πολὺν γέλων:
Laughter, Humour & Greek Tragedy

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Trinity 2022

Abstract
This DPhil builds upon the relatively limited prior research into laughter and humour in Greek tragedy. Recent and long-standing social theories of laughter are introduced to account for the textual instances of γέλως 'laughter' vocabulary in extant tragedy, clarifying its associations and consequences in the dramatic context. As laughter and humour are not one and the same, cognitive theories of humour are also employed to elucidate scholars' perceptions of comic elements and even jokes in tragedy. Humour is traditionally associated with tragedy's sister genre, Old Comedy, and so common comedic tropes appearing in tragic contexts are identified and analysed as potential sources of audience amusement. Euripides' reciprocal parodic engagement with Aristophanic paracomedy is assessed, and this framework is extended further to address Euripides' apparent parody of Sophoclean and Aeschylean tragedy too. Performance theory, and particularly that of theatre clowning, is introduced to account for certain characters' rather idiosyncratic relationships to laughter and humour. An analysis of laughter and humour disputes the various aesthetic, ethical and affective arguments against comic interpretations of tragedy, simultaneously challenging inherited interpretations of humour that are perhaps grounded more in the cultural prejudices of receiving cultures than in the ancient texts themselves.

Acknowledgments
This DPhil would not have been possible without the support of many people and institutions. I would like to thank my viva examiners, Professor Constanze Güthenke and Professor Isabel Ruffell; the Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies and Jesus College, for the funding that made this project possible; Dr Scott Scullion, for his unwavering enthusiasm and encouragement in supervising this thesis; Professor Fiona Macintosh, without the guidance and feedback of whom I would not have pursued the DPhil or published during its course; Dr Sarah Miles, for her continued support; my internal examiners, Professor Armand D'Angour, Professor Timothy Rood and Dr Adrian Kelly, for their critical and generative feedback; Qasim Alli, Marcus Bell and Nicolette D'Angelo, with whom I've had the sheer joy of collaborating along the way; Dr Meg Dyson and Dr Ashley Chhibber, for sharing the process (and Virgil's birthday) with me; the cast and crew of 'Orestes', the Greek play the pandemic couldn't hold back; the clowns of the Why Not Institute; my personal clowns, or 'housemates' Elliot and Benedict; Jon, for his patience, kindness, and never failing to make me laugh; my fabulous parents, Theresa and Andy, who taught me to always see the funny side; and, of course, the legendary cats.

Abbreviations

OCD – Oxford Classical Dictionary
OED – Oxford English Dictionary
LSJ – Liddell, Scott, Jones Ancient Greek Lexicon

Greek & Roman Authors & Works

A.	**Aeschylus**
Ag.	*Agamemnon*
Cho.	*Choephoroi*
Eum.	*Eumenides*
Per.	*Persians*
Supp.	*Suppliants*
Ap. Rh.	**Apollonius Rhodius**
Ar.	**Aristophanes**
Ach.	*Acharnians*
Av.	*Aves*, or *Birds*
Ecc.	*Ecclesiazusae*
Eq.	*Equites,* or *Knights*
Lys.	*Lysistrata*
Nu.	*Nubes,* or *Clouds*
Pax	*Pax*, or *Peace*
Pl.	*Plutos*, or *Wealth*
Ra.	*Ranae*, or *Frogs*
Th.	*Thesmophoriazusae*
Vesp.	*Vespae*, or *Wasps*
Arist.	**Aristotle**
Ath. Pol.	*Constitution of the Athenians*
Eud. Eth.	*Eudemian Ethics*
Nic. Eth.	*Nicomachean Ethics*
Poet.	*Poetics*
Rh.	*Rhetoric*
Crat.	**Cratinus**
Diod.	**Diodorus**
E.	**Euripides**
Alc.	*Alcestis*
Andr.	*Andromache*
Ba.	*Bacchae*
Cyc.	*Cyclops*
Hcld.	*Heraclidae*
Hec.	*Hecuba*
Hel.	*Helen*
Her.	*Heracles*
Hipp.	*Hippolytus*
IA	*Iphigenia in Aulis*
Ion	*Ion*
IT	*Iphigenia in Tauris*
Med.	*Medea*
Or.	*Orestes*
Ph.	*Phoenissae*
Rh.	*Rhesus*
Supp.	*Suppliants*
Tr.	*Trojan Women*
Hdt.	**Herodotus**
Hes.	**Hesiod**
Hom.	**Homer**
Od.	*Odyssey*
Il.	*Iliad*
Hom. Hymn.	*Homeric Hymn*
Isoc.	**Isocrates**
Hel.	
Luc.	**Lucian**
Dial. Deor.	*Dialogi Deorum*
Lys.	**Lysias**
Men.	**Menander**
Epitr.	*Epitrepontes*
Ov.	**Ovid**
Met.	*Metamorphoses*
Paus.	**Pausanius**
Philostr.	**Philostratus**
Vit. Apoll.	***Vita Apolloni***
Pl.	**Plato**
Ap.	*Apology*
Laws	*Laws*
Phil.	*Philebus*
Phaedr.	*Pheadrus*
Rep.	*Republic*
Sym.	*Symposium*
Theaet.	*Theaetetus*
Plaut.	**Plautus**
Cur.	*Curculio*
Merc.	*Mercator*
Plut.	**Plutarch**
Per.	*Pericles*
Ps.-A.	**Pseudo-Aeschylus**
PB	*Prometheus Bound*

Quint. **Quintilian**

Sanny. **Sannyrion**

Sem. **Semonides**

S. **Sophocles**
Aj. *Ajax*
Ant. *Antigone*
El. *Electra*
OC *Oedipus Colonus*
OT *Oedipus Tyrannus*
Ph. *Philoctetes*
Tr. *Trachiniae*

Stratt. **Strattis**

Ter. **Terence**
Hec. *Hecyra*

Theog. **Theognis**

Thuc. **Thucydides**

Vit. Aesch. Vita Aeschyli

Translations are my own, unless specified.

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Introduction

The title of this thesis captures the essence of its subjects of study: the meaning of πολὺν γέλων is elusive, and greatly affected by its context. Versions of the phrase appear no fewer than seven times within the extant tragic corpus, broadly capturing two distinct themes: in some instances, it refers to the quantity of laughter ('much laughter', S. *Aj*. 303, 958, *Ant*. 647, E. *Ion* 1172) and in other contexts, it is more of a qualitative reflection upon a situation ('how ridiculous', E. *Ba*. 250, *Tr*. 983, *Or*. 1160). In this sense, it pertains to both laughter and humour, which, although separate phenomena, share so much of the same language that it can be difficult to tell them apart. Laughter, most commonly γέλως in classical Greek, is by no means rare in tragedy; this study counts eighty-seven instances of γέλως-vocabulary in the extant tragic corpus.[1] Despite this, tragic laughter remains a rather neglected topic, with relatively few devoted studies. Dillon's article 'Tragic Laughter' (1991) addresses the complex phenomenon across the tragic corpus within only ten pages, thereby leaving much scope for further analysis of the examples. His concluding questions are taken as a starting point for this thesis and are addressed throughout the first chapter. To account for the various roles of textual laughter within the plays themselves, this thesis employs the two most popular social theories of laughter – superiority and play. Whilst these help to unravel some common generalisations about the quality of textual laughter in Greek tragedy, instances of tragic laughter have already been identified and typed within Borowski's thesis *Laughter in Ancient Greek Drama of the Classical Period* (2015). Therefore, whilst superiority and play theories guide my discussion in the first three chapters of the thesis, these are intended as a basis for the analysis of laughter in its tragic contexts rather than the study's end goal.

