045-6). This question challenges the Danaids' belief that they enjoy special divine protection by pointing out that Zeus has not granted their request to cast the suitors back into the purple-coloured sea (528-30).

[133] Zeitlin (1996), 146-9.

[134] For a discussion of the reasons for Hypermnestra's act of mercy, see Winnington – Ingram (1961), 147; Ferrari (1977), 1318-19; MacKinnon (1978), 80-1.

balance.[135] Before the final resolution is reached, however, it is clearly shown that excessive closeness between gods and mortals is potentially dangerous both on the personal and on the social levels. Zeus' sexual affair with Io also threatens the political stability of the city of Argos, which piously decides to grant the suppliants asylum, as we shall now see in greater detail.

Io's union with the Olympian god has been interpreted as a myth which glorifies the Greeks' ethnic anteriority and superiority over all other ethnic groups[136] and hence justifies Greek colonization in the Mediterranean.[137] For the fruit of such union is Epaphus from whom the eponymous founders of several foreign races descended. Given that these people trace their origins back to Greece, the appropriation of foreign land by the Greeks is somehow legitimized. Aeschylus' treatment of this myth could thus be associated with the mythological device through which the sexual encounter between a god and a girl provides divine sanction for the Greek colonies.[138] The most famous example is the liaison between Apollo and Cyrene, which is told by Pindar in the ninth *Pythian*: Phoebus, enamoured of the Thessalian nymph, carried her off to Libya where he

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[135] For the right balance between force and persuasion in any sexual relationship, see Zeitlin (1996), 158-9 and A. fr. 44 R.

[136] For the different opinions given by Aeschylus and Herodotus about this topic, see Vasunia (2001), 36-7.

[137] Sandin (2003), 5; Papadopolou (2011), 27: 'The creation of genealogies which provide mythical ancestors in foreign countries, but ultimately trace their origin back to Greece, may be an ethnocentric form of appropriation, using myths to appropriate foreign lands and to justify Greek colonies around the Mediterranean.' As far as the African continent is concerned, the Greeks actually founded the colony of Cyrene only but, through this mythological device, they claim that they could rightfully occupy, or extend their influence over, many more territories. Lloyd (1975), 13 points out that in Egypt there existed a civilization 'strong enough to prevent much colonization'. Nevertheless, the Greeks founded the ἐμπόριον of Naucratis, which became the centre of Greek trade in Egypt, and other settlements of Greek mercenaries such as Daphne.

[138] Dougherty (1993); Athanassaki (2003).

made her the foundress of the namesake Greek city.[139] On closer analysis, however, it becomes evident that the myth of Io in the *Suppliants* has far more problematic implications.

As far as the Pindaric version of this myth is concerned, two points are worthy of mention. First of all, Apollo's union with Cyrene is described as a legal marriage,[140] whereas in all other literary sources the liaisons between gods and mortals are usually represented as one-off sexual encounters. The reason for this peculiarity probably lies in the fact that Pindar wants to accentuate the lawfulness of this founding act, while suppressing the violence of the abduction (ἄρπασε, 6).[141] In this way, only the positive consequences of Apollo's erotic attentions towards Cyrene are stressed: the nymph is given a portion of Libya as her rightful (ἔννομον, 58) possession.[142] As a consequence, Greek presence in Libya is also legitimate. There is a further way in which this myth is exploited to justify the Greek occupation of foreign land. Since Pindar's version speaks of a marital union between Apollo and Cyrene and marriage is considered as a civilizing institution, this foundation myth can be used to celebrate Greek colonization as a civilizing process.[143]

A couple of differences between the myths of Io and Cyrene are immediately noticeable. To begin with, Zeus did not marry Io but merely

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[139] Cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 161; Nonn. *D.* 13. 300 ff; A. R. 2. 498 ff; Call. *Ap.* 85 ff; D. S. 4. 81. 1.

[140] At v. 51 Cheiron prophesies that Apollo will be 'the husband' (πόσις, 51) of Cyrene, who is called 'bride' (νύμφαν, 57). Cf. also the use of the verb ἁρμόζω ('to betroth') at v. 13. For a more thorough analysis of this passage, see Carey (1981), 65-103, esp. 74, 80; Dougherty (1993), 137-9; Athanassaki (2003), 99.

[141] For an analysis of the way in which Pindar suppresses the violent aspects of colonization by means of the prophesied marriage between Apollo and Cyrene, see Athanassaki (2003); Carey (1981) on v. 58; Dougherty (1993), 140 ff.

[142] Athanassaki (2003), 99; Carey (1981), 58.

[143] Dougherty (1993), 9, 140 ff.

mated with her (μειχθῆναι, 295), whether or not there was consent on her part. What is more, Zeus did not carry the girl off to Egypt with the aim of making her found a Greek colony, but Io was rather forced to run off by the gadfly. Although she eventually settled in the land of the Nile, the play does not hint at any civilising function performed by this heroine of Greek origins in the Egyptian land. On the contrary, it highlights the barbarous aspects of Io's descendants, who have lived in a foreign land over four generations.

One might object that there is a rigid line of demarcation separating the Aigyptiads and the Danaids: the former are in all respects negative and barbarous characters, whereas the latter retain their Greekness despite their exotic appearance.[144] According to this line of interpretation, the suppliants symbolize the preservation of Greek traditions in a barbarian land, and the reason why they reject the marriage with their cousins is that they do not want to marry men who despise their national origins, and do not respect Greek gods.[145]

Yet the interpretation of the fifty sisters as 'the paladins of Greekness' is not convincing: they are as barbarian as Aegyptus' sons, as much as they try to hide it. To win sympathy from Argos, they use a denigratory rhetoric directed against their suitors by representing them as more barbarous than the barbarians themselves.[146] In this way they want to affirm their cultural diversity by claiming that, unlike their cousins, they have never forgotten their roots and have preserved Greek customs

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[144] Vasunia (2001), 40-3.

[145] Couch (1932), 54-55.

[146] The dark colour of the skin, for instance, is typical of both the Danaids (70, 154-5) and their suitors (719-20, 741-5). However, in the case of Aegyptus' sons, this characteristic is described by the chorus by means of a gloomy metaphor (a spider, a black nightmare: 885-7) which makes it appear as a monstrous somatic trait.

and traditions. Nevertheless, they share most of the same characteristics with them.[147] The only difference is that Aegyptus' sons, represented by their Egyptian herald, are ostentatiously violent and disrespectful towards Greek religion and Greek laws,[148] whereas the Danaids intentionally assume a pious attitude towards the Greek gods and praise the power of the Argive δῆμος by emphasising the importance of the decisions taken collectively by the citizens.[149] However, the Danaids' respectful behaviour may merely be the result of prudent calculation aimed at ingratiating themselves with the Argives and at turning things to their favour.[150] In conclusion, the Greek text provides us with several clues which warn us against drawing a clear distinction between the savage and barbarian nature of Aegyptus' sons and the Danaids' pious behaviour and compliance with Greek customs.

There is a further meaningful difference between the myths of Cyrene and Io, as represented in Pindar and Aeschylus respectively. On the one hand, the aim of *Pythian* 9 is to play down the violent aspects of Greek colonization by telling the story of a Greek girl who, upon divine command, takes up residence in Libya and founds a settlement in which

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[147] Cf. their somatic traits (70, 154-5, 719-20, 741-5), exotic clothes (235-6, 432, 123 = 133), foreign language (119 = 130) and different religious background (220, 10245). Hall (1991), 117-21, 144-6; Johansen – Whittle (1980), 2. 106; Bakewell (2013), 35-6.

[148] A. *Supp.* 839, 884, 893-4, 904, 909-14, 920-2, 934-7.

[149] A. *Supp.* 625-709, esp. 640, 699-700.

[150] In this regard, it is worth pointing out that in the first episode (370-5) they exalt Pelasgus' sovereignty, whereas in the II stasimon they sing a hymn to the power of the Argive δῆμος. This is proof of their ability to change attitude rapidly to fit the circumstances. Given that it is far easier to persuade a single person rather than an entire assembly, they initially suggest that Pelasgus should not consult with the other citizens before making a major decision. Only after they are informed that the Argives have decreed to give them refuge in Argos, do they praise the democratic power of the assembly. The thesis of the Danaids' cunning is also supported by the fact that insidious guile is traditionally ascribed to the Egyptians (Cratin. fr. 406 KA; Ar. *Th.* 920-22; Hyper. III. 3, 13; A. fr. 373 R). Musti (1995, 22-5), by contrast, argues that the Danaids are gradually attracted to democratic ideology; Bakewell (2013, 36-8), *contra.*

natives and colonists collaborate peacefully. On the other hand, the *Suppliants* is about a group of people who, in spite of their Argive roots, have been barbarised and have now decided to go back to Argos to seek protection against their suitors: their blood ties with the Argives make them confident that their request for help will be granted. It is precisely the Danaids' return to their ancestral home that is problematic since it will entail violence and will pose a serious threat to the wealth and political stability of the Argive reign. Therefore, the myth of the Danaids is not so much an αἴτιον justifying the policy of Athenian expansion as a myth highlighting the dangers inherent in the arrival of a group of foreigners, who nonetheless have Greek blood in their veins.

The incorporation of foreigners into a πόλις was a crucial issue at the time in which the play was produced: soon after the end of the Persian wars Athens opened up to the non-Greek world on both the political and the commercial levels. This change in Athenian foreign policy was caused by more than one factor. First of all, Athens realized that Sparta, its loyal ally in the fight against the barbarians, was becoming too powerful and potentially dangerous: since the Spartans replaced the Persians as the object of the Athenian fears, diplomatic relations were established between Athens and its former barbarian enemies.[151] What is more, in the aftermath of Greek victory at Salamis, Athens enjoyed a period of strong economic growth, which attracted increased numbers of foreigners.[152] Finally, the wars of the Delian League caused Athens to come in contact

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[151] Cimon, the main supporter of anti-Persian policies, was ostracized from Athens in 461 BC as the result of his unsuccessful expedition against the Spartan Helots (Plut. *Cim.* 17.2). Moreover, after Xerxes' death (465 BC), Athens sent an embassy headed by Callias to Susa to negotiate with Artaxerxes (Hdt. VII. 151). These preliminary negotiations may have led to the 'Peace of Callias', which marked the end of the Greco-Persian Wars.
[152] See, for instance, the expansion of the Piraeus and the rise of Athenian naval power: Plu. *Them.* 4.1; D. S. 9. 19. 7.

with non-Greeks coming from the Aegean, the Black Sea area and Asia Minor: consequently, after the end of hostilities, Athens intensified trade relations with foreign countries, such as Phrygia, Thrace, and Lydia.[153] For all these reasons the Athenians had to cope with an increasing influx of foreigners.[154]

In the case of Danaus and his daughters, the reception of newcomers is made more complicated by their paradoxical status as foreign kinsmen of the Argives, which is in turn the result of the ethnic confusion introduced by Zeus' union with Io in Egypt. As soon as Pelasgus is informed about the Danaids' genealogy, he expresses his fear that their mixed ethnicity may lead to social and political turmoil:

> εἴη δ᾽ ἄνατον πρᾶγμα τοῦτ᾽ ἀστοξένων,
> μηδ᾽ ἐξ ἀέλπτων κἀπρομηθήτων πόλει
> νεῖκος γένηται· τῶν γὰρ οὐ δεῖται πόλις.
> (A. *Supp.* 356-8)

May the business of these citizen-strangers not prove ruinous, and may this event, never expected or planned for, not bring strife to the community: the city does not need that!

Their arrival, whose unpredictability is stressed by two alpha-privative adjectives (ἄελπτος, ἀπρομήθητος, 357), is immediately perceived by the Argive king as a negative event which could result in strife (νεῖκος). The implied idea is that it would have been better for the

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[153] X. *AthPol.* 2.8; Pl. *Ap.* 17d-18a. Bakewell (2013), 19.

[154] Aristotles (*Pol.* 1275b35) writes that Cleisthenes πολλοὺς γὰρ ἐφυλέτευσε ξένους καὶ δούλους μετοίκους. The meaning of this passage is disputed since the word 'μετοίκους' can be interpreted either as a direct object or as an apposition. According to Bakewell (2013), 17-9, the two most likely hypotheses are that Cleisthenes distributed among the tribes either 'many metics who were once foreigners and slaves' or 'many foreigners and slaves as metics'. Cf. also Papadopolou (2011), 65-75. Please note that Aristotle's use of the word 'μετοίκους' is anachronistic since μετοικία was probably created in the 460s (IG i³ 244; A. *Eu.* 1011, 1018): Bakewell (1997), 219-21.

city of Argos if those barbarian people of Argive roots had remained in Egypt (τῶν γὰρ οὐ δεῖται πόλις, 358). The potentially harmful effects of their arrival, which Pelasgus wishes he could avert (εἴη δ᾽ ἄνατον, 356), are closely linked to the Danaids' ambiguous status (ἀστόξενοι, 356): they are distant relatives of the Argives, though foreigners by birth.

Why is their double ethnicity perceived as especially threatening?

To understand how this ethnic confusion complicates matters, it is useful to compare how Pelasgus struggles to cope with the problem of the Danaids' arrival to the way in which Apis the Healer in ancient times had freed Argos from a horde of snakes by effecting 'a drastic cure' (ἄκη τομαῖα, line 268):

> Ἄπις γὰρ ἐλθὼν ἐκ πέρας Ναυπακτίας
> ἰατρόμαντις παῖς Ἀπόλλωνος χθόνα
> τήνδ᾽ ἐκκαθαίρει κνωδάλων βροτοφθόρων,
> τὰ δὴ παλαιῶν αἱμάτων μιάσμασιν
> χρανθεῖσ᾽ ἀνῆκε γαῖα †μηνεῖται ἄκη†[155]
> δρακονθόμιλον δυσμενῆ ξυνοικίαν.
> τούτων ἄκη τομαῖα καὶ λυτήρια
> πράξας ἀμέμπτως Ἄπις Ἀργείᾳ χθονὶ
> μνήμην ποτ᾽ ἀντίμισθον ηὕρετ᾽ ἐν λιταῖς.
> (A. *Supp.* 262-270)

Apis the healer and seer, son of Apollo, came from the land of Naupactus across the sea, and cleansed this land of the man-destroying creatures which the earth, stained by the pollution of old bloodshed, had sent up from below, a hostile horde of serpents sharing our home. From these Apis effected, beyond all cavil, a decisive, liberating cure for the Argive land, and in return won as his reward the right to be remembered in prayers.

The adjective τομαῖος ('decisive', 268) is especially meaningful since it derives from the verb τέμνω, 'to cut'. The defensive measures

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[155] On the many unsuccessful attempts to correct the corrupted text, see Johansen – Whittle (1980) on 166.

taken by Apis are likened to a surgical operation, the aim of which is to remove the infected part. It is Pelasgus who tells the Danaids the story of Apis: he proudly proclaims to be the son of the earth-born (γηγενοῦς, 250) Palaichthon and tells the chorus that since ancient times the Argive territory has been tenaciously protected against all invaders. The tone of Pelasgus' speech is intimidating: he is warning the strangers that, as Apis eradicated the brood of serpents in order to protect the Apian land from pollution, so he will strenuously defend Argos from any external threat.[156]

Nevertheless, it is precisely the Danaids' singular condition as both foreigners and relatives of the Argives that impedes him from effecting a cure that is as drastic but effective (ἄκη τομαῖα, 268) as the one chosen by Apis. The Danaids' double ethnicity is perceived by Pelasgus as especially threatening precisely because it impedes him from resorting to violence in order to thwart the danger that these people pose to the Argive reign: Pelasgus, unlike Apis, cannot eliminate the problem simply by driving the Danaids out by force since 'a twofold defilement (διπλοῦν μίασμα)—from strangers and from natives at once (ξενικόν ἀστικόν v. 618)—would arise before the city' (618-20). For the Argive assembly would be committing a double offence by not complying with its duty of care towards both guests and citizens.[157]

To sum up, on the one hand, the city of Argos had better welcome them with open arms. On the other hand, if the Danaids are welcomed in Argos, they may become a threat to the racial purity of the Argive

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[156] For lexical analogies between the Danaids and the horde of snakes, see Bakewell (1997), 216-9; Pattoni (2006), 163-4.
[157] What is more, to compel Pelasgus to side with them, the Danaids threaten to commit suicide on the altars of the gods (461-5).

bloodline. This impasse has been brought about by ethnic identity confusion, which is in turn the result of Zeus' union with Io in Egypt.

In light of the above, Aeschylus' *Suppliants* can be interpreted as representing the desperate attempt of an autochthonous city to preserve the purity of its origins.[158] The only possible solution is to incorporate Danaus and his daughters as metics: they are thus granted rights of residency while remaining aliens, namely non-citizens (609-10).[159] In this way both the danger of pollution is thwarted and the autochthony of the Argives is preserved. This brings us back to the historical context of the mid fifth century BC: the increased flow of foreigners triggered anxiety among Athenian citizens, who felt the urgency to proclaim their superior identity by distancing themselves from the newcomers. In this regard, it is meaningful that during the fifth century the myth of Athenian autochthony was given greater and greater prominence:[160] on the grounds of this myth, the Athenians could assert their primacy over all other ethnic groups, the Dorians above all.[161] It was thus especially important to

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[158] Argos is particularly well suited to serving as the alter-ego of Athens since the Pelasgians, as well as the Athenians, can boast autochthonous roots (Hdt. I. 56. 2; VIII. 44. 2; Paus. 2. 1. 4- 2. 2. 1; Apollod. 3. 8. 1; Serv. *Aen.* 2. 84). Montanari (1981), 29-121; Rosivach (1987), 305-6; Thomas (2000, 117-22); Mitchell (2006), 219; Bakewell (2013), 90-1; Pattoni (2006), 157 ff. .

[159] For a discussion of Pelasgus' assumption of the roles of πρόξενος and προστάτης, see Gould (1973), 90; Giordano (1999), 71-7; Cuniberti (2001), 143; Papadopolou (2011), 70; Bakewell (2013), 29-32.

[160] The Athenians believed that they had sprung from the soil of Attica (Hom. *Il.* 2. 547-8; Pi. *I.* 2. 19; Hdt. 8. 55; Apollod. 3. 14. 6; E. fr. 360. 6-8 Loeb edition (*Erechtheus*) and had always thereafter occupied the same land (Th. 1. 2. 5, 2. 36. 1). The two ideas were blended together in the fifth century for ideological reasons. See Rosivach (1987), 294-301; Parker (1987), 187-207, esp. 193-5; Isaac (2004), 109 ff; Zacharia (2008), 32 ff; Mc Coskey (2012), 57.

[161] Hdt. 1. 56. 2; Thuc. 1. 2. 6; 2. 36. 12. For an analysis of the reasons why the Athenians were proud to be autochthonous, see Montanari (1981), 54-55; Saxonhouse (1986), 255-6; Rosivach (1987), 302-6; Parker (1987), 195; Dougherty (1996), 254-6; Hall (1997), 51-6; Thomas (2000), 118.

preserve the pure autochthonous blood of the Athenian citizen body. In response to these needs, the institution of μετοικία was created in the 460s with the aim of drawing a clear line of demarcation between the Athenians and 'the others'.[162] A few years later (451-0 BC) Pericles' law on citizenship was motivated by a similar attempt at self-definition, as we shall see in the next section.[163]

All things considered, the incorporation of the Danaids into the πόλις through the institution of μετοικία seems to be the best way both to calm the fear of losing one's identity in the encounter with a stranger and, at the same time, to praise Argos' φιλοξενία, a quality that Athens traditionally boasts of.[164] What is striking, however, is that the following dramas of the Danaid trilogy show that this is an imperfect - though inevitable - solution to a difficult problem:[165] it does not resolve the complications resulting from the Danaids' double ethnicity. On the contrary, it further complicates matters: instead of securing political stability, the reception of foreigners in the city of Argos results in military defeat, in bloodshed and in the establishment of tyranny.[166] To make

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[162] If μετοικία is founded in the 460s (Bakewell, 1997, 219-21), Aeschylus' *Suppliants* addresses a topic of great interest to the audience.

[163] For the reasons for Pericles' law, see Rhodes (1981), 333-4; Bakewell (2013), 34-58; Azoulay (2014), 82.

[164] Th. I. 2. 6; Loraux (1986), (1993). For the interpretation of the *Suppliants* as a play which conveys a message of cooperation among different countries with the aim of legitimizing a new friendly political relationship between the Athenians and the Persians, see Mitchell (2006); Zeitlin (1996), 123-171.

[165] I follow the traditional order of the plays comprising the Danaid trilogy (*Suppliants, Aigyptioi, Danaides*). For a rebuttal of the new order of the play suggested by Sicherl (1986), 81-110 (followed by Sommerstein, 1995 and 1996; Rösler, 2007), see Sandin (2003), 11 n.30; Papadopolou (2011), 63.

[166] For the reconstruction of the plot, see Johansen – Whittle (1980), 44 ff; Winnington-Ingram (1961), 141-52. In the lost plays of the Danaid trilogy the character of Danaus, who assumes the royal throne after Pelasgus dies on the battlefield, is likely to have been represented as the exact opposite of the positive model of democratic king embodied by Pelasgus, whose rule is characterized by piety, φιλοξενία, and respect for the authority

things worse, Argos is actually polluted by the Danaids' murder of their husbands.[167] Pelasgus' efforts to prevent the spread of μίασμα by piously granting the suppliants refuge turn out to have been worthless. Finally, even the preservation of the Argive autochthonous bloodline is jeopardized: a hybrid royal dynasty, sprung from the union between Hypermnestra and Lynkeus, will henceforth rule over the reign of Argos.[168]

On the other hand, it must also be borne in mind that Hypermnestra and Lynkeus are the only ones in the entire group of foreign newcomers who prove to be pious, righteous and conciliatory. In the second and third dramas of the trilogy attention is perhaps drawn to such positive behavioural traits. If in the *Aigyptioi* it is Lynkeus who leads the negotiations between the Egyptian army and Danaus,[169] he has the opportunity to show his diplomatic skills, which associate him with the positive model of wise king embodied by Pelasgus. What is more, since Hypermnestra is the only Danaid not to kill her husband, it is possible to infer that Lynkeus maintains a moderate attitude in his personal life as well: Lynkeus is likely to take advantage of the power of persuasion (πειθώ) both to negotiate with Danaus successfully and to seduce his

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of the Argive demos. His propensity towards tyranny has already been revealed in the previous play (*Supp.* 492-6, 985-8). Moreover, Danaus urges his daughters to kill their bridegrooms (Σ E. *Hec.* 886; Hyg. *Fab.* 168. 3-5), and thus shows his impious attitude. Finally, he does not comply with the law of hospitality since Aegyptus' sons were probably Danaus' guests at the moment of their death: Winnington – Ingram (1961), 146.

[167] Aegyptus' sons are both relatives of the Danaids and their hosts in the royal palace: if the Danaids are accommodated in the royal palace at the end of the *Suppliants* (956-63, 1009-11), the murder of their husbands is also the murder of guests: Winnington – Ingram (1961), 146.

[168] Σ E. *Hec.* 886; Σ E. *Or.* 872; Paus. 2. 16. 1; Apollod. 2. 2. 1. 1; Pi. *N.* X. 21-2; B. *Ep.* XI. 73-6.

[169] Winnington – Ingram (1961), 141-52. For the debate on the identity of the chorus in the *Aigyptioi,* see Cunningham (1953), 230-1; Johansen – Whittle (1980), 23-5; Garvie (1969), 191-8.

bride. The new Argive royal family thus springs from a union based on mutual consent and desire. The benefits of Lynkeus' persuasiveness and moderate behaviour are twofold: not only do both qualities reconcile women with the institution of marriage, but they also give hope that the reign of Argos will hereafter be powerful, long-lasting and harmonious.

If the *Danaides* celebrate the foundation of a glorious royal dynasty descending from the fruit of that illicit liaison,[170] it may be argued that, by the end of the trilogy, the eulogistic function of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals is recovered. By telling a continuous story comprising more than one generation, the connected trilogy provides perspectives beyond those perceived by a single individual or a group of people living in the same place and historical time period. For instance, from the standpoint of both Pelasgus and the Argive citizens the Danaids' arrival is undoubtedly a calamitous event. By contrast, the Argives who live under the reign of Lynkeus and Hypermnestra are likely to consider it as a providential event guided by Zeus.

The Danaid trilogy shows that a man cannot judge the importance of an event in absolute terms but rather can only decide whether it is either positive or negative on the basis of its consequences on his own personal life and on the society to which he belongs. Human understanding is necessarily limited due to the fact that the outcome of an action – whether it be positive or negative - may become evident only long after that action is undertaken. Therefore, it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – for a mortal to establish the correlation between an event and

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[170] We cannot be sure that this is the version of the Danaid myth which was enacted. For an overview of all the variants of this myth, see Garvie (1969), 163-233.

its results. An act that in the present provokes suffering and destruction may turn out to be beneficial in the future, and vice versa. Unpredictability and instability are constitutive elements of the human condition.

Nonetheless, what is tragic about this is that human nature tends to value any experience on a relative basis rather than on an absolute one. This is the reason why a future benefit does not necessarily compensate for one's past suffering, especially if it is enjoyed either by the following generations or by the community as a whole. Although in the end Zeus' union with Io probably turns out to be beneficial to the Argive reign, this positive outcome is only reached through lots of suffering endured by the Argives. By stressing the negative side-effects of Zeus' affair with Io on the wealth and stability of Pelasgus' kingdom and on the well-being of its citizens, the *Suppliants* plays down the laudatory aspects of the sexual encounters between gods and mortals.

Besides causing Io pain, such union is put forward by the Danaids as an argument in support of their stubborn refusal to marry their suitors: by virtue of their descent from Zeus, the heroines believe that, whatever their claim, they have the right to get special divine support. The Danaids' rejection of marriage is threatening because, taken to extremes, it could lead to social destabilization. What is more, as the result of Zeus' union with Io, the distinction between kin and foreigner has become blurred given that the descendants of the Argive princess have been barbarised during their stay in Egypt. Such ethnic identity confusion has put the city of Argos in a delicate situation, which eventually results in foreign military occupation and in a tyrannical takeover.

The glorious future of the city of Argos under the new dynasty founded by Hypermnestra and Lynkeus is thus established at the expense of its previous citizens living under the reign of Pelasgus. This, we might say, is the tragic awareness that underlies the *Suppliants.*

Similarly, in the *Ion* the illustrious offspring of Apollo and Creusa, despite many vicissitudes and much pain, eventually ascends the throne of Athens. However, as I shall discuss in the following section, Euripides goes one step further: Apollo's union with Creusa not only causes individual mortals lots of suffering but is also of doubtful benefit to Athens. For the enthronement of Apollo's son is carried out by means of a trick which shakes the Athenian patriarchal order to its foundations and even affects the god himself.

1.4 Euripides' *Ion*

Like the *Suppliants*, the *Ion* discusses the impact of the sexual intercourse between a god (Apollo) and a girl (Creusa) both on the human life of the heroine and on the political order of Athens. The action of both dramas is influenced by a similar event which has taken place prior to the beginning of the play: a god rapes a virgin and impregnates her. What is more, in both plays this past event is connected more or less directly with the threat posed by an intruder to the purity of an autochthonous royal family and to its political stability. However, there are several differences in the description of the sexual act and in the analysis of its implications. This section considers how and to what extent Euripides' representation of Apollo's union with Creusa differs from Aeschylus' treatment of a similar myth of sexual intercourse between a deity and a girl.

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To begin with, let us briefly review the sequence of events that occurred just before the action of the play begins: Creusa, the daughter of Erechtheus, the autochthonous king of Athens, exposes her child fathered by Apollo. She then gets married to Xuthus, but their marriage is childless. The married couple thus decides to consult the Delphic oracle about having children: the scene opens in Delphi soon after they arrive at the temple of Apollo.

One difference between the treatments of the myths of Creusa and Io is immediately noticeable: in the *Ion* the victim of rape is a character of the play, whereas in the *Suppliants* the girl sexually possessed by Zeus lived five generations before the historical moment in which the Danaids' story takes play. This difference makes the critique of the divine rapist's behaviour harsher in the *Ion* due to the fact that Creusa gives voice to her grief and anger on stage. Closer attention is thus paid to the heroine's feelings, and much stress is laid on her grief and sense of shame.

Two accounts of the violence suffered are given by the heroine herself. The first one exemplifies her reticent behaviour well since she hides the identity of the real victim of the rape out of shame.[171] Although she is reluctant to speak openly of the rape, several elements of criticism emerge from her fragmented speech: the rape is condemned as a daring, unjust and disgraceful act, and Apollo is blamed for abandoning his offspring.[172] As we have seen in the previous section, Io also felt shame after her intercourse with Zeus. Her feelings, however, can be interpreted both as expressing grief for the sexual violence and merely as an

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[171] E. *Ion.* 336. Hoffer (1996), 303-8 gives a psychological interpretation of Creusa's attitude: her self-suppression, shame and riddling speech identify her as a victim of violence and oppression.
[172] E. *Ion.* 252-4, 288, 384, 386.

indication of feminine modesty prompted by the god's erotic attentions.[173] By contrast, Creusa's shame cannot be considered as a mere symptom of a prudish attitude since she explicitly accuses the god of behaving badly and harshly criticizes the act of the rape itself as 'a shameful deed' (αἰσχύνην, 288). What is more, Ion acknowledges that Apollo is guilty (ἀδικεῖ, 355) and hypothesises that even the god feels ashamed for what he did (αἰσχύνεται, 367).

Once she is informed that Loxias has just given a son to Xuthus only, Creusa's hopelessness reaches its climax: besides being bound to be childless for the rest of her life, she will have to put up with the presence of an illegitimate child inside her house. Out of desperation she thus decides to set aside shame and to give a more explicit account of the sexual violence experienced. Creusa's monody (859-922) is a sort of an anti-hymn to Apollo:[174] her lyric condemnation of Apollo focuses on his bad treatment of her.[175] The rape is depicted as the dreadful reversal of a joyful marriage (γάμος), and she uses terms from the semantic field of violence, shamelessness and pain.[176] She also holds the god responsible for

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[173] See Section 1.3.

[174] LaRue, (1963); Zacharia (2003), 76-99; Swift (2010), 90-101; Rynearson (2014), 56-61.

[175] Other scholars, by contrast, maintain that Creusa's monody reveals that she was not raped but rather seduced by the god: Burnett (1962), 95-6; Lefkowitz (1993), 26-8; Rabinowitz (1993), 197-201. For the rebuttal of this thesis, see Deacy (1997), 45; Zacharia (2003), 76-99.

[176] Apollo is called 'the divine partner of the bed' (θεὸς ὁμευνέτας, 894) who acted shamelessly (ἀναιδείᾳ, 895). Creusa's resistance to Apollo's desire is expressed by the word ἄκουσα ('unwillingly', 941) and is emphasised by means of an agonistic metaphor: she 'contested a terrible contest' (ἐνταῦθ᾽ ἀγῶνα δεινὸν ἠγωνίσμεθα, 939). A similar image is used by Cassandra to describe her divine rapist as a wrestler (παλαιστής, A. A. 1206). See Scafuro (1990), 144 ff. What is more, as Huys (1995) points out in his study, the word γάμος describing Creusa's union with Apollo is always accompanied by terms which negate the positive nature of the marriage: 10-11 (Φοῖβος ἔζευξεν γάμοις/ βίᾳ Κρέουσαν), 437 (βίᾳ γαμῶν), 445 (βιαίων…γάμων), 505 (πικρῶν γάμων/ ὕβριν), 941 (δύστηνον γάμον). Zacharia (2003), 76-99 points out that Apollo's shamelessness in Euripides' Ion strongly contrasts with Loxias' moral scruples in approaching Cyrene in

their son's death: it was Creusa who exposed the new-born, but she did so because she thought the god would save his own son (965).[177] By contrast, as far as Creusa knows, the god let their offspring die in the wild (917-9). Whereas in the *Suppliants* the birth of a child signals the end of Io's suffering and her final reward, in the *Ion* the same event triggers a downward spiral of greater calamity: she abandons her offspring, and this dreadful act results in unbearable pain.

At this point, we should wonder why she decided to conceal her pregnancy and expose her baby. By her own admission she did so for fear of her mother,[178] but Hermes in the prologue and Athena in the exodus assert that it is Apollo who wanted to keep his sexual affair secret.[179] The reasons for the god's silence over his paternity will be discussed later on. Let us for the moment analyse Creusa's feeling of fear: she is probably afraid of her parents' punishment for her illicit sexual affair. In Section 1.2.b. it has been pointed out that in Greek mythology divine seduction usually brings no disgrace.[180] It follows that Creusa's reticence and fear

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Pi. *P.* 9. 39-41: the Pindaric Apollo, before mating with the nymph, even asks Chiron for permission. Apollo's abduction of Creusa while the girl was plucking flowers (κρόκεα πέταλα ἔδρεπον, 889-90) can also be compared with Pluto's abduction of Proserpina in Ov. *Met.* V (*violas aut candida lilia carpit*, V. 392). Both texts openly criticize the god's violent behaviour (*Ion.* 893-5 κραυγὰν Ὠ μᾶτέρ μ᾽ αὐδῶσαν [...]ἄγες ἀναιδείᾳ ≈ Ov. *Met.* V. 395-398 *raptaque Diti [...]maesto/ et matrem et comites, sed matrem saepius, ore/ clamat*; *Ion.* 941, ἄκουσα ≈ Ov. *Met.* V. 415, cf. 492 *invitae*) even though Ovid's description of rape through the words of the fonts Cyane and Aretusa is far more explicit: the imagery of Pluto hurling his sceptre in the fountain (V. 422, *contortum valido sceptrum regale lacerto*) and piercing the land to make his way to Tartarus (V.423 *icta tellus*; 426 *inconsolabile vulnus*; 492 *terra nihil meruit patuitque invita rapinae*) replicates the violent image of penetration. Cf. Curran (1978), 222.

[177] Cf. E. *Ion.* 1497-500. Rabinowitz (1993), 201-2 claims that Creusa is to be blamed more than Apollo due to the fact that she decided to expose the child. Nevertheless, her human helplessness and her belief that her baby would be rescued by his divine father is likely to have aroused sympathy among the spectators (960). See further Hoffer (1996), 302.

[178] E. *Ion.* 898 (φρίκᾳ ματρὸς), 1497 (ἐν φόβῳ).

[179] E. *Ion.* 14-5, 69-73, 1353, 1565, 1601-3.

[180] Lefkowitz (1993), 26.

must have sprung from her conviction that nobody would believe her story. Scepticism usually surrounds the stories of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals in Euripidean plays.[181] For instance, Amphion, the son of Antiope and Zeus, asserts that he cannot believe that a god would come to the bed of a mortal girl imitating the behaviour of a malefactor.[182] Similarly, the sisters of Semele claim that 'she has conceived a child from a mortal father and then ascribed the sin of her bed to Zeus'.[183] Likewise, Ion is reluctant to believe right to the end that a woman mated with Apollo: he twice supposes that it is a clever trick to which mortal girls resort whenever they want to escape the shame of an illicit sexual affair by shifting the blame on a god.[184] He is not convinced of his divine origin until Athena appears to confirm Creusa's version of the facts:

ὦ Διὸς Παλλὰς μεγίστου θύγατερ, οὐκ ἀπιστίᾳ
σοὺς λόγους ἐδεξάμεσθα, πείθομαι δ᾽ εἶναι πατρὸς
Λοξίου καὶ τῆσδε· καὶ πρὶν τοῦτο δ᾽ οὐκ ἄπιστον ἦν.
(E. *Ion.* 1606-8)

Pallas, daughter of great Zeus, I believe what you have said, I am convinced that I am the son of Loxias and this woman; even before this was not incredible.

The authority of divine speech finally persuades Ion: mortals cannot receive the word of a deity with disbelief (ἀπιστίᾳ). Athena's appearance dispels Ion's previous doubts about his father: that he is of divine origin is no longer unbelievable (ἄπιστον) to him. Had it not been for Athena's intervention, Ion would probably never have believed in his

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[181] Huys (1995), 90-1; Segal (1999), 98-102.
[182] E. fr. 210 N². For Lycus' scepticism, see E. fr. 223 N².
[183] E. *Ba.* 27-30, 242-7, 286-97.
[184] E. *Ion.* 340-341, 1523-7.

divine origin.[185] Creusa's awareness that humans lack a propensity to believe stories of intimate contact between gods and mortals contributes to worsening her situation because it spurs her to abandon her child.

On the one hand, such scepticism is a necessary plot device, which advances and complicates the action,[186] and on the other hand, it can be seen as a reflection of the fifth-century rationalizing tendency.[187] Ion in this play, as well as Amphion in the *Antiope*, seems to act as the spokesperson of avant-garde philosophical speculation against divine anthropomorphism.[188] However, the plot itself then confirms that Ion is of divine origin, although nobody initially believes it. Therefore, scepticism about the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals is eventually rebutted.[189] It follows that Ion's initial reaction of disbelief is more likely to be simply a way of coping with an event that defies explanation in terms of typical human experience.

Euripides is playing on the specificity of theatre, namely the tension between the real and the mythical. As Gould points out, in any tragic performance two different perspectives of myth coexist: whereas the

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[185] This observation will come in handy later when we analyse Euripides' problematization of Apollo's behaviour.

[186] Huys (1995), 90-1.

[187] Susanetti (2007), 230.

[188] It is widely acknowledged that Euripides often drew on cutting-edge philosophical theories to put unconventional ideas into the mouths of the characters: Conacher (1998); Ostwald (1999), 33-49; Allan (1999-2000), 145-56; Dillon (2004), 47-73; Whitmarsh (2014), 109-26.

[189] What is more, the theory of the development from μῦθος to λόγος in ancient Greek civilization (Nestle, 1940) has fallen out of favour among a considerable number of scholars (Dodds, 1951 and Buxton, 1999 with further recent bibliography): it has been argued that there was no sudden change from myth to reason and that the new way of explaining reality introduced by rational philosophy did not involve a total rejection of mythology. By contrast, the mythical and the rational coexisted throughout the centuries. For a discussion of the rationality of myth, see Gould (1999), 107-116. See also Kindt (2012), 36-54.

audience considers the events performed on stage as belonging to myth, from the characters' point of view they are real life experiences.[190] Creusa's and Ion's vicissitudes belong to the world of myth but, once they are performed or recalled on stage, they become the harsh reality of the characters' own lives. In the *Ion* things become even more complicated because Euripides makes the heroine directly involved in the sexual relationship with a god reveal her own story, whereas in the *Suppliants* Io's union with Zeus is recalled on stage several decades after it happened. In the latter case, the reliability of the account of the sexual intercourse between the god and the mortal girl is never disputed: this event has already been accepted as belonging to the mythical past, as the terms used by both the Danaids and Pelasgus indicate.[191] By contrast, scepticism about Creusa's story springs from the overlap between the mythical and the real. What is unbelievable in real life is credible and true in the world of myth: the story of Creusa's rape by a god gives rise to doubt and disbelief on stage precisely because for the characters Creusa's myth coincides with real life. Sexual encounters between a deity and a mortal are plausible in the world of the myth only, whereas they are doubtful if they either happen or are recounted as happening in the real world.

This is confirmed by the fact that Ion has no doubt that both Poseidon and Zeus have had several violent sexual unions with mortal girls (445, 507-8), but Creusa's confession that she had a sexual union with Apollo sounds unbelievable to his ears. The plot of the *Ion* stimulates the audience to compare their own perspective and reaction to accounts of

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[190] Gould (1999), 108. For a discussion of the ways in which the mythical past can be conflated with the present, see Burkert (1979); Bremmer (1987); Calame (2003). For the extent to which the ancient Greeks believed in their myths, see Mikalson (1991); Sourvinou – Inwood (2003), Parker (2007), *contra.*

[191] λόγος and derivatives (295, 310); φημί and derivatives (φάτις) at vv. 291, 293, 301.

sexual encounters between gods and mortals with those of the characters on stage. Any spectator would have had a similar reaction of disbelief if the person sitting next to him had claimed to be Zeus' son: such a claim would have been perceived as belonging to the reality of the utterer's personal experience and thus as lacking the authentication of cultural tradition. By contrast, Heracles' divine paternity would have been taken for granted by the audience since Heracles' myth is part of the collective memory shared by the whole community. Euripides thus plays on the fact that in any theatrical performance the boundaries between myth and reality are blurred: as soon as a spectator realizes that he would react in the same way as Ion does on stage, he is also forced to acknowledge that such a reaction of incredulity is wrong. For Ion is indeed Apollo's son.

In conclusion, the expressions of scepticism uttered by Ion are not to be considered as evidence that in this play the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals are criticized as risible and senseless stories which can no longer be believed in the wake of the latest advances of philosophical speculation. Euripides problematizes these myths of intimate contact between a deity and a girl on a different level, as we shall see a bit later in this section.

Let us return for a moment to the discussion of the accusations brought against Apollo by the victim of rape. Apart from the violence suffered, what causes the greatest distress to Creusa is Apollo's uncaring attitude. Just as the Danaids lay claim to Zeus' protection by virtue of their bond of kinship, so too Creusa expects Apollo to save their own son. Similarly, Creusa feels resentment against Apollo precisely because he is believed to have broken the 'reciprocity contract' which should have

created a certain obligation towards the woman he coupled with and their offspring.[192] At vv. 912-917 Creusa angrily exclaims:

> Ἰὼ <ἰώ> κακὸς εὐνάτωρ,
> ὃς τῷ μὲν ἐμῷ νυμφεύτᾳ
> χάριν οὐ προλαβὼν
> παῖδ᾽ εἰς οἴκους οἰκίζεις·
> ὁ δ᾽ ἐμὸς γενέτας καὶ σός, ἀμαθής,
> οἰωνοῖς ἔρρει συλαθείς […]
> (E. *Ion.* 912-918)

Oh, wicked lover, though you had no previous favour from my husband, you gave him a child for his house; yet my son and yours, unfeeling god,[193] has vanished taken as prey for birds […].

From this passage it is evident that, at least from the humans' point of view, the principle of reciprocity governs the relationship between gods and mortals. Creusa is angry at Apollo because the god, although he has received no favour (χάριν οὐ προλαβὼν, 914) from her husband, has reserved special treatment for him. The word χάρις refers to the practice of a continued and reciprocal exchange of favours between deities and worshippers, whereas the concessive clause highlights the fact that Apollo was not required to give Xuthus a child as a gift since there was no favour to reciprocate. On the contrary, as the adversative particle δέ stresses (916), Creusa is the one who should have enjoyed Apollo's special care and affection by virtue of their previous sexual affair. This is the reason why she accuses Apollo of being evil (κακός, 912) and unfeeling (ἀμαθής,

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[192] Creusa calls both her husband and Apollo 'ungrateful betrayers of her bed' (λέκτρων προδότας ἀχαρίστους, 880).
[193] Cf. Owen (1939) on 916: 'ἀμαθής is almost certainly an apostrophe'.

917) and even imagines him playing his lyre joyously without any care for their child (905-6).[194]

From the beginning of the play, however, the audience is aware that the charge of child neglect is unfair and that Creusa's belief that her son is dead is false.[195] In the prologue Hermes affirms that he saved Ion by bringing him to Delphi upon Apollo's command (28-36). What is more, several times throughout the play the characters acknowledge that Loxias directed the events to the final reunion between mother and son.[196] These passages have been put forward by scholars as evidence in support of the thesis that the critique of the god ultimately proves to be unfounded and the figure of Apollo is fully rehabilitated: he did care for Creusa and his offspring.[197]

Nevertheless, from the vantage point of the mortals such a close relationship is still a doubtful privilege since it has resulted in a prolonged period of separation between mother and son. The god has acted in aid of family reunification too late and has not even reassured Creusa about Ion's fate.[198] In this regard, the charge brought against Apollo by Ion is particularly meaningful: at vv. 448-9 Ion exclaims that Apollo is 'guilty (ἀδικεῖτ') of pursuing his own pleasures and taking no thought for the future (τῆς προμηθίας πέρα)'. Ion is provocatively accusing the prophetic god of lacking insight into the future.[199] Being a mortal, he cannot help but

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[194] The adjective ἀμαθής can have either a moral or an intellectual meaning. See Bond (1988), n. *ad loc.*

[195] E. *Ion.* 951-3, 1439-53.

[196] E. *Ion.* 67-75 (Hermes); 1456-7 (Ion); 1343, 1347-9, 1353, 1357-60, 1367-8 (Pythia); 1565, 1595 (Athena), 1609-13 (Creusa).

[197] See Wassermann (1940); Burnett (1962); Wolff (1965), 184.

[198] E. *Ion.* 310-2, 320, 324, 360-1, 563-5, 668-70, 1369-79.

[199] The word προμηθία literally means 'foresight'. See Lee (1997), n. *ad loc., contra.*

judge the violent act committed by Loxias from the narrow perspective of the specifically human.[200] Ion's sentence thus means that Apollo, at the moment of the rape, did not think about the negative consequences that his act would have had on human lives.

Apollo's uncaring attitude is due to the different way in which gods and mortals perceive time, as we have already seen in the analysis of the *Suppliants*.[201] The human conception of time is limited to their short existence, and this is the reason why they evaluate both divine agency and their own happiness on the basis of their emotional well-being. By contrast, the suffering experienced by mortals is of less importance to the gods due to the fact they have a broader view of the future, which comprises more than one generation. In this regard, the twofold etymology implied by the name 'Ion' is worth mentioning. Apollo decided to call his child Ion to make him the eponymous founder of the Asian Ionian cities, as Hermes explains in the prologue (73-4), whereas Xuthus chooses the same name for a different reason: he names the boy after the participle of the verb 'to come/go' because Ion was the first person he met as he 'came out' (ἐξιόντι, 662) of the temple.[202] Since men cannot predict the future, the etymology given by Xuthus inevitably refers only to the fortuitous reunion with his son, without any hint at the future glorious role played by Ion.

