A Double Meaning in Sophocles' *Electra* 1110–1111 and the Tragedy's Denouement

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Abstract: In *Electra* 1111 there is a pun on the word Strophios, suggesting that Orestes is a "trickster". After examining the differences of the accentuation of the word in the MSS, I consider the significance of the pun for interpreting the denouement of the tragedy. Much of the tragedy provides an intertextual dialogue with Aeschylus' *Oresteia* but, in contrast to Aeschylus, the main emphasis of the curse on the family falls on Pelops not Atreus. The tragedy was first performed during the Peloponnesian War. All previous versions of the myth from the 6th century onwards seem to have had a political bias. If we take into account the subtlety of Sophoclean irony, *Electra* can be read as anti-Spartan. In the Peloponnesian War the Delphic Apollo was pro-Spartan (Thuc. 1.118.3). His oracle, enjoining Orestes to use deceit in his revenge, frames the whole dramatic action. Proverbially, wolves were known for deceit. In several passages of *Electra*, Apollo is identified as Lykeios "wolf-like", noticeably at l. 1379, before Electra enters the curse-ridden house.

Keywords: trickster; Hermes; curse; Pelopidae; Spartans; wolf-god.

> ἀλλά μοι γέρων
> ἐφεῖτ᾽ Ὀρέστου Στροφίος ἀγγεῖλαι πέρι.

El. 1110–1111

Στροφίος LK: Στρόφιος cett.

But the aged Strophios told me to bring the news about Orestes.

trans. Lloyd-Jones

> ἀλλά μοι γέρων
> ἐφεῖτ᾽ Ὀρέστου στρόφιος ἀγγεῖλαι πέρι.

fortasse στρόφιος

But an old man told me to bring news about Orestes, a trickster.

Before the publication of Fraenkel's edition of *Agamemnon* it was common for modern editors to accent the name Strophios at *Agamemnon* 881 as a proparoxytone.[2] Fraenkel, however, stated: "as the Medicean gives Στροφίος at *Cho.* 679…, S. *El.* 1111 and in the ὑπόθεσις of the *Electra*, there is no point in following the later MSS here and in other passages in accenting Στρόφιος".[3] More recent editors, therefore, of both Aeschylus and Sophocles, have accepted Fraenkel's argument

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All Greek translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
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[2] E.g., Sidgwick 1905, *Ag.* 881; Verrall 1889, 104; Paley 1870, 399.
[3] Fraenkel 1950, 396.

and followed the Medicean accentuation.[4] Editors of Euripides, however, continue to accent the name Strophios at *Iphigenia Taurica* 917, 921 and *Orestes* 765 as Στρόφιος.[5] In support of his view, Fraenkel quotes the ancient notice of the *Etymologicum Magnum* 521.10: τὰ εἰς ος λήγοντα τριβράχεα ἐπὶ κυρίων παροξύνεται οἷον Σχεδίος, Χρομίος, Κλυτίος κτλ. ("tribrachs ending in 'os' on regular [nouns] are paroxytones like Schedios, Chromios, Clutios, etc."). Fraenkel, however, does not quote the whole entry which discusses those that are irregularly accented among which we are informed: "masculines in 'ος', if they are not regular, while written with the 'ι' in the penultima, are proparoxytone" (τὰ εἰς ος ἀρσενικά, μὴ ὄντα κύρια, τῷ ι παραλεγόμενα, προπαραξύνεται). Furthermore, Chandler's book, still the most comprehensive English work on accentuation, which Fraenkel cites in support of his argument, in fact directly contradicts him.[6] While Chandler recognizes the "tribrach" rule, he writes: "to this rule of the grammarians there are many exceptions, of which the more important are: Ἅλιος, Ἅνιος, Κρόνιος, Ξένιος, Στρόφιος." Chandler cites Eustathius 1030, 11 in support of this accentuation of Strophios' name as does Ellendt.[7] Sophocles had no knowledge of diacritics, and we simply cannot be sure where he wanted the actor, playing Orestes, to put the pitch on the word Strophios. Simply because M is the older manuscript is no reason to accept its reading unequivocally. This variation in accentuation may seem a relatively trivial point, but the two differing traditions about it in *Electra* 1111 may conceal a reason that has been overlooked. That is that the Greek word στρόφιος, with the acute accent on the first omicron, the antepenult, is the genitive case of the noun στρόφις, which means a "twister" or "trickster". Understood in this way the genitive form of the noun stands in apposition to the genitive case of Orestes' name, Ὀρέστου, so the two nouns together might mean Orestes a "twister" or "trickster". I should therefore like to take a different approach to interpreting the meaning of the sentence in which these words appear before considering their importance for the ending of *Electra*.

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I shall first examine why *Electra* 1110–1111 contains a secondary meaning that stands in contrast to other passages in the extant tragedies in which Strophios' name is mentioned. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 877–886, and Euripides' *Electra* 18 it is stated that the child Orestes is sent to Strophios to be brought up.[8] In Euripides' *Iphi-*

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[4] E.g., for Aeschylus, Thomson 1966, 117; Denniston-Page 1957, 34; Sommerstein 2008, 100; for Sophocles, Kells 1973, 63; Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990, 103; March 2001, 102; Lloyd-Jones 1997, 270; Finglass 2007, 70.