Humour is even more intangible than laughter, especially in the study of drama that has been transmitted over millennia. The extant texts, accurate or inaccurate as they may be as records of their initial performances, do not contain stage directions, let alone emotional cues for their audiences. The chasm is linguistic and cultural as well as temporal, which Woolf famously reflects upon in 'On Not Knowing Greek': 'we do not know how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh, or how the actors acted' (1925, 39). For some, this forecloses the pursuit of humour; Torrance (2013, 285), for example, describes the search for amusing elements in Greek tragedy as 'a veritable minefield with no straightforward answers'. Nevertheless, perceived humour in Greek tragedy has historically been, and remains, the subject of countless scholarly assertions, conjectures, caveats and questions.

[1] Of the eighty-seven total, I count twelve instances in Aeschylus (A. *Ag*. 794, 1264, 1271, *Ch*. 29, 222, 448, 738, *Eum*. 254, 560, 789, 819, Ps.-A. *PB* 90), thirty-three in Sophocles (*Aj*. 79 (x2), 303, 367, 382, 383, 454, 957, 958, 961, 969, 989, 1011, 1043, *El*. 227, 807, 880, 1153, 1295, 1300, 1310, *Ant*. 483, 551 (x2), 647, 839, *Phil*. 258, 1023, 1125, *OT* 1422, *OC* 902, 1339, 1423) and forty-two in Euripides (*Med*. 383, 404, 797, 1041 (x2), 1049, 1162, 1355, 1362, *Ba*. 250, 272, 286, 322, 380, 439, 842, 854, 1021, 1081, *Her*. 285, 935, 950, *Ion* 528, 600, 1172, *Tr*. 332, 406, 983, 1176, *IT* 276, 502, 1274, *Alc*. 724, 804, *Hcld*. 507, *IA* 372, 912, *Hel*. 1349, *Hipp*. 1000, *Supp*. 846, *Or*. 1560, *Rh*. 815). In total, this is seven more instances than Dillon (1991, 345 n4).

Seidensticker's monograph, *Palintonos Harmonia* (1982), is the most extensive study of humour in tragedy, and much of the second half of this thesis is in conversation with his observations.

As with all research, every scholar brings their own interpretive baggage to the studied texts.[2] This can be a particularly acute problem when working upon something so scarcely evidenced as humour in tragedy. Haraway (1988, esp. 580-583) warns of the search for objective, universal 'truth', advocating instead for a 'feminist objectivity' that acknowledges the situated knowledges of individuals and communities. My study is guided by this approach; given the topic of this thesis, it may be no surprise that I am a practising comedian. Given its tone thus far, maybe I should hang on to my day job. Much of this thesis critiques the deletion or emendation of perceived humorous elements, countering the aesthetic, ethical and affective arguments against jokes and humour. For the sake of fairness, it also critiques identifications of humour in tragedy that lack textual support and seem instead to reflect more upon the assumptions or prejudices of receiving cultures. The alternative readings I offer are not presented as objective truths, but as textually supported possibilities that deserve equal consideration alongside more traditional, established readings.

This thesis is not a comprehensive study of laughter and humour in Greek tragedy. Rather, its multiple methodological approaches are intentionally broad, opening paths towards potential future work in the field rather than constructing a narrowly focused, singular argument. In a similar vein, my study focuses only upon the three extant tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.[3] My approaches to laughter and humour require an appreciation of their context within scenes and entire plays, and so tragic fragments are only addressed when relevant to the discussion of extant works. Euripides receives the most attention within the thesis, which is due to his greater number of surviving works and their contemporaneity with the Aristophanic corpus. My aim is not to depict Euripides' intergeneric relationship with Aristophanes as anomalous or unprecedented, but rather to highlight the generic interplay at work in the evidence available. Similarly, I do not intend my focus on Euripidean paratragedy to imply that parody of this kind is unique to the one tragedian.

This thesis owes a great debt to previous scholarship on classical Greek literature. Two works have studied laughter alongside a phenomenon with which it shares much physiology, weeping. Arnould's monograph *Le Rire et Les Larmes dans La Littérature Grecque d'Homère à Platon* (1990) directly addresses examples of tragic laughter, often stressing its negative or hostile qualities. The volume *Greek Laughter and Tears* (2017) edited by Alexiou & Cairns has a particularly broad temporal and geographical scope and does not address the laughter (or indeed the tears) of tragedy. However,

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[2] Hence Martindale (1993, 3): '*Meaning*, could we say, *is always realized at the point of reception*' (original emphasis).

[3] This includes the pseudo-Aeschylean tragedy *Prometheus Bound*. For its contested authorship, see 3.5.2.

both studies examine laughter outside of its connection to humour, emphasising its ability to accompany, assuage or even intensify experiences of suffering. This approach is particularly suitable for the study of tragic laughter, rarely a straightforward, positive emotional experience in the extant texts. The most general and comprehensive study of laughter in Greek literature and culture is Halliwell's monograph *Greek Laughter* (2008), which spans the period from Homer to early Christianity. Halliwell outlines and engages with much of the laughter and humour theory that I work with in this thesis, though his analysis of tragedy is limited to only a section of his third chapter. This work, which focuses on the *symposium*, has proved particularly influential for my own section 'Laughter & the *Symposium*'.

Tragedies of Euripides that have been traditionally sidelined in scholarship due to their perceived genre-transgressing elements are addressed by two monographs: Burnett's *Catastrophe Survived* (1971) and Wright's *Euripides' Escape Tragedies* (2005). These scholars address the structural elements of generic transgression that have historically garnered critique and even the reclassification of entire works.[4] Works such as these have served to revive the study of some of the less popular Greek tragedies, previously devalued on account of their more 'comic' structures. My approach, greatly influenced by their work on these long-neglected plays, focuses instead on tragedy's shared themes and tropes with Old Comedy, particularly where scholars have perceived humour. Jendza's monograph *Paracomedy* (2020) outlines a methodology for determining instances of tragic paracomedy, the parody of Old Comedy in tragedy. To allow for broader intergeneric observations, this thesis does not adopt this framework, nor does it seek to define particular instances of paracomedy. Moreover, there is a clash in definition that moulds our two approaches to the topic; Jendza reads Euripidean parody as an attempt by the tragedian to demonstrate 'dominance' (2020, 164) over the comedic genre. My understanding of parody, which is explored in chapter six, is broader and lacks the superior or competitive connotations implied by Jendza's reading.

Potential humour in Euripides has been addressed by Gregory's article 'Comic Elements in Euripides' (1999-2000), which encourages a more open definition of tragedy whilst warning against seemingly random 'Euripidean one-liners' (1999-2000, 74). My chapter on tragic jokes seeks to rehabilitate jokes within tragedy, which can only be appreciated in their dramatic context, where they are 'tokened', rather than as abstract pieces of text. Jokes, as a form of humour, are studied in detail in relation to Old Comedy in Ruffell's monograph *Politics and Anti-Realism in Athenian Old Comedy* (2011). The chapter 'On Eating Cake: Joke Semiotics' introduces formal elements and frameworks of jokes, whilst emphasising the contextual importance of the audience and their mode of engagement.

[4] For example, Kitto (1939, 311) identifies Euripides' *Alcestis*, *IT*, *Ion* and *Helen* as 'tragicomedies'.

Jokes in tragedy are rarely extensively addressed beyond the commentaries that identify and explain them, and, to my knowledge, have not yet been studied collectively as a category of tragic utterance.