To sum up, the glorious destiny of the Athenian lineage, which should be considered as the adequate compensation for Ion's and Creusa's misfortunes, cannot blot out their previous distress. It follows that, on the

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[200] Wassermann (1940), 589-90; Burnett (1962), 93.

[201] De Romilly (1968), 113-41; Segal (1999), 74-81, 91-3; Mirto (2009), 10 f.

[202] See also E. *Ion.* 535, 802.

personal level, a close relationship with a god is not worthwhile. On the other hand, the divine origin of Ion should at least be beneficial to the city of Athens since it can be put forward both as evidence of the nobility and prestige of the royal family and as an argument in support of Athens' imperialistic claims. What is more, the heterosexual union between the autochthonous Creusa and Apollo should restore the gender balance, which is usually compromised in the myth of autochthony. However, I shall now argue that all but one of the potential benefits deriving from Apollo's union with Creusa are impaired by Apollo's actions.

We have seen that in the *Suppliants* Zeus' union with Io threatens the political stability of Argos and the autochthony of its rulers because the city that piously grants the Danaids asylum suffers foreign military occupation and a tyrannical takeover. Similarly, in the *Ion* the racial purity of an autochthonous city is suddenly menaced by an intruder, namely Ion, who is initially believed to be the illegitimate son of Xuthus. Therefore, at first glance the danger that a foreigner might inherit the throne is similar to the threat posed by the Danaids. Yet there is a significant difference between the two stories: whereas a mixed royal dynasty does take over Argive rule, in the *Ion* this eventuality turns out to be merely a false menace, given that Ion is actually Creusa's son. In the long run the sexual intercourse between a god and a mortal girl jeopardizes the autochthony of the royal dynasty in the *Suppliants,* whereas it preserves it in the *Ion.* What in the *Suppliants* is a negative consequence of Zeus' liaison with Io turns out to be the only actual advantage brought about by a similar sexual union in the *Ion.* I shall now examine the differences between the two plays in more detail.

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Creusa is a noble native of Athens,[203] the only surviving daughter of the king Erechtheus.[204] Since Erechtheus died leaving no male heir, Creusa has become an ἐπίκληρος, namely the daughter who transmits her father's property to her sons.[205] According to the Athenian institution of the *epiklerate*, she should have married her closest male relative on the paternal side of the family. By contrast, she was given in marriage to the foreign-born Xuthus in return for military service.[206] This apparently incongruous betrothal actually follows a typical habit of archaic marriage:[207] in case of need, the head of a household can adopt a foreign ally and betroth his daughter to him.[208] Such mixed marriage has the advantage of both enhancing the military strength of the household and protecting its property since, as the result of the adoption, the bride is not transferred to an alien οἶκος. Therefore, if Creusa had borne Xuthus a son, the royal property would have been transferred to a legitimate heir.[209] The

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[203] Creusa's nobility is constantly highlighted: γενναιότη (237), εὐγενής (240, 242), γενναίος (262), ἐσθλός (620), εὐπατρίδης (1073).

[204] E. *Ion.* 277-80; cf. E. fr. 360 K (*Erechtheus*).

[205] See esp. Loraux (1993), 202 ff.

[206] E. *Ion.* 57-64, 292-8. His foreign origins are frequently stressed throughout the play: οὐκ ἐγγενὴς (63); ἐπακτὸς ἐξ ἄλλης χθονός, (290, 592); ξένος, (293, 813); θυραῖος (702-3).

[207] Whereas archaic marriage aimed at establishing relationships of mutual assistance between aristocratic families, after Cleisthenes' reforms the main purpose of matrimonial unions was to 'ensure the legitimate continuity of the citizen households' (Seaford, 1990, 155). In the democratic state there was an increasing tendency to discourage marriages with non-Athenians (e.g. Pericles' law on citizenship): Todd (1993), 178.

[208] In this case, the girl must have been betrothed by a male guardian, given that Creusa's father is dead: Mirto (2009), 22-3.

[209] Although the property of the Erechtheid household cannot be alienated from the ἐπίκληρος, Creusa still needs Xuthus to beget a legitimate son to whom she may bequeath Erechtheus' holding. For an ἐπίκληρος does not own the property but rather is the medium through which a male child may inherit his grandfather's property. Cf. Lacey (1968), 138-42.

integration of an outsider into an Athenian οἶκος is accepted provided that the marriage results in the birth of a successor.[210]

The problem is that the couple were barren. To complicate things further, the Delphic oracle apparently reunites the foreign husband with a son of his own, who was born out of Xuthus' previous illicit affair with an unknown woman. The autochthony of the Erechtheid line is thus jeopardized since an alien, who has no blood tie with Creusa, becomes the heir to the throne of Athens.[211] The fear of losing one's identity and presumed racial purity accentuates xenophobic attitudes. Ion himself, as soon as he is informed about Loxias' oracle (507-38), worries about his foreign origins and illegitimacy:[212]

> εἶναί φασι τὰς αὐτόχθονας
> κλεινὰς Ἀθήνας οὐκ ἐπείσακτον γένος,
> ἵν᾿ ἐσπεσοῦμαι δύο νόσω κεκτημένος,
> πατρός τ᾿ ἐπακτοῦ καὐτὸς ὢν νοθαγενής.
> καὶ τοῦτ᾿ ἔχων τοὔνειδος ἀσθενὴς μὲν ὢν[213]
> μηδὲν καὶ οὐδὲν ὢν κεκλήσομαι·
> ἢν δ᾿ ἐς τὸ πρῶτον πόλεος ὁρμηθεὶς ζυγὸν
> ζητῶ τις εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ἀδυνάτων ὕπο
> μισησόμεσθα
> (E. *Ion.* 589-97)

> ἐλθὼν δ᾿ ἐς οἶκον ἀλλότριον ἔπηλυς ὢν

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[210] See Seaford (1990), 158.

[211] The autochthony of the Erechtheid line is highlighted at E. *Ion.* 20-1, 29-30, 267, 589-90, 737, 1000.

[212] A little later he also complains that a foreigner's tongue is enslaved in Athens (τό γε στόμα/ δοῦλον πέπαται, 674-5). This reminds us of the advice given by Danaus to his daughters in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (194-203): 'You are an alien, a fugitive (ξένος, 202), and in need. Bold speech (θρασυστομεῖν, 203) does not suit the weak.' Ion also prays that his mother may be Athenian, so that he may have free speech (παρρησία, 672). This passage has been interpreted as a reference to Pericles' law on citizenship since it implies that a child has a right to citizenship only if both of his parents are Athenian. See Walsh (1978), 307; Segal (1999), 67-74.

[213] I keep the transmitted text (μὲν ὢν L : μένων Musgrave)

γυναῖκά θ᾽ ὡς ἄτεκνον, […]
πῶς οὐχ ὑπ᾽ αὐτῆς εἰκότως μισήσομαι,
ὅταν παραστῶ σοὶ μὲν ἐγγύθεν ποδός,
ἡ δ᾽ οὖσ᾽ ἄτεκνος τὰ σὰ φίλ᾽ εἰσορᾷ πικρῶς;
(E. *Ion.* 607-8, 611-13)

They say that the famous Athenians, born from the soil, are no immigrant race. I would be suffering from two disabilities if I were cast there, both the foreignness of my father and my own bastardy. And with this reproach, if I am insignificant,[214] I shall be called no one and nothing. If I attempt to be somebody by aspiring to the city's helm, I shall be hated by the powerless.

Then suppose I come, as a foreigner, to a house that is not mine and to your childless wife. […] How will she not hate me, and with reason, when I take my stand beside you while she, being childless, looks with bitterness at what gives you joy?

In Athens Ion would be put at a disadvantage: he would be powerless (ἀσθενής, 593) because he does not come from a famous (κλεινὰς, 590) and autochthonous (αὐτόχθονας, 589) γένος, which has not been brought in from outside (οὐκ ἐπείσακτον, 590) but rather has always lived in the same place. Ion's shortcomings are expressed by means of a medical metaphor: compared to Athenian citizens, he suffers from two ailments (δύο νόσω, 591), namely his foreignness (ἐπακτοῦ, 592; ἔπηλυς, 607) and illegitimacy (νοθαγενής, 592). Due to these defects, which are both regarded as a blot on his name (τοὔνειδος, 593), the Athenians will despise him.

The fear of reproach against newcomers is also felt by the Danaids in the *Suppliants* (ψόγον, 973; γλῶσσαν…κακήν, 994-5). Nevertheless, whereas Danaus' fifty daughters ask the Argives for protection only, Xuthus intends to place his illegitimate son on the throne of Athens: as a consequence, Ion will be hated not only by the Athenians (μισησόμεσθα,

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[214] Owen (1939) on ἀσθενὴς at 593: 'ineffectual', i. e. 'of no political weight'.

597) but also by his adoptive mother for more personal reasons (μισήσομαι, 609). Creusa's grief for being childless (ἄτεκνος, 608, 613) will turn into bitterness (πικρῶς, 613) if she is forced to welcome her stepson.

This is exactly what happens shortly afterwards. Xuthus is accused of having betrayed his wife[215] and of having devised a diabolical plan to rob the Erechtheids of their household[216] and to make his illegitimate son the country's future king (828-9).[217] However, it would be unthinkable to let a foreign-born interloper reign over an autochthonous city:[218] as the ancestor Erechtheus strenuously fought against the Thracian incursion, so Creusa must defend the racial purity of Athens at all costs (721-4).

Another similarity can here be detected between the *Ion* and the *Suppliants*: to justify their intention to ward off the foreign threat, both Pelasgus and the Athenian chorus call to mind a similar act of self-defence carried out by a previous ruler of the city, namely either Erechtheus or Apis.[219] Yet the king of Argos restricts himself to menacing the Danaids and, in the end, welcomes them in his royal palace in order to respect the

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[215] E. *Ion.* 808 (προδεδόμεσθα), 864 (προδότης), 880 (λέκτρων προδότας ἀχαρίστους).

[216] E. *Ion.* 692 (ἔχει δόλον τέχναν), 705 (ἐξαπαφὼν), 809-10 (μεμηχανημένως ὑβριζόμεσθα), 834 (μηχαναῖς), 826-7 (κἄπλεκεν πλοκὰς/ τοιάσδ'). In this regard, it is interesting to note that excessive cunning is a typical characteristic of foreign people and that it is ascribed to the Danaids as well in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (see Section 1.3.). Yet, whereas the fifty daughters are indeed sly, both Ion and Xuthus are innocent. On the contrary, it is Creusa and the old tutor who will prove capable of devising deadly stratagems to get rid of Ion (1028, 1216, 1279-80).

[217] See also E. *Ion.* 809-11, 865-6. Creusa's old pedagogue even speculates that it was Xuthus that made up the false oracle (823-7). There is some irony here: for, the oracle is indeed false, but the blame lies with Apollo only, as we shall see below. Cf. Zacharia (2003), 136.

[218] E. *Ion.* 719-24, 843-6, 978, 1048-60, 1069-73.

[219] Pelasgus mentions Apis' success in eradicating a brood of invasive snakes (A. *Supp.* 262-70).

inviolability of the suppliants. Creusa, by contrast, contrives a cunning and effective way (δόλια καὶ δραστήρια, 985) to kill the young intruder.[220]

Creusa's plan, however, is thwarted by divine intervention: Apollo intervenes because he does not wish to be polluted (οὐ μιανθῆναι θέλων, 118). Similarly, Pelagsus decides to welcome the Danaids with the aim of avoiding pollution (*Supp.* 472-3). Nevertheless, in the *Suppliants* it is precisely the Danaids' reception into the city that eventually leads to μίασμα.[221] By contrast, in the *Ion* reconciliation between the two parties is made possible by the arrival of the Pythia, who brings the recognition tokens. Once the ἀναγνώρισις between mother and son has taken place, the threat posed by Ion to Athenian autochthony immediately turns out to be illusory: not only was Ion not born from Xuthus' illicit affair with an unknown woman, but he is not even the half-Athenian son of Creusa by Xuthus. On the contrary, he was born by the autochthonous daughter of Erechtheus to Apollo: therefore, as Athena as *deus ex machina* proclaims, he is entitled to rule over Attica. Instead of jeopardizing the racial purity of the Athenians, he will have the merit of perpetuating the autochthonous Erechtheid line. The first problem caused by Apollo's union with Creusa is thus solved on all levels.

Returning to the apparent advantages of Creusa's sexual union with Apollo, it has been argued that Euripides intentionally modifies the myth of Ion by making him Apollo's son with the aim of reconciling two opposite myths, which were both essential for the self-representation of

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[220] E. *Ion.* 987-1038, 1050-7, 1181-6. Since the Gorgon is an earth-born monster (989), her venom is the best weapon to use against he who endangers the perpetuation of the Erechtheid stock.

[221] See Section 1.3.

Athens, namely the Ionianism and the autochthony of Athens.[222] Whereas in the archaic period the Ionian identity of the Athenians was strongly affirmed,[223] an anti-Ionian attitude began to emerge in the fifth century: after the end of the Persian Wars Athenian identity became a subject of more urgent concern due to the increasing flux of foreigners and, as a consequence, the myth of Athenian autochthony was given increasingly greater prominence.[224] The autochthonous origins of Athens made it possible for the Athenians both to exalt their democratic origins and to fulfil their desire for self-definition as distinct from any other γένος.[225] However, it was also important for the Athenians not to deny their kinship links with the Ionians completely since the latter were their allies.[226] Consequently, Athens did not profess to be of Ionian descent anymore but rather claimed to be the μητρόπολις of Ionia:[227] this modified version of the relationship between the two Hellenic races allowed Athens to deal with the Ionians from a position of strength and to justify its imperialism.[228]

Similarly, in the *Ion* Euripides thinks up an original way to praise the Athenians' autochthony while defending their imperialistic claims: contrary to tradition, the playwright makes Apollo and the autochthonous

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[222] Dougherty (1996), Saxonhouse (1986), Hall (1997b), 51-6. According to the main version of the myth of Ion, the hero is the son of Creusa and Xuthus, who is Hellen's offspring and has two siblings, namely Aeolus and Dorus (Hes. fr. 10a 20-3, ed. Solmsen – Merkelbach – West; Hdt. VII. 94, VIII. 44; Paus. 7.1-2; E. *Melanipp. Sap.* fr. 10 f Page). See Owen (1939), x-xvii; Wolff (1965), n. 9; Parker (1987), 206-7.

[223] Cf. Sol. fr. 4a West; Hdt. 1. 56. 2, 1. 143. 2; Th. 7. 57. 2; Hall (1997b), 51.

[224] Montanari (1981), 40-3, 54-5; Alty (1982), 1-14; Rosivach (1987), 297; Hall (1997b), 53-5; Zacharia (2003), 48-55; Isaac (2004), 109 ff; Mc Coskey (2012), 57 ff.

[225] The Athenians gradually distanced themselves from their previous aristocratic ideology (cf. Cleisthenes' reforms): Dougherty (1996), 254; Montanari (1981), 53-7.

[226] Hdt. I. 143. 3 with Alty (1982), 8.

[227] Th. 1. 12; Str.. 14. 1. 3; Paus. 7. 1-2.

[228] Hall (1997), 55-6. Cf. also Zacharia (2003), 44-55, *contra*.

Creusa Ion's parents. As a result of this invention, the foreignness of Ion is eliminated and the Ionians come to be the Athenians' descendants. For, as Athena predicts at the end of the play, 'children born to Ion's four sons shall come to dwell in the island cities of the Cyclades and the coastal cities of the mainland. [...] They shall be called Ionians after this boy and win glory' (1581-9). Thanks to this bond of kinship, Athens' leading role in fifth-century Greek politics is justified. What is more, by making Achaeus and Dorus the younger stepbrothers of Ion, Euripides stresses that both the Achaeans and the Dorians are inferior and of mixed blood. The supremacy of the Athenian γένος is thus once again strongly affirmed. For all these reasons the *Ion* has long been interpreted as a play spreading Athens' political propaganda in order to support Athenian imperialism.[229]

This theory, however, has fallen out of favour among scholars since it suffers from some serious limitations.[230] First of all, the action of the play shows the dangers inherent in the myth of autochthony. An autochthonous city inevitably becomes xenophobic, but the Athenian demand for racial purity has potential harmful effects, as the plot of the *Ion* illustrates: to protect the autochthony of the Erechtheid line, Creusa almost kills her only son.[231] Xenophobia has brought the Athenian royal dynasty to the brink of extinction, but such danger is ultimately averted by divine intervention. As Athena predicts at the end of the play, Creusa and the city of Athens will cure their previous infertility provided that they both open up towards the foreigners: Creusa will bear two sons to her foreign husband, and Athens will become the mother city of Ionian

[229] Owen A. S. (1939), xi-xii; Grégoire (1950), 168 ff; Hoffer (1996), 313.
[230] Esp. Mirto (2009), 62 n. 66; Lee (1997), 34; Walsh (1978), 301-15
[231] For an analysis of the dangers inherent in autochthony, see Whitman (1974), 69-103; Mastronarde (1975), 163-76, esp. n. 18; Walsh (1978), 305-6; Saxonhouse (1986), 256-61; Goff (1988), 47-50 and (1995), 365; Rabinowitz (1993), 206-8; Loraux (1993), 220-36.

colonies.[232] Therefore, the aim of the play is likely to be not so much to express Athenian pride in racial exclusiveness as to indicate the need for a more open attitude towards outsiders.[233]

Additionally, although in the play there is undoubtedly an assertion of Athenian superiority over all other Greek ethnic groups,[234] this boasting is mitigated by two key elements. On the one hand, the attitude towards the Ionians is laudatory: Ion's four sons will give their names to the Athenian tribes and will be renowned in Hellas. Given that the four tribes of ancient Athens had already been replaced by Cleisthenes' ten tribes at the time of the production of the play,[235] this anachronistic reference to the eponymous role of the Ionians must have been intentionally flattering.[236] On the other hand, the eponyms of the Dorians and the Achaeans are still Ion's brothers, even though they are of mixed blood: the kinship between the Athenians and the other Hellenic races is highlighted despite their different levels of blood purity.[237]

For all these reasons scholars have proposed a slightly modified version of the commonly-held interpretation of the *Ion* as a piece of political propaganda: Apollo's union with Creusa has indeed been the means through which the Athenians have preserved their autochthony, which in turn justifies their imperialism by making them superior to any other Greek ἔθνος. However, Athenian supremacy is expressed in a

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[232] Barrenness is a common problem among autochthons: see Loraux (1993), 213-20; Rynearson (2014), 51.

[233] Saxonhouse (1986), 272-3; Zacharia (2003), 44-102.

[234] See Montanari (1981), 191-7; Loraux (1993), 213-20.

[235] The *Ion* was probably performed in 411 BC. For the rejection of an earlier date for the play, see Wolff (1965), n. 8; Walsh (1978), 313-5;

[236] Zacharia (2003), 48-55.

[237] Walsh (1978), 307 ff; Zacharia (2003), 48-55.

moderate and somewhat conciliatory way so as to promote ties of friendship among countries.[238] In this way, the most sinister and violent aspects of autochthony are offset. Nevertheless, as I shall show in a moment, the Athenians' claim to hegemony, which is based on Ion's divine origin, is jeopardized precisely by Apollo's behaviour.

Ion's divine origin also serves as a way to nullify another drawback of the myth of autochthony. Whereas birth from the earth deprives women of their status as mothers, the heterosexual union between the autochthonous Creusa and a male deity recuperates female power in a way that restores gender dynamics. In a feminist reading of the play, the myth of Ion has been interpreted as exalting the role of the mother and giving prominence to Creusa by making her 'the sole bearer of legitimacy'.[239] This thesis, however, is not convincing because Creusa eventually resigns herself to accepting male authority: although the maternal bond is essential to validate Athenian autochthony, Ion's physical tie to his natural mother is kept secret in deference to his bond to his putative father. According to a diametrically opposite interpretation, the play ultimately reasserts the dominance of the paternal principle given that Ion can inherit the Erechtheid household provided that he is recognized as Xuthus' legitimate son.[240] Yet the interpretation of the *Ion* as a play propagating patriarchal ideology is also unconvincing because Xuthus' authority is irremediably challenged by the insertion of an

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[238] Wassermann (1940), 595; cf. Walsh (1978), 308-12; Zeitlin (1989), 177-179; Zacharia (2003), 48-55. According to Walsh (1978) and Loraux (1993), 57-71, the play symbolizes the relaxation of Pericles' law of citizenship. Cf. Seaford (1990), 159 and Hoffer (1996), 314, *contra*.

[239] Loraux (1990), 171. See also Saxonhouse (1986), 256-71; Loraux (1993), 184-236; Zeitlin (1996), 289.

[240] Rabinowitz (1993), 213 ff.; Saxonhouse (1992), 76-89.

illegitimate child into his household.[241] Such a serious blow dealt to male power is once again ascribable to divine agency, as I shall now discuss more fully.

A further potential benefit deriving from Apollo's union with Creusa is that it resolves a problem affecting Athenian autochthony: an autochthonous city can pride itself on its racial purity but cannot boast of divine origins. For there is no founder-hero fathered by a god, but rather all citizens descend from the earth itself. This shortcoming was first pointed out by Loraux in her analysis of the myth of Erichthonios' birth from the earth: 'the virginal goddess Athena, exempted from sex and procreation, cannot directly enhance the city's prestige through the popular strategy in Greek myth by which the offspring of a god and a mortal confers divine sanction on a city's beginning'.[242] However, the Greeks thought up a clever solution to this problem: Erichthonios sprang from the Attic soil but, as a matter of fact, the earth itself had been fertilized by the semen of Hephaestus overcome by desire for Athena. It follows that the Athenians can legitimately claim a divine ancestry: for their forefather was born from a sort of heterosexual union and was then taken care of by the goddess herself.[243]

Bearing all of this in mind, we can assume that Apollo's paternity in the *Ion* serves the same purpose: by making Apollo the father of Ion, Euripides probably intended to glorify both the Athenians' autochthony and their special connection with Apollo.[244] What is striking, however, is that Apollo's fatherhood is kept strictly secret: Phoebus even passes his

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[241] Segal (1999), 93-8; Rynearson (2014), 66.
[242] Loraux (1993), XIV.
[243] Loraux (1993), 57-71.
[244] Cf. the cult of Apollo Πατρῷος in the post-Euripidean: Montanari (1981), 191-7.

own son off as Xuthus' offspring. In order to understand the scope of Euripides' problematization of Apollo's behaviour, the reasons for the god's silence over his paternity should be analysed.

Both Hermes in the prologue and Athena in the exodus assert that it is Apollo who wants to keep his sexual affair secret by saying that Xuthus is the father of Ion.[245] This intention is motivated by his desire to make Ion take his place in a noble house.[246] Therefore, Apollo lies for a good cause: he has not neglected his own son but rather has bestowed a putative father on him to give Ion what belongs to him.[247] Apollo's lie is closely related to his affection for his offspring. Phoebus' caring attitude is in the end acknowledged by Creusa too, after she has finally been reunited with her son:

> εὐεργετῶν σε Λοξίας ἐς εὐγενῆ
> δόμον καθίζει· τοῦ θεοῦ δὲ λεγόμενος
> οὐκ ἔσχες ἄν ποτ᾽ οὔτε παγκλήρους δόμους
> οὔτ᾽ ὄνομα πατρός. πῶς γάρ, οὗ γ᾽ ἐγὼ γάμους
> ἔκρυπτον αὐτὴ καί σ᾽ ἀπέκτεινον λάθρᾳ;
> ὁ δ᾽ ὠφελῶν σε προστίθησ᾽ ἄλλῳ πατρί.
> (E. *Ion.* 1540-45)

It was for your good that Loxias settles you in a noble house. If you were called the god's son, you would not have had a house as your inheritance or a father's name. How could you, seeing that I hid my liaison and tried to kill you secretly? But he is doing you good by making you over to another father.

In this passage the heroine reassures the sceptical Ion that Apollo handed him over to another father for his benefit. Two verbs are used to stress Apollo's benevolent intent: εὐεργετέω ('to show kindness to one', 1540) and ὠφελέω ('to help', 1545). To convince Ion, Creusa gives specific

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[245] E. *Ion.* 69-73 (Hermes), 1353 (Pythia), 1565, 1601-3 (Athena).
[246] E. *Ion.* 1561-2 (Athena).
[247] E. *Ion.* 70-73 (Hermes).

details on inheritance issues: being called the god's son (τοῦ θεοῦ δὲ λεγόμενος, 1541) is the very condition that would impede Ion from inheriting a home (παγκλήρους δόμους, 1542).[248] What is puzzling about Ion's process of inheritance is that Apollo's paternity is not a sufficient condition to ensure that Ion obtains what rightfully belongs to him. To grant his offspring an inheritance, Apollo must make Xuthus believe that Ion is his own child.[249]

Blame could be shifted to Creusa: since she concealed her pregnancy and even tried to kill Ion, nobody would ever believe that Ion is Creusa's son. She bitterly adds that, had it not been for Apollo's intervention, Ion would have never be able to become the heir to the throne of Athens.

Nevertheless, scepticism is not the real reason why Ion's inheritance would be taken away from him. Just as Athena's speech was sufficient to help Ion overcome disbelief in his divine origin, so Apollo should have been able to persuade Xuthus that Ion was fathered by the god himself. In addition to this, Phoebus' declaration of paternity should have sufficed to grant Ion an automatic right of succession to the throne. On the contrary, to guarantee Ion a glorious future as the king of Athens, Phoebus must give him up for adoption. This constraint imposed on Apollo highlights the scope of Euripides' problematization of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals: a god, who should not be concerned with human laws, seems to be forced to adhere to inheritance law, as I shall discuss in further detail. As a consequences, the prestige of divine paternity is irremediably compromised, and the popular strategy in

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248 Lee (1997), on 71-3; Zacharia (2003), 70-6.
249 Susanetti (2007), 244-5.

Greek myth by which a local hero of divine origin glorifies his city is called into question.

In this regard, it is worth analysing how different Euripides' treatment of the myth of Ion is from the depiction of sexual intercourse between a male deity and a girl in earlier sources.

The myth of Evadne in Pindar's *Olympian* 6 is especially interesting.[250] The heroine is impregnated by Apollo and, as much as she tries to hide her pregnancy out of shame and fear, she cannot escape the notice of her step-father Aepytus.[251] 'Unspeakable anger' (χόλον/ οὐ φατὸν, 62-3) is Aepytus' first emotional reaction to his stepdaughter's illicit behaviour. However, he decides to consult the Pythian oracle about such a great misfortune. Meanwhile, the girl gives birth and exposes the baby, who is then rescued by the will of Apollo (68-80). The decision to expose the child is likely to have been prompted by the same reasons that motivated Creusa's behaviour, that is shame and fear of punishment, which both spring from the heroine's awareness that scepticism would be the most common reaction to hearing her story. In Pindar's treatment of Evadne's myth, however, as opposed to Euripides' *Ion*, the situation is resolved simply thanks to Apollo's declaration of paternity. In fact, as soon as Aepytus is informed about the divine origin of his grandson Iamus, he changes his attitude towards Evadne's illegitimate offspring: he commands Evadne to recover her son since he is bound to become a great

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[250] Mirto (2001) and references.

[251] Whereas in Pindar Evadne alone is held responsible for the concealment of her pregnancy and for the exposure of the new-born, in the *Ion* Apollo shares responsibility for both acts since he wants to keep his paternity secret. For a similar case of joint responsibility in epic sources, see Hom. *Od.* 11. 236-59: Poseidon urges Tyro to tell nobody about their union but, unlike the Euripidean Apollo, he appears to his mortal lover in order to reassure her about the glorious fate of her offspring.

prophet and the founder of a famous line (80 ff). Therefore, it is the divine origin of Iamus that makes Aepytus change his previous hostile attitude towards Evadne's offspring: Iamus is no longer considered as merely an illegitimate child but rather as the glorious child of Apollo.[252]

Another Pindaric ode worthy of mention is the ninth Olympian since it concerns another married couple who, like Creusa and Xuthus, are affected by barrenness. Protogeneia's rape by Zeus, which results in the birth of Opus, is presented by Pindar as a kind of fertility treatment: the god carried off the girl (ἀναρπάσαις, 88) and lay with her peacefully (ἔκαλος μίχθη, 88-9) 'so that age would not overtake her husband Locrus and lay the burden of childlessness on him' (90-2).[253] It is also specified that Locrus 'rejoiced to see his adopted son' (εὐφράνθη τε ἰδὼν ἥρως θετὸν υἱόν, 96). Therefore, in Pindaric poetry divine paternity is a credit to the child's entire family: the offspring of a god is freed from the stigma of illegitimacy, and the mortal adoptive father feels honoured to foster him.

In the *Ion*, by contrast, the offspring born from the illicit sexual affair between Phoebus and Creusa does not benefit from his divine origin; on the contrary, he is stigmatized as any other child born out of wedlock. If divine paternity were still such a powerful source of prestige that it could wipe out the child's illegitimacy, the Erechtheid line would never be at risk of extinction: Apollo could openly acknowledge paternity of his child, Xuthus would be thrilled to adopt him, and Ion would

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[252] Cf. the myth of Asopos' daughters in Corinna's fragment 654 (esp. 44-51) and the story of the birth of Jesus in the *Gospel of Matthew*. I. 19; Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, 2. 4; *Protevangelium of James*, 14. 1.
[253] Transl. by D. A. Svarlien. Cf. Gentili (2013), 542-3.

automatically become the legitimate heir to the throne of Athens.[254] By contrast, Apollo cannot simply give Ion up for adoption but must also make the mortal parent believe that the child is his natural son. For the problem lies in the very fact that Ion could never be considered as legitimate despite his glorious divine origin. Divine paternity has partly lost its celebratory and legitimizing function: to be able to inherit what is due to him, Ion must be passed off as the legitimate heir of Xuthus.

Euripides thus problematizes the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals by showing Apollo's attempts to cope with the consequences of his sexual union with a mortal girl. In this respect, it is worth recalling Athena's assertion that Apollo preferred not to come into their sight because he feared their reproach (μέμψις, 1558).[255] Scholars are divided as to the meaning of this problematic utterance. For some, Athena's speech confirms Ion's previous hypothesis about Apollo's feeling of shame (αἰσχύνεται, 367), which was interpreted as an admission of guilt.[256] Apollo feels bad about his behaviour: he ravished a defenceless girl, thereby causing great pain. For others, Apollo's willingness to avoid direct contact with Ion and Creusa is not due to his shame but is rather intended to save them from blasphemous behaviour.[257] A further hypothesis can be advanced: Phoebus feels not so much guilty about using violence against Creusa as ashamed of not having handled the situation properly. In the long run his stature has been diminished as a consequence of his sexual affair with a mortal girl.

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[254] According to the Athenian law of inheritance, if a woman with a male child born of a lawful marriage becomes an ἐπίκληρος, her son is entitled to inherit the family's estate. In this case she is not legally an ἐπίκληρος anymore: MacDowell (1978), 96; Lacey (1968), 139-42.

[255] Cf. the analysis of this passage in Susanetti (2007), 232, 245.

[256] Rosenmeyer (1963), 113-22; Conacher (1967), 269 ff.

[257] Owen (1939), xxxi, 178; Wasserman (1940), 602.

First of all, to grant his offspring an inheritance, he had to give a false oracle intentionally, and his falsehood has damaged his credibility.[258] While divine oracles are usually enigmatic, though truthful, the oracular response given to Xuthus is unambiguous, yet false.[259] Some scholars have maintained that Xuthus misinterprets the oracle whose real meaning is that Apollo merely gives his own son up for adoption.[260] Creusa herself seems to interpret the oracular response in such a way because, in reply to Ion's question of why Apollo gave his child to Xuthus, she asserts: 'he did not say that you are his son (πεφυκέναι μὲν οὐχί, 1534); he merely gave him his own son as a present (δωρεῖται, 1535), just as a man might give a friend his son to be his heir'. Nevertheless, two out of three accounts of the oracle report that Phoebus actually predicted that the first person met by Xuthus out of the temple would be his son (πεφυκέναι).[261] Both Hermes and Xuthus use the verb φύω, whereas only the chorus leader says that Apollo 'gave (ἔδωκ', 787) Xuthus as a son to the one whom he should first encounter' without specifying whether the oracle also implied that Ion was his natural son or not. Even if the Pythian prophecy was somewhat ambiguous, it was undoubtedly meant to deceive Xuthus given that Athena herself, at the end of the play, urges Creusa and Ion to respect the wishes of Apollo and not to reveal the truth to Xuthus (1601-2).

The way Apollo deals with the consequences of his liaison also challenges his prophetic ability. He intends not to reveal Ion's true

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[258] Even Ion, Apollo's faithful servant, casts doubt on the credibility of the Delphic oracle (vv. 1537-8, 1546-8).

[259] The responsibility for interpreting an oracle incorrectly usually falls on men only: S. *OT.* 711-19; Hdt. I. 53ff. Cf. Mirto (2001), 26-7.

[260] Owen (1939), xix; Hartigan (1991), 76. For a rebuttal of this thesis, see Mirto (2001), 29-46.

[261] E. *Ion.* 69-71 (Hermes); 534-6 (Xuthus). The present perfect πεφυκέναι construed with the genitive means 'to be born from somebody' (Liddell – Scott, s.v. B. 2).

paternity until Creusa and Ion come back to Athens (1566-8), but the unexpected reactions of humans forestall the divine plans.[262] Loxias is thus forced to disclose such information in advance in order to impede mother and son from killing each other.

Finally, the most serious blow dealt to Apollo's omnipotence consists in the fact that the god seems to be limited by human laws on inheritance given that a divine origin no longer grants privileged treatment. To enthrone his son rightfully, he must lie because Ion's destiny depends on the Athenian laws of inheritance in spite of the fact that he is of divine origin. I have argued that Ion's sceptical attitude towards the story of his divine origin is not to be considered as evidence that the play supports advanced philosophical theories against divine anthropomorphism; on the contrary, the plot itself seems to rebut such theories by confirming that Ion is Apollo's son. Nonetheless, in the play a critique of anthropomorphic conceptions of the gods unfolds on another level: whereas it was widely acknowledged among the Greeks that human laws do not apply to the gods, the *Ion* shows that, as soon as Apollo interferes in human affairs, he is in a way obliged to conform to such laws. It is absurd that a god is forced to do so in the same way as it would be absurd for gods to be punished for their wrongdoing according to human laws. The startling aspect of the constraints imposed on Apollo is highlighted by the charge of ἀνομία ('lawlessness', 443) which Ion provokingly brings against Loxias in the first episode when he sarcastically states:

εἰ δ᾽ (οὐ γὰρ ἔσται, τῷ λόγῳ δὲ χρήσομαι)

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[262] Mastronarde (1975), 163-76; Mirto (2001), 39 ff; Zacharia (2003), 128-49; Susanetti (2007), 225.

δίκας βιαίων δώσετ᾽ ἀνθρώποις γάμων
σὺ καὶ Ποσειδῶν Ζεύς θ᾽ ὃς οὐρανοῦ κρατεῖ,
ναοὺς τίνοντες ἀδικίας κενώσετε.
(E. *Ion.* 444-447)

It will never happen, but I say it anyway: if you pay recompense to mortals for your rapes, you and Poseidon and Zeus, the ruler of heaven, you will empty your temples in paying for your crimes.

These verses have been interpreted as a reference to the Athenian law concerning the legal action claiming compensation for criminal injuries (δίκη βιαίων).[263] The tone of Ion's invective is provocative: he inconsistently applies the criteria of human justice to the judgment of divine behaviour although he is well aware that the gods, as opposed to men, do not have to pay the penalty for their crimes.[264] In fact, he bitterly comments: 'It will never happen, but I say it anyway' (444). Therefore, on the one hand it is acknowledged on stage that neither Apollo nor any other divine rapist can be judged and punished by the Athenian legal system, but on the other hand, it is shown that Apollo must comply with inheritance law to enthrone his son. Even worse, Apollo also breaks another law to reach his goal: as the result of Loxias' deceitful oracular response, Xuthus welcomes Ion to his home as his own lost son. This is the worst consequence of Apollo's union with Creusa because divine rape ultimately results in the social danger most feared by Athenian society: [265] an illegitimate child is brought up by an unknowing putative father.[266]

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[263] Mirto (2009), 49 ff.

[264] Wolff (1965), n. 32; Hoffer (1996), 309-10.

[265] Ebbott (2003), 67-83; Susanetti (2007), 224; Mirto (2009), 49 ff.

[266] It has been argued that the seriousness of this transgression is lessened by the fact that Xuthus is a foreigner: Wolff (1965), 189; Wassermann (1940), 596-8; Burnett (1962), 91-3; Zacharia (2003), 70-6. This thesis, however, is not entirely convincing since the aim of the play is to promote friendly relationships between the Athenians and foreign countries. Moreover, as we have seen above, the marriage with the foreign-born is accepted for

Turning back to the positive consequences of Apollo's sexual affair with Creusa, we have seen that their sexual union seems to bring at least one advantage: the divine origin of Ion, by preserving the autochthony of the Athenians, justifies Athens' hegemony over other Greek states. However, it is precisely the problematic aspect of Ion's illegitimacy that partly undermines this positive effect: there is nothing glorious about Athenian ancestry since in the myth of Ion the legitimacy of the indigenous citizens paradoxically clashes with the illegitimacy of the boy who is bound to rule over the city in violation of Athenian law.[267] Whereas in Aeschylus' Danaid trilogy the dynasty founded by Hypermnestra and Lynkeus grants the city of Argos a glorious destiny, in the *Ion* the prestige of the new Athenian royal line is compromised by Apollo's lie.

In conclusion, the audience is hardly likely to have agreed with Athena's opinion that 'Apollo has done all things well'.[268] The final solution is all but perfect since it involves destabilizing the male hierarchy by inserting an illegitimate child into a household.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the myths of sexual encounters between gods and mortals are problematized in Greek tragedy, whereas they are positively represented in pre-tragic poetry. As far as the representation of the sexual act is concerned, ambiguity surrounds the accounts of such sexual affairs in both kinds of sources, although the

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political reasons: if the royal couple had not been barren, Creusa's son by Xuthus would have rightfully inherited the throne of Athens.

[267] See Mirto (2001), 336-41.

[268] E. *Ion*. 1595: καλῶς δ᾿ Ἀπόλλων πάντ᾿ ἔπραξε.

Suppliants and the *Ion* either implicitly or explicitly hint at the violence involved in the intercourse.

The most striking differences in the treatment of these myths are found in the depiction of the consequences of the sexual transgression. The idea that any excessive contact with the divine is threatening, given that it can induce mortals to overstep their bounds is a traditional belief, which is often expressed in pre-tragic poetry as well.[269] However, in pre-tragic poetry attention is drawn to the positive outcome of the stories of intimate contact between a male deity and a girl, while Greek tragedy stresses their dangerous potential.

Both the plays chosen for analysis focus on the immediate aftermath of the event and on the hardships endured by the heroine, which are by contrast overlooked in earlier sources. Moreover, in both plays the sexual unions between gods and mortals are shown to be not only troublesome for the person directly involved in such a close relationship with a deity but also potentially damaging to the socio-political stability of a state. Yet the treatments of this kind of tale in the *Suppliants* and in the *Ion* differ from each other in two important respects.

In the former play Zeus' union with Io is shown to be dangerous because it makes the Danaids believe that they have the right to obtain divine support by virtue of their special family connection with Zeus. This belief in turn leads to socio-political destabilization in Argos. The heroines' obstinacy is especially indicative of the arrogant attitude to which an excessively close relationship with a god can lead: a sexual affair

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[269] Hoey (1965). For a discussion of the complementary needs 'to make the absent present' and 'to maintain the ontological gap separating humanity from divinity', which are co-present in ancient Greek religion, see Kindt (2012), 36-54; Versnel (2011), 379-91.

between a deity and a mortal is undoubtedly troublesome because humans may misinterpret its significance and try to turn it to their advantage. However, Zeus neither grants them any privilege nor supports their act of rebellion: in the end they are punished and the importance of marriage is reconfirmed. Zeus' authority is thus not called into question: since the Danaids' request was ill-founded, the god did not fulfil their wish.

By contrast, Ion has a right to succeed to the throne of Athens, and Apollo directs events with the aim of giving his son what is due to him. To reach his goal, however, the god must lie and must pass off his own son as the legitimate heir and offspring of Xuthus. Whereas in the *Suppliants* the Danaids' hope of being entitled to a preferential treatment is sufficient to cause a number of serious problems, in the *Ion* it is precisely Apollo's lie that undermines gender balance and jeopardizes the prestige of the royal dynasty of Athens. As opposed to the Danaid trilogy, the *Ion* also shows that the negative consequences of an excessive contact between a god and a mortal affect the deity himself as well. For, as a result of Apollo's lie, the god's stature has been diminished: he has been forced to give up his paternity in a sense, and to do this, has even compromised his reputation as a prophetic god whose oracles are always truthful in spite of their inherent ambiguity.

2. Divine and Human Knowledge
in Sophocles' *OT* and Euripides' *Bacchae*

2.0 Introduction

The distinction between human and divine knowledge is already emphasised in Homer and other early poetry, and it is a theme that features prominently in Greek tragedy as well, especially in Sophocles' *OT* and Euripides' *Bacchae*.[270] Both plays are produced in the late fifth century, a time of great intellectual fervour and of on-going political turbulence due to the Peloponnesian War, and investigate epistemological issues in ways that overlap with contemporary intellectual thought.

Past scholarship has focused on the relationship between tragedy and the emerging philosophical and medical discourses. According to one view, both plays praise fifth-century rationalism and scientific spirit in the wake of Anaxagoras' thought, Hippocratic investigation and the Sophistic movement.[271] In fact, Oedipus' search for truth is based on scientific enquiry (ζήτημα, 278-9; τεκμαίρεσθαι, 109, 916; σκοπεῖν, 68, 291, 407) and on his critical intelligence (γνώμη, 398), which are words pregnant with scientific and philosophical significance in fifth-century Athens since they call to mind the theories of Anaxagoras, the thought of the doctor-philosopher Alcmaeon of Croton, Thucydides' work and the Hippocratic treatises.[272]

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[270] Hom. *Od.* 18. 130-7; Semon. fr. 1. 1-5 (quoted by Allan, 2005, 71-82); Heraclit. DK 83; A. *Ag*, *PV*; S. *Trach*, *OT*; E. *Hel*, *Ba*.

[271] Stella (2010) on 390-400; Vegetti (1983); Diano (1968); Dodds (1966).

[272] See Anaxagoras' famous dictum on reaching the unknown by conjecturing from the visible to the invisible (Anaxag. DK 59 B 21 a). See also Hp. *VM*. 3, *Prog.* 24, *Acut.* 68; Th. I.

A different view, on the other hand, argues that both plays aim to blame the intellectual progress of the fifth century rather than exalt it. Pentheus, Jocasta and Oedipus, who reject the words of the prophets, are taught that it is not cautious to rely on one's intellect alone since divine will and oracles always find fulfilment.[273] The opposition between human intelligence and the unscientific knowledge of prophecy ends in both plays with the victory of prophetic and divine truth over defective human knowledge.

It has also been pointed out that the contrast between these two kinds of knowledge is articulated in the two tragedies through the distinction between mere visual skills, which are typical of any man, and true insight, which is a feature of divine knowledge and a privilege granted by the gods to few men. It is commonly accepted that Greek tragedy questions the reliability of the knowledge acquired through the five senses and, especially, through visual perception: whereas in Greek historiography αὐτοψία is the most reliable way to gather information, Greek plays show that the sense of sight is particularly vulnerable to divine delusion.[274]

The focus on the weakness of the senses in Greek tragedy might be motivated by the influence of Presocratic philosophy and its discussion

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1. 3; I. 10.5 (cf. Hdt. I. 57); Alcmaeon of Croton DK B1. Cf. Knox (1957), 119-126; Diano (1968), 119-65.

[273] S. *OT.* 385-8, 705-6, 707-25, 945-53, 964-72, 979, 1080-5. Di Benedetto (1983); Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 113-140; Knox (1957).

[274] Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* Sophocles' *Ajax* and *OT,* and Euripides' *Helen* and *Bacchae* are the plays which most significantly develop the topic of the weakness of the senses: Segal (1971), 560-1; Buxton (1980), 22-37; Goldhill (1984); Hartog (1988); Calame (1996), 17-48; Thumiger (2013), 223-45. There are, however, also tragic passages supporting the view that personal vision (αὐτοψία) is the most reliable source of knowledge: A. *Pers.* 266; S. *OT.* 7, *Trach.* 747; E. *Supp.* 684, *IT* 901. Cf. Hdt. 1. 7. 2; Th. I. 20-2. See also Gregory (1985), 27.

about the difference between reason and sense perception.[275] This crucial distinction can be found in Parmenides' work. In more than one fragment the philosopher overvalues reason against sense perception: only the former is believed to grasp the essence of reality, while the five senses are likely to be deceived by mere appearances.[276] In both the tragedies chosen for analysis human sensory perception, however, is opposed not only to reason but also to an inner form of sight, which consists of either divine prophecy or the privileged reciprocity of gazes between Dionysus and his initiates.

To give an example, in the *Bacchae* Dionysus takes advantage of the limits of human vision to punish the wrongdoers, whereas he allows his initiates to gain insight into what is true about reality. Similarly, in the *OT* the sighted Oedipus does not even know who he is, whereas the blind Teiresias is the only one who has access to true knowledge.

This chapter is an attempt to give some additional observations and remarks on these well-studied topics by analysing them from a different perspective. First of all, I will explore how the contrast between human and mantic knowledge is bound up with political discourse: the kind of knowledge typical of a democratic system is set in opposition both to the privileged mode of knowing claimed by the seers and to the autocratic knowledge that the tyrant aspires to gain. Secondly, special attention will be paid to the fact that in the plays gaining knowledge about both divine and human matters is described not simply as an intellectual process but also as a physical one. In other words, the process of gaining knowledge

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[275] Allan (2005), 71-82; Grelka (2013), 19-33.
[276] Parm. DK 1. 28-32, 6. 4-9.

involves the several facets of one's total being: body, five senses, mind, and emotions.