[5] Kovacs 1999, 246; Kovacs 2002, 492; Diggle 1982, *IT*. 917, 921; Diggle 1994, *Or*. 765.

[6] Chandler 1881, 69–70.

[7] Ellendt [1872] 1958, 697; Lehrs [1882] 1964, 265–267 supports Fraenkel's view but is opposed by Ellendt.

[8] It may be mentioned that, when in Aes. *Cho*. 679 Orestes falsely claims that he has been told by "Strophios the Phocian" to report his own death, the word Strophios is etymologically related to the

genia Taurica 917 and 921 and *Orestes* 765 and 1403 it is Strophios' relationship as the father of Pylades, Orestes' faithful friend, that is of prime importance. In both Aeschylus' and Euripides' tragedies Strophios' role as Orestes' guardian is clearly established early on in their respective versions of the myth, something that likely pre-dated tragedy.[9]

In contrast, in Sophocles' *Electra* there is no mention of Orestes having been sent as a child to Strophios to bring up. In fact, before the sudden mention of Strophios at *Electra* 1111 all reference to him has been ignored. In the Sophoclean version, after Electra had rescued Orestes at the very time when Agamemnon was being murdered, she gave him to the paedagogus for safe keeping. The paedagogus, not Strophios, performs the role of the guardian who brings Orestes up with the express intent of having him avenge his father's death (11–14). Later, Orestes informs us that Apollo at Delphi has told him to use deceit as the means by which to avenge Agamemnon's murder (36–37), so he instructs the paedagogus to inform the murderers that he has come from the Phocian Phanoteus, the greatest of Aegisthus' military allies, to announce that he, Orestes, was killed in the chariot race at the Pythian games, and that men would come bringing his ashes home in an urn (44–58). The paedagogus carries out these instructions, mentioning both Phanoteus (670) and the urn (757–759). We find no mention of Phanoteus' role in the context of Orestes' revenge before Sophocles, and so his intrusion into the myth was possibly deliberately invented by Sophocles for dramatic reasons.[10]

The deceitful plot devised by Orestes and the paedagogus in the prologue frames the whole dramatic action. After the men's departure (85), the drama becomes centred on Electra and her sufferings, caused by her upfront opposition to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, the murderers of her father (86–659). Until the paedagogus' second entrance (660), the audience is kept reminded of Orestes' off-stage presence, first in Electra's threnody (117), then in her interaction with the chorus (159–172;180–182;303–306;317–322), then in her dialogue with Chrysothemis (454–456), and finally in her confrontation with Clytemnestra (601–604). In her references to her brother there is sometimes a note of reproach, if not despair, in Electra's words about Orestes' constant delaying as is seen in her following dialogue with the chorus:

> CH: ...What is the word from your brother? Will he come or is he putting it off? I'd like to know.

> EL: He says he is coming; but as for his intentions he does nothing of what he says.

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verb "to turn" or "twist". See also n. 22 below.

[9] The only other extant reference is Pind. *Pyth.* 11, 35, but there are two possible dates for this ode 474 or 454 BC. Pylades is first mentioned in the Epic Cycle's *Nostoi*. West 2013, 286.

[10] On Phanoteus see Finglass 2007, 106. Phanoteus was Strophios' uncle, being the twin brother of Crisus and his enemy from birth. Finglass states that the alliance between Aegisthus and Phanoteus may have been the "invention" of Soph.

CH: Yes, for a man on a risky venture usually hesitates.

EL. Yet I did not hesitate when I saved him.

<div align="center">317–321</div>

The audience of course knows that Orestes has returned but has not revealed his presence. Much of the suspense in *Electra* is based upon Orestes' slowness to act. When he exits at l. 85 he does not re-enter till l. 1098. In other words, he is off-stage for two thirds of the play. Even after the paedagogus gives his false news of Orestes' death (660–803) and Electra sings a *kommos* with the chorus (823–870), Orestes still does not re-appear. Rather there is a further delay, when there is a second entrance of Chrysothemis (871–1057) followed by the second stasimon (1058–1097).[11] If Electra is upfront in all she says and does, stealth is a major characteristic of Orestes' movements.

In the recognition scene between Electra and Orestes, Electra's speech of lament over the urn (1126–1170) is one of the most powerful in Greek tragedy, certainly comparable, say, to the one Hecuba makes over the shattered body of her grandson Astyanax in Euripides' *Troiades* 1167–1205. Yet Electra's *tour de force* in this scene, unlike Hecuba's speech, provides the climax of all the deception in the play without Electra herself being aware of it.

