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Awry Crowns: Queenship and Its Discontents

Edited by Rosy Colombo

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MICHAEL J. CARROLL*

Prophetic Deception: The Narrative of the Chariot Race in Sophocles' *Electra*

Abstract

Towards the midpoint of Sophocles' *Electra*, the Paedagogus uses a speech of eighty-four lines to convince Clytemnestra and Electra that Orestes has met his death while competing in the chariot race at the Pythian games (680-763). Scholars have increasingly recognised that the length and vividness of this false narrative requires explanation; some interpretations focus on the effect of the speech on the two women, while others explore the thematic significance of the events described by the Paedagogus. The central claim of this article is that the narrative symbolically foreshadows what is to happen after Orestes kills Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, though the play itself ends with the latter still alive: the disaster in the fictional chariot race is a sign to the audience that a reversal of fortune lies in store for the real Orestes (and their first thought is likely to be of the pursuit by the Erinyes). The audience have been prepared for this possibility by Orestes' insistence in the prologue that, though it is considered inauspicious to be spoken of as dead while still alive, in this case he has nothing to fear (59-66). When the Paedagogus later conveys the false news, further clues that point to the ominous import of the narrative include its two-part structure, with initial success in the games followed by disaster, and the intra- and intertextual resonances of the chariot race itself. Prophecy is a major theme of *Electra*, and in this scene the audience are challenged to identify and interpret an omen which none of the characters are in a position to perceive as such.

KEYWORDS: Sophocles; *Electra*; Paedagogus; chariot race; omen; prophecy; Erinyes

Early on in Sophocles' *Electra*, Orestes entrusts the Paedagogus with the task of announcing the false news of his death to those inside the royal palace of Mycenae, urging the old slave to do so "when the right moment leads you inside" (39: ὅταν σε καιρὸς εἰσάγῃ).¹ In the event, the Paedagogus comes upon Clytemnestra, Electra and the chorus outside the palace, and his timing is exquisite. Clytemnestra has just ended an extended prayer to Apollo by alluding to unspoken desires she hopes the god will bring to

¹ Timeliness is a key motif of this first scene; the word καιρὸς appears also in lines 22, 31 and 85 (cf. Schein 1982: 71-2).

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fulfilment (657-9), and it requires little imagination to infer that the demise of her own son is foremost among them. If from Clytemnestra's perspective the announcement that soon follows suggests that her prayer has been answered, the audience have very different grounds for attributing the slave's opportune entrance to Apollo's influence.² In the opening scene Orestes had revealed that the proclamation of the Pythian oracle was that he should kill his father's murderers "by deceit" (37: δόλοισι) rather than through force of arms, and the Paedagogus' tale is of course an essential part of the scheme devised by Orestes in response to the prophecy.

The Paedagogus' brief is to say that Orestes died by falling from his chariot while competing in the Pythian games (47-50), but what the audience have not been prepared for is the scale of the narrative that he proceeds to elaborate: in a speech of eighty-four lines (680-763), the Paedagogus begins by describing the successes of the fictional Orestes on the first day of the games before recounting in vivid detail the chariot race that took place "on another day" (698) and culminated in Orestes' death. In the past, the speech was often applauded for its brilliance and then largely passed over (cf. Finglass 2007: 300), but in recent decades scholars have increasingly recognised that its dramatic prominence requires explanation.³ What is so remarkable is not simply the length of this false narrative but the fact that it follows the conventions of a tragic messenger speech (cf. Lloyd 2005: 67-69; Marshall 2006: 203). The expansiveness and attention to detail characteristic of such set pieces reflects their dramaturgical importance as a means of bringing to life events that, though integral to the action, were impossible (or at least very difficult) to portray on the tragic stage (cf. Bremer 1976). In the case of the Paedagogus' speech, by contrast, the spectators are well aware that, however much they may feel gripped by the twists and turns of the narrative and perhaps even moved by its conclusion, it does not correspond to any real sequence of events in the world of the drama.⁴ Thus, unless we are willing to accept that the dramatic economy so characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy has for once been set aside, the challenge is to explain

² On the ironies here, cf. Finglass 2007: 288: "The immediate entry of the Paedagogus will seem like the god's answer to her prayer: indeed he has been sent on his way by the god, but to bring Clytemnestra's destruction".

³ Cf. e.g. Lloyd 2005: 66: "It is a major problem in the play why Sophocles should have devoted so much space to a long and exciting speech in which there is apparently not a word of truth". For overviews of the scholarship on the speech, see MacLeod 2001: 107-10; Finglass 2007: 300-4.

⁴ This tension between the speech's dramatic power and (from the audience's perspective) transparent falsity has been the starting point for a number of metatheatrical readings; see Batchelder 1995, ch. 3; Ringer 1998: 161-72; Barrett 2002, ch. 4; Marshall 2006.

why, in this central scene, a shorter account of Orestes' death could not have fulfilled more or less the same dramatic purpose.

One approach is to focus on the effect that the speech has on Electra and Clytemnestra, who lack the crucial information possessed by the audience.⁵ The thoroughness of the Paedagogus' report is certainly an important factor in convincing both women of his trustworthiness; after he has finished, Clytemnestra refers to the "definite proofs" of Orestes' death (774: *πίστα . . . τεκμήρια*) that he has provided, and Electra is so convinced that she can later dismiss without hesitation Chrysothemis' suggestion that the lock of hair newly placed by Agamemnon's tomb offers clear evidence (885-6: *σαφή / σημεῖα*) of their brother's return. It is also true that the time we are given to imagine the turmoil Electra must be experiencing as she listens adds greatly to the tension of the scene (cf. Finglass 2007: 300-1). It is far from obvious, however, that a considerably shorter speech could not have achieved a similar level of verisimilitude (cf. MacLeod 2001: 108; Lloyd 2005: 66) or offered the spectators ample opportunity to wonder what effect the Paedagogus' words might be having on his listeners.