In this regard, it is worth pointing out that, even though the distinction between ψυχή and σῶμα is as old as Homeric poetry, ψυχή does not originally refer to mental activity but rather to the principle of life which, at the moment of death, leaves σῶμα (corpse). On the contrary, intellectual activity is linked to the body and is located either in the chest or in the lungs.[277] The act of thinking is itself described as an encounter of physical stuffs in Presocratic philosophy.[278] Similarly, the Hippocratic corpus gives a physical account of mental activity, as well as of sense perception and emotions: the functioning of all these phenomena depends upon the soundness of the body organs to which they are related.[279]

Therefore, in the archaic and classical periods there is no neat separation between the cognitive, sensory and emotional dimensions of human nature.[280] Thinking, emotions and sensations cannot unequivocally

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[277] For some examples, see Holmes (2010), 29-37; Wright – Potter (2000), 13; Onians (1954), 116.

[278] Emp. DK 31 B105; Heraclit. DK 22 B118 (quoted by Holmes, 2010, 117-8). It is only later that ψυχή comes to denote the mental foil to σῶμα: associated with thought, perceptions and emotions, ψυχή with its passions reigns over the body (Cf. Gorgias, *Helen).* The western body-mind dualism stems from Descartes' thought and has its furthest origins in Plato's work (e.g. *Phaedo* and *Meditations).* See Wright – Potter (2000).

[279] Intellectual activity is related to air and the brain (*On the Sacred Disease*) and to the blood (*Breaths, Diseases I*). For some physical accounts of sense perception, see *Places in Man* 2 (6. 278), *Fleshes* 15-17; *Regimen* I. 35. In *On the Sacred Disease* the corruption of the brain by bile and phlegm brings about abnormal emotional states: emotions are thus given a somatic explanation. On the other hand, they can also trigger somatic reactions: for instance, violent emotions create vibrations, which in turn can cause heart palpitations or sweating. See *Humours* 9 (5. 490. 5-8), *On the Sacred Disease* 17 (6. 392. 5-12; 15-394. 2). Cf. Gundert in Wright – Potter (2000), 13-35.

[280] In this regard, it is interesting to point out that early Greek medical practice also consists of three complementary activities: observing the effects either of a disease or of a treatment on the patient's body, reflecting on such visible effects, and making conjectures on the basis of the inward reactions of the body as felt by the patient himself (τοῦ

be attributed either to the mind or to the body because the boundaries between mind and body are blurred and partially overlap. For instance, emotions are not merely mental states but also bodily expressions. They are embodied and manifest through bodily symptoms: for instance, fear is constituted by a combination of physical experiences, such as incapability to breathe, heart palpitation and perspiration.[281] Similarly, sensory sensation takes place by means of the body but the information gathered through the five senses is then interpreted thanks to mental processes.[282] In analysing the *OT* and the *Bacchae* I will show that there is no clear opposition between empirical and rational knowledge.[283] By contrast, both tragedies lay emphasis on the role played by emotions in one's process of inquiry, a topic that has recently drawn greater attention in scholarly literature:[284] emotions shape both the reasoning and the sense perception of the characters on stage.

Before proceeding, a brief word about terminology may be useful. What is emotion? The issue of definition is permeated by confusion in scholarly literature and has even been considered as insoluble by Paul Griffiths: the problem lies in the several approaches to the study of

σώματος τὴν αἴσθησιν, Hp. *VM.* 9. 3 cf. Schiefsky, 2005, *ad loc*). Therefore, the doctor must take into account what is apparent to his own senses, what is felt by the patient, and what his own reason and experience tell him about what has been grasped by perception. Cf. also Hp. *Praec*. I L. 9. 250. 2-5. Similarly, the method of Herodotus (2. 99) is based on 'his own sight (ὄψις), judgement (γνώμη) and enquiry (ἱστορία).'

[281] Konstan (2006); Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 21. On emotions and facial expressions, see Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 134 and Ekman (1982), (1992).

[282] See Onians (1954), 74-5 and his analysis of lexical correspondences between verbs expressing sense perception (e.g. ἀίω, αἴσθομαι 'I perceive') and verbs indicating bodily functions (ἀίω, ἀίσθω 'I breathe in').

[283] I use the adjective 'empirical' in the sense employed by Lateiner (1986), 3, n.5: 'the word indicates the belief that knowledge depends on sensation and practical experience, but does not imply systematic commitment to the experimental method.'

[284] For the study of emotions in Classics, see for instance Harris (2001); Braund and Most (2003) (eds); Konstan – Rutter (2003); Sternberg (2005) (ed.); Konstan (2006); Cairns (2008), (2009); Meineck (2011).

emotions that have been so far proposed by scholars.[285] There is one school of thought that, studying emotions with a focus on the resulting physiological changes, holds that emotions are innate and universal: Paul Ekman, for instance, argues that a few basic emotions are universally identified by facial expressions.[286]

Ekman's project and its results, however, have been challenged from two main fronts. On the one hand, Anna Wierzbicka has highlighted the ethnocentric bias arising from Ekman's use of English terminology to describe allegedly universal basic emotions: according to the researcher, 'the caterigorisations of the emotions that every language makes are culture-bound'.[287] To elude the danger of ethnocentrism, it has been proposed to use 'scripts' in the subjects' own mother tongue rather than labels in the researcher's language in order to describe and define the emotions in question: 'a script is a mini-narrative that will usually encompass (at least) the conditions in which emotion X occurs, the perceptions ad appraisals of those conditions, and the responses (whether symptomatic, expressive, or pragmatic) that result'.[288]

Ekman's approach is also vulnerable to the criticism that emotions, owing to the fact that they involve a substantial cognitive component, are creations of culture: since any emotion is made of judgement and appraisals, one's emotional states is likely to be conditioned by the social

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[285] Griffiths (1997), 15, 17; Lloyd (2007), 58;. Cf. Cairns (2008), 43.

[286] Ekman (1998) develops Darwin's research, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872; rev. ed. 1998, London), which concerns the biological aspects of emotional life: it explores the animal origins of the physiological expressions of human emotional reactions. Cf. the work by the evolutionary psychologist David Buss (1994), (2000), also indebted to Darwin.

[287] Wierzbicka (1999), cited by Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 433.

[288] Cairns (2008), 46. Cf. Russell (1991); Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 433-468.

environment in which the subject lives.[289] Konstan, in particular, explores the extent to which the ancient Greek conceptions of the individual emotions differs from the way emotions are characteristically conceived in our contemporary world. The rationale for his research is based on the argument that, 'insofar as emotions are a function of valued judgements, they will vary from one individual to another and according to the collective values of particular communities.'[290] Over the course of this chapter, we will see that the ancient Greek concept of anger differs in important respects from what we call 'anger' nowadays. Similarly, I will show how what one fears changes along with society's development since the emotion of fear tends to be a reflection of one's perception of the world.

The idea that emotions are not the opposite of reason but are rather interwoven with cognitive and sensory processes and complement them is fully present in ancient Greek accounts of the emotions. Interestingly, some verbs such as φρονέω and οἶδα, which were later reserved for the expression of intellectual activity and awareness, in their original meaning are comprehensive terms involving cognition, emotion and conation: Onians gives several examples from the Homeric poems which show that these verbs are not merely used to describe an intellectual process but rather cover 'undifferentiated psychic activity.[291] In Homer's *Iliad* (XXII. 263-4), for instance, wolves and sheep are said to 'feel evil sentiments toward each other' (λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες […] κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν). An additional example is Eurykleia's description as

[289] Budelmann – Easterling (2010); Lloyd (2007); Konstan (2006), (2005); Nussbaum (2001); Scherer *et al.* (2001); Frijda *et al.* (2000); Frijda (1993); Solomon (1993).
[290] Konstan (2006), 24.
[291] Onians (1954), 13 ff.

'truehearted' (κεδνὰ ἰδυῖα) in the *Odyssey* (I. 428). Furthermore, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* may be considered as the first attempt to apply a cognitive approach to the study of πάθη, that is, forms of psychological experience that involve physiological changes resulting from pain and pleasure and 'in account of which people change and differ in regard to their judgements'.[292]

My analysis aims to show that affective phenomena can and should be included in the epistemological analysis of the characters' search for truth in the *Bacchae* and in the *OT*. By 'affective phenomena' I mean emotions conceived as involving both bodily activity (that is, sensations and bodily symptoms) and mental activity. As Altieri argues, 'all emotions, beside being embodied, have an intentional component constituted by beliefs and desires: they involve the construction of attitudes and generate some sort of action'.[293] I thus use the term 'emotion' in its broadest sense which entails not only the physiological aspects but also the cognitive awareness of emotion: both aspects are worth studying since cognition is relevant to the starting point of the emotional process, whereas the physical reaction shapes the course of an emotion and its outcome.[294] As far as my usage of the terms for individual emotions is concerned, while being aware of the caveat that the ancient Greek terms diverge to some degree from their closest modern equivalents, I agree with Cairns' claim that 'the best we can do is to use our language to

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[292] Arist. *Rh.* 1378a20-3; *de An.* 403a25-b2. Cairns (2008), 45; Konstan (2006). For arguments in favour of the trustworthiness of Aristotle's account of ancient Greek emotions, see Konstan (2005), 228.

[293] Altieri (2003), 8-9.

[294] Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 9; Konstan (2006), 25 ff.

interpret theirs, with the fullest possible attention to the diversity of the date regarding the scenarios to which the terms of both languages refer.'[295]

Studying the human quest for knowledge as a process involving the total being will help us show that both tragedies articulate a series of reflections on the great influence that affective phenomena exercise both over human inquiry and over that particular mode of knowing which is granted as a privilege to very few humans through divine revelation.

Emotions can have either a positive or a negative impact on both the process of gathering/interpreting information and on how one is spurred into action.[296] The misinterpretation of accurate information provided by the senses may arise from mistaken reasoning: it is a matter not so much of taking into account what one has seen as of pondering what it is that one has seen. It is precisely one's emotions that shape the way in which one interprets the relevance of the information gathered: emotions are elicited by appraisals, that is, by subjective cognitive evaluations of occurring events, and 'complement reason by establishing salience'.[297]

Such a characteristic can be either advantageous or disadvantageous depending on the circumstances. On the one hand, it can provide insight into an obscure situation: emotions such as anger, jealousy or fear, which connect to what an agent thinks, suspects, or is afraid of, can make one disposed to look into things carefully and to notice every sign that either confirms or disproves one's suspicions; consequently, as

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[295] Cairns (2008), 58.

[296] For the connection between emotion and action, see Konstan (2006), 25 ff; Chaniotis (2012), 14, 28, 230; Strongman (2003), 67.

[297] Altieri (2003), 4. Lada (1993), esp. 113-119 and (1996), 403-4 with further bibliography.

Altieri argues, they might 'allow the subject to take in modes of information not likely to arise without the distinctive distribution of affective energies.'[298] On the other hand, affective phenomena might make one overfocused on a goal, concern or supposition and might therefore blind one to other important features of the same situation. As a consequence, one might not act in accord to one's own best interests, still less in accord with the interests of the community to which one belongs. On the one hand, Pentheus' resistance to the cult of Dionysus in the end brings destruction upon his own royal house. On the other hand, Oedipus causes harm to the realm he intended to protect because he is excessively preoccupied with personal matters and, as a consequence, loses sight of what should be his primary objective, namely, the well-being of the citizens.

The chapter is divided into two thematic units. The first section (2.1) investigates the process of human search for knowledge and aims to show that the *Bacchae* by Euripides and the *OT* by Sophocles, by discussing the role played by emotions in one's process of knowledge acquisition, articulate different conceptions of the subject considered both as a knowing agent and as a political being. We will see that the democratic model of distributed knowledge is opposed to the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant.

Section 2.2 concerns the human knowledge of the divine, and addresses to what extent men can gain insight into divine will and divine nature. I will analyse how the interpretation of phenomena that are traditionally believed to be divine manifestations changes depending on

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[298] Altieri (2003), 6-9.

the cultural codes used in the wake of contemporary intellectual advances. As in the previous chapter, my major concern is to investigate how in both plays religious ideas regarding the opposition between human and divine knowledge are tied up with other competing discourses from philosophy, from medical science to political theory.

2.1 The Process of the Human Search for Knowledge

Both plays chosen for analysis put on stage a king who undertakes a series of actions to find and tackle the root causes of a crisis affecting his kingdom. Oedipus needs to find an effective cure for the plague devastating Thebes, whereas Pentheus must deal with the supposed threat posed by Dionysus and by its cult.

This section compares the steps involved in Pentheus' assessment of the status of Dionysus to the measures taken by Oedipus to find out the truth about the oracle and, ultimately, about his own past. The aim of this section is to discuss the extent to which physical factors and affective phenomena influence the processing of data by the mind, whether information is obtained from witnesses' testimonies or through the inquirer's direct observation. Even first-hand experiences are filtered through the mind, which in turn interprets them according to one's aspirations and emotional states. An additional purpose is to analyse how the plays' investigation of issues relating to knowledge and of the role played by emotions in one's process of inquiry merges with political discourse.

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2.1.1 The Limitations of Human Knowledge and their Political Consequences

The *Bacchae* and the *OT* highlight the impediments to human knowledge: if one relies on either what one has seen first-hand or on the capacity to assess circumstances, make valid inferences and draw sound conclusions, one is nonetheless likely to make mistakes.

As far as one's own direct experience is concerned, the *Bacchae* gives a supernatural explanation of the limits of human autoptic perception,[299] whereas the *OT* pushes the discussion further by showing that, even when it is first-hand, human knowledge is inherently flawed, irrespective of divine opposition. Irony can be detected in the passage in which Oedipus boasts that, had he been present when the murder was committed, he would easily have found some piece of evidence to solve the case (220-1).[300] Actually, he was on-the-spot even though he is still unaware of it.

Oedipus looks for any hint which, together with other pieces of evidence, may shed some light on the mysterious murder of Laius.[301] As time goes by, however, traces decay and fade away (δυστέκμαρτον). Jocasta (915 ff) thus suggests that he should form conjectures

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[299] In Subsection 2.2.1.b. I will discuss how and why the vision of the wrongdoers such as Pentheus is distorted by Dionysus.

[300] I follow Dawe's text (1982): μὴ οὐκ ἔχειν. By contrast, Jebb (1949) and Stella (2010) read: μὴ οὐκ ἔχων τι σύμβολον (I would not go far on the trail if I were tracing it alone 'without a clue').

[301] At vv. 120-1 he affirms that 'one discovery (ἀρχὴν) may lead to many others', and at v. 221 says that he needs a σύμβολον, namely 'anything you can συμβάλλειν with anything else when putting two and two together': Jebb (1949) on 220-1. An example of a successful use of Oedipus' method of investigation is the scene where he recognizes the shepherd as soon as he enters the stage by inferring his identity from his age and from the servants accompanying him (1110 ff). For a thorough analysis of the terms used by Oedipus to describe his process of reasoning (σταθμᾶσθαι 1111, σύμμετρος 1113, ἐπιστήμη 1115), see Di Benedetto (1983), 88; Hall in Ormand (2012), 21 ff.

(τεκμαίρεται, 916) by relying on his previous experience and should interpret new events by means of past ones.[302] However, later Jocasta accidentally gives evidence of the unreliability of the method she proposes. To persuade her husband not to pay regard to Teiresias' accusation that he was the murderer of Laius, she provides the following piece of evidence (σημεῖα, 710): what she has learnt from her experience is that oracles given by mortals must never be trusted given that a prophecy once given to Laius eventually did not come true. Contrary to what was predicted, Laius was not killed by his son but by a group of robbers. Moreover, their child never became a parricide; on the contrary, though innocent, he died after being exposed on a mountain (711-25). The flaw in her reasoning is that she did not actually see either her husband murdered by brigands or her baby die in the wild. She thus jumps to hasty conclusions based on the criterion of verisimilitude and others' testimonies. That a defenceless exposed baby must have died is the most likely hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is just one of all the possible scenarios. The play thus explores the limitations of the human process of inquiry.

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[302] The *OT* gives voice to ideas which were in vogue in Athens in the second half of the fifth century and were spread by philosophers, historiographers and physicians. In a much-quoted fragment Anaxagoras argues that 'appearances are a vision of the invisible' (ὄψις γὰρ τῶν ἀδήλων τὰ φαινόμενα, Anaxag. DK 59 B 21a), meaning that the observance and analysis of phenomena also make it possible for men to gain insight into those events that are not the object of direct perception. Similarly, the Hippocratic corpus asserts that, as to the reasons for illnesses, one forms a judgement (τεκμαίρεσθαι) from all the symptoms (τεκμηρίων) taken together (Hp. *Prog.* 17. 467). Finally, Thucydides writes that he conjectured that the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians would be a great one from a series of clues, which he subsequently lists (I. 1-2). For a discussion of these references, see Diano (1968); Longo (1972); Ugolini (1987); Knox (1957). See also Lateiner (1986), 5-6, 11-3 for further examples drawn from early Greek medical writers (*On regimen 1*, 7. 14-7; Hp. *VM.* 12. 15-6 cf. Schiefsky, 2005, 22) and for a discussion of Herodotus' analogical explanations (Hdt. 1. 57. 1; 2. 33. 2). As Hartog (1988), 225-30 argues, comparison and analogy are 'procedures of translation' whose function is 'to set the thing before the eyes' in order to instil belief in the addressee. They can thus serve as substitutes for one's own direct experience.

Such investigation into the limits of human knowledge is interwoven with political discourse: by illustrating that anyone's direct or indirect experience of an event can be misleading, the tragedy encourages the audience to reflect on their own experience. The spectators are attending a performance; consequently, they have first-hand experience of what happens on stage except for the events which occurred in the past and reported by the messenger. Will they be able to interpret the series of events correctly or might they also be mistaken in their understanding?

Throughout the play the spectators can pride themselves on their ability to pinpoint the times when the characters on stage are either deceived by their limited knowledge or misuse a word without even noticing. For instance, in the *OT* there is a misuse of the concept of truth: at v. 800 Oedipus sincerely promises that he will tell Jocasta the whole truth (τἀληθὲς ἐξερῶ). His intention is to confess to the murder of a man in a cross-way but he is still unaware that his confession only gives part of the truth. For the crime he has committed is far more serious than he thinks: it's not mere homicide but rather parricide. Dramatic irony signals the epistemological superiority of the audience over the characters.[303] Yet realizing how frequently the characters' understanding is blurred by their partial knowledge and by the ambivalence of language should warn the spectators against the confidence of having superior knowledge.[304] The spectators should realize that they themselves struggle fully to understand the ironies of language and the chain of the events performed in front of them. As Goldhill argues, tragic irony 'gives an uncomfortable view of the

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[303] Liapis in Ormand (2012), 91-2.
[304] For the ambivalence of language, see also Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 85-112; Goldhill (1986), 218 ff; Pucci (1992), 105-22; Budelmann (2000), 1-18; Goldhill (2012).

audience's political role as judging citizens and asks a painful question of the confident self of fifth-century democracy'.[305]

By showing that human knowledge, however resourceful men might be, is inevitably defective, the plays demonstrate that even the most common procedures used by democracy in the gathering of information and in the making of decisions, such as witnesses' testimonies, are limited by a series of factors.

On the one hand, physical factors may affect the process whereby one gains and retains knowledge. One's memory of events can grow less and less precise whenever one recalls them.[306] To give a couple of examples, in the fifth episode the second messenger, before he recounts Jocasta's death and Oedipus' act of self-blinding, warns the chorus that they will hear of what happened in the palace so far as his memory serves him right (ὅσον γε κἀν ἐμοὶ μνήμης ἔνι, 1239). Moreover, even though he was present at the tragic event, he is not able to describe Jocasta's death because a much more frightful happening had grabbed all his attention.[307] Memories can also be altered and falsified by subjective interpretations of past events. In this regard, the most illustrative example is Creon's report of the oracle: it is impossible to distinguish the elements which are part of the prophetic message from the ones which are merely Creon's interpretation of Apollo's words (95-8).[308]

On the other hand, witnesses can lie or omit information for several reasons, such as shame, fear, and eagerness to protect somebody. For

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[305] Goldhill (2012), 37.

[306] Segal (2001), 63-4, 123-6 analyses how time can block knowledge.

[307] S. *OT*. 1252-4: 'Oedipus burst in crying out loud, so that we could not watch her calamity to its end, but were gazing upon him as he moved around.'

[308] For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Pucci (1992), 22-4; Stella (2010) on 102.

instance, the only eyewitness to Laius' murder might have exaggerated the number of the killers because he was ashamed of not being able to protect his master.[309] By contrast, Polybus and Merope hide the truth of Oedipus' real parents out of love for their adopted son but in the end truth comes out thanks to the revelation made by a drunkard who, as opposed to Oedipus' foster parents, has no personal reasons for hiding the truth (774-80). Similarly Jocasta, spurred by maternal love, refuses to confirm the identity of the Theban shepherd who was charged with exposing the baby born to the royal couple (1053-61).

Consequently, the trustworthiness of sources may be compromised by the witnesses' emotions.

2.1.2 The Role Played by Affective Phenomena in Human Inquiry: the Tragic Interweaving of Epistemological Investigation, Religious Exploration, and Political Inquiry.

By illustrating how emotions influence the process of knowledge acquisition and transmission, the *OT* and the *Bacchae* demonstrate that the kind of knowledge typical of a democratic system (namely, distributed knowledge), even though it is as defective as any other kind of human knowledge, is still preferable to the privileged knowledge claimed by either the seers or the Dionysiac initiates and to the archaic model of autocratic knowledge, which tyrants such as Oedipus or Pentheus aspire to gain. The distribution of knowledge ensures that different versions of the same event can be compared and contrasted to each other. The greater the opportunity for comparison between different accounts of the same

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[309] Pucci (1992), 123-44; Garvie (2005), 46; Stella (2010) on 118-9.

story, the more likely it is that a version of the story freer from the constraints dictated by personal emotional states will emerge.

By contrast, the danger inherent in the archaic model of the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant is that knowledge acquisition and distribution might be subject to the fears and desires of one single person, namely the ruler. Even though both Oedipus and Pentheus use reasoning to get to the truth and to make decisions, that reasoning is driven by emotion. Emotions thus influence the mind and the process of knowledge. No problem arises if the ruler's actions are motivated by a genuine desire for the well-being of his people. Yet, if the king is driven by his individualistic impulses, the tight control of information imposed by the tyrant might turn out to be harmful to the community.

In support of this argument, I shall now compare and contrast the way Oedipus and Pentheus handle the crises affecting their kingdoms.

2.1.2.a. Oedipus' and Pentheus' searches for truth: hindrances and limitations.

Both kings affirm that they want to acquire information about the problem at first hand (*OT.* 6-7; *Ba.* 215-6). Yet, whereas Oedipus' willingness to have direct experience is motivated by a genuine desire to find the truth and a sincere concern for the well-being of the Thebans,[310] Pentheus' intention conceals a voyeuristic desire, which will lead him to cause harm to his kingdom rather than benefit it. The first objective of Pentheus' desire for αὐτοψία is not to ascertain facts but rather quickly to put a stop to both the spread of the new religious cult of Dionysus and its

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[310] S. *OT*. 11-3, 58-72, 93-4, 128-9, 132-6.

criminal revelry (*Ba.* 226-7). At the same time, he wants to see with his own eyes such criminal revelry, a bitter sight which nonetheless brings him pleasure (*Ba.* 814-5). Therefore, in the *Bacchae* there is a misuse of the concept of αὐτοψία since the king's claim about the necessity of αὐτοψία is merely an excuse to satisfy his hidden desires, which will in turn cause him to commit impiety by violating the secrecy of the Dionysiac mysteries.

Moreover, Pentheus' desire to reject the subversive cult of Dionysus turns out to be harmful to his own royal family and to the Theban reign given that it endangers the lives of the citizens by drawing divine anger upon Thebes. Pentheus is so focused on his intent to thwart the threat posed by the Dionysiac cult that he fails to acknowledge the supernatural nature of the events brought about by divine action in the palace (643 ff). Pentheus' lack of knowledge in turn leads him to behave unwisely and to bring destruction upon the royal house. In this regard, it is worth analysing the following exchange:

> **Πενθεύς**
> ὁ θεός, ὁρᾶν γὰρ φὴς σαφῶς, ποῖός τις ἦν;
> **Διόνυσος**
> ὁποῖος ἤθελ᾽· οὐκ ἐγὼ 'τασσον τόδε.
> **Πενθεύς**
> τοῦτ᾽ αὖ παρωχέτευσας εὖ γ' οὐδὲν λέγων.
> **Διόνυσος**
> δόξει τις ἀμαθεῖ σοφὰ λέγων οὐκ εὖ φρονεῖν.
> (E. *Ba.* 477-80)

> **Pentheus**
> *The god – what did he look like? You claim you saw him clearly.*
> **Dionysus**
> *He looked as he wished to look: I had no say in the matter.*
> **Pentheus**
> *Another evasive answer: you talk nonsense so cleverly.*
> **Dionysus**

Speak wisdom to a fool and he will think you foolish.

The stranger's comment on Dionysus' outward appearance would have probably been understood by any initiate who has had the chance to 'see the god as the god saw him' (470): for Dionysus can take any form he likes.[311] By contrast, Pentheus blames the stranger for 'side-tracking his interlocutor with empty phrases' (τοῦτ᾽ αὖ παρωχέτευσας εὖ κοὐδὲν λέγων, 479). From several ancient sources we know that riddling language was part of the initiation into the mysteries and was employed to confuse the initiands before revealing to the them the truth.[312]

Pentheus claims that there is nothing in what the stranger says but he cannot actually see the truth hidden in his words because he is ἀμαθής (479). The adjective ἀμαθής can have either a moral or an intellectual meaning:[313] in this passage it is usually translated as 'foolish' but it literally means 'lacking knowledge/unlearned in something'.[314] It is also worth remembering that in the context of the mysteries this term has a more specific connotation since it implies 'uninitiated'.[315] The dialogue between Pentheus and the stranger refers to the knowledge gap between the two parties: Pentheus is ἀμαθής in the sense that he lacks the basic information to understand a discourse about Dionysus, probably because he is not initiated into the Dionysiac mysteries. The word σοφά indicates

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[311] Vernant – Vidal Naquet (1988), 395: 'The epiphany of Dionysus is that of a being who, even in proximity and intimate contact with one, remains elusive and ubiquitous, never where he seems to be, never fixed in a definite form': a god, a smiling young man, a bull, a lion, a snake, a flame, and so on. Cf. E. *Ba.* 100, 618, 920-22, 1017-23

[312] Cf. Pl. *Phd.* 69c; *Derveni Pap.* col. 7; Plu. *Mor.* 389. See Seaford (1981), 254-5; (1996) on 480; (2006), 52.

[313] Cf. E. *El.* 971; *Or.* 417; *Ion.* 917: see Lee (1997), n. *ad loc*; *HF.* 347: see Bond (1988), n. *ad loc.*

[314] Kovacs (2002b) translates it as 'a fool', Buckley as 'foolish'.

[315] Cf. Arist. Quint. *De Mus.* 3. 25; Ar. *Nu.* 135, *Derveni Pap.* col. 5. 10. See Seaford (1996), n. *ad loc.*

those things that need some sort of knowledge or expertise to be understood properly. Wisdom implies a possession of knowledge to apply appropriately to any given circumstance. Consequently, whoever possesses wisdom is likely to avoid wrongdoing. By contrast, Pentheus is induced by his lack of knowledge and by a widely prevailing feeling of personal resentment and boldness to act impiously. He tries in vain to re-establish his authority over the stranger by the use of force, that is, by putting him in prison.[316] Dionysus' reply is telling:[317]

> οὐκ οἶσθ᾽ †ὅτι ζῇς,† οὐδ᾽ ὃ δρᾷς, οὐδ᾽ ὅστις εἶ.
> (E. *Ba.* 506)
> *You do not know what your life is or what you are doing or who you are.*

That the king does not know who he is does not mean that he is unaware of his name and genealogy, as Pentheus incorrectly thinks,[318] but rather that he is not able to define himself in opposition to the identity of his interlocutor; that is to say that he does not acknowledge his mortal status as opposed to the divine status of his interlocutor. Consequently, he does not even understand the power relations between them: he erroneously believes that he has – or at least should have – the upper hand over the stranger. He thus both acts and will be punished accordingly.[319] What is more, by taking position against Dionysus and thus displaying his insolence (θράσει, 270), Pentheus becomes 'a bad citizen' (κακὸς πολίτης, 271) because he endangers the well-being of all the Thebans.

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[316] E. *Ba.* 505: 'And I, more masterful than you, bid them to bind you.' (ἐγὼ δὲ δεῖν γε, κυριώτερος σέθεν).

[317] For a discussion of this passage and of its variants, see Dodds (1944) and Susanetti (2010), *ad loc.*

[318] In fact, he answers back by saying his name (507).

[319] Interestingly, in the fourth stasimon the chorus blames Pentheus for trying to 'master by force what cannot be mastered' (τἀνίκατον ὡς κρατήσων βίᾳ, 1001).

I have argued that Oedipus, as opposed to Pentheus, in his search for first-hand information is spurred by his genuine intention to make careful and effective decisions for the highest good of the Theban citizens in his care. Yet Oedipus' inquiry, due to the arousal of fears concerning his personal life and his past, gradually shifts its focus from the most effective cures for the plague to the king's own origins. As a result, he completely forgets about the primary motive for which he is looking for the killer of Laius. He is initially worried about the well-being of the Thebans and asks for the collaboration of anyone to collect information about Laius' murder,[320] whereas later on his only concern is that he might not be worthy of the throne of Thebes because of his obscure origins, and that Creon, in connivance with Teiresias, might take advantage of that to deprive him of the throne.[321] The arousal of these emotions, which have nothing to do with the prosperity and stability of the reign but are rather linked to the king's personal matters, is disadvantageous for the community: fear of losing power and anger at Teiresias spur Oedipus to disdain collaboration with the very man who is in possession of valuable information.[322]

Oedipus initially holds the prophet of Apollo in high regard (300-4): after calling him their saviour (σωτῆρα, 304), he asks him to help them decode the prophetic message. Yet soon after a dialogue begins between them, Oedipus gets angrier and angrier to the point that he exclaims that he is so furious (ὡς ὀργῆς ἔχω, 345) that he will leave unsaid nothing of what he understands (345-6). Oedipus thus accuses Teiresias of being an accomplice in the murder of Laius (346-9), and the prophet answers back

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[320] S. *OT.* 84-146; 216-315.
[321] S. *OT.* 378-403, 435-7, 532-621, 642-3.
[322] For the co-existence and connection of fear and anger, see Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 23.

that the unholy polluter of Thebes is rather Oedipus (350-3). Teiresias tells the truth but reveals part of his mantic knowledge at the most inappropriate moment: in the exchange of accusations his revelation loses credibility because it is likened to Oedipus' unfounded charge sprung on the spur of the moment. Once it is unleashed, emotion tends to be self-validating: it can influence how one thinks in such a way as to reinforce the cognitive evaluation that triggered the emotion.[323] Oedipus cannot believe Teiresias any longer since he is convinced that his words are not prophetic at all but have rather been uttered in retaliation.

But what is it that makes Oedipus angry in the first instance? To understand the reasons for the king's angry reaction, it is useful to call to mind Aristotle's definition of anger in order to point out the divergencies between the ancient Greek conception of such emotion and our own: according to Aristotle, anger is a desire for revenge which is elicited by a voluntary slight on the part of people who are believed to be unfit to slight the offended party.[324] It is evident that our modern concept of anger is broader since it indicates a response not only to slight but to more general kind of offences, including injustice and personal (physical or psychological) harm.[325] By contrast, Aristotle limits the definition of ὀργή to one's reaction to a deliberate slight committed by one's inferiors. Anger thus depends on an appraisals not only of intentions but also of social roles.

Oedipus loses his temper in the dialogue with Teiresias for the same reason that Pentheus gets angry at Dionysus-the stranger: both

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[323] Konstan (2006), 37-8. For an example of how anger may distort decision-making, see Antiph. 5. 72.

[324] Ar. *Rh.* 2.3 1378b10 ff.

[325] Konstan (2006), 65 ff.

rulers must deal with reticent interlocutors, who seem not to disclose knowledge intentionally. Anger thus springs from a perceived insult and disrespect (ἀτιμάζεις, *OT* 340) on the part of a person who, according to the king, should be his subject. Both rulers aim to pursue and gain a specific kind of knowledge, that is, the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant. The tyrant demands to be the only person to retain full control over information and the spread of it. Reticence thus raises the king's suspicion and provokes his anger since it is believed to conceal information that might damage his royal power.

In the *Bacchae* the king of Thebes would like to know from the stranger what Dionysus looks like (ποῖός τις ἦν, 477) and what kind of form (τίν' ἰδέαν, 471) his rites take.[326] The knowledge that the king would like to gain, however, is acquired through an extraordinary experience reserved for the privileged group of the initiands only. Pentheus, being unable to get access to the secret knowledge that is passed on to the initiates alone, suspects that it may concern illicit and dangerous activities. In its inclusiveness the cult of Dionysus subverts the traditional power structures.

Moreover, just as Oedipus cannot fully trust Teiresias, so Pentheus cannot rely on the loyalty of the soothsayer. A seer can be a powerful ally to the ruler since he can make up or modify a sacred story with the aim of

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[326] A reference to Protagoras' fragment *On the Gods* has been detected in this passage: the brevity of human life impedes the human knowledge of the divine because men are not provided with enough time for the collection of a significant amount of data. Just as Protagoras takes an agnostic view on the existence and the appearance (ἰδέαν, Protag. DK 80 B 4) of the deities, so Pentheus needs to collect visual data to be convinced of the divine status of Dionysus. Di Benedetto (2004) on 471.

bringing advantage to the ruling family.[327] However, he can also be a dangerous ally since he is not easily manageable due to his privileged position, as we shall see in the following section.

Both the initiates to the Dionysiac Mysteries and the soothsayers become suspicious in the eyes of the ruler because they constitute an uncontrollable and menacing source of power. Yet the rulers are mistaken when they decide to disdain the advice given by Teiresias because in both plays the seer is ultimately shown to be right. The kings' desires to gain autocratic knowledge and maintain full control over their kingdoms have negative consequences for Thebes: in the *Bacchae* it draws destruction and divine vengeance, whereas in the *OT* it delays the discovery of truth, which is necessary to sort out the problem of the plague.

2.1.2.b. The Opposition between Mantic Knowledge and Human Knowledge

The *Bacchae* and the *OT* thus problematize the archaic model of the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant. However, the aim of the plays is not merely to show that the rulers would have been better to confide in the revealed knowledge of the seer. They portray the soothsayers in an ambiguous light. To give an example, in the *OT* Oedipus accuses Teiresias of 'having sight only when it comes to profit' (388-9) and insults him by calling him μάγος, a negative term indicating an impostor involved in

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[327] E. *Ba.* 330 ff. When Cadmus tries to persuade Pentheus to welcome the cult of Dionysus, his arguments hinge on one basic concept: be Dionysus a god or a man, the royal family can only benefit from his claim to a divine origin since Pentheus will gain honour from a divine descent (330 ff). Therefore, what is important is not so much the actual status of Dionysus as what people believe and claim about him, and a ruler, with the connivance of the seer, can manipulate and turn his citizens' beliefs to his advantage.

some sort of wizardry and political manoeuvring.[328] A similar accusation is brought against the prophet in the *Bacchae*: Teiresias' support of the Dionysiac cult is believed to be motivated by his intent to achieve monetary gain (257). What is more, the Euripidean play pushes the critique further by representing Teiresias as an astute soothsayer who, unlike his Sophoclean namesake, has no foreknowledge of his ruler's fate but takes the side of Dionysian religion merely on political grounds and from common sense considerations (358-369).[329]

Scholars have argued that in such criticism of the seers there might have been a polemical reference to cases of manipulative exploitation of divination for political purposes, which occurred in fifth-century Athens.[330] Therefore, the aim of such invectives against seers is not to undermine the trustworthiness of divinely inspired knowledge as opposed to a rational pursuit of truth.[331] It is rather to criticize those human agents who, because of their machinations, have made one of the few techniques by which men have access to the divine will completely unreliable.

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[328] Μάγοι were the priests and interpreters of signs of the ancient Medes but in the fifth century BC the term μάγος came to be used with a pejorative connotation to indicate people involved in fraudulent activity for the love of gain: *Morb. Sacr*. 1. 10-12; Gorg. *Hel.* 10-14; E. *Or.* 1496 ff. See Lloyd (1979), 13, 15-29; Flower (2008), 64-5, esp. n. 118; Whitmarsh (2015), 97-114.

[329] Winnington – Ingram (1948), 57.

[330] See Longo (1972), 23-9, Ahl (1991), 35-53 and Stella (2010), on 387-9, 390-400, and pp. 31-4 with examples; Whitmarsh (2015), 75-86. In this regard, Jocasta's invective against the seers is interesting: by highlighting that the oracle did not come directly from Apollo but rather from his ministers, she insinuates that it might have been made up or modified (707-25). Cf. also Hdt. 5. 63, 5. 66: the priestess may have been bribed to give a false oracle.

[331] It has been argued that tragic growing hostility towards professional μάντεις is due to the rise of intellectualism in fifth-century ancient Greece, especially in the fields of philosophy and medicine, which causes divinely inspired knowledge to lose favour and credibility: Di Benedetto (1983); Vegetti (1983). Cf. Knox (1957), esp. 61-98; Diano (1968); Stella (2010) on 390-400.

In this regard, it is significant that both the plays represent the paradox of a soothsayer who divests himself of his prophetic art in order to be believed. When Teiresias foretells that Pentheus will bring suffering on Thebes, he even denies speaking by his prophetic art (μαντικῇ μὲν οὐ λέγω, 368): anyone would draw the same conclusion merely by looking at the facts (τοῖς πράγμασιν δέ, 369). In the *Bacchae* Teiresias does not take advantage of his privileged knowledge for the same reason that in the *OT* he does not link what he knows about Oedipus to his mantic art, and does not reveal the meaning of the prophecy until he is forced to; that is, the suspicion raised by intrigue and secrecy surrounding oracular consultations.[332] In the dialogue with Oedipus, to whose ears such a delayed revelation sounds like a mere fabrication (357), the prophet gives the following explanation for his silence:

ἥξει γὰρ αὐτά, κἂν ἐγὼ σιγῇ στέγω.
(S. *OT*. 341)

Things will come of themselves, even if I veil it in silence.

The first sentence stresses the inevitability of the fulfilment of any oracle, whereas the concessive one justifies his conduct: he is responsible for no disgrace that has befallen the Theban land. For, even if had spoken earlier, it would have made no difference to the outcome. Therefore, he chose what he thought would be the safest way for him to act: to keep silence and not get involved.[333] Apart from his awareness that he is powerless to divert the course of fate, another consideration might have

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[332] Edmunds (2000), 34-73 analyses all the passages in which Teiresias fails to appeal to his seercraft and his authority as a seer. The only reference to his mantic art is at vv. 461-2. According to Winnington – Ingram (1948), the characterization of Teiresias in the *Bacchae* is 'a satirical picture of a shrewd ecclesiastic'.

[333] Teiresias' reticence is stressed by the use of the vague term αὐτά, 'these things', which increases the ambiguity of his words and builds suspense: Budelmann (2000), 19-60.

played a role in his decision: he is afraid that the king might not believe him and might accuse him of conspiracy, which is exactly what happens in the course of the play. For, as I have already said, suspicion is cast on seers and oracles.[334]

In a world where political manoeuvring prevails even in the sphere of the sacred an ordinary man's advice based on common sense is more likely to be trusted than the divinely inspired words of a seer.

The following conclusion can be drawn from this analysis. The opposition between mantic knowledge and human knowledge in the *OT* and the *Bacchae* is not merely an opposition between two forms of knowledge. It also hides a political antinomy: in both dramas a king, who makes every attempt to have control over every source of information, is set in opposition to an uncontrollable, and thus dangerous, source of power and secret knowledge. The political reasons why the wisdom of the seers and of the Dionysiac Mysteries is disregarded must not be forgotten. For the interweaving of knowledge issues and political discourse sheds light on the fact that the two forms of knowledge represented in the dramas are not more or less reliable in themselves. On the contrary, their reliability depends on the motives that spur one on to start an inquiry and on the purpose for which a person uses the knowledge acquired.

The following passage from the *Bacchae* illustrates this point well: the Asian maenads try to define what σοφία is but they can only give a negative definition.

> τὸ σοφὸν δ᾽ οὐ σοφία
> τό τε μὴ θνατὰ φρονεῖν.

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[334] For further interpretations of Teiresias' silence, see Segal (2001), 57-9; Ahl (1991), 77-83.

(E. *Ba.* 395-6)

Cleverness is not wisdom, nor is it wise to think thoughts not mortal.

There seem to exist two different kinds of wisdom: a true and a false one.[335] Scholars are divided as to who is the subject of the chorus' criticism. According to one interpretation, the maenads are criticizing the rationalist mind-set of men like Pentheus, who fights against the god (θεομαχεῖν, 1255), as opposed to the pious attitude of the seer, who relies on divinely inspired knowledge.[336] A different view maintains that the polemical target of the critique is more likely to be Teiresias himself since he is the only one who speaks as a sophist, albeit in defence of Dionysus.[337] However, the chorus is not necessarily referring to a specific character. The maenads are elaborating a discourse on human knowledge in general and on its positive and negative uses. By means of a paradoxical sentence, the maenads argue that the possession of any kind of skills is not sufficient to be clever, which implies that cleverness is a matter of ends to which skills are applied. If the purpose is to battle against the god, then it cannot be called true wisdom.

In this regard, it is worth analysing a passage from Pindar's *Olympian* 9: after the poet rejects the myth of Heracles fighting against Poseidon, Apollo and Hades, he declares that 'to speak evil of the gods is a

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[335] For a thorough analysis of this passage, see Winnington – Ingram (1948), 59-70.

[336] Dodds (1944) and Seaford (1996) on 395.

[337] Susanetti (2010) on 395-6. Cf. the first episode: Teiresias, soon after claiming 'not to play the sophist when the gods are concerned' (οὐδ' ἐνσοφιζόμεσθα τοῖσι δαίμοσιν, 200) and rejecting the use of sophistry in his enquiries into divine matters (vv. 201-204), actually speaks as a sophist when he equates Demeter with earth/dry food, and Dionysus with the wet/wine (275 ff; cf. Prodic. 84 B 5 DK). The seer thus uses sophistic explanation to anchor the new cult of Dionysus in the past and to show that it will not subvert tradition: if Dionysus is wine, it follows that he is as old as one of the oldest beverages. Susanetti (2010) on 274-9, 285-97; Conacher (1998), 17-25.

hateful skill' (τό γε λοιδορῆσαι θεοὺς/ ἐχθρὰ σοφία, 37-8). The word σοφία refers to poetry: a poet can be called σοφός because he masters the poetic art. Nevertheless, if it is used against the Olympian deities, such an art becomes hateful and hostile to the poet himself since it can provoke divine anger.[338]

Similarly, the chorus in the *Bacchae* asserts that, if human skilfulness leads men to 'think thoughts not mortal' (τό τε μὴ θνητὰ φρονεῖν, 396), it will inevitably pull down divine vengeance upon them: for Dionysus hates the man who does not keep his wise heart and mind (σοφὰν…πραπίδα φρένα, 428) away from excessive men. In the fourth stasimon the chorus further clarifies that cleverness is not good or bad in itself. Rather there are good and bad ways to take advantage of it: the maenads affirm that they 'do not begrudge those who pursue cleverness in due measure' (τὸ σοφὸν οὐ φθονῶ καιρῷ θηρεύουσι, 1005), and specify that honouring the gods and behaving according to justice lead mortals to success. Therefore, cleverness is a good possession provided that it is not excessive and is not used against the gods.

Just as human intelligence is not bad or good in itself provided that it used neither against the gods nor to the disadvantage of the community, so the revealed knowledge of the seers is reliable unless it is manipulated for political reasons. It is the purpose for which one has recourse to either mode of knowing that determines whether that form of knowledge is positive or negative.

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[338] Gentili (2013) mentions the story of the divine punishment suffered by Stesichorus for offending Helen in one of his poems.

2.1.2.c. The Models of Distributed Knowledge and Autocratic Knowledge Compared.

We have seen that the plays criticize the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant since both Pentheus and Oedipus are induced to behave unwisely and to reject the very wisdom that would have been most effective and beneficial to the community.

As Wohl points out in her analysis of the *OT*, the transformation of the tyrant from the bearer of impossible potency to the bearer of utter lack is a warning against 'the peril the tyrant's ecstasy poses to the symbolic order'.[339] At the same time, it represents Athens' democratic ideology: for, 'by figuring that such an exorbitant power could ever be claimed by one individual, the tyrant makes that imagined power available to the δῆμος as a whole.'[340] Democratic freedom is freedom from the political and sexual domination of tyrants.[341] Following Wohl's thesis, it can be argued that democratic freedom is also freedom from the autocratic model of knowledge, which is typical of the tyrant, and from any kind of knowledge that is reserved for members of a privileged group and can thus be manipulated by the élite for their own ends. To be able to curb individualistic impulses effectively, knowledge must be distributed.

Oedipus, by committing incest and parricide, transgresses paternal law and jeopardizes the authority of Zeus given that, as the chorus highlights, νόμοι are 'the children of Olympian Zeus' (863-72). In his metaphorical blindness, he endangers both the cosmic and the political orders. Harmony is restored only when Oedipus, after gaining full

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[339] Wohl (2002), 259.
[340] Wohl (2002), 215 ff.
[341] Wohl (2002), 3-4.

knowledge about his past, loses part of his prosperity and power, which is symbolically represented by the loss of his eyes. His downfall, by showing that the tyrant cannot be self-sufficient, opens up a space for a fantasy that claims for the whole πόλις the power, control over knowledge and civic prosperity that were the prerogatives of the tyrant.