It is in this context that I should like to consider the meaning of *Electra* 1110–1111. When Orestes, accompanied by Pylades, finally enters, there is a short dialogue exchange between brother and sister full of ambiguities before Electra's lament. Orestes tells Electra to go inside and report that some Phocian men are "seeking/hunting" Aegisthus with a clear pun on the verb 'ματεύουσι' (1107). What now starts to become apparent is that emphasis is being placed on the status of the reported word. When Electra states: "Oh dear no! Surely it cannot be that you are bringing manifest proofs of the story we heard?" (οἴμοι τάλαιν', οὐ δή ποθ' ἧς ἠκούσαμεν / φήμης φέροντες ἐμφανῆ τεκμήρια; 1108–1109), the particles οὐ δή ποθ', used of almost total disbelief,[12] serve as a warning for the audience that the manifest proofs Orestes is bringing are a false φήμη (cf. 65–66), a mere rumour. This warning becomes more pronounced in Orestes' reply (1110) οὐκ οἶδα τὴν σὴν κληδόν', usually translated as: "I do not know about your story" (Lloyd-Jones). But the term κληδών carries the notion of a "word of omen". Ellendt[13] comments: "vocabulo ad id quod

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[11] Schein 1982, 73 writes: "An Athenian audience, schooled by countless other dramas, must have expected a recognition scene as soon as they heard Electra's voice, especially since in *Choephori* Aeschylus placed such a scene early in the play. The disappointment of their expectations might well have helped make their evaluation of Orestes' character at least ambivalent." I suggest that the audience may not have felt "disappointment of their expectations" so much as total surprise at what they will hear.

[12] Finglass 2007, 441 says these words indicate "a surprised or incredulous question".

[13] Ellendt 1954, 386. Kells 1973, 186 is wrong when he writes: "κληδόνα, by *variatio*, for φήμην." Similarly, Schein 2013, 168 completely misses the irony in *Phil.* 254–256: ὦ πόλλ' ἐγὼ μοχθηρός, ὦ πικρὸς θεοῖς, / οὖ μηδὲ κληδὼν ὧδ' ἔχοντος οἴκαδε / μηδ' Ἑλλάδος γῆς μηδαμοῦ διῆλθέ που ("Oh, I'm totally

Electra clamaverat οἴμοι τάλαινα spectante" (a wording that refers to what Electra had shouted: "Oh dear no"). The sentence is ironic because the news that Electra takes to be a bad omen in her making the cry "Oh dear no" is in fact a good omen since Orestes is alive in front of her. The strong contrast in the word "but" (ἀλλά) that begins the following sentence prepares the audience for another κληδών.

> ἀλλά μοι γέρων / ἐφεῖτ' Ὀρέστου ⟨Στρόφιος⟩ ἀγγεῖλαι πέρι

> 1110–1111

There has been no mention of the Phocian Strophios in *Electra* before 1111. The message about Orestes' death has been reported as coming from the Phocian Phanoteus (45; 670). On the mention of Strophios' name at l. 1111, Kamerbeek writes: "in the context of the play itself his name comes as unexpectedly as Polybus' at *O.T.* 490".[14] Kamerbeek, however, fails to realize why. Let us first note that, if we take the traditional understanding of *Electra* 1110–1111, there is a hyperbaton in the sentence, since the name Strophios comes immediately after that of Orestes' although it describes γέρων (old man) in the previous line. A more natural way to take the order of the words would be to construe στρόφιος as a genitive in apposition to the genitive immediately preceding it, that is the genitive of the name Orestes (Ὀρέστου).

The word στρόφιος is the genitive of the noun στρόφις which means a "slippery fellow" or a "trickster". In this case, the pitch accent would have been sounded on the antepenult rather than on the penult as supposed by Fraenkel in his comments on the Medicean reading in *Agamemnon* 881. The word γέρων, then, the subject of the sentence, should not be taken to refer to Strophios, the father of Pylades, but to the lying paedagogus who had brought the fake news of Orestes' death and who has been described in the prologue as "being grey-headed" (43). Thus, the whole sentence in 1110–1111 can be understood to have an alternative meaning: "An old man directed me to report about Orestes a trickster." This meaning is not unsuited to Orestes' role in *Electra*. As Johnston has recently written: "By means of trickery, and in pursuit of profit, power and status, Orestes will commit two murders."[15]

There are only two references to στρόφις in LSJ. In the *Clouds* of Aristophanes (*Nubes* 450) Strepsiades, who is himself a twister, describes the different characters he is willing to adopt to avoid paying his debts among which is a στρόφις. In his *Onomasticon* (6.130) Pollux, while describing the type of "person who disturbs public life", terms the στρόφις as a figure straight out of comedy (ὁ δὲ στρόφις ἄντικρυς κωμικόν). A further reference, however, to the term στρόφις is found in Eustathius

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wretched and hateful to the gods, since no κληδὼν of my condition reached home nor anywhere else in Greece"). Philoctetes says these words to Neoptolemos. The only reason why Neoptolemos is speaking to Philoctetes is because a κληδὼν (word of omen) came to Neoptolemos in Greece that Troy could not be captured without himself and Philoctetes' bow. This relates to the whole subject of the tragedy.

[14] Kamerbeek 1974, 151.

[15] Johnston 2021, 202. According to Ringer 1998, 23: "In *Electra*, trickery (δόλος) takes over the whole play."