A different way of meeting the challenge is to explore the thematic significance of the events described by the Paedagogus. If the narrative offers a glimpse of the qualities that make the real Orestes a worthy son of the former commander-in-chief at Troy, by the same token it brings to light a troubling disjunction between his actions in that alternative reality and the murderous dissimulation of the dramatic present (cf. Segal 1981: 281-2; Blundell 1989: 173-4.). It is hard to believe, moreover, that there is simply an accidental connection between the setting for Orestes' fictional death and the events of family history evoked in the epode of the first stasimon (502-15), where the chorus allude to the chariot-race victory that allowed Pelops to claim Hippodamia as his bride, and the subsequent murder of Myrtilus, thrown into the sea from Pelops' chariot.⁶ Yet even when scholars acknowledge the pertinence of the connection, interpretations of its significance differ. Thomson appears to have in mind the curse which the dying Myrtilus is supposed to have called down upon the house of Pelops when he argues that the Paedagogus' speech makes us realise that Orestes is "doomed" (1941: 357). For Finglass, on the other hand, the reappearance of the chariot theme is better understood as "an indication of how Orestes has broken free from his family's troubled history"; Orestes' death, after all, is "only a fiction" (2007: 302).

Both types of approach have their merits, and my intention in what fol-

⁵ For a survey of interpretations along these lines, see MacLeod 2001: 109-10.

⁶ For a partial list of readings that draw this connection, see MacLeod 2001: 109n10 (to which can be added e.g. Schein 1982: 76).

lows is certainly not to invalidate them. The first group of scholars rightly emphasise the contribution of the immediate context to the speech's dramatic power, but my proposal is that a further important source of tension in the scene concerns the implications of the narrative for Orestes' own mission. Various clues, both earlier in the play and in the speech itself, raise the possibility that the speech has a prophetic import of which neither Orestes nor the Paedagogus are aware. More specifically, the disaster in the chariot race points ahead to a possible reversal of fortune for Orestes following the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and the first thought of many of the spectators, I shall suggest, would have been of the pursuit by the Erinyes. The speech, in other words, has proleptic force, symbolically anticipating events which, it will emerge, fall outside the main action of the play,⁷ and it is only when seen in this light that the full relevance of the aspects of the narrative explored by the second group of scholars becomes clear.

The first section of the essay focuses on some lines from the prologue in which Orestes insists that, though it is generally considered inauspicious to be described as dead while still alive, in this case he has nothing to fear (59-66), a passage which, I argue, prepares the audience for the possibility that the Paedagogus' tale will indeed have ominous significance. In the second section I propose that the startling length and vividness of the narrative gives substance to this hint from the prologue, and that the pursuit by the Erinyes is the turn of events most likely to occur to a spectator who interprets the speech as an omen of the future. The argument of the third section is that the two-part structure of the speech, with initial success in the games followed by the disastrous chariot race, reinforces the impression that the narrative is foreshadowing what is to follow the killing of the ruling couple. In the fourth section I consider the symbolism of the chariot race itself, and, building on Thomson's brief discussion, argue that it is only when Orestes' fictional death is understood as anticipating the pursuit by the Erinyes that we can fully appreciate the link between the manner of his death and the events of the past involving Myrtilus and Pelops, as well as the intertextual relationship between the Paedagogus' narrative and a set of athletic metaphors in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. The fifth section, finally, aims to contextualise this reading of the speech; prophecy is a major theme of *Electra*, and in this scene the onus is placed on the audience to identify and interpret an omen which none of the characters are in a position to perceive as such.

⁷ De Jong (2007: 276, 285) argues that, because a play is not a narrative, 'prolepsis' is not the right term in this context; in the terminology she favours, the speech can instead be described as an external prospective narrative ('external' because the events it anticipates are subsequent to the action of the play).

1. To be Reported Dead While Still Alive

Once the Paedagogus has been given his instructions, Orestes explains that in the meantime he and Pylades will perform at Agamemnon's tomb the ceremonies specified by Apollo, before returning with an urn supposedly containing his own ashes that will provide confirmation of the happy news of his death (51-8). Orestes gives the impression that the plan is not one he is entirely comfortable with, however, devoting a whole eight lines to justifying the decision to have his death reported while he is still alive (59-66):⁸

OP. τί γάρ με λυπεῖ τοῦθ', ὅταν λόγῳ θανῶν
 ἔργοισι σωθῶ κάξενέγκωμαι κλέος; 60
 δοκῶ μέν, οὐδὲν ῥήμα σὺν κέρδει κακόν.
 ἤδη γάρ εἶδον πολλάκις καὶ τοὺς σοφοὺς
 λόγῳ μάτην θνήσκοντας· εἶθ', ὅταν δόμους
 ἔλθωσιν αὐθις, ἐκτετίμηνται πλέον·
 ὡς κάμ' ἐπαυχῶ τῆσδε τῆς φήμης ἄπο 65
 δεδορκότ' ἐχθροῖς ἄστρον ὡς λάμψειν ἔτι.

[OR. How can it harm me when, though reported dead, I in fact achieve safety and win renown? My view is that no word is ill-omened when it brings gain. Indeed many times before now I have learned of clever men falsely described as dead; then, when they return home, all the greater is the honour bestowed on them. In the same way, I trust that with the help of this report I too shall be revealed as alive, shining like a star on my enemies.]

For some critics, Orestes' defensiveness in this passage points to the moral dubiousness of the deception plot (e.g. Schein 1982: 72) or indeed of the matricide itself (e.g. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 236), but Finglass is right to argue that what is at issue is the violation of the taboo of not speaking of oneself, or allowing oneself to be spoken of, as already dead (2007: 109-10). A further question, though, is why Orestes is made to lay such stress on the apparently ill-omened nature of the false report even as he strives to downplay it; we can accept that Orestes is attempting "to avert the power of the taboo by challenging it" (Finglass 2007: 109), and still wonder why eight lines need to be set aside for this purpose.

I referred earlier to Thomson's remark that the link between the choice of fictional disaster in the Paedagogus' narrative and the chariot-race victory of Pelops makes us realise that Orestes is "doomed". Winnington-Ingram is one of the few scholars to have responded positively to this observation, and his suggestion is that the seemingly "gratuitous" length of

⁸ Here and elsewhere (unless otherwise indicated) I quote from the Greek text of Finglass 2007; translations are my own.

this section of Orestes' speech in the prologue is an early sign that there is something sinister about Orestes' mission (1980: 236). Winnington-Ingram's understanding of *Electra* – about which I have more to say in the second and fourth sections – overlaps in many respects with my own, but Winnington-Ingram denies that the future fate of Orestes is a major concern of the play: “it is not what the Furies may do when the play is over that matters, but what they have done and do before and during the play” (1980: 227). From this perspective, Orestes can be seen as a victim of the Erinyes as well as their agent already before the play has finished, and that is because in taking the vengeance demanded by justice he is forced to commit an act of matricide. When Winnington-Ingram turns to the Paedagogus' speech, therefore, the question that interests him is whether the narrative suggests “that Orestes really did suffer disaster through his Pythian associations” (237). In other words, he takes the false story to point *backwards* in time to Orestes' initial decision to pursue the course of action advised by Apollo; after suffering the “disaster” of adopting this plan, Orestes then “rises from the dead . . . to play a chthonian role as the avenger of his dead father” (*ibid.*).