Oedipus' personal story of rise and fall allows the Athenian spectator to look upon the tyrant's exorbitant sovereignty and to enjoy this fantasy of power just long enough to become aware not only of its enticing aspects but also of its threats. Wohl argues that in Athenian democratic ideology we find 'political fantasies that contradict or complicate the simple declarations of love of the good Athenian citizen'.[342] An example given by the scholar is the Athenians' attitude towards Alcibiades as it is described by ancient Greek historiographers. Alcibiades, the scion of an illustrious family who became embroiled in allegations of sexual perversion, religious profanity and tyrannical ambitions (Th. 6. 15. 4), exercised a profound attraction on the Athenians to the point that the citizens, after exiling him, wanted him back since 'they lusted with an amazing desire to be ruled by him as a tyrant' (Plu. *Alc.* 34. 6-7). It is undoubtedly a logical contradiction that a democratic city like Athens longs for tyranny. This episode is thus illustrative of unconscious desires lying beneath the surface in Athenian democracy: any exorbitant power, such as that of a tyrant, retains its attractiveness even to those who are subjected to it. Democratic citizens may be fascinated by it and may secretly desire to assume it unto themselves.

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[342] Wohl (2002), 1-2.

Both the *OT* and the *Bacchae* arouse democratic fantasies, such as the possibility that anyone, even humble people, have the same level of knowledge as the ministers of Apollo and may get access to the secret knowledge of the Dionysiac mysteries. In the *OT*, for instance, it is not Teiresias but rather a mere drunkard that first discloses the truth about Oedipus' origins (*OT.* 779-86). In the *Bacchae*, on the other hand, Dionysus is said not to discriminate between the rich and the poor (421-3) and to be happy to receive joint honours from everyone and to be magnified by all without exception (208-9).[343]

Yet a question arises: once the citizens assume to themselves such power, will they act better than a tyrant? They might, but they might also be enticed into using it to take control over information, to turn it to their advantage and to manipulate it for political purposes. In any historical period political madness might affect not only tyrannical regimes but also democratic systems. In fact, both the *OT* and the *Bacchae* show that, within the democratic ideology that sustains such fantasies, the prohibited tyrannical desire to have privileged access to, and control over, knowledge lives on.

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[343] Dionysus is the god of the πλῆθος, who 'equally gives the painless joy of wine both to the rich and to the lowly' (421-3): Dodds (1944) on 430-3. See also Goff's interpretation (2004), 271-88 of Dionysiac maenadism as 'a cultural resource for women that could afford them an intellectual experience as well as release from a subordinate existence.' Di Benedetto (2004) on 395 argues that the *Bacchae* represents Euripides' twist in his political beliefs: Euripides defends the re-establishment of the democratic government after the Athenian oligarchic coup of 411 BC by re-evaluating the importance of the simple people (430-1) and by extolling anti-elitist feelings. By contrast, Beltrametti (2007), 42-54 maintains that Dionysus represents the model of divine royalty and that the play, taking Archelaus of Macedonia as the model of a good ruler, praises monarchy, the oldest form of government.

2.2 The Knowledge of the Divine

Both the *OT* and the *Bacchae* address the theme of the knowledge of the divine although they develop it in different ways: whereas the Euripidean play raises questions about divine identity, the *OT* deals with the concept of divine will and focuses on human effort to find out what the gods expect of mortals.

To judge who a god is and what the gods wish a person to do, men need clear signs. The sensory dimension plays a major role in the mental processes by which knowledge of any kind is acquired.[344] Yet the interpretation of any data perceived by the five senses also involves reasoning and thinking. The process of giving meaning to the data acquired is based on a set of cultural codes, that is, of particular frames that help the members of a society make sense of things. For instance, it is assumed that the gods exist provided that they manifest themselves through phenomena which are culturally-recognized divine manifestations. Similarly, there is a set of natural phenomena which, according to culturally specific codes, are believed to signal divine will. For example, catastrophic events such as earthquakes, due to their superhuman destructive force, can be viewed as signals of divine anger.

The occurrence of an event which is at the limits of man's analytic capacities leaves men no recourse but to mythical and religious thought. Interpreting such events as brought about by the gods allows men to make sense of the world. These phenomena are interpreted as unambiguous and objective signs of the divine precisely because they fit in with the cultural codes according to which a specific culture interprets them. This means

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[344] Whitmarsh (2015), 87-96.

that, whenever a member of that culture witnesses an earthquake, for example, he/she truly believes that the gods are communicating with men through that natural event and thus feels that he/she is objectively in contact with the divine.

Objectivity, however, is culturally constituted, that is, criteria of objectivity may vary among different societies.[345] Culturally specific codes supply univocal meaning for the members of a specific culture only, whereas different explanations and interpretations of the same phenomena can be given in other cultures. In addition to this, criteria of objectivity can change over time even within a particular group: at certain periods the members of a specific culture can find subjective and unreasonable what at other periods they found objective and reasonable, and vice versa. The plays chosen for analysis delve into these issues: they provide a space for discussing how commonly held cultural codes may change and for exploring potential alternatives to them.

Moreover, both dramas show that human beings perceive the universe not only through the five senses but also through their emotional response to the occurring events: one's body language reveals emotions and those emotions in turn shed light on the way in which a person has interpreted an event. This section aims to show that in the process of gaining knowledge the characters on stage reveal the fusion of the cognitive, sensory and emotional dimensions of their perceptions, and that such a process is influenced by the cultural codes that shape and form the basis of one's understanding of phenomena.

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[345] For a thorough analysis of how objectivity is mediated and oriented by cultural codes and subjective desires, see Sahlins (1995), 148-89. cf. also Geertz (1973), 98 ff.

2.2.1 Changing Cultural Codes: the Interpretation of Catastrophic Events
and the Function of Emotions

Natural and health disasters, such as epidemics and seismic events, can be a manifestation of divine anger, as the plague sent by Apollo in the first book of the *Iliad* and in the *OT*, and the earthquake conjured up in Aeschylus' *PV* and Euripides' *Bacchae* suggest. Why are these natural phenomena believed to be divine acts? For nature is a force which is ultimately beyond human control: once unleashed, these powerful natural phenomena give rise to fear and astonishment, and such emotions in turn inspire religious awe. Moreover, it is hard for men to discover the causes of such events. Any event which either defies explanation or is too catastrophic to be handled by limited human resources is attributed to divine agency because the gods hold both knowledge and power over men.[346]

However, in the *OT* and the *Bacchae* the characters on stage display different emotional reactions in response to catastrophic events. As I shall now discuss in further detail, the reason why they react differently is that emotions are socially and culturally constructed and, consequently, might develop according to changes in society and culture:[347] we will see that the

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[346] In this regard, it is significant that the ancient Greeks think that plagues are caused by the darts of Apollo or Artemis (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 6. 428, 19. 59, 24. 758; Lloyd, 1987, 1-12): the divine archer, as well as any other human archer, has a visual advantage over his victims who cannot see the arrows going toward them. Similarly, human beings are struck down by natural and health disasters without even noticing. It follows that the supernatural interpretation of the plague as brought about by Apollo's arrows emphasizes the god's supremacy in sight and knowledge as opposed to the gap in men's field of vision: Holmes (2010), 48-58.

[347] Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 15-6: for instance, 'the fear of death and emotional response to the loss of loved ones […] depend on factors such as eschatological beliefs, philosophical ideas about life, ritual performances, normative restrictions on mourning […].'

characters respond to such phenomena in diverse ways depending on the cultural codes used for interpreting them.

2.2.1.a. Sophocles' *OT*

The action of the *OT* begins with a rite of supplication. A crowd has gathered with suppliant boughs before the altars in front of the royal palace, burning incense and singing lamentations (4-5). The priest of Zeus informs Oedipus, the king of Thebes, that 'the fire-bearing god (ὁ πυρφόρος θεὸς, 27), hateful Pestilence (λοιμὸς ἔχθιστος, 28), has swooped upon the city and ravages it'. The plague is straightforwardly interpreted as an act of a god, and more specifically as an act of 'the fire-bearing god', who may be either Ares or Apollo.[348]

If such events are divine manifestations, how can men determine the reason for divine wrath and how to placate it? On such occasions men usually appeal to the gods asking them to demonstrate how to overcome adversities: they ask the gods themselves for explanation by consulting an oracle. This is what Oedipus has already done before the action of the play begins.

> [...] πολλὰς δ᾽ ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις.
> ἦν δ᾽ εὖ σκοπῶν ηὕρισκον ἴασιν μόνην,
> ταύτην ἔπραξα· παῖδα γὰρ Μενοικέως
> Κρέοντ᾽, ἐμαυτοῦ γαμβρόν, ἐς τὰ Πυθικὰ
> ἔπεμψα Φοίβου δώμαθ᾽, ὡς πύθοιθ᾽ ὅ τι
> δρῶν ἢ τί φωνῶν τήνδε ῥυσαίμην πόλιν.
> (S. *OT*. 67-72)

> *[…] I have travelled many roads in the wanderings of reflection. The one*

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[348] Sheppard (1920) on 11. Cf. also Liapis in Ormand (2012), 84-6, and Whitmarsh (2015), 97-114, who in the representation of the pestilence as an assault of Ares see a reference to the plague affecting Athens during the Peloponnesian War.

remedy which, by careful thought, I have found I have applied: I have sent Creon, son of Menoeceus, my wife's brother, to the Pythian halls of Phoebus, so that he may learn by what deed or word I may protect this city.

Oedipus' decision to consult the oracle might be interpreted as an indication that he also views the plague as divine punishment. Yet special attention must be paid to a significant shift in Oedipus' understanding of the pestilence. The king of Thebes initially tries to apply a rational method of research to the study of the causes of the plague affecting his reign: it is important to note that Oedipus resorts to divine help only after 'having travelled many roads (πολλὰς δ᾽ ὁδοὺς, 67) in the wanderings of reflection' and having carefully considered (σκοπῶν, 68) any option available. The word ὁδός has semantic relevance since in medical science and in the semantic field of intellectual process it refers to the research method known as successive approximations:

'The summary conclusion comes from the origin and the going forth, and from many accounts learned little by little, when one gathers them together and studies them thoroughly. […] This would be the road (ὁδός). In this way develop verification of correct accounts and refutation of erroneous ones.' (*Epid*. VI. 3. 12)[349]

With these words the Hippocratic treatise *Epidemics* describes a research method that, by gathering and evaluating data little by little, progresses towards deeper levels of understanding.[350] Given that men, unlike deities, do not possess omniscient knowledge, they must approach any problem in a set of stages that should gradually add to their understanding.

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[349] Cf. Hp. *VM*. 2.2 (Schiefsky, 2005, *ad loc*).
[350] Stella (2010) on 67; Cambiano (1991).

Since Oedipus is unable to find a solution, he finally resigns himself to resorting to the oracle of Apollo but his intention is not so much to find out what the Thebans are guilty of and how they can make amends as to learn from the prophetic god what actions he should take to deliver his people from the plague. Therefore, he does not initially interpret the plague as a catastrophe arising from μίασμα. He rather consults the oracle to find out the natural causes of the plague and the best measures to eradicate the disease. This is made evident by the fact that, when Oedipus asserts that oracular consultation is the only remedy left (ἴασιν μόνην, 68), he uses a word belonging to the semantic field of medical science: that is, ἴασις, which literally means 'healing'.[351] This might indicate that Oedipus is still far away from understanding what the real meaning of the plague is. He is not looking either for past offences for which the wrongdoers must make amends or for the culprits in order to punish them. He is rather searching for the most effective remedies against the plague.

One could argue that these two types of intention coincide as the only way to find a cure for the pestilence will turn out to be precisely the punishment of the person guilty of causing the pollution arising from the slaughter of the previous king Laius. The change of focus in Oedipus' speech, however, is striking. It is only later that the oracle itself leads Oedipus back to a more religious interpretation of the pestilence (95-107), which is based on the nexus between guilt and pollution, and between punishment and purification,[352] and this view is later confirmed by the chorus:

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[351] Hp. *Aph*. 2. 17. Stella (2010), on 68; Vegetti (1983).
[352] The oracle clearly orders Oedipus to cure the Theban land from pollution (μίασμα, 97) by punishing the killers of Laius (95-107), and Oedipus promises that he shall do

ὦ Διὸς ἁδυεπὲς φάτι, τίς ποτε
τᾶς πολυχρύσου
Πυθῶνος ἀγλαὰς ἔβας
Θήβας; ἐκτέταμαι φοβερὰν φρένα
δείματι πάλλων,
ἰήιε Δάλιε Παιάν,
ἀμφὶ σοὶ ἁζόμενος τί μοι ἢ νέον
ἢ περιτελλομέναις ὥραις πάλιν
ἐξανύσεις χρέος.
(S. *OT.* 151-6)

O sweetly-speaking message of Zeus, in what spirit have you come to glorious Thebes from golden Pytho? I am on the rack, terror shakes my soul, O Delian healer to whom wild cries rise, in holy fear of you, wondering what debt you will extract from me, perhaps unknown before, perhaps renewed with the revolving years.

Interestingly, this passage focuses on the physical effects and on the emotions felt by the chorus in connection with their ideas of what the epidemic might mean in terms of human losses caused by divine wrath. The chorus is in a state of fear (φοβερὰν φρένα δείματι, 152-3) and religious awe (ἁζόμενος, 155) towards the prophetic word of Apollo and shudders (πάλλων, 153) at the thought of what debt the god will require Thebes to pay. Such bodily symptoms (shudder, 153) and emotions (terror, 152-3) reveal something about the way in which the chorus interprets the epidemic: the elderly Thebans believe that the gods are responsible for the outbreak of the plague in Thebes. In this regard, it is noteworthy to mention Aristotle's definition of fear: it arises 'from an impression of a future evil', which typically comprises judgements concerning the hostile attitude of others and their relative power in comparison with one's

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anything to drive away the pollution arising from an unvindicated murder. As Holmes (2010), 265-74 argues in her analysis of Euripides' *Heracles*, 'μίασμα bridges two worlds by accommodating the helplessness of a body caught in a causal chain alongside the need to make someone pay for the damage.'

own.[353] In other words, fear is a socially conditioned response which is elicited by the awareness that someone or something has the power and a motive to harm you. In this passage, the pestilence is interpreted as divine punishment for a debt which has not yet been settled.

Nevertheless, the fact that the plague could have resulted from divine agency does not exclude the possibility that it can also be explained in terms of natural causes. In this regard, the chorus' utterance that 'unpitied, the children lie on the ground, spreading pestilence (θανατατφόρα), with no one to mourn them' (180) is especially meaningful: the adjective θανατηφόρος refers to death by contagion and thus implies a natural process whereby the plague is spread from person to person. A striking similarity can be found between the idea of double determination expressed in the play and the kinds of enquiries concerning the nature of diseases in Herodotus and early Greek medical writers. Herodotus, on the one hand, maintains that diseases can be brought about by divine agency.[354] On the other hand, his work is informed by certain ideas also current in medical circles, namely that diseases are natural phenomena and that nature implies a regularity of causes and effects.[355] This belief challenges the notion of divine intervention but Herodotus does not rule it out: he rather redefines the idea of divine agency by

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[353] Ar. *Rh.* 2.5, 1382a21-25. Konstan (2006), 129-155.

[354] See, for instance, the explanation given by Herodotus for the Scythian female disease: it is the result of a sacrilegious act (Hdt. I. 105; IV. 67). Interestingly, this supernatural interpretation of the Scythians' impotence is criticized by the author of *On Airs, Waters, and Places* (22. 3J): Bottin (1996), 13-5; Thomas (2000), 28 ff.

[355] See Lloyd (1979), 15-29.

arguing that the gods, to punish mortals, work through natural processes.[356]

By putting on stage a king who consults the oracle of Delphi not so much to find out a way to appease the Olympian deities as to learn what natural causes brought about the plague and what healing treatments are most effective, and by suggesting that the plague might be doubly determined, the play participates actively in some of the kinds of enquiries also carried out in medical speculation and historical investigation. It invites the audience to reflect on how the cultural codes according to which catastrophic phenomena such as the plague are interpreted change over time. As Ahl argues, 'Oedipus' belief that consultation of the Delphic oracle is the only possible way to deal with the plague would have struck many of Sophocles' contemporaries as old-fashioned and not efficacious.'[357] The scholar mentions the example of Thucydides (2.44) who, with regard to the plague of Athens, writes that consultations of oracles were ineffectual since the epidemic arose from natural causes. Yet the peculiar way in which Oedipus consults the oracle reveals precisely his interest in finding out not so much why the gods have brought about the epidemic as its natural causes, how it propagates, and how to hinder its propagation: he intends to draw on the superior knowledge of the prophetic god in order to face the plague in the most effective way.

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[356] For instance, Herodotus (IV. 205) explains the natural cause which brought about the parasitic skin disease contracted by Pheretima, queen of Cyrene: 'while still alive she teemed with maggots'. Yet soon afterwards he also mentions a divine cause: 'thus does over-brutal human revenge invite retribution from the gods'. Interestingly, the view that natural causes do not exclude the participation of the divine is also present in medical circles: early Greek medical writings such as *On Airs, Waters, and Places* (22) and *On the Sacred Disease* (2) argue that all diseases have a nature and, consequently, a definitive physical cause, while agreeing that they are also divine given that the whole of nature is divine. See Lateiner (1986), 11.

[357] Ahl (1991), 35-53. Cf. Fontenrose (1978), 41.

The *OT* artfully calls to mind such changes in the interpretation of natural disasters and hints at the predominant cultural codes of the time of the performance: it thus proves to be part of the intellectual developments of the mid and late fifth century, developments both in understanding the physical world and in medicine.

2.2.1. b. Euripides' *Bacchae*

The plot of the *Bacchae* is driven forward by the fact that the city of Thebes doesn't acknowledge the divine status of Dionysus. The Thebans suppose that the claim of a divine origin for her newly born baby is just a clever trick (σοφίσματα, 30) to which Semele resorted in order to escape the shame of an illicit sexual affair. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Ion thinks the same of Creusa. Scepticism usually surrounds the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals since such stories lend themselves to be turned to one's advantage: anyone might easily make them up either to shift the blame on a god, as both Creusa and Semele supposedly did, or to increase the prestige of one's family.[358] Therefore, scepticism about the divine origin of Semele's child is not in itself atypical. Nonetheless, it becomes impious because it leads to the Thebans' neglect of Dionysus' cult. The problem lies in the fact that, as opposed to most of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals, in this case the offspring born to the couple is not a hero but a god.

This in turn raises several questions regarding human knowledge of the divine: how can men know who a god is? How can they be sure that the one who claims to be a deity is not an impostor? From the audience's

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[358] cf. Cadmus' speech in E. *Ba*. 330-42.

point of view the divine status of Dionysus is never at stake from the beginning to the end of the play but, thanks to the chronological gap between the time in which the story is set and the time of the theatrical performance, the *Bacchae* makes the spectators reflect on this set of questions about the frontiers and limits of human knowledge of the divine.[359]

Given that Greek religion lacked sacred texts, human knowledge of the gods, of their prerogatives and attributes, was partly based on oral traditions, and partly on written texts expounding ancient myths. The *Bacchae* dramatizes the problematic arrival of a new god who has no tradition corroborating his claims to divine authority. How can Dionysus thus prove that he is a god? Dionysus' response is to put on a show.

The third episode begins with the terrific epiphany of Dionysus: while the chorus is alone on stage, for the first time the god manifestly reveals himself through his loud voice (ὁ κέλαδος, 578).[360] In the course of the play he never appears in front of his θίασος in his true form:[361] the maenads cannot see him but can now hear him. The syntax of the brief dialogue between the god and his initiates is elementary and

[359] Before the publication of the Mycenaean *lamellae* (Beltrametti, 2007, 13-64), the *Bacchae* was interpreted as a play representing a historical event, that is the introduction in Athens of a new religious cult either from Thrace (Rohde, 1970) or from Macedonia (Dodds, 1944). The decipherment of the name of Dionysus on a Linear B tablet from Pylos, however, proved that Dionysus was worshipped during the Mycenaean period as well: Seaford (1996), 44-52. Therefore, at the time of the performance, the divine status of Dionysus is not at stake nor is it a recent acquisition. For an analysis of additional interpretations of Dionysus' arrival in the *Bacchae,* see Winnington- Ingram (1948), Sabbatucci (1979), Versnel (1990), Burkert (1999).
[360] Dionysus needs to repeat his call (ἰὼ ἰώ, πάλιν αὐδῶ, 580) because the chorus cannot understand either who is speaking or where the voice comes from (τίς ὅδε, τίς ὅδε πόθεν ὁ κέλαδος/ ἀνά μ᾽ ἐκάλεσεν Εὐίου; 578-9).
[361] Only at the end of the play does he shows himself on the θεολογεῖον: in his role as *deus ex machina* he predicts Cadmus' and Agave's fate (1330-43).

fragmented:[362] Dionysus first invites them to listen to him (κλύετ᾽ ἐμᾶς κλύετ᾽ αὐδᾶς, 576), and then invokes the goddess Earthquake (Ἔννοσι πότνια, 585) asking her to shake the earth so that Pentheus' palace falls down. Therefore, the god manifests himself by means of his voice (αὐδᾶς, 576; ὁ κέλαδος, 578; πάλιν αὐδῶ, 580), a shout (ἀλαλάζεται, 592), the earthquake (591-2, 605-6) and the flame of lightning (594-5, 598-9). Soon after such a powerful divine manifestation a messenger enters the stage and reports a series of marvels that had happened on Mount Cithaeron (666 ff).[363]

Pentheus' attitude towards these miracles is worth comparing and contrasting with the reactions of other characters on stage. The messenger who reports the marvellous facts that had occurred on Mount Cithaeron correctly infers that 'some god was at work' (οὐκ ἄνευ θεῶν τινος, 764) and, as a consequence, urges the king to receive Dionysus into the city (769-70): for, if Pentheus had been there and seen that, he would have approached in prayer the god that he now blames (712-3). According to the messenger, the vision of θαύματα should instil in Pentheus faith in Dionysus. By contrast, the king of Thebes does not interpret them as a manifestation of Bromios' divine power: on the contrary, he blasphemously threatens that the only sacrifice he will offer to the god will be the bacchants' blood (θύσω, φόνον γε θῆλυν, 796). His disbelief may be due to the fact that he had not seen the wonders on Mount Cithaeron in person but he, as well as the chorus, was present at far more prodigious

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[362] See Di Benedetto (2004), n. *ad loc.*, who argues that this is typical of mystical possession.
[363] Cf. the second episode (447-8) where a servant tells Pentheus that the bacchants, who had been chained up in the public prison, have just been freed of their bonds. The responsibility for this prodigy is ascribed to the Lydian stranger, who is said to be 'full of many marvels' (πολλῶν…θαυμάτων…πλέως, 449).

events, which occurred in his own palace at the beginning of the third episode: the flame of lightning (594-5, 598-9) and the earthquake (591-2, 605-6). Pentheus' reaction to such natural phenomena differs strikingly from the chorus' response:

Χορός
ἆ ἆ,
πῦρ οὐ λεύσσεις, οὐδ᾽ αὐγάζῃ
<τόνδε> Σεμέλας ἱερὸν ἀμφὶ τάφον
ἅν ποτε κεραυνοβόλος ἔλιπε φλόγα
Διὸς βροντά;
δίκετε πεδόσε δίκετε τρομερὰ
σώματα, μαινάδες·
ὁ γὰρ ἄναξ ἄνω κάτω τιθεὶς ἔπεισι
μέλαθρα τάδε Διὸς γόνος.
Διόνυσος
βάρβαροι γυναῖκες, οὕτως ἐκπεπληγμέναι φόβῳ
πρὸς πέδῳ πεπτώκατ᾽; ᾔσθεσθ᾽, ὡς ἔοικε, Βακχίου
διατινάξαντος † δῶμα Πενθέως· ἀλλ᾽ ἐξανίστατε †
σῶμα καὶ θαρσεῖτε σαρκὸς ἐξαμείψασαι τρόμον.
(E. *Ba.* 596-607)

Chorus: *Oh! Oh! Do you not see the fire, do you not perceive, about the sacred tomb of Semele, the flame that once Zeus' thunderbolt-hurled thunder left?*[364] *Cast on the ground your trembling bodies, Maenads, cast them down, for our lord, Zeus' son, is coming against this palace, turning everything upside down.*

Dionysus: *Barbarian women, have you fallen on the ground so stricken with fear? You have, so it seems, felt Bacchus shaking the house of Pentheus. But get up and take courage, putting a stop to your trembling.*

Experiencing (ᾔσθεσθ᾽, 605) the earthquake and the lightning-ignited fire terrifies (ἐκπεπληγμέναι φόβῳ, 604) the maenads to the point that it causes tremors in their limbs (τρομερὰ σώματα 600; τρόμον, 607).

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[364] At v. 599 I follow Seaford's translation (1996) because the Loeb edition keeps the transmitted text (Δίου βροντᾶς), whereas the Oxford Classical Texts edition accepts Wecklein's conjecture (Διὸς βροντά).

Trembling is an automatic reaction of the body to a frightening event: this bodily symptom is thus an indication that the chorus feels terror, as Dionysus specifies (605-8). This scene seems to reflect the initiand's initiatory ordeal in the Dionysiac mysteries: the initiands were frightened in the darkness by sounds unseen and by terrifying apparitions,[365] which caused tremor, sweating and amazement.[366] The grief and torment of the initiands were ended by the appearance of mystic light which brought joy, calm and salvation.[367] Soon after the palace of Pentheus is burnt up, Dionysus manifests himself and encourages the bacchants to stand on their feet (ἀνίστατε/σῶμα, 606-7),[368] to take courage (θαρσεῖτε, 607) and to stop shaking (σαρκὸς ἐξαμείψασαι τρόμον, 607): following the god's advice, the chorus gladly welcomes the mystic light of deliverance (φάος, 608).

Whereas the maenads immediately acknowledge divine agency, Pentheus seems not to understand what is happening. The representation of Pentheus' response to the marvels focuses on the series of unsuccessful actions which the king undertakes with the aim of limiting the damage caused by the catastrophic events. First of all, instead of chaining the stranger, he ends up trying to bind a bull: he 'pants out his wrath and

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[365] Several ancient sources describe the Dionysiac rites as including φάσματα (Pl. *Smp.* 211a; Plu. fr. 178. 5ff Sandbach; Aristid. 22. 3; Pl. *Phdr.* 250b) and the imitation of thunder, lightning and earthquake by the use of kettledrums, ῥόμβοι, dances, and so on (A. frr. 23, 57 R; S. *Ant.* 152-4; Hdt. 4. 79.2; Pl. *R.* 621b, *Phdr.* 254b; Schol. Ar. *V.* 1363b). See Seaford (1981), 259; (1996) on 576-641.

[366] The shivering, trembling, sweating, and amazement of the initiands are mentioned by Plutarch, fr. 178 Sandbach (φρίκη καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἱδρὼς καὶ θάμβος) and Plato, *Phdr.* 248b (θόρυβος οὖν καὶ ἅμιλλα καὶ ἱδρὼς ἔσχατος γίγνεται). See Seaford (1981), 256; (1996), on 616-37.

[367] Cf. Plu. fr. 178 Sandbach. The mystic light emerging from darkness was identified with deity in Eleusis (Ar. *Ra.* 342-3, 455-6; S. *Ant.* 1146-52; P. *O.* 2. 53): Seaford (1996) on 608.

[368] As Seaford (1996) on 606-9 argues, 'mystic initiates might be prostrate in the darkness when the mystic light appeared': cf. Plu. fr. 178 Sandbach (the initiates 'trodden on by themselves'); Pl. *Phdr.* 248 a ('trampling upon and colliding with one another').

drips sweat from his body' (620), while Dionysus calmly (ἥσυχος , 622) sits nearby and watches. In this passage there may be a reference to the opposition between the calm and bliss enjoyed by the initiates and the painful anxiety of the initiand, which in the case of Pentheus cannot be turned into happiness because of the king's stubborn rejection of the Dionysiac cult.[369]

What is more, after the god kindles Semele's tomb, he straightforwardly orders his servants to bring as much water as possible. In this regard, the stranger's remark that their labour is in vain (μάτην πονῶν, 626) is worth noticing: divine fire cannot be put out.[370] Consequently, Pentheus' command shows precisely that he does not attribute the ruin of his house to divine agency. Subsequently, the appearance of a divine light (φῶς, 630)[371] in the courtyard, does not manage to transform Pentheus' disquiet into blissful tranquillity because the king, as opposed to the chorus, obstinately refuses to embrace the cult of Dionysus: he runs out of the palace brandishing a sword against the light, which he identifies with his prisoner. Finally, after the royal palace is shattered and falls down,[372] Pentheus still cannot see any divine hand in what is happening: at the end of the episode, he threatens the Lydian

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[369] For the mystic significance of ἡσυχία, see Seaford (1996) on 621-2, 641, 647, 790. Perspiration usually occurs in the initiatory process (Plu. fr. 178 Sandbach; Pl. *Phdr*. 248b). Pentheus' disquiet, which may represent the initiand's anxious excitement (πτόησις: Plu. *Mor.* 943c; Arist. Quint. *De Mus.*3. 25) has already been noted by Cadmus in the first episode (ὡς ἐπτόηται, 214). See also Seaford (1996) on 214; (2006), 52.

[370] Interestingly, the uninitiated or those who disregard the mysteries are believed to be condemned to carry water in leaky jars (Pl. *Grg.* 493a-b; Paus. 10. 31. 9-11). Cf. Seaford (1996) on 625-6.

[371] φάσμ' Jacobs: φῶς LP. I follow Seaford's translation (1996), who accepts the transmitted text and argues that it is not necessary to change the ms. 'light' into 'apparition' since mystic light was a feature typical of mystic initiation.

[372] Dodds (1944), n. *ad loc.* argues that it was the stable behind the palace that fell down given that the backscene must remain standing throughout the play.

stranger, who has miraculously escaped his chains, that he will lock him up again (792-3). It follows that he has not believed the stranger's revelation that it was the god himself who freed him (649-51).[373]

The process of creating fear begins with a frightening sensory stimulus (in this case, the earthquake together with the flame of lightning); sensory data are then interpreted by the brain whose function is to determine possible threat. The same sensory stimulus is received both by the chorus and by Pentheus but their interpretations of it substantially diverge, as their emotional reactions suggest. The king of Thebes is not stricken with dread because he has interpreted the fire as a natural event, which can consequently be extinguished simply by using water. By contrast, the chorus views it as a supernatural phenomenon resulting from divine anger and, more specifically, from Dionysus' determination to give resounding proof of his divine power.

We should now wonder why Pentheus does not consider such prodigious and powerful events as evidence of Dionysus' divine status.

One of the reasons why Pentheus cannot see any divine hand in what is happening is that his vision has been distorted by Dionysus as a punishment for his impious attitude. While the gods can traditionally see everything,[374] Dionysus takes advantage of the limitations of human

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[373] See also E. *Ba.* 498: 'The god himself will free me when I so desire' (λύσει μ᾽ ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω). In this phrase there may be a reference to Dionysus in his role as Lysios. A similar ritual formula (ὁ Βάκχιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε) is found in the late fourth-century *lamellae* of Pelinna (Thessaly), which describe the Dionysiac mystic rituals. See Seaford (1996), 41, 190; Di Benedetto (2004), 117.

[374] E. *Ba.* 394. The divine ability to see everything is often praised in Greek tragedies (for instance, A. *Supp.* 139; *Eu.* 296; *Pr.* 567-9). This is the reason why tragic characters usually invoke the gods asking them to look graciously upon them (ἐποπτεύω, φυλάσσω, ὁράω,). See, for example, A. *Ch.* 1 (Hermes), 126 (the spirits beneath the earth that keep

vision: he causes Pentheus and Agave to experience altered visual perceptions of reality in order to punish them harshly. What is more, the god of παρουσία conceals his presence by disguising himself as a foreign devotee of Dionysus. Throughout the play nobody recognizes him, not even the chorus of Asian bacchants.

Taking on a mortal guise, Dionysus arrives in Thebes with the aim of making his divinity manifest to mortals (ἵν᾽ εἴην ἐμφανὴς δαίμων βροτοῖς, 20). The presence of the god is manifested by means of three senses (smell, sight and hearing), each of which plays a different role and has a different value. Soon after his arrival he asks his holy band of Asian maenads to take up the drums and make a din 'so that Cadmos' city may see' (58-61). In the same sentence two different sensory spheres are juxtaposed: sight and sound. On the one hand, the clamour made by the kettledrums merely fulfils the function of catching the Thebans' eyes. On the other hand, this phrase may hint at a deeper meaning beyond the literal level, namely the opposition between sight and sound, which is developed in the course of the play: the auditory sphere, together with the olfactory one, is proved to be the most reliable sensory system through which the god reveals himself. In contrast, eyesight is shown to be the most deceptive sense.

One of the most noticeable characteristics of the Lydian stranger is the perfume emanating from his hair.[375] This is an accidental clue revealing the divine nature of the foreigner, but it is overlooked by

watch over the house: ἐπισκόπους), 246-7 (Zeus), 489 (the spirit of Agamemnon), 583 (Apollo and Hermes), 985 (Helios), 1064 (a god); E. *Ba.* 550.

[375] E. *Ba.* 234-6: 'a wizard, an enchanter from the Lydian land, fragrant in hair with golden curls, having in his eyes the wine-dark graces of Aphrodite' (γόης ἐπῳδὸς Λυδίας ἀπὸ χθονός,/ ξανθοῖσι βοστρύχοισιν εὐοσμῶν κόμην,/οἰνῶπας ὄσσοις χάριτας Ἀφροδίτης ἔχων).

Pentheus. Dodds points out that the Lydians used to scent their hair and that this habit was criticised as a 'useless luxury' by Xenophanes.[376] It seems to me, however, that his perfumed hair is not so much a feature indicating Dionysus' successful disguise as a distinctive peculiarity of his divine nature as well as of his mingled nature (θηλύμορφον, 353). In the πάροδος the chorus itself associates Dionysus with the smoke of Syrian incense (144-5). Moreover, several literary sources depict the gods as fragrant, and divine fragrances are sometimes the means by which men can perceive the invisible presence of a deity: scents are thus signs culturally recognized as indicators of divine nature.[377] It is thus likely that Pentheus overlooks this clue because he misinterprets the divine scent emanating from the stranger's hair as a mere indication of his Asian provenance and of the voluptuous habits of his land.

Although the stranger exerts a force of attraction on Pentheus (453-9), the king of Thebes rejects the introduction of Dionysiac rites into the city because he considers them a dangerous source of social disorder: the first action that the king of Thebes intends to take against the stranger is to stop him from beating his thyrsus on the ground and from tossing his scented locks.[378] In this way, the sensory dimension of the Dionysiac cult, by means of which the holy band and the stranger have managed to draw the Thebans' attention, would be neutralized. Therefore, at the end of the second episode, Pentheus orders his servants to lock the stranger up in his stable.

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[376] Xenoph. fr. 3 (ἀβροσύνη ἀνωφελής). See Dodds (1944), n. on 235.

[377] For instance, *H. Hom*. II. 277, IV. 231; Thgn. 9; A. *Pr.* 115; E. *Hipp.* 1391-3.

[378] E. *Ba.* 240-1. Pentheus expresses the same intent in the second episode: vv. 493, 495.

As a consequence, Dionysus significantly punishes the sceptic Pentheus, who relies on his eyes to inspect everything, by making him suffer from visual and perceptual disturbances.[379] Similarly, the god distorts the vision of the Theban maenads so as to wreak vengeance on the sisters of Semele, who offended him. In the fifth episode a messenger reports the dreadful facts that have just happened on Mount Cithaeron. After Pentheus climbs a tree to get a better view of the bacchants (1059-62), the second epiphany of the god occurs. For the second time Dionysus reveals himself through his voice only,[380] and once again he has to call the maenads twice so that they can clearly understand his command to kill Pentheus: 'The maenads had not taken in the shout with their ears, and they stood there erect, turning their gaze this way and that. The god a second time gave the order'.[381] Therefore, the bacchant women, as well as Pentheus, rely primarily on sight to gather information about their environment. Yet it is precisely through visual distortion that Dionysus impedes their clear perception of reality, whereas he reveals himself through the auditory sphere.[382] The Theban bacchants hear the divine command distinctly and obey, but do not fully realize what they are about to do since they see double: Agave urges her sisters to catch the beast mounted on the tree (τὸν ἀμβάτην/ θῆρ', 1107-8) in order to prevent him from making public the secret dances of the god (μηδ᾽ ἀπαγγείλῃ θεοῦ/

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[379] See Vernant's analysis of the two different forms of vision which emerge from the dialogue between Dionysus and Pentheus: Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 392 ff.

[380] E. *Ba.* 1078-9: 'from the upper air a voice – I think it was Dionysus – shouted' (ἐκ δ᾽ αἰθέρος φωνή τις, ὡς μὲν εἰκάσαι/Διόνυσος, ἀνεβόησεν). At the same time, the stranger disappeared (καὶ τὸν ξένον μὲν οὐκέτ᾽ εἰσορᾶν παρῆν, 1077). Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 396 remarks that 'the epiphany of the god takes the form of a sudden disappearance'. Both Dodds (1944) and Seaford (1996), n. *ad loc.* point out the similarity between this epiphany and the divine voice summoning Oedipus at S. *OC.* 1622-9.

[381] E. *Ba.* 1086-8 (αἳ δ᾽ ὠσὶν ἠχὴν οὐ σαφῶς δεδεγμέναι/ ἔστησαν ὀρθαὶ καὶ διήνεγκαν κόρας./ ὃ δ᾽ αὖθις ἐπεκέλευσεν).

[382] Dionysus brings about visual distortion by maddening them (1094, 1122-4, 1166-7).

χοροὺς κρυφαίους, 1108-9). It follows that they see Pentheus as both an animal and a man.[383] When Agave begins the killing of her own son, in her eyes Pentheus is a lion only.[384]

Turning to the reason for Pentheus' disbelief, we can conclude that it is paradoxically his scepticism itself: since he does not honour Dionysus as a deity, he cannot enjoy the interchange of gazes with the god, which is granted as a privilege to his initiates alone.[385] In addition to this, he could never understand the act of seeing as a religious experience involving the reciprocity of direct gaze between the god and the initiate: confusion and prejudices mark his visual perception because what he sees is driven by his voyeuristic desire and by his tyrannical urge to keep everything under control.[386] The ability of miracles to elicit belief also depends on the subject's desire or refusal to believe. Pentheus' expectation of seeing illicit, profane and potentially subversive activities on Mount Cithaeron hinders the possibility that he correctly interprets what he sees as a miraculous display of divine power.

Finally, Pentheus' failure to link the earthquake and the fire to divine agency may be part of a broader discourse on the changes that can occur in the interpretation of natural disasters. By showing that these natural phenomena, which are traditionally ascribed to divine agency, are not given a unique interpretation on stage, the *Bacchae* might hint at how religion is forced to develop along with an increasingly complex world

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[383] See Dodds (1944) on 1106-10; Seaford (1996) on 1107-8.

[384] See the bacchants' sacrificial shout at v. 1133 (ὠλόλυζον) and Agave's exultation for their successful hunt (1143 ff., 1169 ff.). For an interpretation of Pentheus' sacrifice as belonging to the tragedy's pattern of mystic initiation, see Seaford (1996) on 1124-1152.

[385] E. *Ba.* 470, 500-2. For an analysis of the transition from ignorance to knowledge effected during the Dionysiac mysteries, see Seaford (1996), 35-44.

[386] Thumiger (2013), 235.

where cultural codes gradually change and interpretative options multiply. Since the shaking and the burning of the royal palace are described by the chorus as they happen, some visual and sound effects are likely to have been performed on stage.[387] Thanks to the βροντεῖον and κεραυνοσκοπεῖον, theatrical devices for replicating the sound of the thunder and the effect of lightning respectively, the playwrights are able to make the epiphany of the god more realistic and perceptible to the audience too, while maintaining distance on stage and reminding the audience of the fictional nature of the performance. The theatrical imitation of divine manifestation through natural phenomena invites reflection on questions about divine identity: if men can imitate the ways in which the gods are believed to manifest themselves, how can one be sure about who a god is? How much power is required to qualify for divinity?[388]

It is no longer sufficient for a new god such as Dionysus to prove his divinity and power by means of an earthquake or a lightning-caused fire because these events might not be unequivocally referable to divine agency any more. By representing Pentheus as reluctant to interpret them as manifestations of divine power, the play draws attention to the time of the performance and to how the cultural codes according to which such natural phenomena are interpreted may change over time.

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[387] This is Seaford's thesis (1996), n. on 576-641. Dodds (1944) too says that an earthquake could be performed on stage (see A. *Pr.* And E. *HF*) although it is not possible to know in what way.

[388] In this regard the story of Salmoneus is worth mentioning (Apollod. 1. 9. 7): Salmoneus claimed to be Zeus and imitated the god by making the noise of thunder and the effect of lightning by means of bronze kettles and torches until he was punished by Zeus himself with a thunderbolt. See Whitmarsh (2015), 40-51. See also the story of Alexander of Abonoteichus in Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet*: this false priest of Asclepius made up a new snake deity called Glycon, who was probably a puppet-headed trained snake, and established a new mystery-cult playing upon the credulity of people.

2.2.2 Changing Cultural Codes: the Limits of Human Knowledge About Divine Will

In an increasingly complex world communication between gods and mortals becomes much more difficult. Both plays delve into the issue of the extent to which humans can gain insight into divine will.

As far as the *OT* is concerned, it is worth calling attention to another reference to the process of changes in worldview and cultural codes by comparing the Sophoclean play with Oedipus' story recounted by Odysseus in the *Odyssey* (11. 271 ff). According to the Homeric text, Epicaste committed a dreadful deed in ignorance of mind (ἀιδρείῃσι νόοιο, 272) but 'straightway the gods made these things known among men' (ἄφαρ δ᾽ ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν, 274).[389] Odysseus' account is elliptical but it is significant that the process whereby men gain knowledge is described as a concession made by the gods soon after (ἄφαρ) the terrible acts occurred: human effort to discover the truth seems not to be necessary. By contrast, in the *OT* Apollo does not disclose the identity of the murderer/s. Human intellectual ability must come into play to solve the riddle and fulfil the gods' will. It is acknowledged from the beginning that Oedipus will hope to find a way to protect Thebes by catching any hint hidden in any message either from the gods (εἴτε του θεῶν φήμην ἀκούσας, 42-3) or from a man (εἴτ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἀνδρὸς οἶσθά που, 43). Consequently, it seems that the series of actions undertaken to get to the truth and to free the Thebans from the pestilence is a double process where human and divine agents interact: in the *OT* the gods reveal their

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[389] Trans. by S. Butler. Cf. Dawe (1982), 1.

will through oracles but men must use their intelligence to fill in the gaps and to find out what exactly the gods want from them.

The play, however, is permeated by a pessimistic view of the role played by human knowledge in mortals' lives. We might wonder what would have happened if Oedipus had followed Jocasta's advice and had not investigated further. And what if he had asked Creon to disclose the prophecy in private and had then covered up the shameful story of his crimes? The play provides the audience with a fatalistic answer:

ἐφηῦρέ σ᾽ ἄκονθ᾽ ὁ πάνθ᾽ ὁρῶν χρόνος
(S. *OT*. 1212)

Time the all-seeing has found you out, against your will.

The truth eventually comes out anyway even if it is unpleasant for the searcher.[390] The thought underlying this sentence is that men might make no effort to acquire information, or might strive in their quest for knowledge and be either successful or not: in any of these cases, they will only get to know the same elements of truth that would sooner or later come to light anyway with the passing of time.

An even more pessimistic utterance can be found in Jocasta's invective against seers and oracles: she urges her husband not to pay regard to prophecies since 'the god easily reveals the thing, the utility of which he pursues' (ὧν γὰρ ἂν θεὸς/ χρείαν ἐρευνᾷ, ῥᾳδίως αὐτὸς φανεῖ, 724-5). According to Longo, the words χρείαν ἐρευνᾷ condenses the following longer sentence: ἃ θεὸς χρήσιμα ἐρευνᾶν νομίζει, that is, 'the

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[390] In this passage the adjective ἄκων cannot mean that Oedipus tries to conceal his crimes given that throughout the play he strives to find out the truth. It rather means that what he finally discovers is not something that one is pleased to bring to light: Dawe (1982) on 1213-4; Stella (2010) *ad loc.*, by contrast, argues that the adjective ἄκων refers to the fact that Oedipus committed parricide and incest unwillingly.

god easily reveals what he believes that men should investigate'.[391] This passage conveys a hidden meaning: whether men rely on oracles or successfully use their intelligence to gain knowledge, they can only know what the gods either let or want them to know. Jocasta's aim is to divert Oedipus' attention from the prophecy predicting parricide and incest by claiming that Apollo does not need to use seers and oracles if he wants men to investigate something. Yet Apollo did use his prophecies to guide Oedipus in his search for knowledge. When the king consulted the Pythian oracle about the identity of his parents, Apollo refused to answer his question and gave him another dreadful prophecy (787-93): according to Apollo, the identity of his parents was not something to be investigated by Oedipus at that time. The reason why Apollo obstructs Oedipus' inquiry is that Oedipus must meet the fate reserved for him by the gods: he cannot avoid killing his father and uniting with his mother. He is allowed to find out what his origins are only after he fulfils the prophecy: it is once again an oracle of Apollo that, by commanding to punish the killer of Laius, spurs him to investigate into his own past.

Yet is it really possible for men to understand divine commands clearly and unequivocally? After Oedipus finds out that he was the killer of Laius, Creon twice asserts that, before taking any decision, he must learn from the god what he should do (1439, 1443).[392] Creon's helplessness is indicative of the extreme difficulty that men have in understanding what the gods want from men. Even though at the beginning of the play

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[391] Longo (1972) on 723-5.