As tragedy is a dramatic genre, performance theory influences all parts of this thesis. Although many aspects of fifth-century tragic performance cannot be reliably interpreted or recreated, classical scholars have curated the evidence impressively, resulting in influential works such as Taplin's *Greek Tragedy in Action* (1978) and Wiles' *Greek Theatre Performance* (2000). Genre-focused studies, such as Silk's edited volume *Tragedy and the Tragic* (1996) and his monograph *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy* (2002), provide general rules and generic frameworks that are definitive of the dramatic genres, without dismissing the areas of interplay and overlap. Although this thesis does not have a distinct focus on reception, its theoretical underpinning is greatly influenced by scholars and practitioners who work on theatre and the post-classical staging of Greek tragedy. The two volumes *Theorising Performance* (2010), edited by Hall & Harrop, and *Choruses, Ancient and Modern* (2013), edited by Billings, Budelmann & Macintosh, are key examples of work that successfully brings new theoretical approaches to study of the ancient world. In this thesis, my own approach is most influenced by theory from clowning, namely Peacock's *Serious Play* (2009) and Otto's *Fools Are Everywhere* (2001). The first of these monographs led to my practical research into clowning with the Why Not Institute, whilst the latter was recommended during that research by practitioner De Castro.

In a nutshell, this thesis seeks to analyse laughter and humour in tragedy by combining interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives with traditional methods of classical scholarship. This includes social theories of laughter, cognitive theories of humour, joke theory, a comparative study of generic tropes, literary theory on parody and palimpsests, and clown theory. The first three chapters are grounded in a philological approach to the topic of laughter and its instances in the Greek texts. The vast majority of examples addressed in these chapters contain Greek vocabulary pertaining to laughter specifically; namely, forms of the verb γελάω '*laugh*' (LSJ I) and the noun γέλως '*laughter*' (LSJ I).[5] Notably, γελάω has a broader physiological sense than its most common English translation, as it is generally accepted as extending to various types of smiling expressions too.[6] Like the English, the sense of the vocabulary is neutral in quality; these words describe only the laughing act and not its contextual meaning or associations. This neutral sense applies to one of its regular compounds, προσ-γελάω '*smile at*' (LSJ I), which largely conveys direction. Its aural qualities are captured in the compound verbs ἀνα-

[5] Beyond instances of γελάω, the only other verbs considered in this thesis are καγχάζω '*laugh aloud*' (LSJ I; S. *Aj*. 199), ἐγκατιλλώπτω '*scoff at*' (LSJ I; A. *Eum*. 113) and ἐγκερτομέω '*abuse, mock at*' (LSJ I; E. *IA* 1006).
[6] Although classical Greek has the distinct verb μειδάω 'I smile', it is comparatively rare. In *Greek Laughter*, Halliwell (2008, 7) includes smiling as among laughter's 'set of social behaviours', and Beard (2014, 73-4) notes that Latin does not have an obvious distinct word for 'smile', suggesting it is 'perhaps not a major part of Roman social semiotics'. Conversely, Borowski (2015, 85) argues for the vocalisation implied by γελάω as an association that distinguishes it from smiling.

γελάω ‘*laugh loud*’ (LSJ I) and ἐκ-γελάω ‘*laugh out, laugh loud*’ (LSJ I). However, the most common compounds of γελάω specifically pertain to mockery: ἐγ-γελάω ‘*laugh at, mock*’ (LSJ I) and κατα-γελάω ‘*laugh, jeer at*; *laugh down, deride*’ (LSJ I; II). In tragedy, the compound verbs δια-γελάω ‘*laugh at, mock*’ (LSJ I) and ἐπεγ-γελάω ‘*laugh at, exult over*’ (LSJ I) also appear, though more sparingly. Aeschylus uses the compound adjective ἀγέλαστος ‘*not laughing, grave, gloomy*’ (LSJ I), though this form does not appear in the extant works of Sophocles or Euripides.

The first chapter, ‘Laughter & Enemies’, responds to Dillon’s insightful but generalising article ‘Tragic Laughter’ (1991), in which the scholar interprets laughter in tragedy as overwhelmingly hostile and a source of fear. As an introduction to tragic laughter, the thesis begins by addressing the clear examples of hostile laughter in extant tragedy. Superiority theory is introduced to illustrate laughter’s ability to socially isolate and humiliate its targets, rendering it a potential means of inflicting harm, or *hubris*. This hostile laughter is explored in detail in Sophocles’ *Ajax* and Euripides’ *Medea*, two plays that strongly focus upon their protagonist’s fear of mockery. In the second chapter, ‘Laughter & *Philia*’, ‘play’ theory is introduced to account for the socially inclusive and reciprocated types of laughter that appear in tragic texts. These are located in two specific social spaces in which *philoi* are expected to interact, the *oikos* ‘household’ and *symposium* ‘drinking party’. Study of these particularly gendered social spaces brings the social tensions and standards of laughter to the fore. The *oikos* section addresses the House of Atreus as depicted in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and Sophocles’ *Electra*, with reference to the similarly tumultuous household of Homer’s *Odyssey*. The *symposium*’s laughter is analysed in Euripides’ satyr play *Cyclops* and his tragic *Alcestis*, culminating in a study of laughter and the sympotic *kōmos* ‘revel’ or ‘band of revellers’ in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and Euripides’ *Ion*.

The third chapter, ‘Divine Laughter’, analyses laughter that extends beyond human social relationships and into the divine realm. Here, the textual instances of γέλως-vocabulary are split into four categories: the laughter of divinely-inspired madness, laughter amongst the gods, laughter between gods and humans, and laughter of the natural world. Divinely-inspired ‘mad’ laughter is explored with reference to Sophocles’ *Ajax* and Euripides’ *Heracles*, as each hero laughs during their hallucinatory episode. The relatively few scattered examples of laughter among the gods are addressed, as is the trend in Sophoclean tragedy for heroes to attribute human laughter to the will of the gods. The majority of this chapter centres on laughter between gods and humans, as depicted in two works in which deities consider themselves mocked by mortals, Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* and Euripides’ *Bacchae*. Finally, the rare metaphorical usage of γέλως-vocabulary to describe the natural world is studied in two examples, from the pseudo-Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides’ *Trojan Women*. The fourth chapter, ‘Tragic Jokes’, bridges the gap between the philological focus of the first three chapters, and the genre and performance emphasis of the final three. Here, four tragic jokes, in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, Sophocles’ *Ajax* and Euripides’ *Trojan Women* and *Orestes*, are addressed in the context of their works.

Moving away from the social theories of laughter, incongruity theory is introduced to account for the perception of humour in these jokes. The ethical, aesthetic and affective grounds for omitting or amending these jokes are assessed, and joke theory is employed to argue against dismissals of tragic jokes. Each of the jokes addressed in this chapter is 'tokened', that is analysed in its narrative and performance context, rather than as an abstract piece of text.

The fifth and sixth chapters focus on Euripides' intergeneric engagement with Aristophanes, and his intertextual relationship with Aeschylus and Sophocles. The fifth chapter, 'Comedic Tropes, Tragic Contexts', addresses Euripides' use of three tropes which are prominent in extant Old Comedy: the doorkeeper scene in *Helen*, rejuvenation in *Heraclidae, Heracles* and *Bacchae,* and *Bacchae*'s dressing scene. A comparative study with Aristophanic comedy reveals the associations these tropes gain in their comedic contexts before their adoption and adaptation by Euripides for the tragic stage. The sixth chapter, 'Oresteian Parody & Palimpsests', tracks Euripides' development and parodic usage of two particularly tragic tropes: hostage and recognition scenes. Parody, as a comic mode of engagement, forms a theoretical basis for this chapter. The hostage scene is tracked from its role in Euripides' fragmentary *Telephus*, through its parody in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, to its final appearance in Euripides' late *Orestes*. The recognition scenes of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Electra* are compared – the only extant example of the three tragedians presenting versions of the same encounter. As Euripides' *Orestes* and *Electra* so closely correspond to the Aeschylean dramatisations of the myth, these plays are viewed as particularly 'palimpsestic', offering extensive reworkings of the *Oresteia* and its legacy.