Winnington-Ingram's interpretation of Orestes and Electra as simultaneously victims and agents of the Erinyes is in many ways compelling, but his assumption that the play is not concerned with what the Erinyes might do to Orestes after the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus – except as a “possibility inherent in the system of justice Orestes has successfully applied. So much and no more” (227) – causes him to pass over what seems to me a much more natural way of construing the ironic overtones of these eight lines from Orestes' speech. According to the logic of ill-omened speech, the danger is that the false news of Orestes' death might point *forwards*, and, despite his insistence to the contrary, presage a turn of events that is not part of his plans and which, unlike the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Orestes would view in wholly negative terms. Peradotto notes that “[to] believe that the word is capable of evoking the deed is basic to cledonancy” (1969: 11), and although Orestes denies that this principle applies when the words in question are the means towards a beneficial end, the vehemence of the denial is a hint to the audience that the story may indeed serve as an omen of the future.

Stinton raises the following objection to the idea that the Paedagogus' narrative makes us realise Orestes is “doomed”:

Orestes is not doomed; not at least in the sense we might forebode: he does not die. To be sure, pursuit by Furies is a frightful thing, but even in Aeschylus he does not fall victim to them: he is acquitted and freed. Critics who think that pursuit by Furies is portended in Sophocles seem to forget this. (1990: 476)

A symbolic death need not foreshadow an actual death, however, and in the next part of his speech in the prologue, Sophocles' Orestes makes it clear how calamitous an outcome it would be, from his perspective, to be forced away from Mycenae. Addressing his native land, the local gods, and his own ancestral home, Orestes asks not to be sent away from Mycenae in dishonour (*El.* 71: ἄτιμον) but to take control of his wealth and restore the royal house to its former standing. More will be said about the relationship between Sophocles' play and other treatments of the story in the next section, but for the moment it is enough to note that it is the first of these outcomes that initially comes to pass in versions that include the pursuit by the Erinyes. Towards the end of *Choephoroi*, even before the Erinyes have appeared to him, Orestes declares that the matricide leaves him with no choice but to wander from place to place, banished from his native land (*Cho.* 1042: ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος). Sophocles' audience are in no position to assume, especially at such an early point in the play, that the same fate is in store for this Orestes, but his prayer to avoid exile is nevertheless a subtle reminder of the immediate consequences of the matricide in versions that do include the pursuit by the Erinyes.

In fact, the prayer of Sophocles' Orestes already points to an important difference between this version and that of Aeschylus. The Aeschylean Orestes, we discover in the course of *Choephoroi*, has been given information by Apollo's oracle both about the sufferings that will ensue if he fails to avenge his father's murder (*Cho.* 269-96) and what he must do once he has committed the matricide (i.e. make his way to Apollo's temple at Delphi; *Cho.* 1038-9). His Sophoclean counterpart, by contrast, gives no indication that he has received any information from the oracle beyond the instruction to use deceit in carrying out the "just slaughters" (*El.* 37: ἐνδίκους σφαγὰς) of his father's murders,⁹ or that he has even properly considered the possibility that his actions might have (even temporary) negative consequences. Thus, by the time Sophocles' Orestes hears Electra's voice some lines later and leaves the stage along with the Paedagogus and Pylades, the audience have been given grounds to suspect that, despite Orestes' protestations, the false tale may indeed prove inauspicious, and that this is not a possibility for which he is remotely prepared.

2. The Erinyes

When the Paedagogus eventually relays the false news to Clytemnestra and Electra, it quickly becomes apparent that the taboo on speaking of the

⁹ I follow the manuscript reading here, rather than adopting Lange's ἐνδίκου (favoured by Finglass); cf. n19.

living as dead has not induced him to give an evasive or cursory account of the circumstances of Orestes' death. From the Paedagogus' perspective, of course, the comprehensiveness of the narrative serves to increase its believability, but especially in light of the reminder in the prologue that such a report would conventionally be considered ill omened, the audience have grounds to feel troubled by his adoption of the role of tragic messenger in this context.¹⁰ And the longer the speech continues and the more detailed the narrative becomes as it reaches its conclusion, the more the impression is bolstered that the Paedagogus is tempting fate by defying the taboo so flagrantly. Indeed a significant part of the dramatic tension of the scene, I suggest, stems from this disjunction between the Paedagogus' willingness to prolong the narrative and the audience's awareness of its sinister overtones.

It should be stressed immediately that, though I am speaking here of 'the audience' as if it were a uniform entity, there would certainly have been scope for a variety of possible responses to the speech, including simple obliviousness to its prophetic import. Nevertheless, the use of an extended messenger speech as the vehicle of misinformation is a strikingly innovative dramaturgical move,¹¹ and even a spectator unreceptive to the hints of foreboding in the lines from Orestes' speech in the prologue might be tempted to wonder – as it becomes apparent how detailed a description of the fictional death is to be offered – whether there is more to the narrative than meets the eye. We shall turn in the next two sections to clues within the narrative that allow for a further splintering of responses among the audience, but it is worth pausing at this point to consider what a spectator struck by the possibility that the speech has ominous significance might take it to be foreshadowing.

Sophocles had a rich and varied tradition to draw on in adapting the story of Electra,¹² and an Athenian audience would have positively expected a new treatment to engage with, and diverge (in more or less signifi-

¹⁰ For an overview of some of the conventions of the tragic messenger adopted by the Paedagogus (including those that help him to drag out the story), see Marshall 2006: 213–18.

¹¹ As Lowe points out, tragedy is a "medium of far stricter narrative economy" than epic (2000: 162), one symptom of which is the contrasting treatment of messengers in both genres; while in Homer they are used "only to report to a character information already narrated to the audience", in tragedy "messengers have become not a supplement for primary action, but a richly functional *substitute*" (167; Lowe's emphasis). It is precisely this convention that is flouted by the Paedagogus' false narrative.