[392] In this regard, it is worth analysing a wordplay which puts human knowledge under divine control: the semantic field revolving around the verbs μαθεῖν and ἐκμαθεῖν initially refers to Oedipus' rationalistic quest for knowledge (120, 308, 493) but, subsequently, occurs in Creon's speech in association with the necessary comprehension of divine words (1439, 1449): Di Benedetto (1983), 91-3.

Creon himself reports the oracle which, according to him, 'clearly' revealed what measures were to be taken against Laius' killer, he now feels stuck and unable to take action.[393] The major factor hindering his decision-making process is the very fact that he has witnessed how Oedipus has totally misinterpreted two prophecies.[394] To avoid similar mistakes, he decides to consult the Pythian Apollo once again. The content of the new oracle is not revealed on stage but the play is likely to have left the audience under the impression that it must have been as ambiguous as the previous two prophecies. The dramatic power of the ending of the *OT* rests on the tension between closure and lack of closure.

Just as the OT gives no reassuring answer to the question of whether men can gain true insight into divine will as expressed in oracles, so the *Bacchae* presents an uncomfortable view of human ability to grasp the real meaning of an event which has been brought about by divine agency as a way to communicate with men. We have already seen that Dionysus reveals himself through miracles and powerful natural phenomena, such as the earthquake and the flame of lightning. Another way in which Dionysus tries to show that he is indeed a god is through the exemplary punishment of the figure who refused to acknowledge his divine status.

One of the assumptions on which Greek religion relies is that the impious man will sooner or later be punished by the gods.[395] Divine

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[393] For a different interpretation of Creon's decision to consult the oracle a second time, see Ahl (1991) and Stella (2010).

[394] According to Vernant – Vidal Naquet (1988), 85-112, Oedipus, who does not understand the real meaning of the Delphic oracle about his birth parents, 'is in the wrong not to bother about the god's silence and to interpret his words as if they provided the answer to the question of his origins'. See also Pucci (1992), 105-22.

[395] Cf. E. *Bellerophon.* fr. 286 N².

retribution for impiety should therefore prove the existence of the god. Yet the play calls into question the reliability of factual evidence in religious matters concerning the existence of a god since it shows that the same kind of event - namely, the supernatural punishment of a mortal - can be put forward as evidence both proving and disproving the divine status of Dionysus. On the one hand, Dionysus uses this device to take vengeance on Pentheus and to affirm his divine power. On the other hand, from the very moment in which Dionysus was born his mother's death has been advanced by the Thebans as evidence in support of the thesis asserting the mortal nature of Semele's offspring.

Semele meets her death under remarkable circumstances: she dies consumed in lightning-ignited flame. Both her sisters and her nephew Pentheus ascribe her untimely passing to Zeus' thunderbolt, and assume that Semele must have offended the Olympian deity. How could she have wronged Zeus? Since she claimed that Zeus fathered Dionysus and her supposed divine lover killed her, she must have lied about having sexual intercourse with him (30-1, 244-5). It follows that Dionysus is not of divine origin but is rather a simple mortal boy. However, the conclusion they infer from this sequence of events is false because their arguments are fallacious. The Thebans, even though they correctly assume that Zeus killed the girl by striking her with a thunderbolt, fail to get to the root causes of her death. The reason why they misunderstand Semele's story is that the deity who decided Semele's punishment by death is not the same as the one who carried it out. It is Hera who tricked the girl into asking Zeus to reveal himself in all his glory, and she did so out of jealousy because Semele actually united with Zeus. That Semele died is a unique and unmistakable fact, and facts are much more reliable than words, for

words can be used to deceive. What Semele claimed about her privileged relationship with Zeus is of less value than her prodigious death.[396] Nonetheless, any fact may yield multiple interpretations.

Since the Thebans have misinterpreted the reasons for Semele's punishment, will they be able to interpret Pentheus' chastisement by Dionysus correctly? Will divine retribution be an effective way for Bromios to prove that he is indeed a god? As in Semele's case, the divine punisher is not the actual perpetrator of murder; Pentheus' mother, together with the other bacchants, becomes the instrument of divine vengeance. Yet in the *Bacchae* the cause of Pentheus' death is clarified by Dionysus/the stranger himself even before the Theban king dies: at the end of the second episode, he preannounces that Pentheus is about to walk into a mortal trap (ἐς βόλον, 848). He will be punished with death at the hands of his mother (θανὼν δώσει δίκην, 847; μητρὸς ἐκ χεροῖν κατασφαγεῖς, 858) so that 'he will learn that Dionysus is in the full sense a god, a god most dreadful to mortals but also most gentle' (γνώσεται δὲ τὸν Διὸς/ Διόνυσον, ὡς πέφυκεν ἐντελὴς θεός,/ δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἠπιώτατος, 859-61).[397] It goes without saying that this release of

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[396] A similar opposition between words and facts is drawn in Euripides' *Helen*: the tale of Helen's birth from Zeus and Leda is as questionable as the subsequent λόγος of her ghost taken by Paris to Troy. Menelaus does not think that Helen's account is trustworthy; he can only believe what he suffered (πόνοι, 593) during the Trojan War. According to Conacher (1998), 70-83, in this passage there might be a reference to Gorgias (Gorg. DK 82 B3, B11), who argues that λόγοι are incapable of expressing reality. For an analysis of the opposition between words and fact in Greek tragedy, see also Goldhill (1986), 199-221, 222-43.

[397] E. *Ba.* 860 ἐντελὴς Hirtzel: ἐν μέρει Diggle: ἐν τέλει P. This is a highly controversial passage. Seaford (1996) keeps the ms. ἐν τέλει and translates 'he will recognise Dionysos the son of Zeus, that he was born to be a god in initiation ritual most terrible, but to humankind most gentle', thus interpreting the word τέλος as referring to mystic initiation. Di Benedetto (2004), while accepting the ms. ἐν τέλει, translates it as 'nella pienezza dei poteri' (cf. Thuc. I. 40.4; I. 90. 5) since the primary aim of the punishment of Pentheus is to show that Dionysus has full rights to be worshipped as a god. Similarly,

information only enhances the knowledge of the audience given that nobody except for the chorus of Asian maenads is on stage. What is more, only the spectators know that it is the god himself who speaks through the stranger. Dionysus, however, spells out his intentions a second time on Mount Cithaeron. In the fifth episode a messenger reports that, after Pentheus climbs a tree to get a better view of the bacchants, an epiphany of the god occurs:

> ἐκ δ᾽ αἰθέρος φωνή τις, ὡς μὲν εἰκάσαι
> Διόνυσος, ἀνεβόησεν· Ὦ νεάνιδες,
> ἄγω τὸν ὑμᾶς κἀμὲ τἀμά τ᾽ ὄργια
> γέλων τιθέμενον· ἀλλὰ τιμωρεῖσθέ νιν.
> (E. *Ba.* 1078-1081)

From the upper air a voice (I think it was Dionysus) shouted: 'Young women, I bring you the man who is mocking you, me, and my rites: punish him!'

Even though Dionysus reveals himself through his voice only (φωνή τις, 1078), the herald's conjecture (εἰκάσαι, 1078) that Dionysus is speaking acquires a considerable degree of probability thanks to what the voice says: Pentheus must be punished because he is guilty of mocking the rites (ὄργια γέλων, 1080-1) of the deity who is speaking. The word ὄργια reveals the identity of the divine speaker since this term usually refers to the secret rites practised by a group of initiates to mystery cults, such as the Eleusinian or Dionysiac mysteries.[398]

A direct connection is thus established between the death of Pentheus at the hands of the bacchants and his scornful attitude towards

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Hirtzel's conjecture, accepted by Kovacs (2002), highlights Dionysus' desire to prove that he is a god 'possessing full rights': cf. Liddell – Scott – Jones, *ad loc* (ἐντελής).

[398] Theocr. 26. 13; A. fr. 57 R. The word ὄργια also occurs in connection with the cult of Dionysus in two inscriptions of the Hellenistic period: an oracle from Magnesia in Ionia, c. 200 BC [*IMagn.* 215; cf. Henrichs (1978); Seaford (1996), 36 and on 470] and an epitaph of a woman from Hellenistic Miletos, c. 276-5 BC [cf. Sokolowski (1955), n. 48].

the rites of Dionysus. Thanks to the god's utterance, it is easier for the messenger to interpret all the following remarkable events: the bacchants' frenzy caused by the bacchic god (1094, 1122-4) and Agave's supernatural strength, which is also put in her hands by Bromios (1128). News of Pentheus' disgrace also reaches Cadmus' ears: he repeats the god's words that Pentheus 'meant to mock the god and his rites' (ἐκερτόμει θεὸν σάς τε βακχείας, 1293) and adds that, as a consequence, the king was punished by Dionysus justly, yet excessively (ἐνδίκως μὲν ἀλλ' ἄγαν, 1249).

Finally, there is a further epiphany of Dionysos at the end of the play: the god as *deus ex machina* once again proclaims his divine status and confirms what the real reason is for the calamities that have befallen the house of Pentheus: they treated him with contempt and were thus chastised (1330 ff).

In the *Bacchae* all the characters, with the likely exception of Pentheus, do understand that they have been punished for having wronged the god (ἠδικήκαμεν, 1344).[399] Yet a crucial question is left open: if Dionysus had not appeared as *deus ex machina* to explain how he wove events together to accomplish his will, would the characters have been able to grasp the meaning of their punishment anyway or not? At least as far as the interpretation of supernatural events is concerned, the play

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[399] Agave: v. 1296, 1374-6; Cadmus: vv. 1249-50, 1297, 1302-5, 1344-6; Chorus: 1327-8. As to Pentheus, the text leaves the issue of his understanding unclear. When the king is about to be killed by his mother, he implores her to have pity on her son and not to kill him for his mistakes (ταῖς ἐμαῖς ἁμαρτίαισι, 1120-1). However, it is not specified whether Pentheus has just understood that he wronged Dionysus by depriving him of the honours due to a god or whether the term αἱ ἁμαρτίαι merely refers to the fact that the king tried to spy craftily on the bacchants (838, 955), that is 'to see what he should not see, and eagerly try what should not be tried' (912-3).

seems to entertain the view that human intellect needs the help of the god's authoritative voice to be able to interpret a fact in the correct way.[400]

2.2.3 The Emotional Construction of Religious Beliefs and Experience

The *OT* and the *Bacchae* call into question the efficacy of communication between gods and mortals by representing phenomena, which are culturally-recognized divine manifestations, as susceptible to multiple interpretations. Even the punishment of the wrongdoers, which is traditionally indisputable evidence of the existence of the god, is shown in the Euripidean tragedy to be subject to misinterpretation and, as a consequence, not fully reliable.

What are then the grounds of ancient Greek religious beliefs and experience?

The asymmetrical relationship between gods and mortals is founded on two basic emotions: fear and hope. Lucian, the second-century CE satirist, describes the reasons why a certain Alexander and his friend decided to introduce the new cult of the snake-god Glykon in these words: 'they readily understood that human life is ruled by two great tyrants, hope and fear […]. Thanks to these two tyrants, men continually visited the sanctuaries and sought to learn the future in advance, and to that end sacrificed hecatombs and dedicated ingots of gold'.[401]

Fear and hope are thus the emotional states that most likely characterize the worshippers approaching a god. I have already discussed

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[400] Divine epiphanies, however, are only a rare occurrence beyond the theatrical space: see, for instance, the alleged epiphany of Pan to Philippides before the battle of Marathon (Hdt. VI. 105).

[401] Luc. *Alex.* 8, Chaniotis (2012), 205.

the passage in the *OT* (152-6) where the elderly Thebans are seized by a mixture of awe (ἀζόμενος, 15) and terror (δείματι, 153) at the sight of the plague's propagation since they interpret it as a sign of the scourge of divine anger. What I have not pointed out is that soon afterwards they invoke for help the immortal voice of the god by calling it 'the child of golden Hope' (χρυσέας τέκνον Ἐλπίδος, 158). The fear of the gods must be accompanied by hope for the relationship to work successfully.[402] As Chaniotis points out, in narrative of human encounters with the divine, the gods often urge mortals to 'have courage' (θαρρεῖν or θαρσεῖν).[403] The use of such imperative verb phrase presupposes the reality of fear and the necessity of hope, *conditiones sine qua non* of religious belief and experience.

A significant example is Dionysus/the stranger's exhortation to the chorus of Asian bacchants, who have fallen to the ground out of terror in the palace-miracle scene, to have courage (θαρσεῖτε, 607). Dionysus' miracles prove his divine power and status by instilling fear in humans. For his cult to be successful, however, it has to appeal to, and be accepted by people. In fact, Dionysus' nature comprises not only a vengeful, destructive side but also a beneficial and life-giving aspect. Such a dual nature is well exemplified by the thyrsus, one of the attributes of the god, which can have propitious and harmful effects: it can function both as a

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[402] For an analysis of the construction of fear and hope in ancient Greek religious experience, see Martzavou's study of the healing miracles of Epidaurus in Chaniotis (2012) (ed.), 177-204.

[403] For a discussion of epigraphic evidence testifying to the use of such imperative, see Chaniotis (2012), 205-207.

supernatural source of water, wine and honey (704-7; 710-11) and as a violent weapon (25, 113, 762-3, 1099-1100).[404]

The joys associated with Dionysiac worship are present in the chorus's entrance song (64-166): blessed (μάκαρ, 72) is the man who, 'happy (εὐδαίμων, 72) in knowing the Dionysiac mysteries, makes his life pure' and dancing (χορεύσει, 114; χοροῖς, 148) for the god is called 'a toil that is sweet' (πόνον ἡδὺν, 66) and 'a weariness that wearies happily' (κάματον τ᾽ εὐκάματον, 67). Several ancient sources associate mystic initiation with dance, and dance is explicitly linked to the mystic transition from anxiety to joy by Plutarch.[405]

A further characteristic of Dionysiac mysteries is to make the initiates feel younger and energetic:[406]

Κάδμος
πoῖ δεῖ χορεύειν, ποῖ καθιστάναι πόδα
καὶ κρᾶτα σεῖσαι πολιόν; ἐξηγοῦ σύ μοι
γέρων γέροντι, Τειρεσία· σὺ γὰρ σοφός.
ὡς οὐ κάμοιμ᾽ ἂν οὔτε νύκτ᾽ οὔθ᾽ ἡμέραν
θύρσῳ κροτῶν γῆν· ἐπιλελήσμεθ᾽ ἡδέως
γέροντες ὄντες. **Τειρεσίας** ταὔτ᾽ ἐμοὶ πάσχεις ἄρα·
κἀγὼ γὰρ ἡβῶ κἀπιχειρήσω χοροῖς.
(E. *Ba.* 184-190)

Kadmos
Where must I dance, where set my feet and shake my grey head? Show me the way, Teiresias, one old man leading another; for you are wise. And so I shall never tire night or day striking the ground with the thyrsos. Gladly I have forgotten that I am old.
Teiresias

[404] Chaston (2010), 200 ff.
[405] Plu. *Mor.* 1105; fr. 178; Luc. *Salt.* 15; E. *Ba.* 20-22; Ar. *Ra.* 357. Seaford (2006), 53, 69-70.
[406] A. fr. 264 R; Ar. *Ra.* 344 ff; Pl. *Lg.* 666 b-c. Cf. Seaford (1996), *ad loc.*

Then you and I have the same feelings, for I too feel young[407] *and will try to dance.*

Both Cadmos and Teiresias have the same feelings (ταῦτ᾽ ἐμοὶ πάσχεις ἄρα, 189): they think young again (ἡβῶ, 190). The sense of rejuvenation experienced by Cadmos and Teiresias persuades them that honouring Dionysus with dances is the right thing to do even though they are old. In fact, Dionysus 'does not distinguish between the young man having to dance and the older man' (206-7). By contrast, Pentheus, as soon as he discerns the two old men playing the bacchants, cannot see anything sacred in it but rather finds the behaviour of Cadmus and Teiresias both amusing (πολὺν γέλων, 250) and inappropriate (νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον, 252). Pentheus' laughter arises from what he considers an incongruous happening: since Pentheus has never experienced such sense of rejuvenation brought about by the Dionysiac experience, he cannot understand what is going on.

In this regard, it is worth paying attention to the use of laughter in the *Bacchae* and to its meaning.[408] Dionysus is also portrayed as laughing at Pentheus on two occasions, when Pentheus' servant ties him up (γελῶν, 439) and when the god is about 'to cast the deadly noose upon the bacchants' hunter' (προσώπῳ γελῶντι, 1021). Dionysus' laughter conveys an awareness of superior knowledge and power. Nonverbal communication reveals thought and emotion but there is a difference between Pentheus' amusement at the sight of the old couple dancing and Dionysus' laugh (439, 1021). Whereas in the latter case it indicates that the

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[407] The literal translation of ἡβῶ is 'I am young'.
[408] For a discussion of the three modern theories of laughter (the superiority theory, the incongruity theory and the relief theory), see Beard (2014), 28 ff; Bennett – Royle (2016), 96-105: Halliwell (2008).

god has taken full and firm control of the situation and can thus afford to scoff at his opponent, in the former case it rather suggests Pentheus' arrogance and self-delusion. At the end of the tragedy, the king himself degenerates from intimidating power into an object of derision as he is led through the city in woman's dress (854-5).

Dionysus' ambiguous laughter has also been interpreted by more than one scholar as a clue to the enigmatic nature of the god as δεινότατος and ἠπιώτατος (861) to the point that it has been suggested that Euripides used a smiling mask in the *Bacchae*, an anomaly among tragic masks, which usually present a neutral expression.[409] The hypothesis of the smiling mask has been recently challenged on the ground of lack of sufficient textual evidence.[410] First of all, it has been pointed out that the text never describe the god as smiling but rather as laughing since the verb γέλαω is used instead of μεδιάω (380, 439, 1021). In addition to this, the only passage where the technical term for theatrical mask is used to describe the laughing god (πρωσώπωι γελῶντι, 1021) cannot be adduced as a convincing proof of an actual mask on stage since 'it is a desired rather than a real scene of hunting that is described, the laughing face belongs to Dionysus rather than the stranger, and it is as a θήρ in which the god is invoked – not in human or divine form.'[411]

Even though Euripides is more likely not to have introduced a smiling/laughing mask in the *Bacchae*, it must be borne in mind that the tragic mask's expression could be interpreted in several ways by the

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[409] Chaston (2010), 182 ff; Goldhill (1986), 260; Foley (1980), 127-8, 132. Cf. also Seaford (1996), 186.
[410] Billings (2017), 19-26; Halliwell (2008), 136-7; Wiles (2007), 221-2.
[411] Billings (2017), 23.

spectators depending on the angle from which the mask was looked at.[412] In other words, it was not necessary to use a smiling/laughing mask to represent a smiling/laughing facial expression. This is further confirmed by Meineck's study of the visual emotional function of the tragic mask: drawing on recent research in the field of neuroscience on mirror neurons and their role in cognitive experience, the scholar argues that 'the mask is extremely effective in stimulating our neural visual responses and creating active and engaged spectatorship.'[413] The tragic mask exploits the spectator's duality of vision: on the one hand, the 'foveal vision', which focuses on people, objects, details and 'responds primarily to higher-resolution (fine) images';[414] on the other hand, the 'peripheral vision' which, by responding to images at a lower (blurred) resolution, allows the audience to look at the wider performance space and at the surrounding environment. When the gaze of the audience moves from the performer's mask to the background, and then back to the mask, such a visual fluctuation between fine and blurry images can trick the eye so that facial expressions might seem to change.[415] For this reason, the blank neutral, and thus ambiguous, expression of the tragic mask is likely to have engaged the audience in interpreting the emotional states of the characters.

Neuroscientific studies have demonstrated that people, when gazing at others, intently look for emotional markers, which include

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[412] Wiles (2007), 41-43.

[413] Meineck (2011), 126.

[414] Meineck (2011), 124.

[415] Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile works in a similar way since the gaze of the viewer moves from the smile to the landscape, and vice versa: Meineck (2011), 120-1.

κίνησις, that is, gesture, dance, bodily and head movements.[416] To connect facial expressions to the characters' emotions and the wider narrative framework, the mask must work in synergy with space, words, music and especially bodily movement: by doing so, the tragic mask encourages the active cognitive engagement of audiences and facilitates individual emotional responses.

Humans process others' emotions thanks to mirror neurons which, by connecting the visual and motor cortexes, enable people to learn behaviour through observation and kinesthetic understanding:[417] it is a form of empathic response that 'can involve the neural processing of similar actions and even a mirroring effect in the viewer's own facial expressions'.[418] According to Meineck, such empathic response may have been heightened precisely by the masked symporeutic performance of Greek tragedy and by the performers' reliance on choreographed bodily movements and conspicuous gestures in concert with words to express thought and emotions. Kinesthetic communication activated by mirror neurons may have strengthened the spectators' emotional connection to the staged story by eliciting a physical response from them.[419] Thanks to such shared bodily sensations, it may also have allowed the audience to

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[416] This is corroborated by research carried out on traditional Japanese Noh masks: see Meineck (2011), 126, 130-1.

[417] Rizzolatti *et al.* (2010); Rizzolatti – Craighero (2004), 169-92. Kinesthesia (deriving from the ancient Greek κίνησις, 'movement', and αἴσθησις, 'sensation') is 'the proprioceptive sense of movement within one's own body': Sklar (2008), 87; Foster (2009), 47.

[418] Meineck (2011), 129.

[419] As Meineck (2011), 136-7 points out, studies have demonstrated that 'the muscles of audience members are stimulated when watching dance performances, where they experience a kinesthetic sensation known as motor simulation, and that the neural activity in the onlookers increases significantly when the dance performed is known to them'. This was likely to be the case of the Athenian audience, which was 'familiar with dance as a cultural participatory activity' (138). On kinesthesia, see Olsen (2017), Foster (2009), Sklar (2008).

earn the same knowledge that is somatically acquired by the characters on stage. For instance, the chorus' comprehension of the dual nature of Dionysus – knowledge that, as we have discussed, is somatically attained during the palace miracle scene – may be interpreted as transferable to the spectators by means of kinesthesia.[420]

Following on these considerations, the ambiguous mask of Dionysus/the stranger is likely to have captured the spectators' cognitive and emotional engagement inducing them to interpret its facial expressions and emotional states. When the pose struck by the mask conveys a smiling/laughing expression, it may be interpreted as 'a doubling of the god's ritual role within the story'[421] since it recalls Dionysos' pillar masks, which are sometimes depicted as smiling on the Lenaia vases.[422] Interestingly, the mask-column iconography of Dionysiac cult is also recalled, though by means of a tragic reversal, by Pentheus' head/mask impaled on Agave's thyrsus (1139-1143).[423]

These symbolic connections might further enhance the spectators' perception of Dionysos' ambiguity, which includes both the promise of blissful ecstasy and the threat of violent retribution.

The parallel between Dionysos and Pentheus is reinforced by the cross-dressing scene: the feminine disguise of Pentheus is an ironic reprisal for the king's mockery of the feminine appearance of

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[420] E. *Ba.* 600 (τρομερὰ σώματα), 604 (φόβῳ), 607 (τρόμον), 607 (θαρσεῖτε), 609 (ἀσμένη).
[421] Vernant (1988), 382-3.
[422] Chaston (2010) 183; Seaford (1996) on 439.
[423] Chaston (2010), 183.

Dionysus/the stranger.[424] As Seaford suggests, Pentheus' transvestism may characterize the king as an initiand since feminisation was part of the process of initiation, which entailed the passage from one state to another through a symbolic death: an argument in support of the interpretation of this scene as reflecting the initiation pattern is the fact that the king's robe is described as a funerary dress (857).[425]

Pentheus, however, is a failed initiate: as opposed to the chorus, who in the third episode passes from the experience of solitude (ἐρημίαν, 609) and of terror as manifesting in their trembling bodies (τρομερὰ σώματα, 600) to a state of supreme bliss at the sight of Dionysus' appearance as a light (608-9), the king resists the transition to the communal joy which is typical of the initiates.[426] Pentheus' decision to dress as a Maenad and to go to Mount Cithaeron to see the bacchants performing illicit sexual activities (esp. 810-6) is induced by Dionysus, who plays on the king's innermost desires, and is part of the god's plan of revenge. The punishment of Pentheus is the instrument by which Dionysus affirms his divine power and makes 'the city of Thebes learn to the full (ἐκμαθεῖν, 39), whether it wants to or not (κεἰ μὴ θέλει, 39), his bacchic rites'. It is the audience and, within the dramatic world of the myth, the Thebans in general who are supposed to learn from Pentheus' mistakes. Divine ability to make use of human emotions thus plays an important role in Dionysus' successful attempt to wreak vengeance on the

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[424] Segal (1982), 29 argues that in this scene Pentheus is ironically represented as the double of the god.

[425] Seaford (1996) on 833, 857, 912-76.

[426] In this regard, it is worth pointing out that Pentheus reveals his deluded attitude when in the palace-miracle scene he mistakes the light created by the god for the human prisoner (629-632). For an analysis of the transition of the initiand from isolated anxiety to communal joy, see: E. *Ba.* 72-5; Plu. fr. 178; Ar. *Ra.*156-7. Seaford (1994), 281-301.

one who scorned him and to make an example of him in front of the Thebans.

2.3 Conclusion

The analysis of the plays carried out in this chapter has shown that emotions, sensory perceptions and cognitive activities are closely intertwined in the characters' process of acquiring knowledge. It has also been pointed out that the tragedies do not take a position in favour of either divinely inspired knowledge or human intellectual ability. They rather show that both modes of knowing can take either positive or negative values depending on the intentions and emotions shaping one's inquiries. Emotions have a great influence on the acquisition of data through the five senses and on the processing of information by the mind: it can provide valuable insight into an obscure situation but might also affect the reliability of any kind of knowledge.

Because of this danger, distributed knowledge, which is typical of a democratic system, is to be favoured since it can curb individualistic impulses and can thus prevent the distortion of information more efficiently than any other type of knowledge which may be kept under the control either of the ruler or of few privileged people, such as the soothsayers. Yet, in spite of this, we have seen that democracy, too, can be enticed by the tyrannical desire for power and for control over knowledge and may, as a consequence, be lured into manipulating information for political purposes. The reliability of any kind of knowledge, whether it be the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant or the distributed knowledge typical of a democratic system or the revealed knowledge of the seers, depends on the emotions and goals which spurs one on to start an inquiry.

The discourse on emotions and on the dimension of the body is also bound up with a discourse on the changes that can and do occur at the level of cultural codes shaping people's beliefs and their ways of perceiving and understanding the world.

I have discussed how, according to culturally specific codes, phenomena such as an earthquake and a plague are interpreted as displays of divine power. The belief that such powerful phenomena are divine manifestations helps mortals make sense of them and of their violent nature. Yet I have argued that the framework through which the plays illustrate how characters on stage make sense of events of this kind encompasses some of the preoccupations and ideas that were common to the enquiry of early Greek medicine and philosophy: medical writers and philosophers transformed the meaning of diseases and natural catastrophes by transferring causal responsibility from divine agency to unseen natural forces operating in the world and inside the body.

This is supported by those passages where some of the characters, such as Oedipus and Pentheus, are not seized either with religious awe or fear at the sight of such powerful and unforeseen events. Their unusual reaction indicates precisely that they do not initially interpret these phenomena as divine acts signalling the gods' wrath. They rather consider them natural calamities, which can be faced and contained by intervening at the right time with appropriate means: that is, with water to extinguish the fire that has broken out in Pentheus' royal palace and by finding the best cure for the plague affecting Oedipus' kingdom. Traditional theological explanations for these phenomena are thus displaced by the new nature-based interpretations.

Both rulers are eventually proved wrong and divine agency is acknowledged. Nevertheless, Oedipus' disdain for divine prophecy and Pentheus' theomachy against the new deity might have theological implications since these stories explore the possibility that the worship of the gods might be pointless and that mortals could actually live without the Olympians.[427]

The *Bacchae*, for instance, invites reflection on whether natural disasters, such as earthquakes and lighting-ignited fires, are to be considered divine manifestations and attenuate their supernatural dimension by showing that humans can imitate these catastrophic events thanks to theatrical devices. If divine manifestations can be reproduced or at least imitated by men, how divine can they be? Similarly, if earthquakes or plagues are not the sign of divine anger but merely natural events brought about by natural causes, how can gods communicate with men and how can they reveal their presence or even existence? By the end of both plays, doubts about the divine nature of Dionysus and the value of divine prophecy are dissipated but the representation of Oedipus' and Pentheus' initial reactions to the gods' manifestations presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes. In the *OT*, for example, the

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[427] In this regard, it is worth pointing out the chorus' reaction to Jocasta's utterance that Apollo's oracles should not be trusted (S. *OT*. 707-25, 851-58): 'If such actions are held in honour, why should I dance?'. Jocasta's distrust of divine prophecy thus brings about a ritual crisis which calls into question not only divine authority but also the value of tragic ritual performances such as choral dancing. See Henrichs (1994-1995), 66-7, 69-70: 'In speaking of themselves as a chorus, the Thebans step out of the play into the contemporary world. […]. The convention of choral self-referentiality enables the audience to cross the boundaries between the chorus *qua* tragic character and *qua* performer, between the drama acted out in the theater and the πόλις religion that sustained it, and more specifically between the cults of the πόλις and the rituals performed in the plays. […] If a central aspect of the πόλις religion is called into question in the play, the ritual identity of the tragic chorus becomes equally questionable, and its dramatic status doubtful.'

plague is eventually interpreted as an event doubly determined, that is, caused by the gods working through nature. As Whitmarsh nicely puts it, 'the conservative ending creates a safe space in which dangerous religious ideas can be experimented without causing offence.'[428] In the wake of the intellectual ferment of fifth-century Athens, the *OT* and the *Bacchae* thus explore different frameworks for interpreting divine manifestations and pave the way for multiple interpretations of those phenomena which go beyond human reason.

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[428] Whitmarsh (2015), 113-114.

3. Divine Intervention in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Orestes*.
An Analysis of How the Physical Presence or Absence of the Gods on Stage Influences Human Agency and Conveys Different Worldviews.

3.0 Introduction

Western contemporary culture emphasizes the importance of the will, namely that faculty of the mind that enables a person to act deliberately. The person is believed to be the true author of his or her actions, for which he/she is truly responsible. By contrast, in ancient Greece the relationship between the human agent and his or her actions is much less straightforward. The landmark in the scholarly debate on human agency in ancient Greece is the publishing of Snell's monograph *The Discovery of the Mind*: the scholar identifies in Greek drama the emergence of the person as a free agent, in contrast to the Homeric poems where any human action is engineered by the gods.[1] Snell's arguments have been challenged from two different perspectives. On the one hand, some scholars have focused their efforts on the attempt to open up a space for human agency in the Homeric poems as well.[2] Others, on the other hand, have tried to reduce the difference between the Homeric world and the tragic one by arguing that even in Greek drama decisions are heavily

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[1] Snell (1953).
[2] See, for instance, Williams (1993), 21-49; Halliwell (1990), 32-59; Gill (1996), 29-41; Holmes (2010), 7 ff. cf. Lawrence (2013), 8-10.

influenced by the gods since the characters often find themselves under the yoke of a supernatural necessity.[3]

The ambivalence inherent in Greek tragedy's representation of how humans come to make decisions is due to the fact that Greek drama is deeply concerned with the problem of the evolving concept of human agency: ancient Greek culture witnesses the evolution of human agency and responsibility from a religious conception of human actions as resulting from supernatural overdetermining causes to a new view that lays emphasis on the role of the human agent: the advent of law is believed to be the turning point marking the transition from one view to the other.[4] Vernant places Greek tragedy at this historical juncture marking the passage from 'heroic values and ancient religious representations' to 'the new modes of thought that characterize the advent of law within the city-state'.[5] With the establishment of law courts, the religious conception of violent misbehaviour gradually vanishes, leaving room for the emergence of a new understanding of crime, which stresses the key role played by the individual in carrying out the criminal action: more emphasis is put on the intention of the criminal, who is no longer believed to have been blinded by, and caught up in, some sinister and supernatural force.[6]

This chapter aims to investigate the changes in the relationship between human and divine agency through the analysis of the *Eumenides* by Aeschylus and the *Orestes* by Euripides. As previously mentioned in the Introduction, these two plays have been chosen for closer analysis

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[3] See, for instance, Rivier (1963), 73-112; Lloyd-Jones (1983), 59-61.

[4] Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 62-3.

[5] Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 26.

[6] Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 62-3; Whitmarsh (2015), 75-86, 254 n. 3.

because they present different views on the process which led the hero to commit matricide and on the consequences of Orestes' violent actions. Whereas in the Aeschylean version of the Orestes myth the law court is established as a replacement for the primitive system of private vendetta only at the end of the trilogy, in the *Orestes* the *lex talionis* is no longer in force from the beginning of the play: public legal procedures to judge criminal acts are already in effect and are depicted as entirely human. The *Eumenides* and the *Orestes* can thus constitute a rich source of information about the ways in which Greek tragedy represents the changes in the conceptions of human agency and responsibility that occurred in the transition from a pre-legal society to a society with law.

Differences in the playwrights' treatment of these topics may be motivated by the historical and cultural backgrounds of the plays' production. In archaic Greek culture there is a tendency to infer divine agency both behind exceptional natural phenomena and behind any 'rupture in the fabric of the self', which may be caused either by a violent emotion like fear or by a disease like madness.[7] Physical and mental symptoms, as well as natural events such as thunders and earthquakes, defy rational explanation: therefore, the ancient Greeks usually attribute the occurrence of these phenomena to divine agency.

Presocratic philosophers first attempt rational explanation for metereological phenomena: for instance, thunder and lightning are interpreted by both Anaximander and Anaximenes as resulting from the wind cleaving, or bursting out of, clouds with force.[8] In the previous

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[7] Holmes (2010), 44-47.
[8] Anaximand. DK 12 A 23; Anaximen. DK 13 A 17: see Lloyd (1979), 15-29, 32-49; (1987), 1-29.

chapter I have discussed how in the classical period, thanks to the developments in philosophical and medical investigation, both catastrophic events such as an earthquake and bodily diseases such as the plague start being interpreted as natural processes rather than as divine acts.[9]

This chapter deepens the discussion of the changes in the interpretation of these phenomena by raising complex questions, among others, about the true nature both of the frenzy that in Aulis spurs Agamemnon to kill his daughter and of the madness afflicting Orestes in the aftermath of matricide: is such mental illness god-sent or does it stem from another, internal source? Are the Erinyes tormenting Orestes real or merely hallucinatory? Is Orestes divinely compelled to kill his mother? Or does his decision spring from emotions such as hatred and desire that erupt from a hidden space inside him and that he is not able to control?

In answering these questions I will discuss the extent to which Greek tragedy is informed by, and develops, ideas drawn from contemporary medical writings, which transform the meaning of diseases and the concept of human agency by shifting responsibility from daemonic agents to unseen physical stuffs and to the person who should have the capacity to master the natural forces operating inside the body.[10] The concept of human nature begins to encompass a concealed inner space, a cavity inside the body, which was earlier believed to be an invisible realm of daemons. This unseen space is now reconceptualised as a site in which different forces (emotions, desires, and powers like 'the

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[9] In the previous chapter I have also discussed differences and similarities in the enquiries concerning the nature of diseases in Herodotus' investigation and in early medical writers: Lateiner (1986), Thomas (1997), Thomas (2000).

[10] Holmes (2010), 121-147.

hot' and 'the cold') work in synergy: even though these forces retain some of the sinister and alien nature of the daemonic, they begin to be understood as subject to human technical agency.[11] Hence, a new concept of the human subject emerges: man comes to be defined as an ethical subject, that is, a person capable of taking responsibility for one's body and for one's actions.[12] In this regard, I will delve into the significance of the crisis that is created on stage in the *Orestes* when the violent act committed by the tragic hero as well as the hero's subsequent frenzy are seemingly decoupled from divine agency.

I will argue that such crisis is to be interpreted against the backdrop of intellectual ferment of late fifth-century Athens. In the second half of the fifth century the sophists, itinerant professional teachers and intellectuals, spread their teachings in Athens and had a great impact on the political and intellectual life of the city.[13] They taught men how to make full use of their rhetorical skills in the legal and political arenas of Athens: their conviction that the power of language can make the weaker argument the stronger undermined security of expression and belief.[14] Moreover, the sophists formulated rational criticisms of traditional religious beliefs: they called into doubt the existence of the gods themselves and questioned conventional ideas about divine power in human life by identifying the divinities with natural forces and gifts of

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[11] Hp. *Morb. Sacr.* 18 (L) 6. 354. 12; 6. 394. 12-15; *Epid.* 3. 134. 2-15; *Aër.* 22; *Art.* 9-11; *VM* 3, 15, 20; *Prog.* 1 ff; Alcmaeon DK 24 B4. See Holmes (2010), 148-191.

[12] Holmes (2010), 172-191.

[13] Kerferd (1981); Goldhill (1986), 222-243.

[14] Protag. DK 80 A 1, 6a; DK 80 A 21. For Protagoras' relativism, cf. Protag. DK 80 B 1. Goldhill (1986), 227-236.

nature.[15] To sum up, both medical writers and the sophists tended to dismiss divine causality, therefore attributing a crucial role to human actions.

I will approach the much-studied topics of human agency and of divine intervention in the mortals' lives from a particular perspective: my investigation is not limited to the narrative of the plays but is also concerned with their performative dimension. By 'performative dimension', I mean all non-verbal elements of a theatrical representation, which from now on, for simplicity, will be referred to as 'stagecraft techniques': these include (but are not limited to) props, scenography, the actors' movements as indicated by implicit stage directions, exits and entrances, and so on.[16] This study aims to discuss how stagecraft techniques are in a fundamental way interwoven into the thematic texture of the tragedies: the playwrights employ them to complicate the discussion of important religious and political topics, such as human and divine responsibility for the mortal characters' misadventures and for their final salvation.[17] Among all the non-verbal elements that constitute a theatrical performance, the different forms of divine intervention as represented on stage will be the main focus of this chapter: more specifically, I will investigate how the physical absence or presence of the gods influences both human agency and the way in which

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[15] Protagoras' agnosticism (Protag. DK 80 B 4) and Prodicus' natural theology (Prodic. DK 84 B 5). Cf. Democr. DK 68 A 75. See also Gorgias'discussion on the relationship between language, knowledge, and reality (DK 82 B 3). Kerferd (1981), 93-99, 163-72.

[16] For a discussion of the meaning of performance, see Harrison – Lliapis (2013), 1 with references.

[17] As mentioned in the Introduction, important studies in the stagecraft of Greek drama and in the function of performance criticism are: Taplin (1977), (1985); Hamilton (1978); Sider (1978); Mastronarde (1979); Halleran (1985); Goldhill (1986), (1989); Wiles (1987), (2000).

Clytaemnestra's death at the hands of her son and Apollo's command are judged on stage.

While the gods routinely appear physically on the Greek stage,[18] most of the time they are on stage for a short time: a god typically appears as *deus ex machina* either at the beginning of the play to establish the context and give background details or at the end of the play to explain what has happened and to predict what events will follow beyond the staged action of the play. In divine epiphanies of this sort the god is usually defined as an outside force, which intervenes in a formal manner to set things right.[19] Only in two plays out of the extant Greek tragedies (Aeschylus' *PV* and *Eumenides*), are the gods characters who truly belong to the action of the play: they are on stage for most of the performance and interact with the other characters.[20] Whereas in the *PV* the physical presence of more than one deity on stage is itself the result of the decision to centre the action on the fate of a supernatural being, the *Oresteia* is a human saga in which nonetheless the gods play a key role. The significance of the gods' physical presence on stage and of their interactions with mortals in the *Eumenides* will be assessed by comparing

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[18] Only Zeus rarely if ever appeared on stage. It is disputed whether he appeared weighing out the souls in the prologue of Aeschylus' *Psychostasia*: Easterling (1993), 77 ff; Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 463 ff with references.

[19] Dunn (1996), 41.

[20] Sourvinou – Inwood (2003), 459-511 distinguishes between two modes of interaction between gods and mortals as represented in Greek tragedy: 'direct interaction', which is typical of the Aeschylean output, and 'distanced interaction', which characterizes the extant Euripidean tragedies where the gods 'only appear at a distance, in a spatially distanced epiphany on high, or on an empty stage unseen by the tragic characters.' (*ivi*, 469). As far as the Sophoclean output is concerned, deities appear in only two of the extant plays (Heracles in the *Philoctetes* and Athena in the *Ajax*) and their mode of interaction with humans is similar to the 'Euripidean epiphany model', a partly distanced interaction.

and contrasting it with the remarkable absence of the gods and Apollo's delayed epiphany in the Euripidean version of the same myth.

The argument of this chapter is that the different forms of divine intervention represented in the plays chosen for analysis (prompt vs late intervention, the gods' physical presence and active involvement on stage vs the gods' physical absence) are not merely diverse theatrical techniques but rather express divergent views on human nature, society, politics and religion.

3.1 The Complex Relationship between Human and Divine Agency in Greek Tragedy

Both the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus and the *Orestes* by Euripides closely investigate to what extent violent criminal acts, like the one performed by Orestes, are to be considered purely human actions or are rather influenced by supernatural factors, such as the divine will, inherited guilt, and curses. In this chapter I will explore how differently Aeschylus and Euripides make use of the physical presence or absence of the gods on stage to introduce a range of perspectives on human culpability and on the interrelation between divine and human agency. Before analysing how stagecraft techniques can shed light on the playwrights' different treatment of these issues, in this section I will briefly review the scholarly debate on the complex relationship between human and divine agency in Greek tragedy.

Agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently, that is, to make and enact decisions. There is no doubt that mortal characters in

Greek tragedy have the capacity to make choices. Several tragic passages depict humans pondering two courses of action before they take their final decision. As far as the Atreid saga is concerned, there are two moments of crucial decisions: the first one is when Agamemnon wonders whether or not to sacrifice his daughter in order to let the Greek fleet sail to Troy, whereas the second moment is when Orestes must choose between avenging his father by committing matricide and leaving his father unvindicated in order to avoid unholy bloodshed.[21] In the end, they both opt for the first option respectively and carry out their decision.

Yet is the choice they make a truly free choice or is it somehow imposed on them? If the choice is imposed on the actors, what kind of constraint or combination of constraints is involved in their decision-making process?

It is a characteristic of Greek tragedy to be exploratory rather than affirmative, and to condense multiple strands of causality.[22] Various interlinked factors come into play in the murderous actions that afflict the Atreid family.

The murders committed one after the other by different members of the same blighted family, starting from the deaths of Thyestes' children at the hands of Atreus, are all interconnected. The curse cast by Thyestes upon the whole house of Atreus is likely to play a role in the subsequent

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[21] Other famous tragic passages are Pelasgus' dilemma in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Eteocles' decision in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes.* In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the tough choices that confront Agamemnon and Pelasgus are both described as 'heavy' (A. *A.* 206-7 βαρεῖα […] βαρεῖα; A. *Supp.* 342 βαρέα, 347 βαρύς).
[22] Gill (1990), 19.

misfortunes suffered by the Atreidai:[23] Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter in Aulis and is in turn killed by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. A desire for revenge is among the reasons which arouse the couple's homicidal impulses: Aegisthus wants to avenge his father Thyestes, whereas Clytaemnestra wishes to take vengeance upon the man who killed her beloved daughter. Finally, the murder of Agamemnon is the triggering event which prompts Orestes to commit matricide. That these two crimes are closely connected with each other is clearly signalled in the *Oresteia* by the fact that the same word (πληγή, 'mortal blow') is used to describe both the death of Agamemnon (*A.* 1344) and Orestes' revenge (*Cho.* 312-3).[24] The Atreid family is hit by an intergenerational chain of violence, which may spring both from Thyestes' curse and from Atreus' original guilt passing down through generations.[25] Since there seems to be a taint of inherited guilt which interconnects the Atreidai and causes them to re-enact some past error, it is hard to see the members of this household as completely autonomous agents.[26]

The murders of Iphigeneia, Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra also share a further characteristic: even though they are human actions carried out by human agents, they all have an element of supernatural causation. First of all, it was Artemis who angrily required the human sacrifice of Iphigeneia (*A.* 211): Agamemnon decided to immolate his daughter because it was the only way to appease the adverse winds that prevented the fleet from sailing (*A.* 214-7). Secondly, in the *Agamemnon*

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[23] Sewell – Rutter (2007), 71-77, however, argues that, even though the curse of Thyestes helps to inform the trilogy, its role should not be overestimated: 'it is simply one of many intertwining strands of explanation for the action of the trilogy.' (*ivi*, 75).
[24] Goldhill (1990a), 120-22.
[25] Sewell – Rutter (2007), 21-4.
[26] Goldhill (1990a), 120-22.

Clytaemnestra gradually merges with the Erinyes and with the δαίμων haunting the household of Atreus: she depicts herself and is depicted by the chorus as a divine instrument, the embodiment of an avenging spirit.[27] Finally, Orestes kills his mother in obedience to Apollo's order (*Cho.* 269-305).

In all three cases there seems to be a divine necessity which induces the human agents to act as the gods wish in order to suit divine purposes.[28] This makes us wonder whether these tragic characters are truly free to select from opposite courses of action or whether they merely see no other choice. The concept of free will, which is closely connected with the issue of human responsibility, underlies the formulation of this question.

It is widely agreed, however, that free will is a specifically modern problem given that the category of the will is unknown to the ancient Greeks, as might be corroborated by the lack of any term which closely corresponds to our idea of it.[29] In Western modern societies the category of the will presupposes that the person is the autonomous centre for his decisions, the true source of all the actions that originate from him. By contrast, all the ancient Greek terms expressing the notion of the intentional first and foremost have a wider and less precise meaning than the modern category of will since they comprise actions resulting from the

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[27] A. *A.* 1433, 1468, 1476, 1482, 1501-2. However, it must be remembered that at other times she vigorously claims responsibility for the regicide (A. *A.* 1379-80, 1394, 1405-6). I will delve into the significance of this contradiction in Clytaemnestra's account of the regicide later in this section.