Finally, chapter seven, 'Clowning around with Tragedy', addresses certain characters whose relationships to laughter have been observed but perhaps not yet explored to their full potential. Performance theory from theatre clowning is employed to account for Cassandra's idiosyncratic relationship to laughter and humour in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Traditionally, scholars have been more accepting of humour in scenes involving minor or lower status characters, often attributing perceived humorous elements to a sense of 'comic relief'. In response to this trend, the second part of this chapter addresses a prominent subsection of tragic minor characters – messenger figures. Building upon the clown theory introduced in the section on Cassandra, three messenger scenes are analysed as depicting 'fool' or 'jester' types of messenger – from Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and *Antigone*, and Euripides' *Orestes*.

Chapter 1 – Laughter & Enemies

1.1 Introduction

Overwhelmingly, laughter in tragedy is depicted as an expression of hostility or mockery. Eighteen of the eighty-seven extant instances of γέλ- rooted laughter in extant tragedy are the mocking ἐγ-, κατα-, δια- or ἐπεγ-γελάω compound forms. Of the remaining sixty-nine instances, the laughing subject in another nine is described as their target's ἐχθρός '*enemy*' (LSJ III).[1] A further thirteen depict γέλως in connection with a character's suffering in some degree, whether experiencing πάθος 'misfortune, calamity' (LSJ II B), κακά '*evils, ills*' (LSJ I B), or ὕβρις '*wanton violence*, *insolence*' (LSJ I).[2] Another six link laughter with defeat (*Eum*. 560), pain (*Phil*. 258, twice at *Ant*. 551), shame (*OC* 1423), or subjugation (*OC* 902). In Euripides, laughter is depicted five times as a means of punishment (*Ba*. 854, 1081, *Med*. 404, 1049, *Su*. 846) and is twice explicitly connected to death (*Ba*. 1081, *Tr*. 1176). Although this exercise vastly oversimplifies the distinctions between these many instances of tragic γέλως, it is certainly telling that fifty-three out of eighty-seven occurrences of laughter in the extant tragic texts have a mocking, hostile or painful quality.

In response to this textual evidence, Dillon's article 'Tragic Laughter' (1991) provides a helpful but succinct overview of the general functioning of laughter in the genre. Dillon interprets tragic laughter as a remarkably negative phenomenon in tragedy, and ends his piece with two questions which I take as a point of departure:

> 'First, given the varieties of laughter known to the Greeks, given the differences among the tragedians themselves, and the considerable development in the form and outlook of tragedy from 472 to 405 B.C., is it not curious that tragedy insists from beginning to end on purely negative laughter? After all, it is not often that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides present a united front on any issue. And secondly, why is this terrible laughter so often feared and so rarely vented?' (1991, 355).

Here Dillon discerns a connection between laughter in tragedy, which he perceives as consistently portrayed as negative, and its fear, despite laughter's relatively scarce voicing in the genre. These observations, though generalising, provide a sound basis for an exploration of the role of laughter in Greek tragedy.

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[1] S. *Aj*. 79, 1042-3, *Ant*. 647, *El*. 1153, 1295; E. *Her*. 285, *Med*. 383, 797, 1049-1050.

[2] A. *Ch*. 222, 789, 819; S. *Aj*. 367, 957, 961, 1043, *Ant*. 438, 839, *El*. 800, *Phil*. 1023, *OT* 1422; E. *Tr*. 406.

The overwhelmingly negative portrayal of γέλως in tragedy fits neatly with the 'superiority' branch of laughter theory, an understanding which has arguably ancient roots in observations of Plato and Aristotle.[3] Though not the most popular of the longstanding theories of laughter or humour, superiority theory still receives critical attention and further development from theorists today.[4] Whilst superiority theory does not account for all instances of laughter or humour in the ancient world, extant tragedy provides strong evidence that 'superior' connotations were firmly established in Greek cultural understanding of laughter and its associations in the classical period. Historical accounts of superiority theory tend to begin in the seventeenth century, with Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651, 45) positing that laughter is a person's expression of glory, either expressing pleasure at their own success or upon realising that they are superior to another. Since laughter thus becomes a value judgement, and is directed at perceived inferiority, it is unpleasant for its targets. They typically experience embarrassment as a result, a 'feeling of self-consciousness, shame, or awkwardness' (OED), which has been theorised by Goffman (1956) as a distinctly socially embedded phenomenon.[5] As embarrassment can be an intensely negative emotional experience, superiority theory's laughter is undoubtedly a consequential act, at the expense of its target. Superiority theory's laughter is *at* and not *with*.

Moreover, this laughter does not tend to occur in a vacuum. Bergson and Morreall have both reflected upon the overwhelmingly social contexts of laughter, since, in most cases, laughter is a social phenomenon that navigates relationships.[6] Indeed, most everyday laughter has nothing to do with humour as such, but is conversational and acts as a social cue (Carroll 2014, 48). In the case of superior laughter, an audience perceiving the interaction may experience the laughter as 'contagious' and feel compelled to join in, aligning themselves with the superior, laughing side, rather than the (likely embarrassed) target.[7] Thus superiority theory sets up relatively binary positions: the subject actively expresses pleasure at feeling superior to the target, and by laughing, encourages others to join in, implicitly making this same social judgement. The target of laughter therefore often experiences social exclusion in addition to their embarrassment. This exclusionary aspect of superiority theory's laughter makes it a powerful social 'corrective', as theorised by Bergson (2013, 19-20). As the embarrassment and exclusion experienced by the laughter's target is unpleasant, they may fear it, avoid repeating whatever provoked it, and behave differently to limit their exposure to ridicule.[8] Laughter thus becomes

[3] Pl. *Phil.* 50a, *Theaet.* 175b, *Rep.* 452e, *Laws* 816e; Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 4.8, *Rh.* 2.2.12, *Eud. Eth.* 3.1234a.
[4] Incongruity theory receives the most scholarly support, but superiority theory is included in almost every introduction to humour and laughter and still has notable proponents today, e.g. Billig (2005).
[5] Goffman (1956, 270) 'embarrassment...is built into the establishment ecologically'.
[6] Bergson (2013, 11): 'Our laughter is always the laughter of a group', Morreall (2009, 37-39).
[7] Laughter as 'contagious' is often attributed first to Hutcheson (1750). See Morreall (2009, 41-48) on the evolutionary origins of contagious laughter. Indeed Goffman (1956, 265) notes that observers of superior laughter may feel embarrassment on behalf of its target, regardless of the target's own expression or feelings of humiliation – embarrassment is a 'contagious' phenomenon too.
[8] Bergson (2013, 20): 'By the fear which it inspires, it restrains eccentricity'. Goffman (1956, 271) describes embarrassment as a fundamental part of socially prescribed behaviour for this reason.

a warning to those who transgress to adhere to the rules and expectations of a group.[9] But whilst this laughter is hierarchical, its direction is not necessarily fixed. Anthropologists Knight and Lewis (2014, 310-312) posit that laughter's evolutionary origin is 'reverse dominance' or 'rule from below' – what we might call 'punching up' in humour today.[10] Those who behave at odds with the group and its values can expose themselves to laughter regardless of their social positioning.