¹² For overviews of the pre-Aeschylean tradition, see e.g. Garvie 1986: ix–xxvi; Sommerstein 2010: 136–45.

cant ways) from, previous versions of the myth.¹³ In the *Odyssey*, the various references to Orestes' vengeance give the impression that he suffered no negative consequences for his actions,¹⁴ and some scholars have argued in favour of seeing Sophocles' play as a 'Homeric' version of the story.¹⁵ The *Odyssey* is notoriously evasive about the circumstances of Clytemnestra's death, however, a feature of the poem that reflects Orestes' role as a paradigm for Telemachus (cf. Alden 2017: 84, with further references). Stesichorus' *Oresteia* is the earliest version we know of to contain the pursuit by the Erinyes, and scholars have drawn from this the reasonable inference that his poem did not shy away from exploring the moral issues raised by the matricide (Davies and Finglass 2014: 488-91). That the works of Stesichorus had an important influence on the tragic poets has long been recognised, and fifth-century audiences seem to have had a reasonable level of familiarity with his poetry (cf. Swift 2015; Finglass 2018). As Stinson notes, however, by the late fifth century it is above all thanks to the "authority" of the *Oresteia* that "the 'pursuit' version may reasonably be accounted standard" (1990: 465).¹⁶ The classic status of Aeschylus' trilogy by itself offers strong grounds for supposing that the pursuit by the Erinyes is likely to have been the first scenario to occur to a spectator who suspected that the Paedagogus' speech had ominous significance, but a further consideration is the fact that, already by this point in Sophocles' play, the audience have more than once been reminded of that aspect of the Aeschylean version of the story.

Winnington-Ingram's influential reading of *Electra* sets out to show that the "theme of Erinyes is developed by Sophocles in close relation to the thought of Aeschylus and . . . is of fundamental importance in the interpretation of his play" (1980: 218). The word 'Erinys' itself, he notes, makes four appearances in *Electra*, each of them significant (112, 276, 491, 1080), and Winnington-Ingram also has an eye for passages that point more oblique-

¹³ Equally, a play might tantalise an audience with the prospect of significant innovations which it fails to deliver; for a detailed analysis of *Electra* along these lines, see Sommerstein 1997.

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of these passages, see Alden 2017, ch. 3.

¹⁵ Cf. Jebb 1894: xli: "Sophocles seems to say to his audience, 'I give you, modified for drama, the story that Homer tells; . . . regard the act of Orestes under the light in which the *Odyssey* presents it'". Support for this 'Homeric' reading has waned considerably since around the midpoint of the twentieth century; on its intellectual context (and relation to the 'optimistic' reading of the play more generally), see Davies 1999 (esp. 127-8).

¹⁶ Stinton goes on to deny that the pursuit by the Erinyes is foreshadowed in Sophocles' play. For the classic status of the *Oresteia* already in the fifth century, see e.g. East-erling 2005 (on *Agamemnon* in particular); Torrance 2013, ch. 1 (on allusions to the trilogy in three Euripidean plays).

ly to the Aeschylean background. For example, when Electra asks Clytemnestra by what sort of law (579: ποίῳ νόμῳ) she killed Agamemnon and warns her that she will be in line for the same treatment if the law of retaliation is to be accepted as a general principle (580-3), the question is subtly raised of whether the same would apply to Electra and Orestes if they were to be responsible for the deaths of the ruling couple (1980: 221). It is important to stress, as Winnington-Ingram fails to do sufficiently, that there are also many marked differences between the two versions,¹⁷ and a spectator who entertained the possibility that the Paedagogus' narrative might foreshadow the pursuit by the Erinyes would have had to be prepared to reconsider this interpretation in the light of subsequent developments. It is also true that our limited knowledge of pre-Aeschylean treatments of the story means that for the most part we can do no more than speculate about the play's engagement with other versions (which included the epic *Nostoi* and a poem by the obscure figure Xanthus), and it may be that if new fragments of Stesichorus' *Oresteia* came to light it would turn out that some of the motifs I shall refer to as Aeschylean would be better described as Stesichorean. Nevertheless, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the *Oresteia* would be understood by many in the audience to be a particularly important model for Sophocles' play, and that such spectators felt free – and indeed at times actively encouraged – to use their knowledge of the Aeschylean version to inform their (flexible) expectations of how the action of Sophocles' play might develop.

For many scholars, the strongest argument against seeing any foreshadowing of the pursuit by the Erinyes in *Electra* is that the killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra is in accordance with justice and thus not vulnerable to retribution (cf. Bowra 1944: 258-9; Stinton 1990: 473). This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the moral status of the matricide,¹⁸ but it may be helpful to end this section with a brief statement of where I stand on this question. One of the strongest arguments against an 'affirmative' interpretation of the killing of Clytemnestra, as Lloyd notes, is that "matricide is such an inherently problematic act that the failure in the play to ad-

¹⁷ For an overview of some of the key similarities and differences, see Finglass 2007: 4-8; Finglass notes that a "prevailing fault" of Winnington-Ingram's discussion "is its emphasis on the Aeschylean character of Sophocles' play with little attention to the real and significant differences between the two dramas" (6n6).

¹⁸ For a summary of the main arguments on both sides of this debate, see Lloyd 2005, ch. 6. An extreme version of the 'pessimistic' or 'ironic' interpretation was first influentially articulated by Sheppard (esp. Sheppard 1918 and 1927), and defended in greater detail in Kells 1973. Prominent advocates of an 'optimistic' position since the publication of Sheppard's studies include Bowra 1944, ch. 6; Whitman 1951, ch. 8; and, more recently, March 2001.

dress this fact is inevitably significant" (2005: 102). That is not to say that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus do not deserve to die for murdering Agamemnon or that Apollo's oracle is wrong to declare that Orestes' hand will achieve "just slaughters" (*El.* 37: ἐνδίκους σφάγας) when he kills them. That their deaths are demanded by justice, however, does not entail that Orestes' action itself is (wholly) just.¹⁹ In the *Oresteia*, it seems that both of the options facing Orestes would leave him vulnerable to the anger of the Erinyes; Clytemnestra tells him to beware the "wrathful hounds of his mother", and Orestes' response is to ask how he can escape his father's hounds if he fails to kill her (*Cho.* 924-5). Whether he spares his mother's life or kills her, Aeschylus' Orestes will be acting contrary to the principle that children ought to show reverence for their parents (cf. *Eum.* 545). A good reason to suspect that, despite committing "just slaughters", Sophocles' Orestes, too, will leave himself exposed to the divinely sanctioned retribution that comes from acting unjustly is the fact that this possibility is never properly explored, let alone refuted, in *Electra*.