(*Hom. Il.*1353,7) which may help to explain it in the context of *Electra*. The god Hermes is described as "one who twists and deceives just like a trickster" (ὁ στρέφων καὶ ἐξαπατῶν οἷον στρόφις).[16]

Like the two previous examples from the *Clouds* and Pollux, the Eustathius example seems more appropriate to comedy than to tragedy. In Aristophanes' *Ploutos*, Hermes appears towards the end as a comic character who is described by several terms including *Dolios*, deceitful, and *Strophaios*, (god) "of the door bracket", where there is a pun suggesting that door brackets are twisters. In the *Suda*, Garvie has reminded us, neither Pylades not his father Strophios have any function in Greek myth outside of the Orestes' story, but variations on both names are used as titles of the god Hermes.[17]

Hermes will play an important role in the denouement of *Electra.* Before we come to that, however, we must consider the scenes that take place with Orestes and Electra that lead up to the denouement. After the harrowing speech of Electra over the urn containing the fake ashes of her brother, she experiences an extreme change of mood when she learns that Orestes is alive and standing beside her. Her almost uncontrollable excitement at the news provides a contrast with her brother's more measured response. In this lyric interchange, she sings, he speaks. [18] This contrast presents a tussle between two different *modi operandi*: Electra's upfront heroic defiance against Orestes' desire for action based on stealth.[19] At first it looks as if Electra's throwing all caution to the winds will overwhelm the circumspection of her brother, as illustrated in the following exchange (1259–1263):

> OR: Do not satisfy your desire for long speech when it is not the right moment (καίρος) .
>
> EL: Who could dispense with words for a silence to match indeed this appearance of yours since I now behold you beyond all my imagination and expectation?

Electra is only halted by the entrance of the paedagogus from the house to reprimand the siblings for ignoring the danger in which they find themselves (1326–1330).

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[16] The accent in *RE s.v.* στροφίς is wrong, as this would make Hermes "the twister and deceiver like a waist or head band." There is only one example I know of for this very rare form at Eur. *Andr.* 717, where it seems possible that Eur. used it for metrical reasons.

[17] See Garvie 1970, 87 with references to other sources for Hermes.

[18] Finglass 2007, 470–471 compares the recognition in *Electra* with male/ female recognitions in Euripides' tragedies which have "a lyric interchange or amoebaeum". The plays Finglass cites all have happy endings: *IT*, *Ion*, *Hel. Hyps.* "In each of these cases a woman sings lyrics whose predominant rhythm is dochmiac...while a man responds by speaking iambic trimeters. This division probably reflects a belief that a woman in this situation would be less able to control her feelings than a man (470)." Finglass then contrasts the El. amoebaeum with the Euripidean ones: "As in these Euripidean instances, S.'s duet does not omit the recollection of the troubles of the past. But its mention of them is brief and imprecise (1244–1252)." As Finglass also points out (471) the caution of Orestes is contrasted strongly with Electra's uninhibited joy.

[19] For a discussion of the contrast between heroic action and deceit in *Electra* see Beer 2020a, 57–75.

The paedagogus displays many of the qualities of Hermes.[20] He has been Orestes' front man in the deceit; like Hermes, the god of boundaries, he manages, by means of lying, to cross the boundary of the doorway of the palace (803). Up to that point the palace-door had been a female preserve, whose exits were controlled by Electra.[21] Like Hermes *Strophaios or Strepsaios,* the doorkeeper, the paedagogus saves the plot, after the excited reunion of brother and sister, by standing guard inside the door. As such, like Hermes *Strophaios* or *Strepsaios*, the doorkeeper, [22] the paedagogus has to look both ways, guarding against what is going on inside and outside the skene door.

When the paedagogus does re-enter (1326) to reprove the children for their noise, and Electra discovers who he is, she again goes over the top in claiming that she thinks she is seeing her father (1361). There then ensues another tussle between a noisy Electra and the paedagogus until he finally calls for silence and action (1354–1371). As he says: "Now is the time (καίρος) for action; now Clytemnestra is alone; now there are no men within" (1368–1369). Shortly thereafter Orestes, Pylades, and the paedagogus go in the palace, crossing the boundary of the skene door that separates the outside from the interior of the murderous house of the Pelopidae (10). As the paedagogus has acted as Orestes' front man from the beginning and knows the disposition of what is inside the house, it seems natural that he would lead the way. Immediately before the murder of Clytemnestra, the chorus sing the words (1391–1397): "The crafty-footed defender of the dead (ἐνέρων / δολιόπους ἀρωγὸς) sneaks inside his father's bowers of ancient wealth, with ready at hand the sharp spilling of blood. Maia's son, Hermes, concealing his guile in darkness, leads him to his final destination, and there's no delay."[23]

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[20] Leinieks 1982, 143 actually suggests that the actions of the paedagogus are so like those of Hermes that he can be taken as the god in disguise. Even if we do not go that far, there are certainly some striking similarities about their movements.

[21] Electra plays the reverse role to that of Clytemnestra in Aesch. *Ag.* who is like a guard dog controlling the entrances into the palace. See Beer 2020b, 29.

[22] *RE s.v.* Strophaios.