[28] According to Williams (1993), 104, divine necessities can be both purposive, 'in the sense that events are shaped towards a particular outcome', and purposed, 'in the sense that they are designed by a supernatural agency that has a motive.'

[29] Snell (1953), 182-3; Dodds (1966), 42; Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 49-84; Dover (1974), 150-1; Sewell-Rutter (2007), 150 ff; Williams (1993), 132 ff.

spontaneous impulse of a desire as well as actions stemming from reflection and deliberation.[30] Moreover, in both cases the truest source of action does not reside in the subject himself but rather in the end towards which the subject sets himself in motion, that is, either in the object of the agent's desire or in that which reasoned reflection and deliberation present to the agent as something enticing. Therefore, once an end has been decided upon, action necessarily follows, leaving thus no space for an idea of the will which corresponds to our modern concept.[31]

In representing the characters' decisions and actions, Greek tragedy always incorporates an inner necessity alongside the supernatural one. The definition of inner necessity, as given by Williams, is 'a necessity encountered when an agent concludes that he must act in a certain way.'[32] It follows that necessity can be partly created by the agents themselves since their actions necessarily follow upon the agents' recognition of what they must do. The concept of inner necessity entails the claim that a human agent can take a supernatural necessity and makes it his own, as is evident from the chorus' description of Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*:

> ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ἀνάγκας ἔδυ λέπαδνον
> φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῆ τροπαίαν
> ἄναγνον ἀνίερον, τόθεν
> τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνω·
> βροτοὺς θρασύνει γὰρ αἰσχρόμητις
> τάλαινα παρακοπὰ πρωτοπήμων.
> (A. *A.* 218-224)

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[30] See Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 49-51, 60, 65-6 who analyse the Greek terms ἑκών, ἐθέλω, βούλομαι and its derivatives, and βουλεύω and its derivatives.
[31] Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 58-9, 66-7.
[32] Williams (1993), 130-1.

When he put on the yokestrap of necessity, his mental wind veering in a direction that was impious, impure, unholy, from that point he turned to a mindset that would stop at nothing; for men are emboldened by miserable Infatuation, whose shameful schemes are the beginnings of their sufferings.

Since the chorus emphasizes the fact that Agamemnon is under the yoke of Necessity, for some scholars he has no choice.[33] Yet it has been pointed out that ἔδυ is a verb of action and cannot thus convey the sense that the king is submitted to necessity; it rather indicates that Agamemnon 'put on the harness of necessity'.[34] The terminology chosen is especially telling since it communicates the idea that Agamemnon is not merely a puppet of the gods: he has actively made a divinely willed course of action his own.

At this point, we might wonder where Agamemnon's decision to put on the harness of necessity comes from. The chorus says that it stems from wretched frenzy (παρακοπά, 223), a bad counsellor, which emboldens men and causes them to suffer. Some scholars maintain that such a fatal frenzy has a religious nature and is similar to the divine power of ἄτη, which makes human intellect blind.[35] According to this interpretation, it is Zeus who intentionally takes Agamemnon's wits away in order to induce him to put on the harness of necessity and to kill his daughter: the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and Agamemnon's consequent punishment are thus part of Zeus' plan to fulfil the curse upon Atreus.[36] The main weakness with this argument, however, is that it does not take into account the ambiguity of the language used to describe the breath taken by Agamemnon when he resolves to kill Iphigeneia. Padel proposes

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[33] Denniston- Page (1957); Rivier (1963), 73-112.
[34] Williams (1993), 132 ff.
[35] Rivier (1963), *ad loc*; Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 76; Gill (1990), 19 ff.
[36] Lloyd-Jones (1983), 59-61. This thesis is rejected by Sommerstein (1996), 362-3.

the following translation of vv. 219-220: 'breathing a wicked [breath? Wind?] of the φρήν, turning unholy, impious'.[37] The scholar highlights that the object of breathing (πνέων) is not specified: it is simply said that what is breathed is 'of the φρήν'. As a consequence, it is not clear whether Agamemnon breathes in a wicked wind from outside or whether he breathes out a wicked breath coming from within. The latter hypothesis implies that the impiety is a characteristic of Agamemnon's ἦθος since it comes from within: if this hypothesis is correct, 'of the φρήν' means 'made there'. In the former case, by contrast, the impious thought is described as coming from the gods into the mortal agent, that is, as entering the φρήν from outside. The ambiguity of this passage is likely to have been intentional: it serves the purpose of representing a simultaneously external and internal causation.[38]

It follows that Agamemnon's decision is not something forcefully imposed from above even though he was not in a normal state of mind when it took it; his decision is better described as the human agent's appropriation of a supernatural necessity, which is not the result of divine frenzy or the taint of inherited guilt but rather depends on the agent's inner dispositions and traits of character.[39] Agamemnon is both bound and eager to immolate his daughter.[40] Upon arrival at Argos, he himself asserts

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[37] Padel (1992), 92.

[38] Padel (1992), 90-8. For an analysis of how the gods can breathe emotions and thoughts into men, see Onians (1954), 51 ff.

[39] Sewell – Rutter (2007), 171. The scholar (*ivi*, 48) speaks of 'a conjunction of inherited guilt with moral inheritance: in both authors, the doomed family's recurrent misfortunes through the generations are mediated not simply through some mysterious supernatural means, but at least in part through the recurrence of traits and modes of behaviour, which help to create the recurrent patterns of doom through intelligible continuities of human character and action.'

[40] Rosembloom (in Goff, 2011, 91-130) argues that 'Aeschylus compels Agamemnon to choose between the titles «father» and «naval ἡγεμών». […[Iphigeneia is literally, as the

that the gods are jointly responsible for his safe return and for his vengeance on Troy (μεταιτίους, 811).[41] The so-called 'principle of double determination' is working in this play: to quote Sommerstein, 'it was inevitable that Agamemnon would sacrifice his daughter, but that does not mean he had no choice. It only means that Zeus chose the right man for his job'.[42]

Similarly, Clytaemnestra knows well how to push the right buttons to persuade Agamemnon to commit the impious act of walking the purple carpet. The carpet scene is a repetition on stage of what happened in Aulis: the king of Argos once again faces a dilemma which strains the will and impels him to a fatal decision. Yet, whereas in the Aulis episode the process that led Agamemnon to kill his daughter is merely reported by the chorus, the carpet scene literally performs the hero's decision-making process on stage and, as a consequence, allows the audience to gain a deeper understanding of the king's character and inner dispositions.

There has been much debate as to the reason why Agamemnon, despite being aware of the ὕβρις of the act itself, eventually decides to step on the precious tapestries.[43] The prevailing tendency is to look for

chorus calls her, «a preliminary sacrifice of ships' (προτέλεια ναῶν, 227)' (ivi, 106-7), that is, the preliminary cost of Agamemnon's naval hegemony. Corrupted sacrifice is a recurring motif in the Oresteia: Zeitlin (1965), 463-508; Goff (2007), 81-82.

[41] The legal adjectives μεταίτιος ('jointly responsible' A. A. 811; A. Eu. 199, 465) and παραίτιος ('jointly responsible' A. Ch. 910) recur throughout the trilogy. The gods are said to be co-responsible because 'in Aeschylus the tragic decision is rooted in two types of reality, on the one hand, ἦθος, character, and on the other δαίμων, divine power': Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 77.

[42] Sommerstein (1996), 365. Cf. also Dodds (1966), 42; Lesky (1983), 13-23; Vernant (1988), 72-77; Sewell – Rutter (2007), 136, 174-5.

[43] Agamemnon himself explains that it is impious to walk the red carpet because it is an honour reserved for the gods (921-2, 946-7). Another theory worth mentioning is that Agamemnon's act of trampling upon the luxurious purple tapestries is equivalent to wasting the wealth of his household: he is afraid that a great shame (αἰδὼς) would fall

motivation in the ἦθος of the hero: scholars have come up with theories which vary from that of Agamemnon's chivalry to that of the king's vanity and wantonness.[44] By contrast, Goldhill maintains that 'it is not so much the weakness of Agamemnon's character, as the strength of Clytaemnestra's undercutting arguments that is indicated in this dialogue. It is the dramatic staging of the power of the rhetoric of persuasion in the pursuit of dominance.'[45] To support his argument, the scholar highlights how skilful the queen is in redefining the meaning of the act of stepping on the carpet by postulating different circumstances: in time of danger it is appropriate to use part of the household's wealth as propitiatory offering to the gods. Had Agamemnon pronounced a vow to make an offering to the gods, walking upon the red carpet would have been a duty (τέλος), the right fulfilment of that vow. Thanks to the manipulation of signs, Clytaemnestra is able to challenge social hierarchies by circumventing the power of male-dominated society to control discourse: by suggesting an alternative deceitful interpretation of the act of walking, she undermines the stability of Agamemnon's initial intention and thus triumphs in her aim to kill the head of the household and the king of the city.

To explain Agamemnon's sudden surrender, which is at odds with his self-confessed awareness of the impiety of the act of stepping on the carpet, some scholars hypothesize that a daemonic force is already at work through Clytaemnestra: just as Zeus takes away Agamemnon's wits in Aulis, so he does likewise in Argos with the aim of fulfilling the curse

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upon him if he ruined the resources of his house (948-9). See Jones (1962), 72-137; Seaford (2012), 200-201.

[44] The former is proposed by Fraenkel (1950), whereas the latter by Denniston-Page (1957). Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1983), 67-9.

[45] Goldhill (1986), 11-4.

upon Atreus.[46] Yet there is no evidence in the text to suggest that Agamemnon is in the grip of ἄτη.[47]

This episode, however, shares some similarities with the decision taken by Agamemnon in Aulis under the yoke of divine compulsion and informs the previous parallel scene, creating an implicit model for interpreting the hero's decision-making process. In both episodes Agamemnon is under some sort of constraint, namely, under a supernatural necessity in Aulis and under the power of λόγος in Argos. Yet in both cases it is Agamemnon who in end takes his own decision according to personal motives and inner dispositions: the murder of Iphigenia, which is straightaway labelled as an unholy crime, can also be interpreted as being the best thing to do under the circumstances since it seems to be the only way to placate Artemis; similarly, walking on the carpet is a hybristic action in terms of Greek traditional attitudes but, if the context were changed in the way suggested by Clytaemnestra, it would become a duty (τέλος, 934) for the hero to perform. In the end, it is up to Agamemnon to choose from among the available options which act to perform and what meaning to give to his action. In both scenes Agamemnon makes his own choice, even though Clytaemnestra and the gods have undoubtedly had a part in triggering Agamemnon's decision.

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[46] Lloyd-Jones (1983), 69, makes a comparison between Eteokles and Agamemnon: neither can fight against their doom because they are overcome by the Erinyes. The scholar, however, admits that, whereas in the *Seven Against Thebes* it is clearly indicated in the text that Eteokles is in the power of Erinys [cf. Solmsen (1937), 197-211], in the *Agamemnon* the evidence of the text is less positive (*ibid.*).

[47] In the carpet scene there is no report either of παρακοπά (vs the Aulis scene: A. *A.* 223) or of any other kind of derangement of mind which may be caused by divine forces: Lawrence (2013), esp. n. 46 p. 84, n. 52 p. 85.

Agamemnon's surrender share some similarities with Pentheus' yielding to Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*. As commented in the previous chapter, Dionysus too plays from within his victim's inner self to induce Pentheus to walk into his trap and make an example of him: he makes him believe that, if he goes to Mount Cithaeron, he will be able to see the bacchants performing illicit sexual activities (esp. 810-6). By playing on the king's desires, Dionysus convinces him to spy on the maenads, that is, 'to see what he should not see, and eagerly try what should not be tried' (912-3). To be able to observe, undetected, the θίασος, Pentheus is gradually convinced by the god to dress as a maenad (821-38). Such a feminine attire serves a dual purpose. It not only makes the king an object of derision in the eyes of the Thebans (γέλωτα, 854) but also might symbolically transform him into a god's follower. Transvestism is inherent in Dionysiac mystic initiation: through the ritual change of dress, the initiand is supposed to abandon his previous identity and to assume a new one.[48] The wearing of a dress of the opposite gender also plays an important role in ancient Greek puberty rites where young boys temporarily dress as girls before attaining full masculinity and becoming members of adult male society.[49] Whether the cross-dressing scene recalls a ritual of passage or an initiation, it is represented as an unsuccessful rite: Pentheus cannot enjoy the joy shared by Dionysiac initiates and, losing his kingly power, regresses to an infantile state, 'held in his mother's arms' (969) as a little boy. It is undoubtedly Dionysus that drives his victim out of his senses and 'puts giddy madness in his breast' (ἐνεὶς ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν, 851) so as to induce him to commit a transgression: this serves the god's purpose of punishing Pentheus in order to give a display of power. Dionysus,

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[48] Segal (1982), 33; Seaford (1996), 30 ff.
[49] Zeitlin (1996), 346.

nonetheless, reaches his goal by releasing Pentheus' innermost desires (ἔρωτα, 813).

Turning to the Atreid saga, a similar combination of internal and external factors also seems to concur in both Clytaemnestra's and Orestes' resolutions to perpetrate murder.

Clytaemnestra's case is especially interesting since her violent act against the head of the household raises questions about female moral agency. As soon as she enters on stage after killing her husband, Clytaemnestra openly declares herself to be the perpetrator of the crime: she is so sure of the rightfulness of her action that she even dares to boast of the murder committed (1394).[50] By contrast, the chorus refuses to believe that she acted alone and that she was in full possession of her mental faculties: her open boasting over the corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra is so shocking that the Argive elders would rather suppose that the queen was under the effect of drugs (1407-9) or that a daemon was working through her (1470-4).[51]

This contradiction in the accounts of the murder of Agamemnon has been interpreted as revealing a male-female conflict, that is, a fundamental opposition between the ways in which the ancient Greeks conceived the moral agency of the two sexes. Women were supposed to be confined to the domestic sphere of life and were not allowed to take any

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[50] There are several passages in the trilogy where the queen claims responsibility for the murder of her husband: A. *A*. 1377, 1380. 1404-6, 1421, 1497, 1551-3, 1567-76; A. *Ch*. 887-91.

[51] Winnington-Ingram (1983), n. 42 p. 108. Foley (2001), 212-3 interestingly points out that the elders of the chorus prescribe the death penalty for the male Aegisthus only, who is believed to have acted deliberately, whereas for Clytaemnestra they propose banishment, which is the punishment for involuntary homicide.

sort of political action.[52] The *Agamemnon* illustrates a total inversion of gender roles: the androgynous Clytaemnestra challenges male-dominated hierarchies by undervaluing the marital bond and by taking political action against the king of the city.[53] By refusing her role as wife subordinate to her husband, she also rejects her role as object: Clytaemnestra openly asserts her sexual independence and shows her desire to rule.[54] By claiming the status of a fully autonomous agent, she puts Agamemnon's role as male subject at risk: when he is killed by his masculinized wife, the head of the household is reduced to the status of a mere object, a corpse.[55] The chorus of Argive elders rejects Clytaemnestra's claim to be a fully autonomous actor in an attempt to downplay the subversive potential of her criminal act. It would be too frightening to acknowledge that a woman is responsible for such a terrible action, which challenges male and kingly power; it is much more reassuring to maintain that she must have acted as the embodiment of an avenging spirit.

What is puzzling, however, is that an oscillation between external and internal causal explanations for the violent act can be found in Clytaemnestra's speeches as well. In the exodus she seems to row back on her previous claim: she disowns the deed and claims that it was the

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[52] Foley (1981), 139.

[53] Foley (1981), 127-68; Zelenak (1998), 59-72; Zeitlin (1996), 87-119; Holmes (2012), 126-35. Cf. also Foley (2001), 201-34.

[54] Wohl (1998), XIII – XXXVII argues that 'Greek tragedy dramatizes the exchange of women as a socially constructive system. [...] The exchange is built around the distinction between the male giver/subject and the female gift/object, but this distinction collapses once the woman refuses her role as object.'

[55] The identity of Agamemnon and the dignity of his role as male subject are gradually restored in the following two plays in the person of Orestes, the lawful heir to the throne of Argos. It has been argued that Orestes' revenge, his banishment from the Argive realm, and his final return to the city of Argos as its legitimate ruler mirror the stages of a puberty rite, which marks his gradual separation from home, from his mother and from the world of childhood: Zeitlin (1996), 98-107 with further bibliography.

ancient avenging spirit of the household that carried out the attack on Agamemnon by taking her form (1497-1504). The queen's utterance has been interpreted as a denial of responsibility by most critics, with the notable exception of Neuburg and Foley.[56] Foley argues that Clytaemnestra does not intend to disclaim responsibility for her actions: the participle φανταζόμενος (1500), which refers to the Alastor of the household (ὁ ἀλάστωρ, 1501), is more correctly translated as 'appearing to Agamemnon's wife' rather than 'appearing in the shape of Agamemnon's wife.' In order to present her action as an act of justice, the queen declares that, after the vengeful spirit manifested himself to her, she took on that supernatural necessity and became the instrument of divine vengeance. The aim of the queen's reference to the daemon is to show that the murder of Agamemnon is not merely a wife's heinous and violent action against her husband but rather a rightful revenge for a family murder.[57] As Neuburg points out, 'it means that Agamemnon's death can be seen as a result of the very *lex talionis* morality which is upheld by Zeus and Dike (1560-4).'[58]

Clytaemnestra is claiming divine authorization for her crime that outweighs her human motivations.[59] She represents herself not merely as a wife who slew her husband but as a rightful avenger. The chorus, though disconcerted, must admit that the Alastor might have been an accomplice (συλλήπτωρ, 1507) in the murder of Agamemnon: the elders are forced to acknowledge that Clytaemnestra's deed has a double nature just as Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter has a dual nature. Both actions can

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[56] Neuburg (1991), 37-68; Foley (2001), 201-34.
[57] Neuburg (1991), 60.
[58] Neuburg (1991), 61.
[59] She claims divine support from Zeus, Ate, the Erinyes, the Alastor of the house, and the Dike of her daughter (A. *Eu.* 1431-3).

be interpreted as heinous family-murders. Yet they can also be seen as justifiable: on the one hand, the queen takes revenge on the slayer of her daughter. On the other hand, the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is part of Agamemnon's vengeance upon Troy and Paris and proves necessary for the departure of the expedition.

The same doubleness will also characterize the murder of Clytaemnestra at the hands of her son in the following play: Orestes' action can be interpreted either as heinous matricide or as a son's rightful revenge for the death of his father. There is, however, an important difference in the decision-making processes which lead the three characters to commit murder. Clytaemnestra's claim that she is the embodiment of the spirit of vengeance looks like a distortion of a mortal's troubled appropriation of a supernatural necessity. Only the two male heroes are said or shown on stage to struggle between two equally difficult choices. By contrast, the moment in which Clytaemnestra decides to kill her husband is not represented on stage neither is it recounted subsequently: what is striking is that no mention is made of any indecision faced by the heroine about whether to avenge the death of his daughter by killing her slayer or whether to leave the murder of Iphigeneia unavenged in order not to commit an impious crime. To the eyes of the chorus, the very fact that she has never been in a moral dilemma undermines her role as serious moral agent.[60]

Her late appeal to the Alastor might thus appear as a mere excuse: in the elders' opinion, the murder of Agamemnon is first and foremost an ignoble and subversive crime committed by a woman against the head of

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[60] Foley (2001), 205-6

the household and the legitimate king of the city. The play shows that it is dangerous to allow moral agency to women since their actions are likely to subvert the hierarchy of the sexes and to threaten the status of the men of a community. Death of a male at the hands of a female cannot be categorized as an act of justice, even though this act is carried out in revenge for a family murder.

This creates a tension between the sexes with regard to the notion of moral agency and raises uncomfortable questions: why should a female act of vengeance upon a man be *a priori* illegitimate, in contrast to the rightful nature of a revenge taken by the male upon the female? Why is Orestes' crime judged on different terms in the last play of the trilogy?[61] Let us analyse the process leading Orestes to commit matricide in order to understand on what basis the hero is acquitted.

In the *Oresteia* Orestes shows himself facing a difficult dilemma, which consists of the opposing pulls of two divine forces: on the one hand, if he kills Clytaemnestra, he will be hunted down by the Erinyes of his mother (*Cho*. 912-3, 924); on the other hand, Apollo has threatened him with dreadful attacks of the Erinyes of the father if he does not avenge the killing of Agamemnon (*Cho.* 269-96).[62] The hero must choose between two equally threatening alternatives: the clash between these two supernatural impositions paradoxically opens up a space for human agency.[63] When he finally opts for revenge, both the need to obey Apollo's command and personal motives (ἵμεροι, *Cho*. 299) come into play in his tough decision:

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[61] Foley (2001), 233.

[62] Cf. A. *Ch*. 924-5.

[63] Cf. Snell (1953), 108: 'under the burden of this twofold ordinance from the gods, man stands all alone.'

the grief for his father's death, the condition of indigence, and the usurpation of the throne.[64]

The Euripidean description of Apollo's oracle also leaves some space for human freedom in the making of decisions: Electra reports that the god persuaded Orestes instead of dictating to him (πείθει, *Or.* 29), and Orestes admits having been gladdened by the prophetic words (ηὔφρανε, *Or.* 287).[65] Later on in the chapter we will see that the hero then modifies his description of the Delphic oracle: by presenting it as a command (κελεύσας, *Or.* 416), he intentionally places the external determinants of the matricide he committed over his inner motivations. I will also show that the reasons underlying Orestes' modification of his earlier version of the oracle can be fully understood if we analyse the fragile condition of the Euripidean hero in a changing world, where human agents are left alone to deal with the consequences of their actions, as opposed to the relative security enjoyed by the same hero in the Aeschylean trilogy.

In neither play, however, is Orestes' liability for the matricide called into question: the hero's case must go to trial. In the *Orestes* the first verdict reached by the jury even condemns him to death, as opposed to the sentence of acquittal delivered at the end of the *Oresteia.* In the *Eumenides* Apollo's defence of Orestes, as well as the final acquittal, hinges not only on the compelling nature of Apollo's order but also, and especially, on the gender-biased argument that the father-son relationship outweighs the mother-son bond. It follows that the hero must be judged to be the rightful avenger of the death of his father rather than an unholy

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[64] According to Sewell-Rutter (2007), 159-60, Orestes' appropriation of the external determinants of the matricide he is about to commit is gradually carried out during the κομμός (A. *Ch.* 306 ff).

[65] Theodorou (1993), 39.

mother-slayer.[66] However, Orestes' acquittal in the *Eumenides* is not without question since only half the jury votes in favour of it and since Athena's vote is needed to break the tie. Later on in this chapter I will further discuss the meaning of Orestes' acquittal and of the decisive role played by Athena in the final verdict. More specifically, I will explore why it is so important that a goddess, physically present on stage, decides the issue: what are the implications of such a decisive divine intervention? To what extent and in what ways does it influence the representation of the new system of human justice?

Each of the following sections is devoted to the analysis of a different deity or group of deities and delves into the ways in which the two playwrights make use of the physical presence or absence of the gods on stage to convey different conceptions of Orestes' crime and to raise political questions about the efficacy of human justice and the trustworthiness of human institutions.

3.2 The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*

This section discusses what lies behind Aeschylus' exceptional decision to represent on stage the Erinyes as visible characters in the *Eumenides*. I will argue that it is not merely an element of surprise, introduced to enhance spectator involvement; it is rather one of the essential components of the narrative through which the playwright articulates a discourse on a cosmic conflict between older and younger divinities and on the crucial transition point in human society from a

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[66] Neuburg (1991), 58.

primitive and personal form of justice to the new civilized form of trial. Their physical appearance on stage, under the eyes of both the characters and the spectators, symbolically represents the integration of these chthonic spirits of vengeance, who reside in the dark region of Tartarus, into the bright Olympian realm. I will also show that the staging of the Erinyes' entrance is meant to invite reflection on the meaning of this exceptional event and on its ethical and theological implications: by conveying first verbal images of the Erinyes, then aural ones, and finally a visual representation of the goddesses on stage, Aeschylus builds up anticipation for the Erinyes' physical appearance on stage in order to call the audience's attention to the uniqueness of this happening and to stress its peculiar significance within the whole narrative.

Before they make their entrance as χορευταί in the last play of the trilogy, the Erinyes are referred to several times in the *Oresteia* as avenging spirits,[67] but only three mortal characters claim to be able to see the goddesses in the flesh. In the *Agamemnon* Cassandra describes a revel-band of Furies who, after drinking human blood, stay in the royal palace besieging the chambers and singing an unpleasant song (1185-9). In the following play, the Erinyes are supposedly seen by Orestes soon after he kills his mother inside the house (1048ff).[68] Finally, in the *Eumenides* the Pythia glimpses them asleep as soon as she enters the shrine of Apollo at Delphi (34ff). In all three cases sightings of these ancient deities are linked with the σκηνή interior, which functions as a symbol of the Erinyes' liminal existence between visible and invisible as well as of those inner

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[67] A. *A.* 59, 463, 645, 749, 991, 1119, 1433, 1580; A. *Ch.* 402, 577, 652.

[68] Since the hero is represented as standing over the corpses of Clytaemnestra and her lover, he is to be imagined as still being inside the royal palace, the interior of which is shown thanks to the ἐκκύκλημα: Bakola (2017), 174 with further references.

and dark spaces, like the mind, that can be controlled by these daemonic powers.[69]

According to Bakola's suggestive interpretation of the *Oresteia*, besides these three apparitions of the Erinyes, the trilogy allows its audience to see further "flashes" of the ancient deities of vengeance well before their physical appearance in the last play.[70] The scholar suggests that the servants of the house (δμῳαί), who form the main chorus in the *Choephorae* (84) and who might appear as mute characters in the tapestry scene as well (*Ag.* 908-11), are intentionally represented as highly suggestive of the Erinyes.

To begin with, in the tapestry scene Clytaemnestra asks the servants of the house (δμῳαί, *Ag.* 908) to spread the crimson fabrics at Agamemnon's feet: Bakola suggests that a secondary chorus might exit the royal palace to carry out the task silently and might re-enter soon afterwards following the king.[71] The servants of the house remind of the Furies since the fabrics they are holding are later called 'the woven robes of the Erinyes' (*Ag.* 1580-1) which trap Agamemnon's corpse: the carpet scene might thus be interpreted as an anticipation of the king's deception and murder.

Furthermore, the δμῳαί 'who keep the house in good order' (*Ch.* 84) appear again in the second play of the trilogy in their role as χορευταί: their half-ripped black garments (*Ch.* 10-12, 23-31) create a compelling visual link with the chorus of the *Eumenides* (52, 370). What is striking is that Orestes, when he appears on the ἐκκύκλημα next to the bodies of

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[69] Bakola (2017), 166-8.
[70] Bakola (2017), 166-186.
[71] Bakola (2017), 168-9. Cf. also Taplin (1977), 308-9.

Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus in a tableaux which evokes the final scene of the previous play, asks the chorus to spread out the fabric which covered his father and to stand around in a circle (*Ch.* 980-4): it is thus likely that the same δμῳαί that in the *Agamemnon* spread the crimson fabric in front of the king, now are holding it around Orestes. As Bakola highlights, the visual symbolism is noteworthy: Orestes seems to be trapped by the 'woven robes of the Erinyes', just as his father had been (*Ag.* 1580).[72]

Interestingly, soon afterwards Orestes allegedly glimpses the Erinyes and runs off stage crying out that he is being haunted by them: there is no doubt that at the end of the *Choephorae* the Erinyes are visible to Orestes alone. Neither the audience nor the other characters can see the goddesses.[73] The chorus even dismisses Orestes' visions as mere fantasies (δόξαι, 1051). The subjectivity of these apparitions has been maintained by some scholars to the point that it has been assumed that Orestes mistakes the chorus of female mourners dressed in black for the black deities of revenge.[74] This thesis is based on the word δμῳαί, which is used by Orestes to address the 'servant women looking like Gorgons' (*Ch.* 1048).

The subjective status of the Erinyes, however, would be at odds with their undeniable transformation from invisible forces into concrete and visible entities in the last play of the trilogy. To solve this incongruity, it has been argued that, if we take as a frame of reference the image of 'a line extending from pure subjective fantasy to pure objective fact', we

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[72] Bakola (2017), 171-2.

[73] Almost all scholars argue that the Erinyes do not appear to the audience in the theatre: Brown (1983), n. 1.

[74] Bakola (2017), 173. For a confutation of this argument, see Brown (1983), 19; Frontisi-Ducroux (2007), 165-76 and West's emendation of line 1048 (σμοιαί, 'hideous').

must 'place the Furies at both ends of the line simultaneously.'[75] This means that, on the one hand, they are subjective manifestations 'in the sense that they appear only to Orestes' but, on the other hand, their objective status is grounded in the blood on Orestes' hands.[76]

According to a different interpretation, Orestes is actually referring to the chorus of handmaidens but he is not simply hallucinating: the play might suggest that these women in dark garments constitute another "flash" of the vengeful goddesses, for both the hero and the spectators.[77] This view might be corroborated by a mirror scene in the *Eumenides*: just as in the last play of the trilogy the Erinyes, in a circular formation around Orestes, drive his mind into madness by means of a binding song (*Eu.* 321-96), so here the hero, surrounded by the singing and dancing δμῳαί, is seized by terror, wrath and frenzy (*Ch.* 1023-5). Both scenes are likely to take place in an interior space, conveyed by the use of the ἐκκύκλημα: in the *Choephorae* Orestes is to be understood as being inside the royal palace, whereas in the *Eumenides* as clinging to the statue of Athena inside her temple.[78] In both cases the σκηνή interior functions as a symbolic space representing Orestes' mind, dominated by these dark and usually unseen daemonic powers.

Thanks to such uncanny and obscure apparitions of the Erinyes, the trilogy builds up suspense for their eventual appearance in person.

In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that Aeschylus was the first to give the Erinyes shape by representing them on stage: these

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[75] Jones (1962), 104.
[76] Jones (1962), *ibid.* cf. also Brown (1983), 24; Samons (1998-9), 232.
[77] Bakola (2017), 173.
[78] Cf. A. *Eu.* 242. Bakola (2017), 176 with further references.

chthonian deities do not appear in Greek vase-painting until the mid-5th century BC.[79] Up to the first performance of the *Oresteia* in 458 BC probably no one had seen any representation of them. Consequently, many in the audience, without casting doubt on the existence and objective reality of the Erinyes, might nonetheless have seen nothing unreasonable in the chorus' incredulous response to Orestes' claim that he was able to see the goddesses right in front of him. They must have agreed with the chorus and thought that Orestes, despite being actually tormented by the vengeful spirits, had merely envisaged his divine persecutors in one of his fits of madness. For neither men nor deities have ever been able to get a glimpse of them: the Erinyes are demonic forces operating in the darkness, unseen by gods and mortals.

This is confirmed by the Pythia's and Athena's reactions of wonder and shock at the sight of the goddesses of vengeance in the *Eumenides.* In the prologue the priestess of Delphi is overcome with such great terror that she drags herself out of the temple crawling like a toddler (34-8). By contrast, Athena in the second episode reacts with fearless confidence, as befits a deity, but she too is struck with amazement ($\theta\alpha\tilde{\nu}\mu\alpha$, 407): she cannot guess who this 'strange company is' ($\kappa\alpha\iota\nu\grave{\eta}\nu\ \ldots\ \tau\acute{\eta}\nu\delta'\ \acute{o}\mu\iota\lambda\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$, 406) since the chorus do not resemble either goddesses seen by gods or human beings (410-2). Athena's bafflement at her first sight of the Erinyes and the stage-direction prescribing the undignified behaviour of a terrified Pythia crawling out on all fours are a powerful and crude representation

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[79] Frontisi-Ducroux (2007), 165-76.

of the responses of both the divine and human realms to a yet unintelligible and little known demonic force.[80]

The characters' astonishment at the sight of the Erinyes might be meant to mirror and anticipate a similar reaction of wonder expected from the audience. When, then, are the spectators finally able to see the chthonic deities on stage? There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to the exact moment when the Erinyes appear on stage and thus become visible not only to the characters but to the audience as well. Some maintain that the spectators can catch sight of the chorus or at least of part of it immediately after the Pythia's exit from the shrine of Delphi at v. 63.[81] Taplin, however, counters that there is no valid reason for anticipating their entry before the choral entrance song: the Erinyes enter on stage during the πάροδος (140 ff). The latter hypothesis is to be preferred for more than one reason.[82] First of all, the way in which the entrance of the Erinyes is staged in the πάροδος is proof of the playwright's intention to build suspense, suspense that would have been dissipated by an early entry of the chorus. The audience starts visualising the Erinyes well before their entrance song thanks to the description given by the Pythia and the bestial sounds the χορευταί make when the ghost of Clytemnestra tries to awake them. Moreover, when the Erinyes finally enter the stage, they do not arrive simultaneously but rather one by one or in small disordered

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[80] Taplin (1977), 362 ff; Taplin (1978), 61-2; Lada – Richards (1998), 42: 'In the neatly ordered Greek universe, which has reserved distinct compartments for the "bestial", "human" and "divine", beings such as the Furies invalidate all distinctions. A well structured society can only accomodate them at its peril, for they exemplify the chaotic and unclassifiable.'
[81] Brown (1982), 26-32 with references.
[82] See all the pieces of evidence advanced by Taplin (1977), *ad loc.* and (1978), 107 ff.

groups.[83] By lengthening the time necessary to make their entrance, this staging technique contributes to building further anticipation for their arrival.

This process of progressive verbal, aural, and eventually visual creation of the Erinyes in the minds of the spectators heightens the dramatic impact and the uniqueness of their physical appearance on stage.[84] An additional function of the delayed entrance of the chorus is precisely to increase the effect of surprise at their physical appearance. Until then the spectators had probably not expected that they too would have been able to see the Erinyes in person: they must have realized that all the three mortal characters who in the trilogy have claimed to have seen the goddesses are either in an abnormal state of mind or bearers of special powers: Cassandra is in the grip of her psychic possession by Apollo, Orestes is struck by madness and the Pythia, in her role as priestess of Delphi, is endowed with inner sight into divine things.

Why then did Aeschylus decide to put such an exceptional event on stage, that is, the physical appearance of deities who until then had been invisible to both the human and divine eye? What is the meaning of such a shocking innovation?

It is widely agreed that the *Oresteia* enacts the passage from the blood feud of primitive society as embodied by the Erinyes and the civilized trial by jury of democratic Athens as proposed and sanctioned by

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[83] Proof of this is the fact that 'the opening pair of stanzas is split into short syntactical units', which can be distributed among individuals or small groups: Taplin (1978), 127. The scholar thus concludes that the chorus is more likely to have entered σποράδην rather than in the usual block formation.

[84] For a detailed analysis of the process of successive approximation by which Aeschylus gradually constructs the Erinyes, see Frontisi-Ducroux (2007), 165-76. Cf. also Easterling (2008), 222-5.

Athena. Therefore, the trilogy also represents a cosmic conflict between the older, chthonic deities and the younger Olympians.[85] To effect the transition of power and prerogatives from the ancient goddesses of vengeance to the human jurors of the Areopagus in a peaceful and harmless way, it is essential that the older divinities be integrated in the new order. At the beginning of the *Eumenides* the Erinyes are described by both Athena and Apollo as a group of outcasts. They are not only unknown but also objects of hate to men and the Olympian gods (73, 191). Apollo even drives them away from his shrine (179) arguing that it is improper for them to approach his temple (185) since 'their sphere is the evil dark of Tartarus under the earth […] and neither men, nor gods, nor beasts want to mix with them' (69-72). Since they belong to the Underworld, the invisible realm, their presence on earth is quite singular, but serves an important function: they must come out of the darkness and of their invisibility to defend their rights and to obtain a new home and cult in Athens, in a cave under the hill of Ares.

Their progressive journey out of the darkness into light mirrors the process of their gradual integration in the new Olympian order. The transformation of the Erinyes from the invisible infernal goddesses into the visible Eumenides honoured in Athens symbolizes their legitimization as members of the cosmic community, who will from then onwards be part of the common store of knowledge and consciousness of gods and mortals.[86]

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[85] Fontenrose (1971), 86 ff.

[86] Bacon (2001), 48-59. Athena welcomes the Erinyes in Athens as resident aliens (μέτοικοι, A. *Eu.* 1011). Their change of status is marked by the red robes worn by them during the procession which ends the trilogy: in this regard, it should be noticed that in the Panathenaia red robes were usually worn by metics to distinguish them from the

It has been pointed out that the Erinyes' transformation into Eumenides is signalled by 'a radical change in the order of music'.[87] Whereas previously in the trilogy the songs chanted by the characters are described as unordered and discordant,[88] at the end of the *Eumenides* the chorus asks Athena what songs she wants them to sing for the land (902) and the goddess implores blessings from the earth, from the sea and from the heavens (903-5): the binding hymn of these infernal spirits (ὕμνον […] δέσμιον, 306), designed to drive its victims mad, is thus turned into songs of blessing.

The reconciliation of the Erinyes with the Olympian order is also essential for the continuing success of the new system of justice under the aegis of Zeus and Athena. In their new identity as Eumenides, they do not lose all their previous prerogatives. They go on acting as deities of punishment, but their sphere of competence switches from the family to the city: they are now tasked with supervising human affairs (*Eu.* 930-1) and, more specifically, with enforcing human justice by maintaining the principle of fear (τὸ δεινόν) without which no society can be ruled (*Eu.* 524-5, 690-710).[89]

Athenian citizens: Taplin (1977), 413; Bacon (2001), 54. The transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides also serves the purpose of solving a gender conflict: see *infra,* Section 3.4.

[87] Wilson – Taplin (1993), 174.

[88] Cf. A. *Ag.* 16-9 (the watchman's song), esp. 17 (ὕπνου τόδ' ἀντίμολπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος); 1142 (Cassandra's νόμον ἄνομον); 1186-7 (Cassandra's vision of the Erinyes chanting 'in unison but unmelodious', ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὔφωνος); 1473-4 (the *daimon* of the house which 'glories in hymning tunelessly a hymn', ἐκνόμως/ ὕμνον ὑμνεῖν ἐπεύχεται); *Eu.* 329-333: the binding song of the Erinyes (ὕμνος ἐξ Ἐρινύων/ δέσμιος, cf. 306), 'which brings madness and frenzy'(παρακοπά, παραφορά), 'which destroys the mind' (φρενοδαλής), 'untuned to the lyre' (ἀφόρμικτος), 'withering the life of mortals'(αὐονὰ βροτοῖς). For a comment on this passages, see Wilson – Taplin (1993), 169-174.

[89] MacLeod (1982), 133-8; Winnington-Ingram (1983), 167-8. MacLeod (*ivi,* n. 52) mentions one way in which the Erinyes might be believed to enforce human justice: 'participants in

The integration of the Erinyes, with their contradictory powers of either bringing fear and grief or bestowing rewards and pleasure, might also be seen to represent symbolically the incorporation of tragedy itself within Athens.[90] Just as the beneficial legacy of these ancient infernal goddesses derives from their accommodation into a cult which grants them proper τιμαί (804-7, 824-36, 848-899), so the frightening aspects of Greek tragedy are organized and contained within the City Dionysia in a form that will benefit the city of Athens: by enacting stories of dreadful sufferings at a safe symbolic distance, Greek tragedy exposes its audience to the beneficial effects of weeping.

Similarly, only after the most powerful and frightening aspects of the Erinyes are contained within the Athenian cult of the Semnai Theai, is their positive function acknowledged: in their role as the source of a necessary and beneficial fear and as guarantors of the court of the Areopagus they are rightfully granted a place on earth. In the final procession escorting the deities to their new sanctuary in Athens the whole city is called upon to 'raise a glad shout in echo to the songs' (ὀλολύξατε νῦν ἐπὶ μολπαῖς, 1043 = 1047): harmony is finally restored both in the musical order and in the social order.[91]

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trials on the Areopagus had to swear an oath sanctioned by a curse on themselves and their descendants, and a prosecutor can refer to the nether gods in pressing for a conviction (Antiphon. I. 31).'

[90] For textual evidence proving the analogies between the Erinyes and Greek tragedy, see Wilson – Taplin (1993), 175-6 (A. *Eu.* 990-1, Ar. *Pl.* 422-4, Aeschin. *Against Timarchos* 190-1).

[91] Wilson – Taplin (1993), 169-80.

3.3 The Erinyes in the *Orestes*

As the *Oresteia* progresses, the Erinyes are described more vividly and in greater detail until they take on a bodily reality in the last play of the trilogy: whereas in the *Choephorae* their existence as objective entities is still at issue, in the *Eumenides* all doubts dissipate as the deities appear in concrete form as members of the chorus. Nearly the same uncertainty surrounding the status of the Erinyes in the *Choephorae* is present in the *Orestes*, with the important difference that the Euripidean representation of the goddesses of vengeance accentuates the illusory nature of these divine appearances: the Erinyes are most of the time presented as merely a delusion, that is, as phantoms which are only visible to the protagonist's frenzied eye. Yet at other times they are referred to in traditional terms as truly existing chthonic deities.

In this section I will show how the confusion between the objective and subjective status of the Erinyes is enhanced by the playwright's decision not to bring the goddesses on stage as characters, in contrast to the earlier Aeschylean version of the same myth. I will argue that this decision springs from his desire to represent the mythical world of Orestes as echoing Euripides' contemporary world: the spectators who attended the performance lived at a crucial moment in history in which they were confronting challenges as they grappled with civil war, socio-political transformations, and cultural changes.[92] Such a continuous oscillation between subjective and objective representations of the Erinyes

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[92] As it will be discussed later in this section, I am mainly referring to the two oligarchic coups in 411 BC, to the general crisis of Athenian democracy in the late fifth century, and to the changes in worldview brought about by advances in contemporary medical inquiry and philosophical investigation: both medical writers and the sophists tended to dismiss divine causality and to seek a more rational explanation of human actions, natural events, and biological and psychological phenomena.

throughout the play, together with their constant physical absence from the stage, powerfully illustrates how differently men can respond to the changes occurring in their society: some strive to make sense of the new worldview, whereas others tend to remain bound to the more reassuring old mythical view. Like his predecessor, Euripides resorts to stagecraft techniques to address important issues which are of concern to fifth-century Athens.

It is widely believed that in the Euripidean version of the Orestes myth the Erinyes are no longer objectively existing entities but are rather nothing more than the hallucinations of a sick and tormented mind. Just as in the *Choephorae* the chorus doubts the trustworthiness of Orestes' visions, so in the Euripidean play Electra tries to calm her brother down by reassuring him that he does not actually see what he thinks he sees and that his disease is merely imaginary.[93] Yet, whereas in the former play Orestes defends his position by maintaining that the grim women are not fantasies to him (1053) and by distinguishing what he sees from the partial sight of the χορευταί (1061-2), in the latter tragedy he does not even bother to convince Electra since his mind is so deranged that he mistakes his sister for an Erinys (264-5).

The psychological interpretation of the Erinyes in the *Orestes* seems to be validated by Orestes' answer to Menelaus' question about the sickness afflicting him (395). Orestes replies that his disease is 'understanding, the awareness that I have done dreadful things' (ἡ σύνεσις, ὅτι σύνοιδα δείν᾽ εἰργασμένος, 396). I shall now briefly pause on the analysis of this verse since it is crucial for a correct understanding

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[93] E. *Or.* 259 (ὁρᾷς γὰρ οὐδὲν ὧν δοκεῖς σάφ᾽ εἰδέναι); 314 (κἂν μὴ νοσῇς γάρ, ἀλλὰ δοξάζῃς νοσεῖν).

of Orestes' visions. Scholarly opinion is divided as to the meaning of the word σύνεσις. Some scholars argue that σύνεσις is to be associated with the later word συνείδησις ('conscience, awareness of right or wrong doing') and thus suggest that it should here be translated as 'remorse/interior awareness'.[94] According to this view, Orestes' frenzy is not to be interpreted as divine punishment; rather, it springs from his distraught conscience.[95]

Yet this argument has been challenged on the basis that the root-meanings of the words συνείδησις and σύνεσις are different.[96] The former belongs to the semantic field of knowledge (συνειδέναι) and indicates an intimate and private kind of knowledge which is kept to oneself. By contrast, the latter derives from a verb of motion (συνίημι), which expresses the ability to understand something on an intellectual level by connecting different elements with each other and by finding the common link between them: the term σύνεσις thus is more likely to indicate 'critical intelligence' rather than 'conscience/interior awareness'.

If we accept this etymological interpretation of the word, we must conclude that the thesis that in this passage Orestes is depicted as raving

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[94] Di Benedetto (1965), 85-6; West (1987) n. ad loc.: 'It has already been hinted that Orestes' madness comes from within (314n.). Now he himself gives a sophisticated interpretation of it as arising from his sense of guilt. He uses a striking formulation in identifying his σύνεσις (normally an admirable thing) as his sickness. Greek did not have a word for conscience (συνείδησις is Hellenistic), but the concept was beginning to be familiar. See Dodds (1951), 36 f.; Rodgers (1969), 241-54; Dover (1974), 220-3; Parker (1990), 252-4. For the debilitating anguish caused by a bad conscience, see especially *Andr*. 802 ff., Antiphon. 5. 93. Note, however, that Menelaus finds Orestes' answer obscure.

[95] Supporters of this thesis are Perrotta (1928), 90; Porter (1994), 300-1, Willink (1986), n. ad vv. 211-315, 259; Di Benedetto (1965), n. ad vv. 258-9.