3. The Structure of the Narrative

For those spectators alert to the tension between the length and vividness of the Paedagogus' speech and the ill-omened nature of the lie he has been instructed to tell, the two-part structure of the narrative plays a crucial role in giving substance to this intuition. The length of time that the Paedagogus dwells on Orestes' extraordinary feats on the first day of the games (*El.* 681-96) is in fact an early sign of his expansiveness. After making an immediate impression with the brilliance of his appearance, he tells his listeners, Orestes was victorious in every event that the judges announced, an achievement without parallel as far as the Paedagogus is aware. The rest of the narrative is then devoted to the events of "another day" (698), and the Paedagogus marks the transition by noting that "when one of the gods causes harm, not even a person of great strength can escape" (696-7: ὅταν δέ τις θεῶν / βλάβη, δύναται ἄν οὐδ' ἄν ἰσχύων φυγεῖν). Although the gruesome conclusion of the chariot race is postponed for another fifty lines or so, the audience already know that this is the competition in which the fictional Orestes is to lose his life.

This clear division in the narrative allows for a loose mapping between, on the one hand, the two days of contrasting fortune for Orestes at the games, and, on the other, the basic sequence of events that lies in store for

¹⁹ The emendation of ἐνδίκους to ἐνδίκου in *El.* 37 (so that it agrees with χειρός) is therefore not as innocent as it may seem.

Orestes in the dramatic reality if he is indeed to be pursued by the Erinyes. In the first place, Orestes' initial success points ahead to the confrontations that will result in the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. There are obvious correspondences between the spheres of athletic competition and violent combat,²⁰ and the two other appearances of the word ἄγων after the Paedagogus' speech – where it refers first to the Pythian games (682), and then to the chariot race itself (699) – are in connection with the encounter between Orestes and Aegisthus (1441, 1492). Given that the action of the *Oresteia* is dominated by a series of such clashes, it is unsurprising that the sphere of athletics is a productive source of metaphors throughout Aeschylus' trilogy, and in two memorable passages in *Choephoroi* Orestes' mission of vengeance is explicitly cast in athletic terms.²¹ First he is an orphaned colt, yoked to a chariot, that with Zeus' help will reach the end of the course (*Cho.* 794-9), and then a wrestler about to take on two opponents by himself (*Cho.* 866-8).²² In the passage from the prologue of *Electra* examined in the last section, Orestes makes it clear that he expects to win renown (60: κλέος) from the acts of vengeance he is shortly to commit. The acclaim that greets the exploits of the fictional Orestes on the first day of the Pythian games thus mirrors the outcome desired by his real counterpart, and such renown is precisely what the Orestes of the *Odyssey* succeeds in achieving: have you heard, Athena asks Telemachus, what *kleos* Orestes has gained among all people (πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους) by killing his father's murderer (1.298-300)?

If I am right that the division of the narrative into consecutive days and the athletic setting encourage the audience to treat the speech as an omen both of the initial success of the revenge plot and of Orestes' subsequent sufferings, the sequence of events in the fictional narrative also serves as an ironic contrast to the reversal of fortune being foreshadowed for Orestes. The Paedagogus presents what happened to the fictional Orestes on the second day of the games as a paradigmatic case of undeserved misfortune; the transitional gnome quoted above (*El.* 696-7) alludes to the familiar idea that extraordinary success incurs divine resentment,²³ and the Paedagogus

²⁰ On the "common culture of athletics and war" in Classical Athens, see Pritchard 2013, ch. 5 (quotation taken from title of chapter).

²¹ For a survey of passages in *Choephoroi* that contribute to the portrayal of Orestes as an athlete, see Petrounias 1976: 167-72 (some examples are more persuasive than others).

²² The conceit of Orestes as athlete plays a particularly prominent role in Euripides' *Electra*; cf. Swift 2010: 156-72 (which also discusses the athletic imagery of the *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Electra*).

²³ Finglass 2007: 310 notes the prominence of this theme in the epinician poetry of Pindar.

later stresses the grief and pity felt by those who witnessed Orestes being dragged to his death by the reins. What stimulated their pity was the fact that someone who had performed such deeds could be rewarded with such misfortune (751: οἷ' ἔργα δράσας οἷα λαγχάνει κακά), and the Paedagogus' choice of phrasing underlines the disparity between Orestes' glorious actions and the horror of his demise; the state of the bloodied corpse was such, the Paedagogus exclaims shortly afterwards, that a friend of Orestes would not have been able to recognise him (755-6).

In the *Oresteia*, on the other hand, far from being the victim of divine forces resentful of his success and working from a distance, Orestes incurs the hostility of identifiable divinities by committing an act that is morally problematic to say the least (even if commanded by Apollo's oracle). In Aeschylus' trilogy, moreover, the type of parallel phrasing used by the Paedagogus in line 751 to emphasise the scale of the reversal instead tends to draw attention to the cyclical pattern of violence following violence: having done things deserving of punishment, Agamemnon is suffering the punishment he deserves, Clytemnestra claims (*Ag.* 1527: ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχω); the words being shouted by Justice, according to the chorus of *Choephoroi*, are "for a bloody stroke let a bloody stroke be paid" (*Cho.* 312-13: ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν / πληγὴν τινέτω).²⁴ From the perspective of a spectator comparing the events of the fictional narrative in *Electra* to the events they seem to be foreshadowing, therefore, what is striking is as much the *mirroring* of success and failure – with athletic competition the forum for both – as the extent of Orestes' fall from grace. The aim of the next section is to look more closely at the means (both intra- and intertextual) by which the Paedagogus' narrative symbolically portrays Orestes as first perpetuator and then victim of the cyclical violence that has beset the royal family for generations.