[23] As this passage illustrates, Hermes was one who liked to work in darkness. In Aesch. *Cho.* 727 -728 he is described as νύχιος (of the night). This characteristic goes back to *Hymn.Hom.Merc.* 66–145, 155–156, 282–290, 358, 578. Like Hermes, their patron god, thieves are partial to working in darkness. Such was a mugger called Orestes in Aristophanic comedy who robbed people of their clothes at night (*Ach.* 1166–1169; *Av.* 711–712, 1487–1493). Quite who he was or whether he was more than one person is not known. The schol. on *Av.* 1487 suggests that Orestes was the nickname of the son of a certain Timocrates, because Orestes, turning mad after killing his mother, wandered to Athens. Orestes' name is also discussed in Pl. *Cra.* 394e, whose dramatic date is the late 5th century. In the dialogue the question is posed whether Orestes' name was given to him by chance or by a poet, to indicate his fierceness and wild nature as a man of the mountains. Perhaps, then, Orestes' name became generic for a wild man. The Orestes of Aristophanes was certainly "a slippery fellow" (στρόφις). When the pun on this word is used at *El.*1111, is it possible that it is an example of tragedy borrowing from comedy at a time when rumors about a character called Orestes were circulating at Athens? For a discussion of this thief named Orestes, see Dunbar 1995, 451–454.

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In the light of the ambiguity of the wording in *Electra* 1110 -1111 with the pun on Orestes being a trickster, I should now like to consider the denouement of the tragedy. In this I shall show that the main powers, whether infernal or not, that are operative in the revenge are powers that use stealth and darkness and that, after the recognition is over, the previously upfront Electra becomes caught up in the cunning and stealthy *modus operandi* of her brother and the paedagogus.

In order to set the scenario for this, we must first look at an earlier passage in *Electra* to see who the main infernal powers are. In her opening threnody Electra calls on the following underworld forces to send help in the vengeance (110–117): "House of Hades and Persephone, oh Hermes of the underworld, and dire Curse and Erinyes, dread children of the gods, you who look upon those who have been foully murdered and upon marriage beds secretly defiled, come bring help, avenge the murder of my father and send my brother to me."[24]

All these powers of vengeance look back to the *Oresteia* in some way. As Cassandra is about to enter the cursed palace in *Agamemnon*, she addresses it as the gates of Hades (1291; cf. 1115). Persephone's power as a helper is invoked at *Choephori* 490. Likewise, Hermes of the underworld (χθόνιος) is addressed in the opening two words of the *Choephori* and again at 124. In the same play at 727, Hermes is invoked as both χθόνιος and νύχιος (of the night). In *Eumenides*, Apollo drives the Erinyes, whom he has drugged, out of his own house into the open (*Eumenides* 179–180). As the daughters of Night, however, the Erinyes' more natural abode is one of darkness. In *Agamemnon*, the Furies are described as a band of kindred Erinyes, made more bold by drinking human blood, who abide in the accursed house, difficult to expel (δύσπεμπτος ἔξω), singing of the first act of harm (πρώταρχον ἄτην) that brought ruin on the family (*Agamemnon* 1188–1193).[25] In *Choephori* 402–403 the chorus claims that the blood of the slaughtered cries out for an Erinys as an avenger, and Orestes at *Choephori* 405–406 invokes the rulers of the dead and the Curses of the slain. In *Electra*, "A dire Curse and the Erinyes, dread children of the gods" (πότνι' Ἀρὰ, / σεμναί τε θεῶν παῖδες Ἐρινύες 111–112) have had their abode in the murderous house of Pelops (10) since the initial curse of Myrtilus at the fatal marriage of Pelops and Hippodameia (502–515). As the chorus predict in the first stasimon (489–491): "There will come a multi-footed, multi-handed, brazen-shod Erinys, hidden in dread ambush" (δεινοῖς κρυπτομένα λόχοις / χαλκόπους Ἐρινύς (490–491). Later they conclude the stasimon (513–515): "never yet has the outrage of

[24] Nooter 2001, 405 describes these infernal powers as "macabre divinities" and writes (406) "The 'paternal home' invoked by Orestes becomes in the mouth of Electra the house of Hades and Persephone, which is in fact also the house of their deceased father."

[25] For references to the Erinyes as children of Night see *Eum*.322, 416, 745, 792, 823, 844, 876, 1033. For their association with darkness see *Ag*.463, 992, 1580; *Cho.* 1048–1050. Note especially *Eum*.416–417: "We are the everlasting children of Night, and in our home beneath the earth we are called the Curses." (Sommerstein's trans.)

many woes taken its leave of this house" (οὔ τί πω / ἔλιπεν ἐκ τοῦδ' οἴκου / πολύπονος αἰκεία).

There has been considerable debate as to how important the Erinyes are for understanding *Electra*, especially since Orestes and Electra do not appear to suffer any consequences from their actions.[26] At the tragedy's climax, however, the movements of Orestes and Electra will make them appear like human embodiments of these dark spirits of vengeance. Through their final exits and entrances, it will seem as if the Erinyes and Curses have finally taken control of the dark recesses of the house where they traditionally belong. Unlike in Aeschylus there will be no reconciliation of the forces of light and darkness.