In classical Greek culture, Blundell (1989, 27) asserts that the widely practised moral code of 'Help Friends/Harm Enemies' encouraged the active harm of opponents as well as the expectation of helping friends. In this social system, laughter becomes not only a consequence of someone's humiliation, but also a *means* of inflicting harm: laughter is a 'vital weapon' (Halliwell 2008, 26) or indeed 'the ultimate weapon' (Dillon 1991, 347). Therefore, laughter is often equated with *hubris* – 'intentionally dishonouring behaviour' (OCD s.v. *hubris*, Fisher) from which the person committing the *hubris* derives pleasure through the shaming of its victim.[11] This form of laughter is undoubtedly the hostile mockery described by superiority theory. In works depicting the heroic past, this value system is regularly pushed to its limits. In Greek literature, the clash of competing ideals is often prominent – Homer's *Iliad*, for example, begins with ἔρις 'strife' (*Il.* 1.8) over a conflict of honour between Achilles and Agamemnon. As mythological characters navigate their friendships and enmities, both of which are subject to change, hostile mockery is often anticipated as *hubris*. This opening chapter addresses the laughter associated with enmity in Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Medea*. As the first extended studies of the thesis, these provide strong evidence of the 'negative' laughter and related fear that tragedy evidences and Dillon describes.

1.2 *Ajax*

Of the eighty-seven instances of tragic γέλως-vocabulary, fifteen are found in Sophocles' *Ajax*. As the tragedy depicts the titular hero's humiliation following his botched murder attempt upon the Greek generals, it unsurprisingly contains multiple instances of laughter with superior connotations. The first two instances at line 79 set the tone for the rest of the tragedy, serving to both establish and problematise hostile laughter as a phenomenon. Athena, who has averted Ajax's violence onto livestock and herdsmen instead of the generals, encourages Odysseus to mock the hallucinating hero:

Ἀθ. οὔκουν γέλως ἥδιστος εἰς ἐχθροὺς γελᾶν; (S. *Aj.* 79)

[9] Carroll (2014, 76): 'Humour…alerts us to the relevant social norms and serves to reinforce them'.

[10] Knight & Lewis (2014, 312) note that laughter is not always directed by the socially superior towards perceived inferiors, particularly as transgressions of more powerful group members may bring graver consequences.

[11] Arist. *Rh.* 1378b23-30 defines *hubris* as the act of doing or saying things which cause the victim shame for the perpetrator's pleasure.

Ath. Is it not the most pleasing laughter, to laugh at enemies?

In epic, Athena's track record with laughter is ambivalent at best. Among the suitors of Homer's *Odyssey* (20.345-374), Odysseus' adversaries, ἄσβεστον γέλω ὦρσε, παρέπλαγξεν δὲ νόημα 'she provoked unquenchable laughter, and led astray their minds' (20.346). Oblivious to the impending revenge of Odysseus, the suitors ἡδὺ γέλασσαν 'laughed in joy' (20.359). In the tragic setting of *Ajax*, Odysseus is wary of laughter; he 'answers evasively, in implicit disagreement' (Blundell 1989, 62) and deflects the question by requesting not to see Ajax (80).[12] Despite Odysseus' reluctance, Athena does bring Ajax onstage, who appears to subscribe to a similar worldview to the goddess. Ajax describes enjoying his (imagined) capture and torture of the generals, echoing Athena's wording by describing Odysseus himself as his ἥδιστος...δεσμώτης 'most pleasing prisoner' (105; Blundell 1989, 64). Later, Tecmessa describes Ajax as laughing whilst committing the violence (303), indicating that the actor may also have delivered these lines with hostile laughter.[13] (As Ajax is hallucinating during this episode, his laughter is addressed elsewhere (3.2.1), whilst the relationship between divine laughter and human characters divine is further explored at 3.4)

The initial direct challenge in the tragedy to the 'Help Friends/Harm Enemies' code also comes from Odysseus. Athena asks him who was more prudent, or better at doing what was needed, than Ajax:

Ὀδ. ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδέν᾽ οἶδ᾽· ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν
δύστηνον ἔμπας, καίπερ ὄντα δυσμενῆ,
ὁθούνεκ᾽ ἄτῃ συγκατέζευκται κακῇ,
οὐδὲν τὸ τούτου μᾶλλον ἢ τοὐμὸν σκοπῶν:
ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν
εἴδωλ᾽ ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν. (S. *Aj.* 121-126)

Od. I know of no one, but in his misery I pity him
all the same, even though he hates me,
because he is yoked to a ruinous fate;

[12] Pucci (1994, 21) notes that the nature of Athena's invitation is unique to tragedy, despite Odysseus expressing similar humility at *Od.* 13.312-13: 'No epic god ever speaks to one of his favorite heroes with this distance and this edifying intention'.
[13] Regarding onstage laughter, I follow Taplin's hesitancy to infer any stage directions that are not signposted by the Greek. Taplin (2003, 17): '*All* the action *necessary* for a viable and comprehensive production of a Greek tragedy is, as a matter of fact, included in the words' (emphasis in original). For Borowski (2015, 92-98, 199), the phrase γέλων πολύν (303) indicates a stage direction, as it most typically pertains to audible laughter. Similarly, Stanford (1963, 100 on 301-5) and Garvie (1998, 153 on 301-4) observe that Tecmessa's account otherwise lines up with the stage action, indicating that the actor may well have laughed during their delivery of this scene.

I think of my own lot no less than his.
For I see that all we who live are nothing more
than phantoms or fleeting shadow.

The recognition of mutual suffering between enemies is not unprecedented, and Finglass (2011, 173 on 121-6) identifies the *locus classicus* for this kind of hostile friendship as the interactions of Achilles and Priam in *Iliad* 24. In the epic case, each has something to offer the other in exchange for their compassion: Achilles gains some understanding of his own father's grief, and Priam receives the body of his son (*Il*. 24.485-676). In the tragedy, there are obvious imbalances. Firstly, as Finglass (*ibid*.) observes, the action is profound because the hallucinating Ajax intended not to show any pity to Odysseus as his imagined captive. Secondly, Achilles' murder of Hector, though similarly impassioned and vengeful, is not committed during a hallucinatory episode and nor is it a betrayal. Finally, Achilles is successful, whilst in Sophocles' play Ajax is presented as a thwarted Achilles – a hero driven to absurd violence by his anger and grief. Despite this, Odysseus still pities him as an *exemplum* of the fragility of humankind. Just as the interaction with Priam makes Achilles lament his own father's suffering (*Il*. 24.507-12), Odysseus finds a double of himself in Ajax (124). However, for Burian, Odysseus' rejection of mockery is still surprising, as it is 'an idea that is more or less universally accepted in the world of heroic myth' (2012, 72). His exposure to the hallucinating Ajax provokes the reverse of *Schadenfreude*, and he does not engage in the hostile laughter Athena invites from him.

Similar hostile themes are continued in the tragedy's next instance of laughter, as the chorus of Salaminian sailors, Ajax's allies, imagine word of the hero's failed murder attempt gaining momentum in the Greek camp:

Χο. ἐχθρῶν δ᾽ ὕβρις ὧδ᾽ ἀτάρβητα
ὁρμᾶται ἐν εὐανέμοις βάσσαις,
πάντων καγχαζόντων
γλώσσαις βαρυάλγητ᾽: (S. *Aj*. 197-200)

Cho. But the *hubris* of your enemies fearlessly
stirs in the wind-swept glens,
while they all laugh aloud
these deeply grievous laughs with their tongues.