4. The Symbolism of the Chariot Race

As mentioned earlier, the chariot race of the false narrative is not the only one to be called to mind in the course of *Electra*. In the epode of the first stasimon, the chorus refer obliquely to an episode in the history of the royal family that saw Pelops race against King Oenomaus of Elis in an effort to win the hand of Hippodamia, Oenomaus' daughter (504-15):

Χο. ὦ Πέλοπος ἄ πρόσθεν

²⁴ On the use in the *Oresteia* of "form-parallelism" as a way to express "the seemingly inevitable continuation of reciprocal violence", see Seaford 2012: 230-3 (quotation from 232).

πολύπονος ἰππεΐα,	505
ὡς ἔμολες αἰανῆς	
τῶδε γᾶ.	
εὔτε γὰρ ὁ ποντισθεῖς	
Μυρτίλος ἐκοιμάθη,	
παγχρύσων δίφρων	510
δυστάνοις ἀκείαις	
πρόρριζος ἐκριφθεῖς,	
οὐ τί πω	
ἔλιπεν ἐκ τοῦδ' οἴκου	
πολύπονος ἀκεία.	515

[CHO. Chariot ride of Pelops from long ago, bringer of much suffering, with what disastrous consequences for this land did you arrive! From the time that Myrtilus found repose in the sea, hurled to annihilation from the golden chariot with shameful brutality, never yet has brutal violence, bringer of much suffering, left this house.]

In Thomson's brief discussion of the false narrative in *Electra* he refers to these events from a previous generation simply as "the story . . . of the race of Pelops at Olympia" (1941: 357), but the key to appreciating the full significance of the links between the real and fictional chariot races is to see that this story, too, falls into two distinct parts. Pelops' victory in the chariot race came about because Myrtilus, Oenomaus' charioteer, had tampered with his master's chariot, and in one version Oenomaus died by becoming entangled in the reins when the chariot broke apart.²⁵ In the second part of the story, Myrtilus was transformed from accomplice to victim: Pelops hurled him into the sea from his chariot drawn by winged horses – different reasons for this turn of events can be found in the tradition (cf. Finglass 2007: 247-8) – and Myrtilus cursed Pelops before dying.

Thus, like the fictional Orestes, Pelops achieved glory in an athletic context, but his victory was the result of deceit, which is precisely the means that the real Orestes is relying on in order to achieve the success symbolically anticipated by the first part of the Paedagogus' narrative. In the second part of the story of Pelops, Myrtilus died in circumstances that recalled the fate he helped to contrive for Oenomaus, and the fictional Orestes too, of course, dies by falling from his chariot. These correspondences not only reinforce the sense that the Paedagogus' words have ominous significance, but imply that what is soon to happen to Orestes is part of the same cycle of success followed by disaster which, as the chorus note at the end of the epode of the first stasimon, has maintained its hold on the royal family ever

²⁵ This is the first version given by Apollodorus, who then says that according to others Oenomaus was subsequently killed by Pelops (*Epit.* 2.7).

since the death of Myrtilus. Pelops' descendants rather than Pelops himself were the victims of Myrtilus' curse, but it is symptomatic of the nature of the troubles that have afflicted the family since then that it now has to be one and the same individual who triumphs before coming to grief: Orestes is the equivalent first of Pelops and then of Myrtilus because fulfilling his objective requires him to commit a crime against a family member.

In the last section I suggested that, once we realise that the false narrative symbolically anticipates the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and the consequences of the matricide for Orestes, the fact that Orestes both achieves success and loses his life while engaged in athletic competition can be seen to point to an important symmetry in the two sets of events foreshadowed by the story. Orestes' role may change from aggressor to victim, but both 'contests' are instances of retributive justice in action. The tendency of bloodshed to engender more bloodshed is one of the dominant themes of the *Oresteia*, and in *Choephoroi* the athletic imagery helps to draw attention to the resemblance between Orestes' fate and that which he has just meted out to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. We saw in the last section that the Aeschylean Orestes is described both as a colt taking part in a chariot race and as a wrestler, and towards the end of *Choephoroi*, when Orestes begins to realise that he is losing control of his mental faculties, he uses a metaphor that recalls in striking fashion the first of those two metaphors in particular (*Cho.* 1021-5):²⁶

ΟΡ. οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅπη τελεῖ,
ὥσπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἠνιοστροφῶν δρόμου
ἔξωτέρω· φέρουσι γὰρ νικώμενον
φρένες δύσαρκτοι . . .

1025

[OR. I am at a loss as to how this will end, careering off the track as I am, like a charioteer with a team of horses: my unruly senses have overcome me and are carrying me along.]

Orestes is now involved in a new contest that seems certain to end badly, and the evocation of a chariot race in both passages helps to bring out the starkness of the symmetry. Scholars have occasionally remarked on the overlap in subject matter between this metaphor in *Choephoroi* and the circumstances of Orestes' death in the false narrative of *Electra* (cf. Easterling 1985: 8),²⁷ but it is only when we understand the speech as an omen of the

²⁶ I follow the text of Sommerstein 2008 here, which accepts Weil's emendation ἠνιοστροφῶν.

²⁷ Thomson notes in reference to the false narrative of the chariot race in *Electra* that "[t]his is the mystical charioteer of the *Choephoroi*, who again runs his race under the direction of Apollo" (1941: 357). Judging by the cross reference he provides, howev-

future that the full relevance of the intertext becomes apparent. The symptoms of madness Orestes is feeling in the passage from *Choephoroi* are of course the first indication of the influence of the Erinyes, whose sudden appearance to Orestes some lines later will drive him from the stage. According to my argument, the pursuit by the Erinyes is precisely what the disaster in the fictional chariot race is foreshadowing, and for members of Sophocles' audience able to recall this Aeschylean passage, the intertextual link is thus one more indication that the narrative has a prophetic significance of which the Paedagogus is oblivious.