After Orestes, Pylades and the paedagogus have gone into the house, Electra prays to Apollo Lykeios[27] for help and then she herself unexpectedly enters the house for a mere thirteen lines (1384–1397). Before this short stasimon she had been on stage for almost 1300 lines since l.86[28] What is the dramatic significance of this brief departure?[29] Earlier, when Electra had first appeared, she wanted to escape outside to air her grief at the brutal death of her father within this house of many murders (10). She had claimed that her mother, the same mother who is now about to be murdered, was so reckless as to live with a vile man, fearing no Erinys (275–276.). While she and the three other conspirators are in the house, the chorus sing in a clear reference to the Erinyes (1386–1388): "Even now there have gone under the rafters of the house 'hounds relentless in pursuit' (ἄφυκτοι κύνες) as they chase after all crimes of villainy."

When she reappears, Electra stands in the doorway witnessing the murderous deeds within while speaking to the chorus outside.[30] Like Hermes she has become two-faced, turning both ways. She calls for silence (1399). When the chorus asks why she has come out, she says to guard against the arrival of Aegisthus (1403–1404).

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[26] See Johnston 2021, 197–2015 for the latest argument for the importance of the Erinyes and 205, n. 58 for references to other discussions. See especially Winnington-Ingram 1980, 238–239: "On one point, however, Sophocles has surely left us in no doubt, which is that we cannot understand the action and the personages without regard to the Aeschylean conception of the Furies. If this is a grim play, it is because Furies have been and are at work with the result that only deplorable alternatives are open."

[27] For the significance of the epithet Lykeios (wolf-like) to describe Apollo see n. 42 below. Given El. is at the door of the house, it would be more natural for her to pray to Apollo Agyieus.

[28] On Electra's excessively long presence 'on stage' see Seale 1982, 79. For him El.s long presence is "the key to the nature of the action" in contrast to her brother's absence: "Orestes is a secretive schemer who needs guidance, unheroic, unemotional. It is no mere accident that Orestes spends most of the play 'behind the scenes.'"

[29] For references to discussions of the exit of Electra into the skene at 1383 see recently Catrambone 2022, 316.

[30] Generally, on the prospective scenarios for the matricide and Electra's participation see Sommerstein 2010, 224–249, esp. 246–248.

Clytemnestra's death has been described as "one of the nastiest in all Greek trag-edy."[31] While her mother is being murdered inside, it is Electra's piercing screams, as she stands in the doorway, rather than Clytemnestra's cries that are almost the more remarkable (1410–1416). When Clytemnestra cries with the exact same words as those of her husband when he was struck in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: ὤμοι πέπληγμαι, Electra screams: "Strike with twice the force, if you can". This scream is followed by Clytemnestra's ὤμοι μάλ' αὖθις, another exact reminiscence of Agamemnon's words. It is almost as if through her screams Electra is physically taking a part in the matricide and reincarnating the role of her mother who was not simply a woman murdering her husband but a family avenger appearing in the likeness of a woman.[32] The chorus' immediate response neatly sums up what is happening (1417–1421): "The curses are at work! Those who lie beneath the ground are living (τελοῦσ' ἀραί· ζῶσιν οἱ / γᾶς ὑπαὶ κείμενοι. 1418–1419), for the blood of the killers flows in turn, drained by those who perished long ago!" (Lloyd-Jones trans.). When Orestes and Pylades enter from the skene, to Electra's question how do things stand, Orestes replies (1424–1425): "all is fair (καλῶς) within the house, if Apollo's prophesy was fair (καλῶς)." These are much debated words to which we shall return.

Now, as the play reaches an almost breathless climax, Electra suddenly dispenses with her open, upfront expressions of anger and defiance, for she quickly learns, in a matter of moments, the deviousness of the paedagogus as she serves as Orestes' "front man" in setting the trap for Aegisthus to walk into (1418–1465).[33] *Dolos* has become part of her make-up. Ironically, the devious Orestes, in his dialogue with Aegisthus, will speak forthrightly to him (1491–1507) in contrast to those words of Electra in her entrapment dialogue.[34] This exchange between Orestes and Ae-gisthus raises pertinent questions about the nature of the revenge. When Orestes orders Aegisthus to go inside, Aegisthus retorts: "Why drive me within the house? What need for darkness, if your deed is fair (καλόν 1493–1494)?" His answer puts into question Orestes' earlier answer to Electra after she had asked how are things (1424–1425): "All is fair (καλῶς) within the house, if Apollo's prophecy was fair (καλῶς)." Apollo had advised the use of deceit. There is nothing fair about deceit; it

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[31] Garvie 2014, 35.

[32] On the words ὤμοι πέπληγμαι (1415)...ὤμοι μάλ' αὖθις (1416) Marsh 2001, 223 writes: "Clytemn-estra's words are exact reiterations of Agamemnon's dying cries at Aesch. *Ag*. 1343 and 1345, serving as a reminder that this is indeed vengeance in kind, blood for blood, a murder for a murder..." Marsh however overlooks that in *Ag* Clyt. is also the embodiment of the family avenger (1497–1505), i.e. an Erinys, which is what Electra sounds like in this Sophoclean passage.