Again, enmity is associated with superior laughter, and here the form of καχάζω '*laugh aloud*' (LSJ I) stresses the openness with which the Greek army are imagined expressing their hostility – they are

pictured acting ἀτάρβητα ‘fearlessly’.[14] This is a straightforward example of superior laughter: it is closely associated with ἐχθρῶν…ὕβρις and depicts the army taking pleasure in Ajax’s suffering (βαρυάλγητ’). At the same time, as Dillon (1991, 355) observes, it is entirely imagined; Ajax’s shipmates conjecture the hostile reactions of the Greek army, in line with the ‘Help Friends/Harm Enemies’ principle. When his hallucinations have passed, Ajax too conflates *hubris* with mockery:

Αἴ. ὁρᾷς τὸν θρασύν, τὸν εὐκάρδιον,
τὸν ἐν δαΐοις ἄτρεστον μάχας,
ἐν ἀφόβοις με θηρσὶ δεινὸν χέρας;
ὤμοι γέλωτος, οἷον ὑβρίσθην ἄρα. (S. *Aj*. 364-7)

Aj. Do you see me – the brave, the courageous,
the fearless in battle among enemies –
terrible with my hands among unformidable beasts?
Alas the mockery, how I have been insulted.

Here Ajax uses almost paradoxical imagery, emphasising the extreme nature of his reversal. The hero exacerbates the impropriety of his attack on ἀφόβοις ‘unformidable’ beasts despite the hero being ἐν δαΐοις ἄτρεστον μάχας ‘fearless in battle among enemies’. For Ajax, the enormous and improper mistake is an embarrassment, and he identifies superior laughter (γέλως) as a natural response to the *hubris* he has suffered through Athena’s intervention.[15] Still, this is expected and not yet voiced.

Specifically, Ajax anticipates the laughter of Odysseus, reiterating his earlier enmity towards him. There is much irony in his repetition of a version of γέλων πολύν to describe Odysseus’ imagined laughter, a phrase Tecmessa has earlier used to describe Ajax’s own hostile laughter (303):

Αἴ. ἰὼ πάνθ᾽ ὁρῶν ἁπάντων τ᾽ ἀεὶ
κακῶν ὄργανον, τέκνον Λαρτίου,
κακοπινέστατόν τ᾽ ἄλημα στρατοῦ,
ἦ που πολὺν γέλωθ᾽ ὑφ᾽ ἡδονῆς ἄγεις.

[14] Borowski (2015, 121) notes the auditory aspect of the verb καχάζω, which has etymological links to the Greek *kha kha* ‘ha ha’. For its Indo-European roots, see Mallory & Adams (2006, 359-60). Lloyd-Jones & Wilson (1990, 10) print βακχαζόντων ‘raving’ in place of καγχαζόντων.

[15] Athena’s divine interference somewhat complicates Ajax’s agency in the events. Therefore Lawrence (2005, 21), following Williams (1981, 27-8), identifies Ajax’s feelings of humiliation as ‘“agent regret” – an inability to divorce ourselves entirely from a consequence for which we are not strictly responsible but in which we are closely involved’.

Χο. ξύν τοι θεῷ πᾶς καὶ γελᾷ κὠδύρεται. (S. *Aj*. 379-382)

Aj. Oh you all-seeing one, instrument of every
evil always, son of Laertes,
most loathsome villain of the army,
how you must persist in much laughter in your pleasure.

Cho. Every man laughs or laments as the god dictates.

In the tragedy's context, Ajax's description of Odysseus is unfairly pejorative, but his expectation of the army's mockery is not entirely baseless. As Borowski (2015, 86 n283) observes, the *Iliad* (23.771-784) depicts the Greek army laughing at the Locrian Ajax losing a race to Odysseus after slipping in dung: πάντες ἐπ᾽ αὐτῷ ἡδὺ γέλασσαν 'they all laughed joyfully at him' (*Il*. 23.784).[16] In both cases, Athena hinders an opponent of Odysseus and humiliates them in the process, so it is not unusual that Sophocles' hero expects a similar response from the army here. Indeed, the chorus' response to Ajax redirects his attention to the divine intervention, whilst also reflecting a particularly Sophoclean connection between laughter and the divine.[17] Evidently, Ajax grasps the pivotal importance of Athena's influence, as later he expresses a similar sentiment:

Αἴ. κεῖνοι δ᾽ ἐπεγγελῶσιν ἐκπεφευγότες,
ἐμοῦ μὲν οὐχ ἑκόντος: εἰ δέ τις θεῶν
βλάπτοι, φύγοι τἂν χὠ κακὸς τὸν κρείσσονα. (S. *Aj*. 454-6)

Aj. But those men laugh at me, having escaped
when I did not willingly let them: but if one of the gods
hinders, then even an evil man can flee a better one.

The hero stresses that he is not embarrassed by the intended act of violence on his allies, but by its misdirection – his failure to kill the generals despite wanting to (ἐμοῦ μὲν οὐχ ἑκόντος, Finglass 2011, 239). Ultimately, the perceived *hubris* and anticipated mockery he suffers leads him to suicide *before* confronting the betrayed Greeks. He pre-empts his further humiliation and punishment by inflicting the

[16] The specific enmity between the two heroes is also depicted in the *Odyssey*, where Ajax's shade turns away from Odysseus (*Od*. 11.543-64).
[17] See 3.3.2.

damage himself: 'He must die not only because it is the only honourable way out of his original disgrace, but also because he would be further shamed by staying alive' (Blundell 1989, 72).[18]

Following Ajax's suicide, the tragedy's central issue becomes the hero's body and whether he deserves burial. Despite the dramatic change of circumstances, the chorus anticipate a similar reaction from the Greek leaders, repeating Ajax's expectation of Odysseus' mockery in particular:

Χο. ἦ ῥα κελαινώπᾳ θυμῷ ἐφυβρίζει
πολύτλας ἀνήρ,
γελᾷ δὲ τοῖσδε μαινομένοις ἄχεσιν
πολὺν γέλωτα, φεῦ φεῦ,
ξύν τε διπλοῖ βασιλῆς
κλύοντες Ἀτρεῖδαι. (S. *Aj*. 955-960)

Cho. Surely, maliciously exulting in his gloomy heart,
the much-enduring man
laughs at our maddened sorrows,
with much laughter, alas alas,
and with him, hearing it, the two kings, the sons of Atreus.

As with Ajax's earlier assumption of Odysseus' mockery, their words are loaded with dramatic irony for Sophocles' audience, who have witnessed his rejection of hostile laughter before Athena. More direct criticism of hostile laughter is expressed by Tecmessa, Ajax's captive and concubine:

Τέ. οἱ δ᾽ οὖν γελώντων κἀπιχαιρόντων κακοῖς
τοῖς τοῦδ᾽: …
…
τί δῆτα τοῦδ᾽ ἐπεγγελῷεν ἂν κάτα;
θεοῖς τέθνηκεν οὗτος, οὐ κείνοισιν, οὔ.
πρὸς ταῦτ᾽ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐν κενοῖς ὑβριζέτω. (S. *Aj*. 961-2, 969-971)

Te. But let them laugh and rejoice over the sufferings
of this man: …
…

[18] This is not the only course of action open to tragic heroes following their failure. See e.g. Wilson (2004, 82-3) on Euripides' *Heracles*, which depicts a hero who ultimately rejects suicide in favour of enduring their suffering. Further connection between the portrayal of laughter in these two plays is discussed at 3.2.

Indeed why should they mock him?
This man died for the gods, and not for them, no.
In the face of that let Odysseus insult in vain.