[96] Cancrini (1970), 20-22 with references; Bosman (1993), 13 ff. Cf. also Willink (1986) n. *ad. loc,* who calls attention to the fact that neither the verb μεταγιγνώσκειν nor related words occur in this passage.

under the burden of remorse is untenable. Nevertheless, Orestes' ambiguous answer can still be advanced as evidence in support of the thesis that in the Euripidean play the hero's frenzy is not a god-sent disease but rather has an interior and subjective cause: for this passage indicates that it is his intellect, namely his renewed ability to look on his actions and situation with an objective eye, that makes him aware that he did dreadful things (σύνοιδα δείν' εἰργασμένος, 396) and causes his mental illness (διαφθαρὲν φρενῶν, 297) to break out.[97]

Euripides' new way of exploring the themes of madness and disease may be influenced by a new concept of the human subject developed thanks to advances in contemporary medical inquiry. As we have discussed in the Introduction, from the fifth century onwards the magico-religious view of physical and mental illness gradually fades away thanks to the reconceptualization of the body concept in medical writing.[98] Instead of being conceived as a realm of daemons, the physical body begins to be understood as an object of knowledge and the natural forces operating inside it, even though they retain some of the sinister and alien nature of the daemonic, are thought to be subject to human agency. Both the physician and the patient are thus believed to be able to control and manipulate these internal processes intentionally thanks to the τέχνη and to practices of self-care.

To quote Holmes' words, 'having incorporated much of an unseen world previously allied with the daemonic, the physical body becomes a site of inhuman otherness within the self.'[99] The Euripidean Orestes is

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[97] For an analysis of Orestes' madness, see Theodorou (1993), 32-46; Saïd (2013), 390-393.
[98] Holmes (2010).
[99] Holmes (2010), 275 ff.

precisely shown coping with his interior otherness. In the *Oresteia* the characters can claim that a daemonic agent is acting upon them and can objectify this alleged daemonic force as other. By contrast, Euripides' Orestes must acknowledge that this otherness is inside him, is part of his self and is potentially dangerous.

The Euripidean tragedy is characterized by the absence of the gods who, by contrast, are the major characters in the *Eumenides.* Why then are the gods absent for almost the whole plot and why does the status of the Erinyes continuously oscillate between subjective and objective? The reason might lie in the context of the play's performance: the *Orestes* was produced in 408 BC against the backdrop of political turmoil and intellectual ferment of late fifth-century Athens and can be read as engaging with contemporary political, cultural and intellectual issues.[100]

As I have discussed in the Introduction, advances in medical inquiry gradually removed divine agency from the explanation of disruptions to the integrity of the person. In addition to this, owing to the new revolutionary ideas formulated by the sophists, mythical and religious worldviews started being called into question.[101] In his treatment of the Orestes myth Euripides engages in the contemporary debate by presenting Agamemnon's son as a hero deprived of his own myth in an already secularized world.[102] It is the prolonged absence of the gods that

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[100] For a brief overview of Euripides' intellectual context, see Dunn (2016), 447- 67.

[101] Bosman (1993), 17.

[102] A famous passage in which it is possible to detect a sceptical attitude to myth is Electra's prologue where the heroine 'prefaces her accounts of family history with sceptical-sounding phrases such as "so they say" (Wright, 2008, 127). The scholar (*ivi*, 127-8) argues that the sophists' ideas about the disparity between language and reality are important to understand this technique used by the playwright to undermine the reality of myth. On the other hand, Wright (2016), 476-82, also warns against making the assumption that Euripides' sceptical attitude to myth is heterodox and innovative and

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casts doubt on the source of his past actions and on the reasons for the dreadful matricide he committed: for more than two thirds of the play the Erinyes and Apollo look like mere names which are used by mortals on stage to account for the dreadful matricide committed by Orestes and his subsequent frenzy. Divine justification seems to have become just an excuse.

As much as Orestes would like to make external attributions for his misbehaviour by shifting the blame on the Delphic god (*Or.* 417, 595-6), in the absence of Apollo even the existence of his oracle is called into question (*Or.* 1668-9). As a consequence, innovative frameworks for interpreting the decision-making process which led Orestes to perpetrate murder are introduced in the play. An action is not always a conscious act of will but can also be motivated by unconscious desires.[103] Before the fifth century the Greeks used to associate the realm of the unconscious and of emotions with daemonic agents: daemons were believed to act upon humans by taking control of the cavity inside the body, home to desires and impulses. In the Euripidean play, by contrast, Orestes, in the wake of the emergence of a new concept of the human subject thanks to advances in contemporary medical inquiry, is represented in the tragic moment when a terrible thought comes to his mind, which strikes him with a terrifying bloom of self-awareness: namely, the thought that the alien, unconscious, and inner force which prompted him to commit an awful crime is tragically part of his true self rather than coming from external divine entities. Once the murder of Clytaemnestra is decoupled from a

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points out that a certain scepticism towards myth is also present in the early Greek philosophical and poetic tradition: e.g. Stesichorus, *Palinode*; Pi. *O.* 1. 37; Xenoph. DK B 11. Cf. also Allan (2005), 71-82.
[103] Gill (1996), 6-8, 34-43.

supernatural necessity and from divine agents, this violent action makes Orestes aware of a part of himself which was earlier unknown to him; this awareness causes a crisis in the hero because the image that Orestes has of himself does not correspond to that of a matricide.[104]

It would be much easier and reassuring for the characters on stage to make sense of the events, if they could ascribe the matricide and Orestes' subsequent fits of madness to supernatural forces. However, the very fact that the Erinyes do not appear in person to pursue Orestes and to claim their rights gives rise to doubts: Orestes' frenzy, rather than being unleashed by external daemonic entities, might have simply been the result of the hero's dreadful awareness of being responsible for an unholy crime. This is the reason why the depiction of the Erinyes oscillates between creatures with an objective status and figments of the imagination. When the characters speak about the Erinyes in traditional terms, they seem to resort to a reference code, which is no longer valid, because they do not know which other way to turn. They show themselves to remain bound to the old mythical view in spite of the lack of any evidence of the existence of these spirits of vengeance and of any part played by them in causing Orestes' madness. Euripides' choice not to represent the goddesses on stage allows opposing interpretations of Orestes' frenzy to emerge and partly to overlap. In this way some of the most innovative ideas of Euripides' time about the human subject and about the role of the divine in human life are introduced in the Euripidean treatment of the Orestes myth.

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[104] Culler (1997), 110-22 discusses how the issue of agency is strictly interwoven with that of identity.

Just as the Erinyes do not appear on stage to defend the claims of Clytaemnestra, so Apollo does not show up to protect his protégée and to take a stand against the old goddesses of vengeance until the end of the play. What is more, there is not a *super partes* divine judge, like Athena in the *Eumenides*, appointed for settling the dispute between the Olympians and the older generations. The trial of Orestes, which in the Aeschylean tragedy symbolized a cosmic conflict, seems now to be reduced to a human matter concealing a struggle for power between rival factions (esp. *Or.* 427-447). Several critics have detected numerous parallels between the political situation of the Argos of the play and the political life of contemporary Athens, which became more and more characterized by intense factional antagonism after the Sicilian defeat.[105]

In 411 BC the Athenian democracy was overthrown by two oligarchic coups: the oligarchy known as the Four Hundred was after a few months replaced by the more moderate but equally short-lived regime of the Five Thousand. Even though the democracy was restored as early as 410 BC, an atmosphere of fear, diffidence and uncertainty pervaded Athens: trust in the stability of Athenian democracy was profoundly shaken by threats of internal discord and factionalism.[106] The

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[105] For a summary of all the allusions to contemporary events detected by critics, see Wright (2008), 102-3 with references. To give an example, Hall (1993), 267, has pointed out similarities between Orestes and Antiphon, the oligarchic extremist who took part in the uprisings of 411 BC and was later tried and executed. Wright (2008), 103, however, maintains that Euripides probably did not intend to make specific references to real-life personalities. As Pelling (2000), 164-66 argues, 'tragedy explores contemporary issues in a more timeless register: the nature of democracy rather than the deficiencies of Cleon. […] It is not a commentary on individuals, but it does shed light on the stereotypes of politicians. Of course the recent prominence of particular figures will have given force and relevance to the stereotypes; but categories they remain, not individuals.'

[106] Many of the leaders of the oligarchic party, such as Antiphon and Archeptolemus, were accused of treason and condemned to death: Th. 8. 96-8; Lys. 20. Cf. Wolff (1983), 340-56; Wright (2008), 102; Hall (1993), 265 ff.

Peloponnesian War and the recent political upheavals also contributed to a progressive erosion of faith in human institutions and in the creative potential of human initiative.

In the following sections, which are devoted to the role played by the Olympian deities in the *Eumenides* and in the *Orestes*, I will further analyse how Euripides shifts emphasis from the cosmic level to the human one in his treatment of the Orestes myth and how he represents the story of Agamemnon's son in terms of contemporary political conceptual codes. By studying how the physical presence or absence of Apollo and Athena affects the characters' attitudes and by comparing and contrasting the gods' different modes of intervention in the two plays chosen for analysis, I will discuss how the playwrights avail themselves of stagecraft techniques to articulate different and at times competing views about human nature, the gods, and socio-political problems.

3.4 Athena in the *Eumenides* and in the *Orestes*

Athena is a pivotal character in the *Eumenides* since she provides the executive agent who simultaneously presides over the trial of Orestes and over the founding of a real institution, the Areopagus, the supreme court of Athens.

From the beginning of the play, her presence is signalled by her old wooden image, upon which Orestes' rescue hinges.[107] Following Apollo's advice that Orestes should take refuge at Athena's ancient statue (80), the

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[107] For an analysis of the function of the old wooden image of Athena, see Taplin (1978), 84 ff.

hero hurries off to the image and clings to it (259) while the Erinyes surround him singing their binding chant (326). The physical contact between the hero and the statue of Athena is already sufficient to reassure Orestes of the goddess's protection, as is shown by an implicit stage direction:

Χορός
οὔτοι σ᾽ Ἀπόλλων οὐδ᾽ Ἀθηναίας σθένος
ῥύσαιτ᾽ ἂν ὥστε μὴ οὐ παρημελημένον
ἔρρειν, τὸ χαίρειν μὴ μαθόνθ᾽ ὅπου φρενῶν,
ἀναίματον βόσκημα δαιμόνων, σκιάν.
οὐδ᾽ ἀντιφωνεῖς, ἀλλ᾽ ἀποπτύεις λόγους,
ἐμοὶ τραφείς τε καὶ καθιερωμένος;
καὶ ζῶν με δαίσεις οὐδὲ πρὸς βωμῷ σφαγείς·
ὕμνον δ᾽ ἀκούσῃ τόνδε δέσμιον σέθεν.
(A. *Eu.* 299-306)

Chorus
Neither Apollo, nor the power of Athena, can save you from having to wander as a neglected outcast, never learning where in the mind happiness lies, preyed on by us spirits until he is bloodless, a mere shadow. Do you not even answer? Do you treat my words with contempt, when you have been reared for me and consecrated to me? You will make a feast for me while you still live, without being slain at any altar; you will now hear this song sung to bind you.

Orestes does not even bother to reply to the Erinyes' threat that Athena will not be able to save him (299ff). The implicit stage direction that he does not answer but spits the Erinyes' words back at them (οὐδ᾽ ἀντιφονεῖν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀποπτύεις λόγους, 303) signals that the actor has stopped speaking. This is the first remarkable silence of Orestes; the second time he chooses to remain silent he hands over to Apollo, who will speak in his defence in the trial (609 ff). Both silences have a dramatic significance since they express Orestes' absolute trust in divine help.[108] On

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[108] For an analysis of the function of silences in Greek tragedy, see Taplin (1972), 57-97 and (1978), 101-21.

the one hand, he is confident that it is not necessary for him to speak up for himself given that Apollo's defence speech will inevitably be much more convincing and effective than any speech Orestes himself could ever give. Likewise, it would be pointless to keep arguing with the Erinyes: it is much more advantageous for him to avoid confrontation and just wait for Athena's help.

Athena's support is later confirmed by the arrival of the goddess herself (397): her physical presence replaces the statue, which is from then onwards disregarded. Athena's entrance is an extraordinary event since this is the only place in all extant Greek plays where a deity grants a mortal's prayer to come to his aid (287-9) by appearing in person on stage.[109] The exceptional character of the goddess's appearance on stage indicates that what is at stake is not merely a case of domestic violence but rather a cosmic matter, which is inextricably intertwined with a gender conflict. Apollo, as representative of male interests and patriarchal ideology, comes to Orestes' aid to defend him against the wrath of the Erinyes, who, by contrast, champion the cause of women. Athena comes into play by assuming the difficult role of mediator between younger and older divinities, and between the male and the female. In mediating between the conflicting claims to justice of the two parties, Athena also serves another important purpose: she oversees and divinely sanctions the delicate passage from the primitive law of personal vendetta to institutionalized restitution.

As opposed to the *Eumenides*, in the *Orestes* Athena is remarkably absent: she does not appear on stage nor is she invoked by the characters.

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[109] Taplin (1977), *ad loc.* For a discussion of the staging of Athena's entrance, see *ibidem*.

What is the significance of her absence? It is an indication that the time in which the story takes place is different from the Aeschylean precedent. In the *Eumenides* Athena sets up the first courtroom trial; the *Orestes*, by contrast, seems to be set in a civilized context where the law of the courts is an already well-established practice, whereas personal blood-revenge is condemned as an illegal act.[110] This is evident from the episode of the encounter between Orestes and Tyndareus.[111] The Spartan king argues that the ancestors established a legal practice in cases of murder: instead of being killed in turn, the murderer must be banished (499 ff). It follows that Orestes is guilty of breaking the common law of the Greeks (τὸν κοινὸν Ἑλλήνων νόμον, 495). He chose the primitive personal vendetta over the legal action that he should have followed; as a consequence, he must be punished for his transgression.

Tyndareus' speech is anachronistic given that, according to the myth of Orestes, the legal action taken against Agamemnon's son is the first trial for murder, that is, the new alternative to the *lex talionis*.[112] The function of this anachronism, as well as of the absence of the gods, is to redirect attention from the cosmic level to the merely human one: as I will discuss in further detail in the following section, emphasis is laid on human responsibility, whereas Apollo and the Erinyes are gradually removed from the account of Clytaemnestra's murder. Thanks to this shift in focus, the play raises questions about the efficacy of human justice and

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[110] In this regard, it is worth pointing out that it is not clear from the text whether the two siblings are on trial in front of an assembly or in front of a court of law. It first seems to be the same court as the one established in earlier times to judge the case of Danaus and his daughters (871-3) but is then described in language that recalls the procedures of the Athenian ἐκκλησία (46, 612, 885): see Pelling (2000), 165. For a discussion of assembly trials in the fifth century, see Naiden (2010), 61-76.

[111] Conacher (1967), 218 ff.

[112] Wolff (1983), 351.

invites the audience to reflect on changing religious beliefs and worldviews. As previously mentioned, the advent of law, which stresses the importance of intention in assessing criminal action, marked the emergence of the individual as a subject with a personal responsibility. The continuous oscillation between internal and external causality in the tragic representation of violent acts is thus likely to reflect the gradual evolution of the concepts of error and crime in ancient Greece.

In the *Eumenides* the very fact that Apollo comes in person to defend his protégée signals that the matricide is not a purely human action but is rather part of a broader divine plan. A part of the responsibility for the matricide is thus cast off from the shoulders of the human agent: Orestes, who acted upon the command of Apollo, is finally acquitted. However, it is worth pointing out that it is thanks to the vote of the goddess Athena that Orestes is absolved, whereas from the point of view of the human jury he is not fully exculpated. The ending of the *Oresteia* is not completely reassuring. Orestes' guilt remains unresolved: the hero's acquittal does not prove Apollo right since he is acquitted on an exceptional basis only.[113] Were it not for Athena's vote, the jurors would have remained in deadlock.

It has been pointed out that the resolution of the *Oresteia* is undermined not only by the ambivalence of the human voting but also by the gender ambivalence of Athena, the goddess who breaks the tie: she was born from the male only and supports the male, but she is also a virgin who rejects the role of wife and mother imposed by patriarchal

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[113] Harris - Leão – Rhodes (2010), 53. For an analysis of the anxieties that emerge from the description of Orestes' trial in the *Eumenides*, see Pelling (2000), 167-77.

society on women.[114] Yet it could also be argued that the tied vote and the lack of one-sidedness in the gender of the deity whose vote breaks the impasse are the necessary conditions for the peaceful integration of the ancient goddesses of vengeance since this means that they have not been defeated.[115] As a consequence, they are more willing to accept the reconfiguration of their functions, which asserts the supremacy of the male over the female by putting the marital bond before the mother-child relationship: previously allied with γένος (that is, blood kinship), the Erinyes in their new role as Eumenides become the protectors of οἶκος, the guardians of marriage and childbirth.[116]

The very fact that Athena's vote is represented as essential raises questions about human ability to deal with complex cases without the help of the gods: can human justice really resolve the problem of Orestes' responsibility? Might we not argue that it is in a sense positive, within the world of the play, that the human jurors need Athena's vote to reach a verdict of acquittal? In this way the responsibility for acquitting the matricide does not ultimately lie with the human jurors but rather with a goddess, who intervenes in the trial with the main aim of solving a cosmic and gender conflict by reconciling the Erinyes to Zeus. The human jurors' indecisiveness might thus indicate that a change in the understanding of crime is already in progress: the *Oresteia* is set at the turning point from the ancient religious conception of crime to the new concept endorsed by

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[114] Goldhill (1986), 30-1, 40 ff. Surprising similarities have been detected by the scholar between the virgin deity and Clytaemnestra: both transgress the boundaries of sexual definition and make use of the power of rhetoric to reach their goals.
[115] Seaford (2011), 216. Cf. A. *Eu.* 795-6, 824-5.
[116] Foley (1981), 157; Zeitlin (1996), 97-8.

law courts, according to which committing a criminal act is a personal choice.[117]

The lack of closure in the ending of the *Eumenides* opens up a space for further exploration of the topics of human responsibility and human justice in the *Orestes*, where the issue of the reconceptualization of crime features prominently. The basic storyline of the Orestes myth remains the same: at the very end of the play, Apollo appears on stage to take responsibility for the matricide and to predict that Orestes will be fully acquitted in a second trial. Yet the delayed entrance of Apollo, together with the absence of the gods from the first trial of Orestes, allows different causal explanations for the matricide to emerge. For almost the whole play Orestes' case is represented as a merely human matter, which is to be judged by a jury composed entirely of humans. Reaching a fair verdict is now the responsibility of the human jurors alone. Yet does the system of trial by jury actually work? Are men able to deal with difficult situations relying on their strengths, skills and code of justice only, without divine help? I will try to answer these questions in the remaining part of this chapter by comparing and contrasting Apollo's various modes of intervention in the *Eumenides* and in the *Orestes.*

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[117] Vernant – Vidal-Naquet (1988), 81.

3.5 Apollo in the *Eumenides* and in the *Orestes*

3.5.1 Human Hope of Divine Assistance: an Analysis of the Various Dramatic Techniques used in the *Eumenides* and in the *Orestes* to raise and frustrate expectations of Apollo's arrival respectively.

In the *Oresteia* the playwright brings Apollo in as a character only in the last play of the trilogy. Yet several dramatic techniques are used to build anticipation and prepare the audience for the major role played by the god in the *Eumenides* and for his physical appearance on stage.

First of all, in the *Choephorae* Orestes and Electra often invoke the gods asking them to look graciously upon them (ἐποπτεύω), to be observers of the events.[118] The idea conveyed is that there is a divine presence watching over despite being invisible to the human eye. The most significant invocation is the one addressed to Helios: after killing his mother and Aegisthus, Orestes invites the Sun to look at the net used by Clytemnestra to kill Agamemnon 'so that I may have a witness in justice (μάρτυς ἐν δίκῃ) one day that I pursued this death justly' (987-8). Helios, due to his daily transit from East to West across the sky, is regularly invoked to act as witness of oaths, but his invocation at this point of the trilogy acquires a special significance given that the Sun is sometimes identified with Apollo.[119] This passage may be seen as hinting at the events staged in the *Eumenides*: Orestes' request that Helios be his witness might prefigure the similar role assumed by Apollo in the upcoming murder

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[118] A. *Ch.* 1 (Hermes), 126 (spirits beneath the earth that keep watch over the house: ἐπισκόπους), 246-7 (Zeus), 489 (the spirit of Agamemnon), 583 (Hermes), 985 (Helios), 1064 (a god).

[119] Appeals to Helios as witness: Hom. *Il.* 3. 277; A. *Pr.* 91; A. *A.* 632 ff. Identification of Helios with Apollo: Orph. Fr. 113, 172, 297.10 Kern; Empedocles and Parmenides (28 A20, 31 A 23 D-K). See Garvie (1986), *ad loc.*

trial of Orestes in Athens. This passage can thus be interpreted as an anticipation of Apollo's appearance on stage as a character in the last play of the trilogy.

In the *Eumenides* Apollo comes in person to Orestes' aid and takes a stand in favour of his protégé. In the previous tragedy Orestes more than once mentions the Delphic oracle and expresses the belief that Apollo's benevolence and support are secured through his obedience to the god's command: if he fulfils the divine will, the oracle of Loxias will not betray him (οὔτοι προδώσει, 269).[120] By contrast, if Orestes disregards the gods' words, he will pay with his own life (276 ff). The idea underlying his speech is that, even though his obedience to Apollo's command inevitably provokes the furious reaction of the Furies of the mother, Loxias' anger would be a much greater evil. The same thought is repeated by Pylades when Orestes has a moment's hesitation before killing Clytaemnestra: he asks his friend not to scorn the Pythian oracle and to think of all men as his enemies rather than the gods (900-2). Apollo is thus described as the most dangerous enemy to be avoided at all costs.[121] On the other hand, if he does not become an enemy, he is depicted as the most reliable friend. Apollo himself in the *Eumenides* confirms Orestes' hopes by reassuring him that he will not betray his protégé (*Eu.* 64 οὔτοι προδώσω, cf. *Cho.* 269), not even if he has to put his shrine at risk of pollution by welcoming a polluted man (*Eu.* 169-70) or if he has to go against the ancient laws of the gods established by the Moirai (παρὰ νόμον θεῶν, 171). Apollo honours Orestes (τίων, 171) because he is his suppliant, albeit a murderer. For this reason the matricide has confidence in divine support.

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[120] A. *Ch.* 259 ff; 558-9, 1026-33.
[121] Wohl (2012), 247.

This is made clear by the staging of the murder tableaux in the *Choephorae* (973 ff) which resembles, with a significant difference, that of the previous murder tableaux at the end of the *Agamemnon* (1372 ff).[122] In both tragedies the murderer stands over two corpses (Agamemnon and Cassandra, and Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus respectively), which are revealed either inside or outside the palace.[123] Yet, whereas Clytaemnestra merely prides herself on the act of vengeance she has accomplished, Orestes makes sure that the matricide is presented as an action dictated by Apollo: he ostentatiously shows the wreathed and leafy branch of the suppliant (1034-5),[124] which he holds together with the murder weapon (the sword, *Cho.* 42), and expresses his firm belief that what the Pythian oracle promised him will come true: he will be without the evil of blame for the matricide given that he committed such a dreadful crime in compliance with the divine command (1030-1). This is a clear indication that Apollo gave him some assurance of security: his promise foreshadows the more concrete help the god will give Orestes during the trial by coming in person to his aid.

However, the trial is not the first occasion when the god and the mortal are brought face to face. Another episode, which does not take place onstage, preceded and anticipated this encounter between Loxias and his devotee: that is, Orestes' purification by the liberating touch of Apollo. At the end of the *Choephorae* the chorus predicts that the liberating touch of Loxias (προσθιγών, 1059) will purify him and will set him free from the torments of the Erinyes. By the time Orestes arrives in Athens,

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[122] Taplin (1978), 122-7.

[123] Either the ἐκκύκλημα is used to show the bodies inside the palace or they are brought on by mute extras: Taplin (1977), *ad loc.*

[124] His insistent request to look at him (καὶ νῦν ὁρᾶτέ μ', 1034) is worth noting.

the pollution of the matricide has been washed off at the hearth of Delphi, as the hero himself declares: 'The blood-pollution was, when fresh, expelled back at the sacred hearth/ of Lord Apollo by purifying with a sacrificial pig' (*Eu.* 282-3, cf. 445-52). This is evidence of a previous contact between Orestes and the deity, even though it is not possible to find in the text (cf. especially *Eu.* 64-93) any stage direction or sign indicating that Orestes' purification by Apollo was performed on stage.

Despite this lack of textual evidence, there are two South-Italian vase-paintings depicting Apollo with a piglet, Orestes as a refugee in Delphi and the Erinyes.[125] In particular, an Apulian bell-krater, which is attributed to the Eumenides Painter, is believed to interact with Aeschylus' *Eumenides* quite closely, even though it is not a mere duplication of the play.[126] The images represented on the vase are: two Erinyes sleeping in a sitting position, picture that fits *Eu.* 46-7 (λόχος/ εὕδει γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἥμενος); a veiled female figure touching the deities asleep, who can be identified with the Aeschylean ghost of Clytaemnestra trying to arouse the deities of vengeance from their sleep (*Eu.* 94-139); a half-awake Erinys, who recalls *Eu.* 140-54.

Since the scene of Orestes' purification was most probably not represented on stage at the play's first performance, its depiction on this vase-painting can be explained in two ways. It is possible to conjecture that the iconographic tradition of Apollo's protection of Orestes sporadically added a purification scene drawing inspiration from *Eu.* 282-8: as Taplin shows, 'the vases are not […] "banal illustrations", nor are

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[125] See references in Taplin (2007), 62 and notes 43, 45 p. 275.
[126] Apulian bell-krater, the Eumenides Painter: Paris, Musée de Louvre K 710. Cf. Taplin (2007), 62-4.

they dependent on or derived from the plays. They are *informed by* the plays; they mean more, and have more interest and depth, for someone who knows the play in question.'[127] Or, more interestingly, we might consider this Apulian bell-krater as a document testifying to Aeschylean tragedy's reception in the fourth century: it might offer us an insight into the play's afterlife on stage and on its performative revision. As Lada-Richards argues, it would be a mistake 'to assume that theatrical performance is entirely contained by (and recoverable through) a text';[128] on the contrary, 'a play-text can be paradigmatically unstable, drifting and shifting in response to the exigencies and fortunes of theatrical production'.[129] This vase-painting might thus be an indication that later Greek audiences considered the purification by Apollo a crucial event in the narrative of the *Choephorae.*

Although the first production of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is likely not to have included the staging of Orestes' ritual purification, the dramatic techniques hinting at Apollo's protection, which I have so far described, are used to build suspense and anticipation of what is to come by implanting questions in the mind of the spectators. How will Apollo prove his support for Orestes? Will he himself purify Orestes from the pollution of the matricide? What part will he play in the trial of the murderer? All these questions must have created dramatic tension and high expectations for Apollo's role in the last play of the trilogy. The dramatic technique of anticipation and the staging of the second murder tableaux must also have made the audience as confident as Orestes that Apollo was about to come

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[127] Taplin (2007), 25. For an evaluation of Taplin's thesis that 'those viewing the Western Greek mythological vases with tragedy in mind "enrich" them' [Lada-Richards (2009), 104], see the review of Taplin's book written by Lada-Richards (2009), 99-166.
[128] Lada-Richards (2009), 126.
[129] Lada-Richards (2009), 126.

in person to protect and rescue his devotee: when Apollo finally appears as a witness in the trial of Orestes, the god testifies that he himself was Orestes' purifier from bloodshed (Eu. 578: φόνου δὲ τῷδ' ἐγὼ καθάρσιος) and declares his intention to act as his advocate (ξυνδικήσων, 579).

As opposed to the *Eumenides*, an atmosphere of utter discouragement, doubt and distrust pervades Euripides' *Orestes*. The hero, tormented by fits of madness, feels abandoned (ἔρημος, 306) by Apollo. Euripides replaces the promise not to give his devotee up that the god made in the Aeschylean version (*Eu.* 64) with Electra's declaration that she will not let go of her brother (264). Human loyalty and comforting presence thus replace divine help. Orestes does not desist from invoking Apollo (260), but significantly he blames the god for persuading him to commit a dreadful crime encouraging him with words but not in deed (τοῖς μὲν λόγοις ηὔφρανε, τοῖς δ' ἔργοισιν οὔ, 287).[130]

Orestes demands action from Phoebus but, as opposed to the *Oresteia* where Apollo provides evidence of his intention to give his protégé concrete help, in the Euripidean version two implicit stage directions indicate that there has been no contact between the two and no tangible sign of the god's support for Orestes.

At vv. 39-42 Electra says that it has been six days since Orestes has killed his mother and since he has eaten or washed himself (οὐ λούτρῳ ἔδωκε χρωτί, 42). Later Menelaus asks Orestes: 'Have not you cleansed your hands of bloodshed, according to custom?' (429). From Electra's

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[130] Cf. E. *Or.* 29 where Electra asserts that Apollo persuaded (πείθει) her brother to kill their mother.

assertion and from Menelaus' negative question we are informed that Orestes has not been purified yet: the blood of his mother is probably still visible on his hands. Orestes' reply to Menelaus' question is also meaningful: 'No, for wherever I go, the door is shut against me' (430). His utterance implies that, as opposed to the Aeschylean Orestes, he did not benefit from physical purification through a formal rite performed at Delphi by Apollo. The only option left for him is to recur to a human purifier, namely, whoever is willing to welcome the polluted man as a guest at his/her hearth.[131] Yet nobody has so far dared to welcome him since the city of Argos has decreed that no one can shelter the matricide (59 ff).

The two siblings thus become the rejects of society, and can only rely upon each other. Apollo's intervention is their last hope of salvation. At the beginning of the play Orestes still clings to the belief that the god will keep his word: struck with madness, he demands to be given 'the horn-tipped bow, Apollo's gift, the weapon he told me would drive the goddesses away if they tried to terrorize me with their ravings' (268-70). Many scholars have pointed out that this passage contains a reference to two earlier versions of the same myth: in Stesichorus' *Oresteia* the god actually gives Orestes a bow for this purpose, whereas in the *Eumenides* it is Phoebus who uses the bow to ward off the Erinyes.[132] In both these versions the bow stands for Apollo's concrete help and protection. By contrast, in the *Orestes* it is not clear whether the bow is a real prop or whether it is illusory.[133] If the bow were purely imaginary,[134] Apollo's

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[131] Hartigan (1991), 127-56.

[132] West (1987), *ad loc* with references.

[133] For a summary of the known evidence and principal positions taken by scholars on this issue, see Hartigan (1987), n. 26, p. 134; Greenberg (1962), 164.

support would also look like an empty promise, mere words that do not match deeds. The representation on stage of the hero shooting arrows at visionary goddesses would thus be a powerful illustration not only of Orestes' derangement but also of his despair and loneliness caused by his frustrated hopes. Apollo has still not shown evidence of his intention to come to Orestes' aid given that he has not come either to purify him or to give him the divine bow, that is, a concrete material instrument of self-defence. By contrast, if the bow were real, it would mark the uselessness of this material object in Orestes' fight against forces that are no longer real goddesses and cannot therefore be driven away simply with physical threats.[135]

In both cases the problem is the missed presence of the god. Orestes finds himself coping on his own with the matricide's terrible effects on his mental state. It would be much easier for Orestes to shift the blame for his fits of madness on real goddesses with specific claims and specific reasons for wanting to punish him. For against their claims he could counterpose his obedience to Apollo's command: he could thus delegate his defence to the god and could reassuringly depict the problem of how to judge his criminal act as a matter of competing claims between two generations of gods and two different conceptions of justice. This is the reason why he is reluctant to give up on Apollo: he wearily repeats the trite saying that playing for time (μέλλει, 420) is a typically divine habit. In the *Oresteia* the maxim about the gods' tendency to temporise is used by Orestes to demonstrate the righteousness of the crime he is about to commit: the divine punishment of Clytaemnestra has been delayed, but it will come in

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[134] Di Benedetto (1965), *ad loc*; Willink (1986), *ad loc*; West (1987), *ad loc*.
[135] Zeitlin (1980), 54-5.

the end thanks to Orestes, who serves as the human instrument of divine will (*Cho.* 382-5).[136] By contrast, in the Euripidean play Orestes' confidence that Apollo will soon intervene alongside him is progressively eroded to the point that the mortal hero contemptuously defines Apollo's delay as mere inaction (ἀπραξία, 426).[137] Divine agency, which is traditionally depicted as slow but sure, becomes, in the eyes of Orestes, absence of action, namely a useless mode of intervention.

Orestes' downheartedness results from the very fact that his urgent need to find an external justification for the matricide and for the resulting madness has so far been frustrated by the huge disparity between the long-delayed intervention of Apollo and the speed with which he has been tormented by the Erinyes (423), that is, by his own mental tribulations springing from the consciousness of having committed an awful crime.[138]

It can be argued that Orestes is feeling an uncomfortable inner tension, which comes from holding two conflicting thoughts in the mind at the same time. On the one hand, Orestes' self-image conforms to that of a righteous young man who justly takes charge of avenging his father. On the other hand, what he did to carry out his vengeance upon the killer of Agamemnon, is a hateful (ἐχθίστων, 160), monstrous (ἀπόφονον, 165, 192) and most unholy (ἀνοσιώτατον, 286) deed.[139] Whenever men do something that causes this sort of uncomfortable inner tension, it is a characteristic of their human nature to justify it by making, for instance,

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[136] Cf. A. *Ch.* 936, 1009: the longer the punishment is postponed the harsher it will be.
[137] Cf. E. *Or.* 794.
[138] Apollo's slowness (βραδύς, 422) is also in contrast to the promptness of Orestes, who was swift (ταχὺν, 422) to obey Apollo's command.
[139] Cf. also E. *Or.* 29-30; 194.

external attributions. This is precisely what Orestes tries to do in the dialogue with Menelaus after the murder:

> **Μενέλαος**
> οὐ δεινὰ πάσχειν δεινὰ τοὺς εἰργασμένους.
> **Ὀρέστης**
> ἀλλ᾿ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἀναφορὰ τῆς ξυμφορᾶς.
> **Μενέλαος**
> μὴ θάνατον εἴπῃς· τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ οὐ σοφόν.
> **Ὀρέστης**
> Φοῖβος, κελεύσας μητρὸς ἐκπρᾶξαι φόνον.
> **Μενέλαος**
> ἀμαθέστερός γ᾿ ὢν τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ τῆς δίκης.
> **Ὀρέστης**
> δουλεύομεν θεοῖς, ὅτι ποτ᾿ εἰσὶν οἱ θεοί.
> **Μενέλαος**
> κᾆτ᾿ οὐκ ἀμύνει Λοξίας τοῖς σοῖς κακοῖς;
> **Ὀρέστης**
> μέλλει· τὸ θεῖον δ᾿ ἐστὶ τοιοῦτον φύσει.
> (E. *Or.* 414-20)

> **Menelaus**
> *It is not strange, if those who have done dreadful things should suffer them.*
> **Orestes**
> *But I have a way to recover from these troubles.*
> **Menelaus**
> *Do not speak of death; that is not wise.*
> **Orestes**
> *It is Phoebus, who commanded me to kill my mother.*
> **Menelaus**
> *Showing a strange ignorance of what is fair and right.*
> **Orestes**
> *We are slaves to the gods, whatever those gods are.*
> **Menelaus**
> *And does Loxias not help your affliction?*
> **Orestes**
> *He will in time; this is the nature of gods.*

Orestes interestingly believes that blaming the matricide on something outside him is the way to recover from the pain (ἀναφορὰ τῆς συμφορᾶς, 414) resulting from the awareness of being the killer of his mother (392). He thus attributes his deed to Apollo who ordered (κελεύσας, 416) him to commit the murder. Orestes' description of the Delphic oracle as a command modifies his earlier version of the event: when Orestes accuses the god of putting him up (ἐπάρας, 286) to an abominable crime, he uses the verb 'to gladden/ to cheer somebody up' (εὐφραίνω, 287), which clearly implies that Orestes is eager to kill his mother.[140] Similarly, in Electra's account the assertiveness of the Pythian oracle is underplayed: the god did not order but rather 'persuaded' (πείθει, 29) her brother to kill Clytaemnestra. Orestes' modified report of Apollo's oracle aims to reduce his responsibility by finding an external justification. Yet Menelaus points out that, if Orestes' account is truthful, Apollo should show some support for him. Apollo's prolonged absence is therefore highly problematic.

Whereas the *Oresteia* sticks to the traditional version of the Orestes myth, which grounds Orestes' criminal act in a divine directive, the *Orestes*, or at least the first part of it, challenges the old mythical and religious view. Even though the characters on stage would love to maintain the long-standing beliefs, doubts insinuate themselves into the minds of the characters, who start calling their own myth into question. As opposed to the *Oresteia*, which gradually raises hopes for Apollo's arrival, the plot of the *Orestes* is constructed so as to give the impression that any hope in Apollo's intervention is in vain. In the absence of the god, Orestes' belief in a religious grounding for the matricide crumbles:

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[140] Theodorou (1993), 39.

καίτοι μ᾿ ἐσήει δεῖμα, μή τινος κλύων
ἀλαστόρων δόξαιμι σὴν κλύειν ὄπα.
(E. *Or.* 1668-9)

Yet at the time I was worried that I heard the voice of some avenging spirit and thought I was hearing yours.

Doubting that he actually heard the voice of Loxias, Orestes goes so far as to question the existence of the oracle.[141]

3.5.2 Apollo's Role in the Trial of Orestes: the *Eumenides* and the *Orestes* Compared

Apollo's apparent absence and missed intervention in the Euripidean play deprive Orestes of his main point of reference. If there are no gods to appeal to, how can men cope with the consequences of their actions? In an increasingly secularized world, can men rely on human institutions, such as the family or the court? I will try to answer these questions by analysing an episode of the *Orestes* in which, in comparison to a similar scene in the *Oresteia*, the absence of the gods is especially glaring: that is, the trial of Orestes.

I have already touched upon the significance of Orestes' silences in the *Eumenides.* The hero twice refrains from speaking: the first time when he is surrounded by the Erinyes (299ff); the second, during the trial when he gives the floor to Apollo asking him to set out on his behalf whether he killed his mother justly or not (609-10). It has been argued that the *Eumenides* illustrates a progressive diminishment of human stature and initiative.[142] This belief appears to be supported by the fact that the process

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[141] For a review of the different interpretations of Orestes' utterance, see Porter (1994), 280-9.

[142] Porter (2005), 305.

leading to the final resolution is conducted entirely by the gods, with the consequence that Orestes seems to be merely a pawn in a divine game.[143] A serious weakness with this argument, however, is that it fails to take into account that Apollo, despite coming to Orestes' aid in person, is not able to save his protégé:

> Ἀπόλλων
> οὔτοι προδώσω· διὰ τέλους δέ σοι φύλαξ
> 65 ἐγγὺς παρεστὼς καὶ πρόσωθ᾽ ἀποστατῶν
> ἐχθροῖσι τοῖς σοῖς οὐ γενήσομαι πέπων.
> [...]
> ὅμως δὲ φεῦγε, μηδὲ μαλθακὸς γένῃ·
> 75 ἐλῶσι γάρ σε καὶ δι᾽ ἠπείρου μακρᾶς
> βιβῶντ᾽ ἀν᾽ αἰεὶ τὴν πλανοστιβῆ χθόνα
> ὑπέρ τε πόντον καὶ περιρρύτας πόλεις.
> καὶ μὴ πρόκαμνε τόνδε βουκολούμενος
> πόνον· μολὼν δὲ Παλλάδος ποτὶ πτόλιν
> 80 ἵζου παλαιὸν ἄγκαθεν λαβὼν βρέτας.
> κἀκεῖ δικαστὰς τῶνδε καὶ θελκτηρίους
> μύθους ἔχοντες μηχανὰς εὑρήσομεν,
> ὥστ᾽ ἐς τὸ πᾶν σε τῶνδ᾽ ἀπαλλάξαι πόνων·
> καὶ γὰρ κτανεῖν σ᾽ ἔπεισα μητρῷον δέμας.

> *I will not betray you: I will be your guardian to the end, whether standing close to you or a long way off, and I will not be soft towards your enemies. [...] Nevertheless, you must flee, and not weaken; for they will drive you right through the length of the mainland, as you go ever forward over the land you tread in your wanderings, and over the water to sea-girt cities. And do not let these labours weigh on your mind to give up the struggle, until you come to the city of Pallas and sit clasping her ancient image in your arms. There we will have judges to judge these matters, and words that will charm, and we will find means to release you from this misery for good and all – for it was I who induced you to kill the woman who was your mother.*

The god promises to be there for Orestes. Nonetheless, Orestes must flee to Athens: to be completely released from his labours, he must

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[143] Porter (2005), *ibidem.*

be judged by human judges. This is an important detail which puts emphasis on the key role played by human agency in Orestes' acquittal and in the process of his reintegration into society.[144] It is true that the hero is ultimately acquitted thanks to Athena's vote and that he himself gives the gods full credit for his salvation (754-61), but still his deliverance would not have been possible if a human trial had not taken place. It follows that the role of human agency is far from underplayed. The tie in the votes of the human jurors and the need for Athena's intervention simply stress the difficulty of Orestes' case, besides serving as the aetiology of the Athenian practice of taking equal votes to mean acquittal (741).[145] To sum up, the divine intervention of Apollo is not sufficient to solve Orestes' problem: for it is up to the human world to welcome back and reintegrate one of its citizens. Nonetheless, Apollo never abandons Orestes to his fate: Orestes' silences are not meant to depict the hero as a pawn lacking initiative but are rather positive indications of his confident trust in divine help. This is further confirmed by the comparison between Orestes' silence in the trial in the *Eumenides* and his behaviour in the *Orestes* by Euripides.

Whereas the Aeschylean Orestes can confidently abandon himself to Apollo, in the Euripidean play he must defend himself in person. Due to the absence of the god, he is forced to speak up for himself but, significantly, his defence speeches turn out to be mere unbridled and

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[144] For a discussion of Apollo's inability to save Orestes, see Taplin (1977) on v. 93; Bierl (1994), 81-96; Johnston (2009), 219-28. Johnston (224) points out that during the trial 'the skills used by Apollo to save Orestes are not those of a god delivering an oracle but rather those of a fifth-century citizen speaking in public assembly about an oracle.' The episode of the trial thus shows how Apollo's oracular speech is displaced by civic speech.

[145] For the debate on whether Athena's vote produces or breaks the tie, see Winnington-Ingram (1983); Seaford (2011).

ineffective talk.[146] Orestes seems to lack both the skills and knowledge adequately to prepare his defence. Firstly, in the ἀγών with Tyndareus he puts forward the same physiological argument adduced by Apollo in the *Eumenides*: the father alone is the begetter, whereas the mother is only a nurse (*Or.* 552-56 ~ *Eu.* 657-66). Already in the Aeschylean play this argument does not carry the day since it only persuades half the jury.[147] Nonetheless, Apollo's view is endorsed by Athena, the goddess born from the male head of Zeus. By contrast, in the Euripidean play it is as if the physiological argument, uttered by a mortal and lacking divine validation, was further deprived of its strength and effectiveness.[148] In the absence of the gods, Orestes' case can no longer be framed as part of a cosmic conflict; by contrast, it must be judged on a legal and exclusively human basis, as Tyndareus' speech suggests (491-541).

The other arguments put forward by Orestes during the dialogue with Tyndareus are an example of rhetorical exaggeration and sophistic argumentation, which is bound to fail.[149] He first claims that his actions

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[146] Dunn (1996), 161-9 discusses the movement in the play from silence to unbridled speech. Cf. also Hartigan (1991), 127 ff; Barker (2011), 145-55.

[147] The dream that the male alone can give birth to a child is a recurrent motif in Greek myth, as is shown by the myth of autochthony (Loraux 1993; Saxonhouse 1986, 258) and by the births of Athena from the head of Zeus, of Dionysus from Zeus' thigh and of Aphrodite from the sea foam produced by Uranus' genitals. The belief in the primary procreative function of the male sperm over the secondary role of the female womb as mere receptacle finds its most famous formulation in Aristotle's *De Generatione Animalium* 1. 20. 729a, 2.4.738 b (cf. also Anaxag. DK A 107). There are, however, alternative voices in ancient Greek thought which challenged the denial of physiological motherhood: Presocratic philosophers, like Democritus, Alcmaeon and Empedocles (cf. Arist. *GA.* 722 b6ff and 764 a6ff), and Hippocratic medical treatises of the fifth and fourth centuries (*On the Seed, On the Nature of the Child, On Diseases IV*) support the view that both men and women provide seed and thus play an equal role in reproduction: see Lloyd (1983), 86-8, 94-105 with references.

[148] Di Benedetto (1965), *ad loc*; Willink (1986), *ad loc*; Medda (2001), *ad loc.*

[149] Willink (1986) on 595-9; Hartigan (1991), 127-40. For analysis of the rhetorical techniques used by Orestes in his defence speech, see Wright (2008), 130-3: to give an example, Orestes makes use of the argument from ἦθος when he criticizes the moral

make him Greece's benefactor since, by stopping the unchaste and brazen behaviour of his mother, he prevented her from setting a bad example for other women (564 ff). He then even suggests that the Argives should consider the god himself as 'impious' (ἀνόσιον, 595) and 'guilty' (ἥμαρτ', 596) and, consequently, should put him to death (595).

The former argument is used again by Orestes in his speech in front of the jury (*Or*. 931-42), whereas Apollo's command is never mentioned again as part of his defence during the trial. Why does he not take advantage of the most convincing argument to prove that he acted piously, that is, in accordance with Apollo's command? On the one hand, it might indicate Orestes' disheartenment: he has now lost all hope in the god's arrival and is well aware that this argument will lose credibility if Loxias himself does not come to corroborate it. On the other hand, Orestes' neglect of his only valid defence might have something to do with the change in worldview coming about in Euripides' times: whereas in the archaic age divine causality is the standard way to explain human and natural events, in the classical age it starts losing ground to other forms of rational explanation.[150]

The Presocratics already sought to explain the world and natural phenomena in abstract and rational terms by ascribing the gods' traditional powers to nature, and Hippocratic writers rebutted divine explanations for diseases[151] The scope of the search for non-supernatural

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character of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus (557-63, 573-8), of the rhetorical device of ἀντικατηγορία ('countercharge') when he blames Tyndareus (585) and Apollo (591), and of many rhetorical questions (ὑποφορά) at vv. 551, 581-4, 596-9.