5. Omen and Interpretation

The response of scholars who deny that the spectators are expected to flesh out their understanding of Sophocles' play in the light of their knowledge of the Aeschylean version is to argue that the allusions would be more emphatic and explicit if that were the case. Stinton, for example, claims in relation to the pursuit by the Erinyes that "the dramatist could not risk leaving such an important matter to the alertness of otherwise of his audience and had nothing to gain by ambiguity" (1990: 479). Given that my argument too has largely relied on hints and intimations, I may seem vulnerable to the same objection, especially as I am taking a more categorical position than Winnington-Ingram on what can be inferred about Orestes' fate after the play finishes. To address this issue adequately would require a comprehensive discussion of the dramaturgy of *Electra*, and the aim of this final section is simply to offer a sketch of what seems to me the most promising line of response. My contention, in short, is that these hints pose a challenge to the audience in a way that more explicit references to the future would not: by forcing the spectators to work out for themselves whether an utterance has greater significance than the speaker realises, the hints and allusions lead to a narrowing of the gap between the audience and the characters on stage. In this way, the spectators are offered a vivid insight into what it might be like to see things from the limited, partisan perspective of individuals caught up in such circumstances, but because the gap separating them from the characters is not completely closed, they at the same time have the opportunity to consider how subsequent developments might cast a very different light on the events they are witnessing. In a discussion of irony in Sophocles, Lloyd helpfully distinguishes between "relatively 'stable' irony, where the audience is confidently aware of

er, Thomson seems to be thinking primarily of the passage where Orestes is described as an orphaned colt (*Cho.* 794-9).

truth hidden from the characters” and “more complex and ‘unstable’ irony which unsettles any feelings of certainty we may have about the real meaning of events” (2012: 577), and my suggestion is that the chariot-race narrative, along with many of the other passages examined by Winnington-Ingram, serves as an instance of the second type.

The most emphatic hint of what awaits Orestes after the murder of Aegisthus – and the passage that scholars who take a sceptical position have most trouble with – comes towards the end of the play.²⁸ Orestes wishes Aegisthus to die in the very place where Agamemnon was killed and orders him to go inside (*El.* 1495-6). When Aegisthus asks whether it is necessary for the palace to see the “present and future troubles of the Pelopids” (1498: τὰ τ' ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα Πελοπιδῶν κακὰ), Orestes answers that it will see Aegisthus' at least; on this topic he has confidence in his own powers of prophecy (1499: τὰ γοῦν σ' ἐγὼ σοι μάντις εἰμί τῶνδ' ἄκρος). Aegisthus responds by noting that the skill Orestes is boasting of is not one he inherited from his father (1500: ἀλλ' οὐ πατρώαν τὴν τέχνην ἐκόμπασας), with the implication being that, like Agamemnon before he was killed, Orestes' grasp on the future may be less firm than he realises. Some scholars have argued otherwise (e.g. Bowra 1944: 258; Stinton 1990: 478-9), but the particle γοῦν in 1499 surely has limitative force (cf. Lloyd 2005: 107; Finglass 2007: 543), so that Orestes is identifying the present troubles mentioned by Aegisthus with *both* the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' imminent demise. Unlike Orestes, the audience have reason to expect that he will shortly be faced with a calamity that he has indeed failed to prophesy, and they can therefore appreciate the insightfulness of the doomed man's premonition that the royal family's woes are not at an end.²⁹

Taplin claims that, because Orestes enters the palace with Aegisthus at the end of *Electra*, this allows us to rule out the possibility that he will be driven into exile by the Erinyes (1983: 163; followed by Finglass 2007: 527). The unsettling sense of incompleteness with which the action concludes counts against Taplin's argument, however; as Lloyd notes, “there is not the remotest parallel in extant tragedy for a play ending with something about to happen inside the *skēnē*” (2005: 114). Because Orestes enters the palace with the specific aim of killing Aegisthus in the place where his own father had been killed, this way of ending the play does not by itself justi-

²⁸ On ambiguity as a characteristic of Sophoclean endings, see Roberts 1988.

²⁹ Lloyd suggests that a reason to take Aegisthus' words seriously here is the topos that “[a] dying man has particular authority in predicting suffering for his killer” (2005: 108). Sometimes this belief is explicitly acknowledged (e.g. *Pl. Ap.* 39c), while elsewhere it seems to be taken for granted (e.g. Patroclus' prediction to Hector at *Il.* 16.852-4 or Hector's to Achilles at *Il.* 22.359-60); that Orestes dismisses Aegisthus' prediction “with a taunt” is in keeping with this topos (109).

fy firm inferences about what is to happen after Aegisthus' death. For present purposes, however, what is particularly interesting in this exchange between Orestes and Aegisthus is the use of the language of prophecy. Orestes is able to see no further ahead than the killing of Aegisthus, but the hints which the audience have been offered in the course of the play, together with their knowledge of other versions of the story, have left them much better placed than Orestes to prophesy the future.

It is not only in this final scene that we find an association between prophecy and retribution. In the scene preceding the first stasimon, Electra and the chorus are told by Chrysothemis that the previous night Clytemnestra had dreamed that Agamemnon took his own sceptre and planted it by the hearth, and that it then sprouted, becoming a flourishing branch that overshadowed the whole land of Mycenae (417-23). The first stasimon begins shortly afterwards with the chorus hailing the imminent arrival of Justice, whose strength will ensure that Agamemnon's murder is avenged (472-7):

ΧΟ. εἰ μὴ ἔγω πάραφρων μάντις ἔφην
καὶ γνώμας λειπομένα σοφᾶς,
εἴσιν ἅ πρόμαντις
Δίκαια, δίκαια φερομένα χεροῖν κράτη·
μέτεισιν, ὧ τέκνον, οὐ μακροῦ χρόνου.

475

[CHO. If I am not a prophet of unsound mind and deficient in wise judgement, Justice who has prophesied the outcome will come, carrying off the just supremacy achieved by the strength of her hands; it will not be long, my child, before she comes after them.]

The dream is not explicitly interpreted at any point in the play (cf. Bowman 1997: 134), but even before Electra hears its content, she reacts with excitement to the news that a nightmare has prompted Clytemnestra to send Chrysothemis to Agamemnon's tomb with libations (411), and in these opening lines of the first stasimon the chorus make it clear that they consider the dream a sign that justice will finally be fulfilled. Later in the ode they refer to it as a "portent" (497: *τέρας*),³⁰ and suggest that if what it foretells does not come to pass there will no longer be grounds to treat dreams and prophecies as sources of prophetic insight (498-501). Clytemnestra herself later refers to the dream as "ambiguous" (645: *δισσῶν ὀνειρώων*), but what gives the chorus such confidence is evidently that Orestes' return, triumph and reign over Mycenae – if that is what the dream portends – is the very outcome that would seem to be demanded by justice. It may be that

³⁰ Pace Finglass 2007: 246, who takes *τέρας* here to mean "monster" and understands a reference to the Erinys in line 491.

the chorus understand Justice to have sent the dream and refer to her as a prophet partly for that reason (Finglass 2007: 239), but what makes the epithet particularly appropriate in this context is that (from the chorus' perspective at least) the punishment of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is something that, even without the omen of the dream, could be predicted in light of the workings of retributive justice.