Of all the characters in the play, Tecmessa and her young son, Eurysaces, are rendered most vulnerable by Ajax's death.[19] Thus her ambivalence towards the code that resulted in his suicide is fitting, and she emphasises the divine element of Ajax's downfall (θεοῖς) to undermine the *hubris* and mockery she too expects from the Greeks. Ironically, the gods' involvement is precisely the reason Odysseus has already given for his own decision not to mock Ajax. However, Tecmessa's reasoning is logistical as well as philosophical, as Hesk (2003, 101) notes that she emphasises the Greeks' practical loss of their greatest surviving warrior (964-5). Scholarship has generally focused upon Odysseus' rejection of hostile laughter, but Tecmessa's speech serves to further problematise this superior use of mocking laughter. This anticipation of hostile laughter, voiced by a character so critical of its justification, is testament to its cultural weight within the tragic, heroic world Sophocles depicts. Tecmessa's reflections, in conjunction with those of Odysseus, justify Dillon's observation that 'in no other play is the right to mock one's enemy so radically questioned' (1991, 350).

Both the final mentions of hostile mockery in the tragedy occur before the entrance of Odysseus, Menelaus and Agamemnon, after which the text is notably silent concerning laughter. First, Ajax's brother, Teucer, reacts to the news of his brother's death with the impulse to protect his body:

Τεῦ. ἴθ', ἐγκόνει, σύγκαμνε: τοῖς θανοῦσί τοι
φιλοῦσι πάντες κειμένοις ἐπεγγελᾶν. (S. *Aj*. 988-9)

Teu. Go, look alive, work with me: for all men love
to mock the dead when they lie upon the ground.

Again, Teucer makes an ironic generalisation that πάντες 'all' mock the dead, anticipating unanimous hostile laughter from the Greeks at Ajax's death. Finally, the chorus herald the entrance of Menelaus:

Χο. βλέπω γὰρ ἐχθρὸν φῶτα, καὶ τάχ' ἂν κακοῖς
γελῶν ἃ δὴ κακοῦργος ἐξίκοιτ᾽ ἀνήρ. (S. *Aj*. 1042-3)

Cho. For I see an enemy, and perhaps when he arrives he will
laugh at our troubles like a villain would.

[19] On Tecmessa's attempt to persuade Ajax out of self-harm and its epic precedent, see p.30-31.

Blundell (1989, 62 n10) notes that whilst there are no explicit references to the laughter of Agamemnon or Menelaus, there are several references that interpret their apparent glee as hubristic (e.g. 1348f., 1087f.; cf. 1151). Additionally, Menelaus makes a joke at the expense of Teucer and the deceased Ajax (1089-1090), indicating his comic interpretation of the circumstances.[20]

However, whilst the sons of Atreus are happy to mock the disgraced Ajax, Odysseus returns and makes a case for his burial (1332-1345). Ultimately, it is this more forgiving approach that wins the day. Despite Odysseus once finding Ajax ἔχθιστος στρατοῦ 'the most hostile of the army' (1336), he was also ἄριστον Ἀργείων 'the best of the Argives' (1340) – except, of course, for Achilles. In contrast to the simple 'Help Friends/Harm Enemies' binary, Odysseus' view of justice allows for Ajax's ambivalent position as their traitorous ally and failed murderer:

> Ὀδ. ἄνδρα δ' οὐ δίκαιον, εἰ θάνοι,
> βλάπτειν τὸν ἐσθλόν, οὐδ' ἐὰν μισῶν κυρῇς. (S. *Aj.* 1344-5)

> Od. But it is not just to harm a good man
> if he should die, even if you happen to hate him.

Odysseus again subtly rejects Athena's approach, evoking Ajax's earlier words (454-6).[21] There, Ajax comments upon the ability of the gods to favour κακός 'a bad man' over τὸν κρείσσονα 'the better one', but here Odysseus collapses the boundary between these categories, suggesting that even an enemy can be ἐσθλόν 'good'. Blundell observes that, in doing so, Odysseus 'thus raises the possibility not just of respecting Ajax as an enemy, but of transforming enmity back into friendship' (1989, 97). At the end of the tragedy, friendship seems to prevail; Agamemnon agrees to Odysseus' request on the principle of their own shared friendship (1370-3), and Odysseus attempts to repair his φιλία (*philia*) 'friendship' with Teucer too (1376-80). Teucer, though appreciative, does not accept Odysseus' offer of help digging the grave (1394-1401), and the tragedy ends with only Ajax's brother and the chorus moving to tend to the hero's body. The image is rather ambivalent; some relationship damage has been repaired, but certainly not all of it.

Sophocles' *Ajax* repeatedly emphasises that the negative, hostile laughter of mockery is only one possible response to Ajax's situation. Although Agamemnon and Menelaus adopt a mocking attitude towards their deceased enemy, Odysseus instead feels sympathy for the suffering hero and ultimately seeks to make posthumous amends. Perhaps the most enigmatic laughter relationship in the

[20] On this joke within its tragic context, see 4.2.2.
[21] Both are also conditional clauses casting similar moral judgements and using the verb βλάπτειν.

tragedy is that between Ajax and mockery. Quick to mock during his hallucinatory episode, Ajax also fixates upon his own embarrassment and frames his suffering in terms of his enemies' laughter. The divine influence upon Ajax's own laughter is evident, and discussed in further detail at 3.2.1. However, the hero's obsession with his own humiliation and his enemies' mockery is fundamental to his decision to enact further violence against himself, even though he never experiences their laughter first-hand. In *Ajax*, Sophocles problematises laughter's role in the 'Help Friends/Harm Enemies' code, primarily through its rejection by both Odysseus and Tecmessa. In this sense, Dillon is correct that this tragedy 'insists from beginning to end on purely negative laughter' (1991, 355), which its characters may choose to engage in, anticipate, or indeed reject. Moreover, *Ajax* is the clearest example of how hostile laughter is 'so often feared and so rarely vented' (*ibid.*) in the genre, as its central character retaliates so swiftly that he prevents direct exposure to his humiliation. Whilst Sophocles parses out and critiques the social politics at play in hostile mockery, his text does not present a positive, alternative manifestation of laughter.[22] For more positive laughter juxtaposed with hostile mockery, Euripides' *Medea* provides textual instances that not only problematise, but also potentially rehabilitate, gelastic expression.

1.3 *Medea*

Among the extant tragedies, the greatest frequency of forms from the Greek root γελ- are in Sophocles' *Ajax* (15), followed by Euripides' *Bacchae* (10), with *Medea* (9) in third. However, *Medea* is the tragedy in which a single character mentions laughter the greatest number of times: of the nine references to laughter in the play, eight are voiced by Euripides' Medea herself. A summary of Medea's particular situation might help to explain this, as the play is structured around its protagonist's abandonment by her husband, Jason, and the revenge it provokes from her. The betrayal is unjustified and undeserved, as Medea repeatedly asserts; their marriage is legitimate, she confirmed it with oaths (160-3),[23] and she performed multiple acts of *philia* 'friendship' for Jason in the past, including helping him defeat a dragon, abandoning her paternal home at Colchis, and giving birth to his male heirs (488-491). She has performed all the expected social duties of her gender role, and yet Jason now intends to leave Medea and (re)marry – with a wedding planned to the princess of Corinth. As a result, Medea is positioned to suffer a social severance that is both marital and geographical, as the threat of her exile looms alongside his upcoming wedding (271-4). Familial betrayal and banishment are both intense forms of social rejection, and Medea begins her tragedy already aware of her isolation and vulnerability.[24] It is common for tragic characters to lament their isolation, which is often expressed in terms of fearing mockery, [25]

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[22] At best, the laughter instances that are not directly hostile are ambivalent: S. *Aj*. 383 (see 3.3.2), 1011 (see 2.2.1).
[23] On the unusual but sincere circumstances of their marriage, see Burnett (1973, 13), McClure (1999, 379-380).
[24] Blundell (1989, 44) suggests that the most painful element of exile is its social consequences – its lack of φίλοι (friends).
[25] E.g. lament for isolation: E. *Andr.* 1216-1221, *IT* 218-228; as fear of mockery: E. *Ba.* 840-2, *Her*. 284-294, *IT* 502-4.

but, besides Ajax, only in *Medea* does this manifest as a fear of laughter that becomes its protagonist's primary motivating anxiety.