[33] On the dialogue between Electra and Aegisthus see Lloyd 2012, 575–576.

[34] Reinhardt 1979, 137 is wrong when he writes: "The ending and the beginning, the plan and the deed in this instance form no more than the framework of the actual play." Along similar lines see Stei-dle 1968, 93. What the tragedy presents in fact is a stark contrast in methods of resistance to tyranny: open words (Electra) and stealthy action (Orestes). Ultimately, only action in the accursed house will bring closure of sorts, though it is not really a closure. See n. 43 below.

is an underhand act fostered by darkness. A house of "many murders" (10) like that of the Pelopidae is an ideal environment for such deeds. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra themselves had once been described as 'twin Erinyes', who committed murder in that same house. As the chorus had expressed the matter earlier (1078–1080): [Electra] "having no forethought of death and ready to forego her own life, if she can destroy the twin Erinyes (διδύμαν ἑλοῦσ' Ἐρινύν)." When Orestes orders Aegisthus to go within so he might die where he killed his father, Aegisthus, a former Erinys himself (1080), replies with a pertinent question (1497–1498): "Is it entirely necessary for this house to witness both the current ills and those to come of the Pelopidae (μέλλοντα Πελοπιδῶν κακά)?" Orestes has no real answer to what seems to be the enigmatic, second part of this question.

There has been an ongoing debate about when the main characters make their final exits in the epilogue of the tragedy. Several critics, following Calder, believe that Orestes, Pylades and Aegisthus exit into the skene at 1507, and that Electra is left alone on stage with the chorus.[35] This arrangement simply will not do. There is a curse on the murderous house (1417–1420). For the ending to make dramatic sense, it is essential that the skene be the centre of focus and that the final tableau reveal how the secretive forces of darkness prevail, and this includes Electra, who has succumbed to the ways of her deceitful brother.

The matricide in *Electra,* we have seen earlier, has intertextual allusions to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* where Agamemnon is murdered in the accursed house of Atreus. In Aeschylus' trilogy, with Apollo's help, Orestes escapes from the murderous house and is later acquitted of matricide under the bright light of the sun in Athens by a court convened by Athena. Through her divine persuasion, Athena effects a reconciliation between the Olympians and the Erinyes, the daughters of Night, who take up residence at Athens as Semnai, Revered Goddesses. In Sophocles' *Electra* there is no such reconciliation and the curses, as embodied in the Erinyes of each new generation of the family, are still alive and functioning (1417). In the epilogue, therefore, all the major dramatis personae should make their final exits together into the murderous house of Pelops, revealing the continuation of the spilling of blood and the victory of the forces of Darkness. It only makes dramatic sense, then, if all the agents of vengeance, past and present, form a kind of anti-procession to that found at the end of the *Oresteia* as they enter the murderous house.[36] First the dead woman, Clytemnestra lying on a bier, is pushed in, followed by her living daughter; thereafter Aegisthus, a former Erinys himself (1080), still alive but about to meet his death, to show that the bloodletting is an ongoing, not a completed process, and then Orestes, the στρόφις, to be followed by Pylades, traditionally the silent representative of Apollo, who had enjoined the use of deceit in the first place

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[35] Calder 1963, 215–216; March 2001, 231; Schmitz 2016, 237.
[36] See Taplin 1977, 410–415 on the procession at the end of Aesch. *Eum.*

(35–37). As the skene doors close behind them, the palace takes on the look of the house of Hades.[37]

Although we do not know the actual date of the Sophoclean tragedy, it is agreed that it was first produced sometime during the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta.[38] For the Spartans in the 6th century Orestes was a military hero, and they adapted the Orestes myth to support their claims to hegemony in the Peloponnese.[39] In the 5th century Pindar composed an epinician ode, (*Pythian* 11. 15–37) which told a pro-Spartan version of the *Oresteia*, possibly to counteract the pro-Athenian version of the myth in Aeschylus' tragic trilogy.[40] It seems, then, that the myth was always appropriated to present a political point of view. Why should we assume that Sophocles' version was any different? What we should ask, then, is what was Sophocles' purpose in framing his *Electra* around a curse on the house of Pelops rather than on that of Atreus as in Aeschylus?

According to Thucydides (1.118.3) the Delphic oracle proclaimed that it would be pro-Spartan in the Peloponnesian War. During the war Athenian literature is full of allusions to Spartans as liars and practitioners of deceit. For instance, in Euripides' *Andromache* 445–452, produced c. 425 BC, they are described "as 'councillors of deception' (δόλια βουλευτήρια), 'princely liars' (ψευδῶν ἄνακτες), and 'tricky spinners of mischief' (μηχανορράφοι κακῶν) and are accused of being 'shameful for greed and saying one thing while thinking another.'"[41] In *Electra*, Apollo ordains Orestes' use of deceit (35–37). In portraying Orestes as a trickster (1111) and as a member of the cursed house of Pelops did Sophocles compose his *Electra* as anti-Spartan propaganda?[42] If so, the enigmatic and seemingly allusive words of Aeg-

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[37] Anton Chekhov, in a letter to a friend on November 1st, 1889, wrote: "One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep." I would argue for something analogous in *El.* 10 with its deictic epithet: πολύφθορόν τε δῶμα Πελοπιδῶν τόδε (The house, here, of the Pelopidae with its many murders). These words emphasise the importance of the skene as a focus for the ensuing dramatic action.