In the antistrophe the chorus imagine the Erinyes waiting in ambush for the killers of Agamemnon and soon to reveal herself, before they turn in the epode, as we have seen, to the story of Pelops and Myrtilus. Some scholars have been puzzled by the suddenness of the shift in mood from the optimistic anticipation of these first two stanzas to the gloominess of the epode, ending, as it does, with the observation that since Myrtilus' death violence and suffering have never left the royal family (e.g. Goward 1999: 109-10). The connection of ideas is thoroughly Aeschylean, however (cf. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 218-19). In the *Oresteia*, the agency of the Erinyes is represented as integral to the system of justice that ensures that crime is eventually punished – an idea explored at particular length by the Erinyes themselves in the second stasimon of *Eumenides* (490-565) – and it is this agency that underpins the unending violence in the house of Atreus; Cassandra memorably speaks of a revel-band (κῶμος) of Erinyes which, emboldened by the human blood it has drunk, refuses to leave the palace (Ag. 1186-90). The change of tone in the first stasimon of *Electra* need not indicate that the chorus themselves suddenly realise that the deposition of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will not mark the end of the family's troubles; tragic choral song revels in the open-endedness of such abrupt transitions. Nevertheless, as Winnington-Ingram notes, the chorus' last words in the ode surely “prompt the question whether the succession of sorrows will stop now” (1980: 219). The inevitability of retribution – which, I have suggested, is reflected in the description in the strophe of Justice as a prophet – is precisely what has prevented the royal family from escaping the cycle of violence: why should Orestes' actions be any different?

I mentioned earlier that in the first part of the Paedagogus' narrative the fictional Orestes achieves the glory to which the real Orestes aspires. Those scholars who see *Electra* as a Homeric treatment of the story are certainly responding to something real in the play; Sophocles' Orestes acts as if he is the Homeric Orestes, and the question is whether that self-conception is to be borne out by what unfolds in the dramatic reality or – as happens to the fictional Orestes on the second day of the Pythian games – undermined.³¹ If I am right, moreover, that we are encouraged to suspect that

³¹ The Homeric echoes in the Paedagogus' speech (the chariot race of *Iliad* 23 is a particularly important model) assume fresh significance in this connection; on these

a turn of events lies in store for Orestes and Electra that neither of them have anticipated, the relative aloofness of Sophocles' Apollo in comparison to his Aeschylean counterpart makes him, in certain respects, an even more ambiguous figure.³² One correspondence between false narrative and dramatic reality that I did not mention earlier concerns Apollo's role in both. The fictional Orestes triumphs and dies in games dedicated to, and overseen by, Apollo, while the murders that correspond to the first part of the Paedagogus' story will be carried out in accordance with Apollo's oracle. What about the events foreshadowed by the disastrous chariot race, however? If Orestes is to be pursued by the Erinyes, is it not safe to assume that Apollo is aware of this? In that case, why has Orestes not been offered information of the sort provided by Apollo in the *Oresteia*, where Orestes was told to flee to his temple at Delphi once the murders have been committed? When Orestes claims after the murder of Clytemnestra that "all is well in the house, if Apollo prophesied well" (*El.* 1424-5), this need not suggest any doubts on his part about the oracle, as some scholars who favour an 'ironic' interpretation of the play have suggested (e.g. Roberts 1984: 78). It does, though, raise the question of whether Orestes will be quite so sure that Apollo prophesied well once the full consequences of the matricide have been revealed.

On the view of *Electra* I am defending, then, there is a significant disparity between the understanding of Orestes and Electra and the 'true' meaning of events. The latter is not something of which the audience can ever feel they have a firm grasp, but the play is full of omens for anyone willing to assume the role of prophet.³³ In some cases, things are left unsaid that the audience are encouraged to supply; in the first stasimon the chorus do not mention the curse of Myrtilus or the possibility that the same principle of retributive justice that makes the punishment of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus inevitable may subsequently become applicable to Orestes and Electra, but that need not prevent such considerations from occurring to the spectators. The dream, on the other hand, is an example of something identified as an omen by a number of characters but not explicitly interpreted, and which raises questions for spectators familiar with other versions of the story that could not possibly occur to any of the characters. If we take the branch which overshadows all of Mycenae to represent the restoration of Agamemnon's line to its position of political supremacy (cf. Bow-

echoes, see e.g. Barrett 2002, ch. 4.

³² On the ambiguity of Apollo already in the *Oresteia*, see Roberts 1984, ch. 3 (his portrayal in other tragedies, including Sophocles' *Electra*, is discussed in ch. 4).

³³ For a recent discussion of *Electra* that explores the relationship between the audiences on stage and the audience in the theatre in light of the ironies and ambiguities in the play's language, see Goldhill 2012: 47-52.

man 1997: 140-3), is the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus sufficient for that outcome to be fulfilled? Or would Orestes' capacity to rule over the land need first to be secure, as it is in the *Oresteia* only after his acquittal in Athens? And does that then imply that, if Sophocles' Orestes is indeed to be pursued by the Erinyes, he too will eventually escape their grasp? Here again we have the second type of irony identified by Lloyd, which only yields insight in combination with uncertainty.

In the case of the Paedagogus' speech, the audience have the extra challenge of needing to identify the narrative as an omen in the first place. Stinton is right to note that, on the sort of reading I favour, much depends on the alertness of the audience, but I hope it has also become apparent why the drama might gain from such allusive ambiguity. Those spectators who manage to see further ahead than the characters are at the same time given an insight into how difficult it can be for individuals caught up in such events to appreciate the partiality of their own perspective and be receptive to portents that contradict their hopes and expectations for the future. Orestes and Electra may not have given much thought to the possible consequences of their actions, but the spectators are encouraged to see the future as integral to the meaning of the events they are witnessing, and it is emblematic of that broader dramaturgical strategy that the prophetic false narrative is placed in such a prominent position at the centre of the play.³⁴

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³⁴ In the case of *Electra* at least, then, it is misleading to describe the future to which the play alludes simply as "another story", a phrase used by Roberts 1988 in a discussion of Sophoclean endings. Cf. the criticism of Lloyd 2005: 109-10.

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