[150] Whitmarsh (2015), 75-86.

[151] To give an example, Anaximander proposed a natural explanation for phenomena, like thunder and lightning, which had been previously ascribed to divine agency: according to Anaximander, thunder and lightning are caused by compressed air, which is enclosed

explanations gradually broadened to include not only natural phenomena and the disruption of normal bodily functions but also human moral agency and political history.[152] Whitmarsh, in his book on atheism in the ancient world, analyses the paradoxical defence of Helen's actions written by the sophist Gorgias in the 420s: the scholar points out that the *Encomium to Helen*, which is legalistic in form, is defined as 'a little game' by the author himself at the end of the work. 'The joke is' – Whitmarsh comments – 'that if you start diminishing the significance of personal responsibility by invoking external forces like gods, then the door is opened for all sorts of moral exculpations.'[153]

This is in line with the new concept of personal culpability developed thanks to the advent of law, as mentioned earlier in this chapter: in Athenian legal speeches emphasis is laid on the human agents' responsibility for their actions, whereas religious argumentation is almost completely limited to the description of the orators' clients as pious people and of their opponents as impious or polluted criminals.[154] Echoes of this new understanding of human agency and responsibility can be found in Greek literature as well: those who try to shift the blame for their criminal actions on the gods, especially when they are defending themselves in front of a jury in a law court, are often criticized and mocked by ancient

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in clouds and which bursts out violently and suddenly (Anaximand. DK 12 A 23). For a full account of the theories of the Presocratics and of the Hippocratic writings (especially *On the Sacred Disease* and *On Airs, Waters, and Places*), see Lloyd (1979), esp. 15-29, 32-49; Lloyd (1987), 11-29.

[152] Whitmarsh (2015), 77. As far as political history is concerned, Whitmarsh mentions the example of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which, according to the scholar, is 'the culmination of the fifth-century tendency toward the exclusion of divine explanation' (*ivi*, 86).

[153] Whitmarsh (2015), 76.

[154] Whitmarsh (2015), 77 and n. 3 with references.

Greek authors, such as Euripides, Aristophanes, and Plato.[155] Therefore, Orestes might avoid mentioning Apollo's command in his defence speech at the trial because that argument may sound like a mere excuse.

In conclusion, it is possible to argue that the *Orestes*, or at least the first two-thirds of the play, illustrates this change of perspective in assessing criminal acts and explores its consequences by raising the question of whether, in the absence of the gods, men can rely on human institutions, such as the family and the court, as we shall see in the next subsection.

3.5.3 The Inadequacy of Human Institutions in Euripides' *Orestes* and its Consequences

Orestes lives in a world where the Erinyes are mythological figures perceived as belonging wholly to the past and where the old *lex talionis* has already been replaced by the more civilized practice of trials. In addition to this, Apollo's command has become a memory so uncertain that the hero can no longer determine whether it sprang from reality or from a dream. Unable to trace the matricide back to some higher cause other than human will and deprived of any divine support, Orestes turns in vain to human institutions such as the family and the court. The aim of this subsection is to analyse how the playwright employs different stagecraft techniques to emphasize the inadequacy of human institutions and its consequences.

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[155] To give an example, in Euripides' *Trojan Women* Helen shifts the blame for her adulterous relationship with Paris onto Aphrodite (E. *Tr.* 938-50) but Hecuba, making a pun on the name of the goddess which recalls the word ἀφροσύνη ('senselessness'), answers back that it was rather Helen's senseless mind that became Aphrodite as soon as the heroine saw the Trojan prince (E. *Tr.* 988-90). See also Ar. *Nu.* 85; Pl. *R.* 379c-380c. cf. Whitmarsh (2015), n. 3, p. 254.

We will see that an implicit stage direction is used to reveal that Menelaus' indifference towards his nephew's precarious condition stems from base motives. Moreover, the movements of the two siblings onstage and offstage stress their helplessness, which is brought about by the citizens' hostility and which eventually leads them to conspiracy and to a brutal scheme of revenge. Finally, that Orestes' recourse to further violence is just his last desperate attempt to cope with the lack of divine and human help by taking matters into his own hands is demonstrated by the distorted use of the famous dramatic technique of *deus ex machina*.

According to human law, Orestes should have chosen banishment rather than death as the punishment for the killer of his father. According to Tyndareus, Orestes must be tried to put a stop to the endless chain of acts of revenge and to defend the common law (523-5). Yet few people with self-interested motives have steered the citizens into the decision to try Orestes: Oiax, who wants to avenge the death of his brother Palamedes (432-3), and the party of Aigisthos, who wants to take control of the city of Argos (435-8). That this decision is not motivated by a genuine desire to respect the law of the land is proved by the fact that the citizens do not intend to take into consideration the option of banishment as the penalty for the matricides but are rather to vote on capital punishment (440-2; 757-9). On top of that, they have even blocked all possible exits so as to prevents the siblings from going into voluntary exile (443-6, 759-62).

Though aware of the dangers awaiting him, Orestes still cherishes some hope that he can persuade the assembly of the righteousness of the matricide when he suggests that Pylades and he should opt to speak in

public (ἐς κοινὸν λέγειν χρή, 774).[156] Resorting to the court is his last hope of salvation given that his previous attempt to turn to his family for support has failed. Orestes in suppliant posture calls on Menelaus (380-4), who owes a debt of gratitude to Agamemnon (χάριτας ἔχων πατρός, 244).[157] Menelaus acknowledges the obligation to take up a kinsman's troubles (684-5) but turns down Orestes' request for immediate protection by adducing pretexts such as his willingness to bide his time in order to watch for the right moment, and to use gentle persuasion in place of the force of arms in order to support his nephew's case (686 ff). However, an implicit stage direction reveals what lies behind his decision not to help Orestes. After the promulgation of the death sentence, Orestes tells us that Helen, the hateful wife of Menelaus, is inside the royal palace of Agamemnon and is putting her seal on everything (ἀποσφραγίζεται, 1108). This means that she is already taking possession of Orestes' goods on behalf of Menelaus.[158] A desire for power and wealth thus lies behind Menelaus' lukewarm reaction to the misfortunes of his nephew and niece.

In this play family is depicted as an institution whose role as a bulwark against external threats is vitiated by personal and political interests.[159] It has been pointed out that Orestes is endowed with an excessive number of paternal figures, all of whom nonetheless turn out to

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[156] Pylades misinterprets Orestes' suggestion and understands it as meaning 'we must confer'. For a discussion of the ambiguous meaning of this sentence, see Willink (1986), *ad loc.*

[157] Cf. also E. *Or.* 453, 640 ff.

[158] Willink (1986), *ad loc.*

[159] In this regard, it must also be taken into account that Tyndareus threatens Menelaus to forbid him access to the Spartan land if he helps Orestes escape the death penalty (534-7; 625-6). Consequently, if Menelaus intervened in favour of his nephew, he would lose an important political connection.

be his opponents.[160] Tyndareus' fierce enmity and Menelaus' betrayal (προδέδομαι, 722) thus force Orestes to put his last remaining hope in human justice, which nonetheless is just as disappointing and inadequate.

The episode of the assembly trial is an example of unreliable legal procedure and bad politics, debased by demagogues and politicians with personal agendas.[161] Several linguistic parallels have been detected between the Argive assembly in the play and the Athenian ἐκκλησία of Euripides' time: the Argive assembly is called 'the mass of Argive people selected to arbitrate' (ἔκκλητον Ἀργείων ὄχλον, 612), a periphrasis that recalls the Athenian term ἐκκλησία; in addition to this, to express what the city of Argos has decreed and to indicate the opening of the debate, Euripides uses formulas that recall Athenian official formulaic language.[162]

Owing to the similarities detected between the mythical and the real world, it has been argued that the messenger's entire account of the voting in Argos should be read as a critique of contemporary demagogical democracy.[163] According to the messenger's report, the debate in the assembly is manipulated by self-serving individuals: Talthybius, the

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[160] Zeitlin (1980), 64. Orestes' paternal figures include Apollo, Menelaus, Tyndareus; even his biological father does not give him any support. Orestes believes that Agamemnon would have disapproved of his son's revenge upon Clytaemnestra.

[161] For a detailed analysis of the speeches against, and in defence of, Orestes, see Di Benedetto (1965), Willink (1986), West (1987) *ad loc* with references, Barker (2011).

[162] E. *Or.* 46 (ἔδοξε δ᾽ Ἀργει), 885 (τίς χρῄζει λέγειν;). See Medda (2001), n. 123 p. 246; Wright (2008), n. 42 p. 148. Cf. also Pelling (2000), 165.

[163] The play 're-enacts the tensions of the failed oligarchic coup of 411, and pre-enacts and precipitates the civil war of 404': Wohl (2015), 120. After the coup of 411 BC, a climate of suspicion and hostility surrounded not only the oligarchic party but also the democratic one and its main bodies of governance. Some sources, the trustworthiness of which may nonetheless be affected by their authors' oligarchic bias, accuse democrats like Cleophon of reducing the political debates conducted in the assembly to mere demagogy (Ar. *Ra.* 679-85, 1532; ?Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 28. 3-4): see further Hall (1993), 265 ff; Wright (2008), 102. For a political interpretation of the play, see also Lanza (1961), 58-72; Di Benedetto (1971), 205 ff; Euben (1986), 222-51; Medda (2001), 246 n. 123, 251 n. 28.

opportunist politician, willing to change sides whenever it suits him, and an anonymous demagogue 'with no check on his tongue' (ἀθυρόγλωσσος, 903). Following the advice of such corrupt individuals, the crowd sentence Orestes and his sister to death (944-5).

Yet in the play criticism is likely not to be restricted to democracy but rather to embrace aristocracy and oligarchic sympathizers as well:[164] the close friendship between Orestes, Electra and Pylades is negatively described in language that explicitly recalls the ἑταιρείαι, that is, the political factions of aristocratic young people that played a key role in the recent oligarchic coup and continued to pose a threat to the stability of Athens even after democracy was restored.[165] Similarly, in the *Orestes* the camaraderie between the three friends is depicted as a threatening alliance which causes turmoil in the city: the helplessness and uncertainty of the two siblings induce them to close themselves off from the world and to put their faith in their in-group only, which includes their loyal friend Pylades. Pylades in particular is the one who takes over the role of Apollo by being a constant presence and by giving Orestes those concrete manifestations of support that should have been provided by the god.[166]

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[164] Wright (2008), 109-114.

[165] The relationship between Pylades and Orestes is explicitly called ἑταιρεία at vv. 1072, 1079. What is more, just as the bond between members of the same ἑταιρεία was felt to be stronger than any blood relationship, so Orestes asserts that a comrade (ἑταίρος), 'a non-relative whose character fuses with yours is a better friend to possess than countless relatives.' (804-5). See Hall (1993), 269-71; Wright (2008), 103-6. Cf. also Pelling (2000), 184-8, according to whom, the depiction of Orestes, Pylades and Electra as members of an oligarchic faction is not meant to be entirely negative but rather invites the audience to respond positively to self-protection and cunning.

[166] Theodorou (1993), 42 argues that Pylades serves as a parallel to Apollo: as the scholar interestingly points out, when Pylades enters the stage, Apollo is no longer mentioned; by contrast, when at the end of the play there is a divine epiphany of the god, Pylades resumes his traditional role as a mute character. Theodorou also hypothesises that the same actor played both the role of Pylades and that of Apollo. It must also be borne in mind that 'one of the most important functions of the *hetaireia*-members was to help their

Yet this condition of isolation turns out to be dangerous. Closure within the group creates identification with insiders and hate for outsiders. As a result, the close friendship between Orestes, Electra and Pylades turns into a distorted form of φιλία, which looks more like a criminal association aimed at taking revenge on Menelaus by harming two innocent women (1105, 1191 ff).[167]

Even though there are undoubtedly many parallels between the mythical world of Orestes and the political life of late fifth century Athens, the play does not express either support for, or criticism against, a specific party, whether it be the democratic or the oligarchic one. On the contrary, it is more likely to convey a broader political message: the *Orestes* might be interpreted as a comment on the inadequacy of human institutions, such as the family and the law court, inadequacy that pushes Orestes to the point where the hero sees no other way out but recourse to further violence.

The movements of the characters onstage and offstage well represent their helpless situation and their feeling of suffocation, which eventually lead to conspiracy and further violence. Throughout the play a dramatic tension develops between the stage space, which represents the domestic world of Agamemnon's royal palace, and the offstage space, which symbolizes the political world of the city.[168] Once Orestes realizes that his family is of no avail given that both his uncle and his grandfather have betrayed him, a centrifugal tendency pushes the hero outwards.

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hetairoi in litigation (Th. 8. 54. 4)', just as Pylades does at the trial of his friend Orestes: Hall (1993), 270.

[167] For a discussion of the transformation of φιλία into an alliance of conspirators, see Hartigan (1991), 127-56; Mc Hardy (2008), 111 ff. cf. also Wohl (2012), 244-69.

[168] Medda (1999), 36-56.

However, his impulse to run away from the city is straightforwardly frustrated since all the ways out have been blocked. He then contents himself with the only remaining option: he asks his friend Pylades to accompany him to the Pnyx, the hill where the assembly trial takes place (774-95). Yet this last attempt to find a way out also fails: Orestes, together with his sister and his friend, are driven back into the suffocating stage space where they will have to take their own lives (946-9). The offstage space has turned out to be as hostile to the siblings as the more familiar stage space. A centripetal tendency once again makes the royal palace the focus of attention, but by now the segregation of Orestes, Electra, and Pylades has metamorphosed a locus of wealth and power into a locus of horror: one by one both victims (Helen and Hermione, 1345) and persecutors (Orestes and Pylades, 1245; Electra, 1352) enter the royal palace. Three times the audience hears Helen crying (1296, 1298, 1301): Euripides purposefully uses the dramatic convention of off-stage cries to surprise and frustrate his audience by suggesting that Helen is being killed at that very moment.[169] The playwright thus calls attention to the conventionality of traditional dramatic forms and, by changing the meaning usually attributed to them, stresses the play's theatrical innovativeness.[170]

A further instance of Euripides' manipulation of dramatic conventions occurs when Orestes, accompanied by Electra and Pylades, appears on the roof of the palace with his sword at Hermione's throat and confronts Menelaus. Many scholars have interpreted this scene as a

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[169] The Phrygian slave then reports that Helen has mysteriously disappeared. Arnott (1982), 41-3 and (1983), 23-28 compares and contrasts the use of off-stage cries in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides' *Orestes*.

[170] For a discussion of the functions of Euripides' meta-theatrical techniques, see Roselli (2016), 390 ff; Wright (2008), 119-26.

mockery of the dramatic technique of *deus ex machina*.[171] Orestes seems to have taken over the divine role but there is a distortion of the function of this device: the technique of *deus ex machina* is usually used in Greek tragedy to resolve a seemingly insoluble problem. By contrast, Orestes' appearance on the roof complicates matters and leads to further disaster: he threatens Menelaus not only to kill his daughter but also to set the royal palace on fire (1578, 1594-6). Only in this way can Orestes set himself free of the claustrophobic space in which he has been driven back.

Such a self-conscious reference to the μηχανή, which is usually used for divine epiphanies only, is not merely a comment on theatrical conventions in general and on the originality of Euripidean drama. On the contrary, it serves an important dramatic purpose since it sheds light on some of Orestes' inner traits and on his present mental state, which can be described as one of internal conflict and exasperation. The depiction of Orestes' entrance as a distorted version of *deus ex machina* might symbolize the likely reaction of a man who has been left to himself in the aftermath of the crime: the hero resolves to replace the god and to take his situation in hand, unfortunately with disastrous results. Deprived of both human and divine support, Orestes fails to come to grips with his double self-image as both the righteous avenger of his father and the abhorrent killer of his mother. Unable to explain away this conflict, he remains stuck in a state of uncomfortable inner tension.

I have already mentioned that the Aeschylean Orestes makes up his mind to kill his mother only after Pylades reminds him that he will suffer divine punishment if he disobeys Apollo's command: Apollo's order and

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[171] Halleran (1985), 43; Mastronarde (1990), 262-3; Dunn (1996), 159-61.

threats of punishment provide justifications for Orestes' behaviour and, as a result, help him bear what he is about to commit. By contrast, the Euripidean Orestes can no longer attribute his actions to an external agent since he is not even sure whether or not he actually heard Apollo's voice.

How can he reconcile his heroic self-image with the heinous crime committed? In his speeches of defence in front of Tyndareus and the Argive jury, he first looks for further advantages of Clytaemnestra's murder in addition to the main purpose of the matricide in avenging Agamemnon's death: the killing should also be given credit for ridding the Argives of a shamelessly lustful and dangerous woman (557-565; 932-5). In addition to this, Orestes maintains that the gravity of the matricide is negligible compared with the risk posed by such a negative role model for women as Clytaemnestra had she continued living (566-71; 935-42).

In Subsection 3.5.2 I categorized Orestes' defence speeches as an example of sophistic argumentation aimed at circumventing his interlocutors' accusations. However, another reading is possible, namely, that Orestes' arguments are a desperate attempt not merely to convince the jurors that he does not deserve the death penalty but also to persuade himself that he is not a criminal after all. Both arguments may help Orestes release his inner tension, which has built up inside him as a result of the process of holding two diametrically opposite opinions about himself at the same time. On the one hand, he reduces the discomfort he feels by claiming that the crime committed was not so serious if compared to the threat posed by the victim. On the other hand, he reshapes the inner discomfort into the claim that the murder of his mother was not merely an act of just revenge but also a benefit for society.

Orestes wants to see himself, and to be seen by the whole community, as a hero who carried out an heroic undertaking. Zeitlin, in her famous study of the literariness of the *Orestes*, has shown that the play often makes references to the *Odyssey* and draws parallels between Orestes' violent schemes and the plot engineered in defence of his father's rights by another mythical hero, namely, Telemachus. Both young men are threatened in their position as legitimate heirs to the kingdom, and both fight against usurpers (Aegisthus and the suitors) who try to seize the throne through either seduction of, or marriage with, the queen.[172] Yet, as the scholar interestingly points out, the relationship between Orestes and Telemachus in the play is the opposite of the one depicted in the *Odyssey*: whereas in the Homeric poem references to Orestes' revenge against Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra serve the purpose of providing Telemachus with an exemplary model for his future vengeance upon the suitors, in the play Orestes appears to be a discredited hero who looks to Ithaca and to Telemachus' battle against the suitors to re-enact his original Odyssean role in Argos.[173]

The problem here is that Orestes' attempts to make sense of what he has done lead him to believe that the murder of other female members of the same debased family as Clytaemnestra should also be called righteous and heroic actions. He first justifies the murder of his mother by

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[172] Zeitlin (1980), 61-2 points out that Telemachus' battle against the suitors is explicitly evoked by two moments of Orestes' battle within the Argive palace: 'by the locking up of servants to prevent their interference (E. *Or.* 1127, 1448-51) and then by the ensuing carnage (E. *Or.* 1482-9)'. Cf. Goldhill (1986), 147-53; Barker in McClure (2016), 270-83.

[173] Zeitlin (1980), 62. In this regard, it must be borne in mind that in the *Odyssey* it is Aegisthus who kills Agamemnon and that the righteousness of Orestes' revenge against Aegisthus and his female accomplice is never called into question. What is more, the Homeric account of the Orestes myth interestingly veils what has really happened to Clytaemnestra: no mention is made of the matricide, and Clytaemnestra's death at the hands of her son is never described. See Goldhill (1986), 147-53.

asserting that he had to castigate an adulteress, whereas Telemachus did not have to punish the faithful Penelope (588-90). He then plans to kill Helen because he intends to 'revive his old emblematic self in a new guise, still more grandiose than the first.'[174] He thinks that killing another unfaithful wife like Helen will be an act worthy of praise since it avenges the deaths of all the heroes fallen during the Trojan war and since it safeguards the institution of marriage. Orestes claims to act in defence of the most important institution of a patriarchal society but, in devising deceitful plans to carry out violent actions, he confounds gender roles by gradually merging with bloodthirsty female figures, like the Erinys, the Gorgon and Clytaemnestra herself.[175] The hero thus contributes to creating the gender confusion that pervades the play: Orestes would like to be seen by society as a powerful male figure, as a defender of male rights and status, but ends up on the female side. In addition to this, his need to justify his behaviour induces him to hatch a plan to kill not only Helen but also Hermione, who is the only entirely positive character in the play. The only way for Orestes to escape from a hopeless situation is the recourse to further violence. Yet the siblings' revenge recoils back on itself and drags the avengers into a cycle of ruin, which leads them to put their own house at risk of destruction.

Nonetheless, the play is not over yet. There is still time for the deities to prove that 'the end is always in a god's hands' (1545-6). At the end of the tragedy, Apollo appears on the μηχανή to cut the knot, as befits a true *deus ex machina*. In the following subsection I will delve into the

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[174] Zeitlin (1980), 62.

[175] For an analysis of the similarities drawn between Orestes and these negative female figures, see Zeitlin (1980), 58 ff. Other examples of gender confusions are the masculinized Electra, who takes over Apollo's role and tries to defend Orestes from the attacks of the Erinyes, and the effeminate Phrygian slave.

meaning of Apollo's abrupt and delayed entrance in the *Orestes* by contrasting it with the god's sudden and unannounced disappearance in the *Eumenides*.

3.5.4 The endings of the *Eumenides* and the *Orestes*: Apollo's sudden entrance and exit.

Apollo's appearance as *deus ex machina* at the end of the *Orestes* is quite unexpected given that the god is remarkably absent for almost the whole play. Just as bizarre is Apollo's sudden and unmarked departure in the exodus of the *Eumenides* (either at v. 753 or at v. 777).[176] What is the significance of such peculiar and abrupt stage movements?

Taplin argues that Apollo's unnoticed exit in the *Eumenides* is something extraordinary, which must have drawn the attention of the audience, since 'not even minor characters disappear without any indication.'[177] The scholar even tries to explain this oddity away by conjecturing a lacuna after 777.[178] On the other hand, among those who maintain that there is no lacuna in the text as it has come down to us, some hold the view that such a sudden departure merely indicates that the role of Apollo is at an end: from then onwards Athena and the Erinyes take the prominent parts. According to others, by contrast, it might even serve the purpose of diminishing Apollo's stature and suggesting that his arguments in the trial of Orestes are unconvincing.[179] However, the latter hypothesis clashes with the fact that earlier in the play Apollo is not

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[176] For an analysis of the arguments adduced in support of each hypothesis, see Taplin (1977), 403 ff.

[177] Taplin (1977), 403-6; Taplin (1978), 38-9.

[178] According to Taplin's reconstruction (1977), 403 ff, the missing part of text contained a short speech of farewell by Apollo.

[179] Winnington-Ingram (1933), 97 ff; for a discussion of both hypotheses, see Taplin (1977), 403-6 with references and (1978), 38-9.

portrayed in a distinctively negative light and with the fact that Athena herself ultimately supports the god's argument that the male prevails over the female.

Therefore, Apollo's disappearance is more likely to signify that his role is at an end, not merely in the sense that he has already carried out the task of standing up for Orestes, but in the sense that, at this point in the cosmic conflict between younger and older divinities, it is high time that the partial views of both Apollo and the Erinyes were replaced by a more harmonious and balanced order under the aegis of Athena and Zeus. The way in which Apollo is quickly disposed of can thus be an indication that his partial vision of the Erinyes is no longer valid: the ancient goddesses of vengeance must be integrated into the new cosmic order. In order to be granted a place of honour in Athens, however, they too must not stick to their previous partial view of the cosmos but must rather find some middle ground: they metaphorically disappear in their role as Erinyes and reappear in their new divinely sanctioned role as Eumenides to remain forever as protectors of fertility (916 ff).[180] In spite of this role reversal, it is significant that the Eumenides probably do not change either their masks or their costumes but simply wear purple-dyed garments over their black clothing (1028).[181] The black attire worn by the Eumenides under the red

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[180] Taplin (1977), 407 rightly points out that 'Aeschylus puts the issue of the Erinyes' attitude to Athens in terms of whether or not they will stay: […] the Erinyes imply that, if they lose, they will prolong their visit just long enough to poison the land (711, 719, 732 ff)'; by contrast, Athena tries to convince them to stay by offering them a place of honour and many benefits in Athens. Their decision to stay is therefore important because it signifies reconciliation.

[181] Taplin (1978), 88 ff lists the arguments adduced in favour of the hypothesis that there is no change of masks and costumes. The red robes signal the Eumenides' new metic status in Athens: Goheen (1955), 122 ff and Sider (1978), 12-27 analyse the similarities between the procession of the Eumenides in purple-dyed garments and the red-robed

robes, serves as a reminder of that element of fear which was a prerogative of the ancient goddesses of vengeance and which is still needed in any community ruled by law.[182]

It can thus be argued that Apollo's sudden disappearance in the *Eumenides* responds to the need for a harmonious ending. A similar argument has also be advanced with regard to the god's abrupt entrance on stage at the end of the *Orestes*, as I shall now discuss in further detail.[183]

The god, together with Helen, appears in the sky over the royal palace.[184] He takes full responsibility for the matricide, in that he persuaded Orestes to commit the crime, and promises that he will set things right (1664-5). It would seem that the ending of the play vindicates Apollo and reconfirms the traditional version of the Orestes' myth: all previous doubts regarding the gods are dissipated, and Orestes is finally reassured that he will soon be acquitted.[185] Some scholars have also claimed that the promised outcome in the *Orestes* is more positive than that of the *Eumenides* given that Apollo's speech implies that his protégé will be acquitted by a clear majority.[186]

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procession of metics in the Panathenaia, similarities that were first noticed by Headlam (see Goheen, *ibidem*, with references).

[182] For a discussion of the role of fear, see Sommerstein's comment on A. *Eu.* 690-2: (2010a), 143-63. For a review of the scholarly literature on the transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides, see Easterling (2008), 219-36, esp. 230-4.

[183] For a summary of the different interpretations of Apollo's epiphany proposed by scholars, see Wolff (1983), 354-6; Porter (1994), 251-89, esp. 280 ff; Papadimitropoulos (2011), n. 2 p. 501. Cf. also Greenberg (1962), 191-2; Arnott (1973), 49-64; Hartigan (1991), 153 ff; Dunn (1996), 32 ff, 159-61; Lefkowitz (2016), 99-127.

[184] The actors either stand on the θεολογεῖον or are suspended from the μηχανή. The latter hypothesis is more likely: West (1987), *ad loc*; Mastronarde (1990), 262-3.

[185] West (1987), n. at v. 28.

[186] Willink (1986) on 1625 ff; Lefkowitz (2002), 50.

Yet the main weakness with Orestes' eventual salvation is that it seems to have come too late. The most serious problem with the ending of the play is the very fact that Apollo's intervention has been delayed so long that, when it finally comes, it creates further bewilderment and uneasiness rather than harmony and order. The happy ending looks implausible since Apollo predicts a marriage and a friendly relationship between people who were earlier fierce enemies: Orestes will marry the woman he was about to kill and will rule over a city, the citizens of which condemned him to death.[187] In the absence of the gods, events have gone too far: no harmonious solution seems possible any longer; Apollo can only impose the traditional version of the Orestes myth from above by dictating what roles the characters will have to assume from then onwards.[188] The characters will have to stick to these new roles and to accept new marital and friendly relationships whether or not there has thus far been fierce enmity between them.

Because of this baffling imposition of the traditional version of the story at the end of a play the plot of which has much diverged from the established myth, the view that the ending of the *Orestes* is reassuring is not convincing. Such a puzzling delayed epiphany is more likely to

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[187] Wohl (2012), 247 ff. argues that Apollo's intervention further confuses the categories of enmity and friendship: it is such confusion, and especially the loss of the distinctive figure of the enemy, that cause political madness in Argos. According to Griffith (2011), 206, by contrast, 'the marriage may even mitigate the feud between Orestes and Tyndareus and return them to the earlier state of mutual affection'. The scholar points out that dynastic solutions to political problems had been typical of the archaic age but that networks of marriage were still important in fifth-century Athens.

[188] Apollo assumes the meta-theatrical role as the director of the theatrical representation: he directs the action of the play and shapes the destinies of its characters. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that this is a rare case where the *deus ex machina* alters the course of events, whereas in most occurrences divine intervention is merely formal: it only sanctions what has already been set in motion. For some examples, see Dunn (1996), 32-4, 159-61. I will further discuss the meta-theatrical role of the gods on stage in the following final section.

highlight the fact that a divine solution to human problems, as much as it would be convenient and enticing, is felt to be unsatisfactory in the advanced contemporary world precisely because it is too artificial.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that stagecraft techniques are to be interpreted not simply as powerful ways of conveying aesthetic effect but also as forms of constructing meaning and of deepening the discussion of issues which were of major concern to the contemporary audience.

My investigation has been mainly concerned with the function of the physical presence or absence of the gods on stage and has raised the following questions: how does the presence or absence of the gods on stage influence human agency? How is it interwoven into the thematic structure of the play?

We have seen that the *Eumenides* is characterized by the remarkable presence of Apollo, Athena and the Erinyes as characters who truly belong to the action of the play. Their active involvement in Orestes' trial is an indication that the story of the matricide is not merely a human matter but is rather to be understood within the broader context of a cosmic conflict between two generations of deities and between two competing claims of justice. As far as the Erinyes are concerned, their physical appearance on stage serves the purpose of articulating a discourse on the integration of these old goddesses of vengeance into a new and more civilized order under the aegis of the Olympian gods. Their integration is necessary to

enact the divinely sanctioned passage from the *lex talionis* to a new system of justice ruled by the high court of the Areopagus.

Such a crucial transition also entails a fundamental change in the understanding of crime: the previous religious conception of human criminal acts as resulting from supernatural factors is gradually replaced by a new view endorsed by law courts, which stresses the role of the human agent. I have shown that the *Eumenides*, which is set at the turning point marking the transition from one view to the other, expresses anxieties about how Orestes' matricide should be judged by the new system of human justice.

On the one hand, Orestes is strenuously defended by Apollo. Aeschylus resorts to stagecraft techniques to build anticipation for the major role played by the god in the last play of the trilogy and to show Apollo's constant support for his mortal protégé. I have discussed how the staging of the murder tableaux in the *Choephorae* illustrates Orestes' faith in divine help. I have pointed out that Apollo's support is later given a concrete manifestation in the purification of Orestes, which is carried out by the god himself. Last but not least, I have shown that Apollo's presence alongside Orestes in the last play of the trilogy corroborates the hero's trust in divine intervention: the god takes a stand in favour of Orestes by admitting freely that it was his oracle that ordered Orestes to kill his mother and by proclaiming that he has never prophesied anything that might be contrary to the will of Zeus (*Eu.* 614-21). In other words, Apollo is saying that the matricide should be interpreted as part of Zeus' will and justice: he is thus placing emphasis on the supernatural causes of the matricide, which are presented as outweighing Orestes' human motivations.

Apollo's defence speeches, however, are not entirely convincing: Orestes is formally discharged but is not totally exculpated, as is shown by the tie in the votes of human jurors and by the key role played by the goddess Athena in deciding the issue. As I have discussed, Athena's exceptional intervention in the voting can be interpreted in two ways. It may be either an indication that human justice still needs the help of the gods to solve complex cases or a way to praise the new system of human justice, which is gradually moving away from the ancient religious conception of crime.

Whatever interpretation we follow, it is clear that in the *Oresteia* the gods are intimately involved in human affairs: the trilogy depicts a world where the gods watch over mortals and oversee major transitions in human society. Their physical presence in the last play of the trilogy also gives the impression that it is the gods that are pulling the strings in the Atreid saga.[189]

By contrast, the characters in the *Orestes* for most of the performance apparently live in a world without gods. Euripides uses the traditional myth of Orestes but changes the dramatic structure and performance of his theatrical representation to suit some of the unconventional ideas of human life, society and religion that he is seeking to express.

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[189] The function of the presence of the gods on stage is usually associated with the power to shape the play and to create awareness of the medium itself, namely, the play as the play. The two most famous tragic scenes in which a deity acts as the director of the action of the play are the dressing of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae* and the episode of Ajax's madness in the Sophoclean play: both Dionysus and Athena take upon themselves a directorial function and lead their unaware victims to their destruction. See Easterling (1993), 77-86; Dobrov (2001), 23-6; 70 ff.

From the beginning of the play, the juxtaposition of subjective and objective representations of the Erinyes, as well as their physical absence as characters from the stage, might be read as calling into question the mythical and religious worldview and might be meant to symbolize the confusion typical of Euripides' contemporary world which was going through a period of political and cultural upheaval: owing to such an ambiguous depiction of the Erinyes and to the remarkable absence of Apollo, there emerges the possibility that the matricide committed by Orestes may be a mere case of domestic violence and that the alien force which prompted the hero to kill his mother, as well as his subsequent fits of madness, may have sprung from his inner self rather than coming from external deities.

I have also shown that, by making use of the physical absence of the gods on stage, Euripides not only introduces innovative perspectives on human responsibility and on the relationship between human and divine agency; he also addresses political issues by raising questions about the role that human institutions should play in a world that, for almost the whole play, is imagined to be without gods. Euripides sets the ancient myth of Orestes in a new civilized context where the law of the court is a practice already in effect and where the justice system is entirely run by humans. Deprived of any concrete manifestation of divine support, Orestes is forced to rely on human φιλία and on human institutions, such as the family and the court, but in vain.

As is well exemplified by the characters' movements onstage and offstage and by the distorted use of the *deus ex machina*, the lack of divine and human help induce the siblings and Pylades to take matters into their own hands through violent means. Whereas in the *Eumenides* it is the gods

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who hold the reins of the story, in the *Orestes* it is up to the mortal hero to make up his own story: the protagonist seems to be free to choose any course of action he wants, even though the actions he intends to perform are not included in his own myth.[190] Orestes takes over the gods' role as director of the story represented on stage and, by devising a new plot to escape the death penalty, creates a competing narrative, which sharply diverges from the myth he traditionally belongs to. The fact that the hero takes the position usually taken by the *deus ex machina* on the roof of the palace indicates that the hero, lacking both human and divine help, is determined to find a solution to his situation as quickly and easily as a god from the μηχανή usually sorts things out. Nonetheless, Orestes' efforts to shape his own destiny only make the situation worse until Apollo finally appears from the μηχανή to reclaim his directorial function and to set things right by imposing the traditional version of the myth.

Apollo's solution inevitably appears to be rather artificial, though necessary. The artificiality of the ending of the play is not to be interpreted as a critique against Apollo, blamed for intervening too late and for imposing a puzzling solution to human problems. It is more likely to raise concerns about the inability of society to disentangle a problematic situation: the inefficacy of human institutions has rather contributed to making the situation so inextricable that, in the end, it turns out to be resolvable only by a divine solution, which is forcefully imposed from above and which ultimately denies men's freedom to choose and shape their own destinies.

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[190] For instance, he plans to kill Helen even though, according to the myth, this cannot – and will not – happen. Zeitlin (1980), 52 argues that in this play 'myth seems to generate fiction'.

4. Conclusions

This research is intended to show how religious ideas in Greek tragedy are tied up with other competing discourses, from medicine, to philosophy and political theory. Three religious topics were selected for analysis based on the most pressing questions pertaining to the hierarchical god-man-beast relationship and to potential disruptions of world order: excessive intimacy between a male deity and a mortal girl; problems of knowledge and communication between gods and humans; ethical dilemmas (raised by human and divine interaction) that often leave questions of agency and responsibility unclear.

It is my aim to make a contribution to the study of Greek tragedy and its relationship to the larger historical and cultural contexts in which it was produced: I hope to have shown that Greek tragedy participates in, and contributes to, the intellectual and socio-political advancements of the fifth century and that it also operates as an innovative framework for exploring contemporary religious experience.

This work is also an attempt to adopt a broader perspective on the study of Greek drama; it brings together a variety of approaches, from literary criticism through the 'stagecraft approach' to New Historicism: each chapter follows a similar methodology of close reading of some paradigmatic plays and connects their themes to the wider context of religious exploration, political thought, philosophical inquiry and medical investigation.

In this concluding chapter I summarise my main findings in light of the research questions that guided my inquiry and outline possible areas for further research.

4.1 Summary of Findings

I began this research by exploring Greek tragedy's depiction of the myths of sexual intercourse between male gods and female mortals. My analysis of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Ion* showed that Greek tragedy, as opposed to pre-tragic poetry, problematizes such an excessively close relationship by focusing on the dreadful misfortunes suffered by the heroines. I considered the counter-argument that, if we place the myths in a broader perspective, it becomes evident that the prestige of such unions is eventually restored because, in the long run, they give rise to new glorious royal lines. Yet my examination into the background of the plays revealed grounds to challenge this position. For instance, I discussed an important aspect of Athens' socio-historical context after the Persian wars, namely a widespread feeling of identity-related anxiety triggered by an increased influx of newcomers: building on this, I argued that Io's union with Zeus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* is called into question on the ground that it jeopardizes the preservation of the Argives' autochthonous bloodline. Similarly, in the *Ion* divine rape ultimately results in the social danger most feared by fifth-century Athenian society: an illegitimate child is passed off as the legitimate son and heir of the king of Athens.

The analysis of both plays thus supported one of the major claims of this study, namely that we can understand the nature and scope of tragedy's religious problematization more deeply if we analyse the ways

in which religious issues are interconnected with, and complicated by, social and political matters of public concern.

Although the world of Greek tragedy remains the divinely governed world of heroic myth, this study also demonstrated that tragic plays composed in the late fifth century (such as the *OT,* the *Orestes* and the *Bacchae*) borrow from the latest advances in various fields of intellectual inquiry to suggest alternative, more rational, explanations of the universe and of human agency. In the second chapter I argued that how characters make sense of events is indicative of the developments of the mid and late fifth century in philosophy, in historical investigation and in medicine: early Greek medical writers, Presocratic philosophers and historians such as Herodotus transformed the meaning of such powerful and unforeseen events by transferring causal responsibility from divine agency to unseen natural forces operating in the world and inside the body. By representing Oedipus and Pentheus as disinclined to see a divine hand in the plague or in the earthquake, Sophocles' *OT* and Euripides' *Bacchae* refer to the cultural context of the performance and draw attention to how the cultural codes used to interpret such natural phenomena may change over time.

The third chapter deepened the discussion of the changes in the interpretation of catastrophic events and bodily diseases by investigating how Greek tragedy represents the transformation in the conceptions of human agency and responsibility that occurred in the transition from a pre-legal society ruled by the *lex talionis* to the new civilized form of trial by jury, which stresses the importance of intention in assessing criminal action. In accordance with the new revolutionary ideas regarding divine and human nature formulated by the sophists and by Hippocratic writers,

the hypothesis arises that Clytaemnestra's murder might be decoupled from a supernatural necessity. Likewise Orestes' madness, rather than being brought about by external daemonic entities, might be simply the result of the hero's dreadful awareness of being responsible for an impious crime. This hypothesis seems to be validated by significant differences in the stagecraft of the Aeschylean and Euripidean plays: to mention the most important one, in the *Orestes*, as opposed to the *Eumenides*, the Erinyes never appear on stage, thus reinforcing the idea that they are mere figments of imagination.

Greek tragedy thus shows acute responsiveness to the compelling political, intellectual and religious issues of the day and provides the spectators with new perspectives to confront future challenges and to deal with processes of cultural change.

As shown in the first chapter, Greek tragedy's treatment of the myths of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals indicates a development in religious thought in the fifth century and an urgently felt need for a more rigid separation between gods and mortals. What this study has tried to show is that a discourse in favour of a much starker line of demarcation between the human and the divine is formulated in the plays in terms of the contemporary political tensions and intellectual trends: for instance, by anachronistically representing Apollo as in a way obliged to conform to fifth-century inheritance laws, the *Ion* deals a blow to the prestige of divine paternity, drawing on philosophical theories against divine anthropomorphism.[191]

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[191] Xenoph. DK 23-24, 26, A32; Heraclit. DK 5, 32, 78; Emp. DK 134.

Similarly, in the following chapters I demonstrated that the investigation into the limits of human knowledge and agency in the plays is interwoven with political discourse. For instance, the *OT* and the *Bacchae* show that, even when the epistemic gap between deities and humans seems to be bridged, as in the case of prophecy or the privileged knowledge of mystic initiates, human knowledge still remains condemned to uncertainty because it can always be manipulated for political reasons. Likewise, Euripides' choice to shift emphasis from the cosmic level to the human level in his treatment of Orestes' myth gives him the opportunity to raise political concerns about the efficacy of human institutions which are imagined to replace the gods in conducting justice.

By representing on stage stories of good or bad government, and of positive or negative social behaviour, as well as examples of pious or impious attitudes, Greek tragedy challenges its audience to view the changes occurring in its society with an open-minded and critical attitude and provides the spectators with a civic understanding of their own good. Just as religion was embedded in every aspect of ancient Greek culture and society, so too it permeated Greek drama where it was inherently interwoven with political and cultural matters. In order to grasp the underlying meaning and function of Greek tragedy, it is important to delve into the ways in which discourses on all these different aspects of ancient Greek life and culture interact with, and cross-fertilize, each other.

4.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

In summarising the main findings of my research, its limitations also need to be mentioned. One limitation lies in the number of tragedies analysed: in this study I presented an analysis of six plays, two for each

topic. This fact may have affected the findings by limiting them to demonstrating religious attitudes in specific plays rather than common trends. However, as each pair of tragedies was selected with the aim of investigating how the same religious theme is treated differently by the playwrights in different times, I suggest that the findings may indicate some general trends, developments and changes in fifth-century Athenian religious beliefs.

Another limitation may lie in the criteria used to choose the plays for closer analysis: the process of selecting six tragedies from the whole corpus of extant Greek drama to address my research questions is an unavoidably risky enterprise, not least because the choice may appear to be arbitrary. Although the plays examined in my research were only a small sample, they were selected for their significance and interest and as illustrative of the three different religious topics treated in the individual chapters. In the Introduction I explained the reasons for my choice of these specific plays in greater detail and I also asserted that the research could easily be expanded to include analysis of other extant tragedies and fragmentary plays in order to have a more comprehensive view of Greek tragedy's treatment of religious issues.[192] However, the plays I have chosen are suitable samples for this exploratory stage of the research.

Finally, my choice of religious topics is also inevitably selective and cannot pretend to be exhaustive: I focused my study on three main kinds of disruption threatening to affect the world order and the hierarchical god-man-beast relationship. Further study on religious exploration in Greek tragedy could be expanded to include other important religious

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[192] Cf. n. 80 in the Introduction.

topics, such as the opposition between purity and pollution, the problem of human sacrifice or the effects of oaths and curses on human agency. In addition to this, there are further lines along which future research on the main kinds of disruption of the world order that I chose to discuss in this work could fruitfully proceed.

While my investigations were limited to the myths of sexual intercourse between male gods and female mortals, further studies could explore similar stories where a male mortal is the object of desire of either a god or a goddess: for instance, the erotic pursuits of Ganymede by Zeus and Tithonus by Eos might be analysed.[193] This would deepen our understanding of gender issues. Myths of this kind hint at the danger of female dominance and evoke its appalling consequence: they violate the dominant gender schema, which assigns the active role (pursuit) to the male and the passive (flight) to the female. As a consequence, such unions leave the male debilitated and unmanned: for instance, Tithonus wastes away in a state of permanent senescence. Similarly, it might be fruitful to compare and contrast the consequences of such abductions in pre-tragic poetry and in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, focusing on the way in which Trojan tragic characters make use of Ganymede's and Tithonos' sexual ties with Zeus and Eos respectively: the chorus blames the gods for abandoning the city of Troy, complains about the uselessness of the love stories between gods and Trojan mortals, and lays claim to special protection from the divine.

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[193] Ganymede's myth: Hom. *Il.* 20. 233-235; *Hymn to Aphrodite* 5. 202-217; E. *Tr.* 820-39. Tithonus' myth: Hes. *Th.* 984 ff; Sapph. fr. 58 Voigt; E. *Tr.* 840-59. Cf. Keuls (1985), 47-55; Zeitlin (1986), 144-145; Robson (1997), 80-89; Kilinski (1998), 34-35.

It would also be worth investigating the stories of mortal men trying to unite with goddesses (e.g. the myths of Peleus, Ixion, Tityos): all the heroes are harshly punished by the gods for their impious transgression of boundaries, with the notable exception of Peleus whose union with Thetis is divinely sanctioned by Zeus.[194] The most interesting example of this kind of myth is Actaeon's story since it is recounted in a fragmentary play by Aeschylus, the *Toxotides*: Actaeon is torn apart by his hounds when Artemis transforms him into a stag for an offence against her.[195] The boy unwittingly comes upon the goddess Artemis bathing naked in the spring with her nymphs, thus trespassing boundaries between gods and mortals. The study of the fragments belonging to this play would enable us to investigate Greek tragedy's treatment of this myth and its religious implications.

All these and further questions could be fruitfully addressed in future research with the double aim of deepening our understanding of religious exploration in Greek tragedy and of testing the main argument of this study: that is, that the interrelation between religious issues, philosophical inquiry, and socio-political matters in Greek plays offers us a fruitful field of study for demonstrating how Greek tragedy, by capturing latent anxieties in contemporary society, informed the cultural assumptions and religious perspectives of its audience and paved the way for changes in worldviews.

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[194] Ixion's myth: Pi. *P*. 2. 21-48. Tityos' myth: Hom. *Od*. 11. 576-81. Peleus' myth: Hom. *Il*. 18. 55 ff; Pi. *P*. 3. 92 ff; E. *IA.* 1051 ff. Cf. Zeitlin (1986), 132; Stewart (1995), 81; Robson (1997), 80-89.

[195] A. frr. 241-244TrGF. Cf. Zeitlin (1986), 147-148; Sommerstein (2013), 81-94.

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