[38] See Finglass 2007, 1–4 for a conservative discussion of the date. I am inclined to date *El.* late, that is fairly close to *Phil.*, produced in 409 BC.

[39] See Garvie 1986, xviii and n. 29 for references to other scholars and, more recently, see Beer 2020a, 59–60.

[40] See Kurke 2013, 101–175. Of the two possible dates for Pind. *Pyth.* 11 (n. 9 above), Kurke makes a good case for 454 BC. Beer 2020b, 32–33 suggests that Aesch. relocated the house of Atreus from Mycenae to Argos in 458 BC in a propaganda war against Sparta.

[41] Beer, 2020a, 69.

[42] For examples of the perfidy of the Spartans in Athenian literature of the time see Henderson 1987: 153. In this note he comments on Ar. *Lys.*626–629, where the male coryphaeus complains about the Athenian women as follows: "They're trying to make peace between us and the men of Sparta, who are no more trustworthy than a starving wolf" (Henderson 2000 trans.). Henderson then cites copious evidence of how: "Wolves were proverbial for rapacity, faithlessness" (and) "quest for prey." In Soph. *El.* wolf imagery is closely associated with Apollo beginning with the words (6–7): "the Lykeian agora of the wolf-slaying god" (τοῦ λυκοκτόνου θεοῦ / ἀγορὰ Λύκειος). See also ll.645, 655, 1379. However, the epithet λυκοκτόνος might also mean "the wolf who slays". See Gershenson 1991, 1–25 on Apollo's association with wolves and as a wolf-god. See also de Roguin 1999, 109 who writes: "… si le dieu est désigné ice comme λυκοκτόνος, cet adjectif doit avoir un sens précis et directememt en relation

isthus in which he refers to the future κακά, (a general term for "ills, woes, crimes" etc.) of the Pelopidae (1497–1498) could well be an extra dramatic reference to the wrongs being perpetrated by the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War at the very time of the production of *Electra*.[43] In this case the skene could be taken as a metaphor for Sparta.

Electra closes with customary anapaests of the chorus 1508–1510: ὦ σπέρμ᾽ Ἀτρέως, ὡς πολλὰ παθὸν/ δι᾽ ἐλευθερίας μόλις ἐξῆλθες /τῇ νῦν ὁρμῇ τελεωθέν ("Seed of Atreus, after many sufferings/ you have at last emerged in freedom, / made complete by this day's enterprise" Lloyd-Jones trans.) If the words "Seed of Atreus" do not refer to Electra, is there anyone or anything else that the words can refer to except "the descendants of Atreus"? and in which case to what does the word "freedom" refer? Sophocles is one of the most subtle masters of irony. This aspect of his dramaturgy has been excellently described by Goldhill who deserves to be quoted at length:

> Sophocles...has an uncanny ability to suggest the horror lurking in mundane language, its predictive even causal force. But I use the word "suggest" advisedly. The question that emerges from these readings is not simply "is there irony here?", so much as "how far should we see irony here?", "how sure can we be of the boundary between the casual and the causal?" In this way, Sophocles turns back against the reader (critic, audience) the fiction of superiority and controlled knowledge. These examples of flickering irony leave the reader in a far more uncomfortable position than the strong model of dramatic irony supposes.[44]

I suggest that the chorus' words "Seed of Atreus, after many sufferings, you have at last emerged in freedom" may refer to Sophocles' own treatment of the myth in which he has transferred the curse from the house of Atreus, as in Aeschylus, to the house of Pelops, i.e. the Spartans; and the words "made complete by this day's enterprise" refer to the performance of the tragedy of *Electra* by Sophocles' own chorus and actors. We should recall that there is a famous chorus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* in which the chorus step out of the dramatic illusion and refer to themselves as performing dancers (895–896).[45] Let us not forget that Sophocles is a theatrical στρόφις, a trickster of the first order; he has his chorus toy with the audience's expectations before it has the chance to applaud another of his dramatic masterpieces.

avec le drame". When Apollo is invoked under the title Phoebus (35 and 637), he is also associated with deceitful and stealthy movements, although the epithet Phoebus means "Bright". Deceit and stealth are more befitting Hermes. For another negative view of Apollo's role in the Orestes myth see Eur. *El.* 971, 979, 1190–1193, 1245–1246, 1302. Euripides' tragedy was also produced sometime during the Peloponnesian War.

[43] Roberts 1998, 186 writes: "Those critics are surely right who argue that Aegisthus' reference to the future misfortunes of the family suggests more than his own death." See her ns. 21 and 22 for references to other critics. κακά at *El.* 1498 has a broader range of reference than Roberts' "misfortunes". The word can also imply "bad deeds" i.e. crimes.

[44] Goldhill 2012, 26–27.

[45] See Henrichs 1994–1995, 56–111.

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