In *Medea*, Mastronarde (2002, 20) observes six mentions of laughter which reflect Medea's concern with avoiding mockery (383, 404, 797, 1049, 1355, 1362). The laughter she fears is certainly hostile, as she describes the laughing parties twice as ἐχθροί 'personal enemies' (383, 797). At 404, she associates mockery with what is being inflicted upon her, and the laughter she mentions at 1049 is a projected result of her failure to punish her foes. The final two examples are forms of ἐγ-γελάω, which always refer to hostile, mocking laughter. In light of Medea's concern, and aware of her exposure, Medea spends much of the play seeking alliances and favours to counteract her social vulnerability and provide the opportunity to retaliate against her mistreatment.[26] She invokes the Greek custom of 'transitivity' (Blundell 1989, 47-8), where friends share in the friendships and enmities of their φίλοι 'friends', by addressing the chorus of Corinthian women as φίλαι 'friends' (797). Thus she subtly projects her personal foes as their enemies too, and also encourages them to help her despite the extremity of her plans. Although there were limits to punishing adversaries, Blundell suggests that 'Approval of Help Friends…knows virtually no bounds, and the strongest disapproval is directed towards those who fail to abide by it' (1989, 56). Therefore adherence to the expectations of this moral code leads the chorus to become implicated in Medea's revenge, even when their silence enables the murder of her children. Regardless of Medea's sincerity, positioning the chorus as friends is savvy as either a persuasion or manipulation tactic.

Similar to the chorus, Medea's old friend Aegeus is πρόθυμος 'eager' (720) to help her, undoubtedly because of their established friendship and her promise to help him father children (709-718).[27] Friendship aside, it is a good deal for Aegeus. Bargaining with Creon, however, the father of Jason's new bride, is riskier. Cleverly, Medea appeals to him as a πατὴρ 'father' (344), asking him to consider her children: οἴκτιρε δ' αὐτούς 'pity them' (343). Creon is ultimately persuaded to be sympathetic, accepting her supplication and granting her more time at Corinth despite knowing that it is unwise.[28] Paradoxically, by lowering her status before Creon, she avoids hostile mockery, precisely because pity is incompatible with the laughter of superiority theory.[29] Just as with her φίλαι 'friends' the chorus, Medea protects herself from ridicule by evoking her enemy's compassion. In contrast to the loyal chorus and Aegeus, Jason's behaviour has transformed him from φίλος 'friend' to ἐχθρός 'enemy'. His abandonment of Medea is not only an infraction of *philia* but is also a violation of the oath he swore

[26] From the chorus (214-266), Creon (340-7), and Aegeus (709-713).
[27] Medea is one of Aegeus' φίλοι (664), and he accepts her request πολλῶν ἕκατι 'for many reasons' (719).
[28] Indeed Creon admits this: ὁρῶ... ἐξαμαρτάνων 'I see…that I am making a mistake' (350).
[29] Billig (2005, 225), Bergson (2013, 10), Carroll (2014, 86), Eagleton (2019, 43).

to her.[30] Medea's vengeance is therefore also twofold: it is simultaneously a retaliation against the insult of breached *philia* 'friendship' and the impious act of betrayal. Arguably the marital betrayal is even graver than the hostility of an enemy, as Blundell (1989, 51) notes that cultivating 'bad' friendships and 'good' enmities is itself a cause of embarrassment in this social code.[31] Medea's misjudgement of Jason's character thus makes her *even more* vulnerable to hostile laughter, and so it is no wonder she labels him with the pejorative παγκάκιστος 'the worst man' (465). Yet Jason, as the offending party, has a different perspective. He stresses that he does not consider Medea an enemy and that he acts out of love for her and their children (459-464) rather than admitting any betrayal.[32] Scholars sometimes attribute the strife between Jason and Medea to their adherence to different moral codes, but Jason acknowledges his *philia* relationship with Medea, and appears aware of the 'Help Friends' principle and the debt thereby implied.[33] Theirs is not a clash in worldview, but rather a disagreement about the particular acts that constitute this prescribed code of conduct. Medea perceives a betrayal of these standards, whilst Jason will not admit to one.[34]

Medea criticises Jason for not gaining her consent before agreeing to his new marriage, and Jason cites her rage as an excuse – he did not think she would be able to put aside her own emotions to support his decision (588-590). In response, Medea sheds new light upon his motives when she interprets his reason for the royal marriage:

> Μή. οὐ τοῦτό σ' εἶχεν, ἀλλὰ βάρβαρον λέχος
> πρὸς γῆρας οὐκ εὔδοχον ἐξέβαινέ σοι. (E. *Med.* 591-2)

> Me. This did not hold you, but that a 'barbarian' marriage
> would not bring you good repute in old age.

Admittedly, Medea and Jason both make claims about each other's intentions that may contain varying degrees of truth, but Medea's observation feels astute here.[35] She portrays Jason's motive as a fear of

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[30] When confronted, he neither confirms nor denies the oath-breaking (492-8).
[31] This concern does not appear to be shared by the Greek generals regarding Ajax's betrayal, perhaps because he is a σύμμαχος 'ally' rather than a φίλος 'friend'.
[32] Medea and the children remain Jason's φίλοι 'friends' (459), though Jason does not necessarily expect the friendship to be reciprocated: καὶ γὰρ εἰ σύ με στυγεῖς, / οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην σοὶ κακῶς φρονεῖν ποτε 'and even if you hate me, I would never be able to think of you badly' (463-4).
[33] E.g. Mastronarde (2002, 19) observes a clash: 'Jason seems to live in a different world, more like contemporary Athens'.
[34] Bongie (1977, 43): 'He understands the values she respects, but he denies that she has applied those values accurately in assessing their situation'. Tyler (1969, 116) also argues that Jason is sincere in the beliefs he expresses.
[35] Allan (2002, 76) suggests that Medea has pinpointed his 'real fear' here. I am slightly more sceptical, and broadly agree with Bongie (1977, 45) that it is more productive to focus on what each says about their own motivations.

personal embarrassment stemming from his non-Greek marriage. Because Medea is not Greek by birth, their marriage cannot offer him a secure social status in Greece when he is vulnerable ‘in old age’, a time in which his children and family ought to care for him.[36] Whilst Jason denies that his actions are γυναικὸς οὕνεκα ‘on account of a woman’ (593), he admits that he is motivated by security, seeking the marriage to form an ἔρυμα δώμασιν ‘defence for the house’ (587). His concern for limiting vulnerability is further evidenced by his later wish for his children to become ἐχθρῶν τῶν ἐμῶν ὑπερτέρους ‘victorious over my enemies’ (921). Jason admits his desire for security, but Medea emphasises the darker side of this motivation: a fear of social precarity, which would leave him vulnerable to embarrassment and isolation.[37] This is also, of course, exactly the position in which Jason has placed Medea, and provides the motive for her revenge. Although their means and expectations may differ, Medea and Jason certainly attempt to abide by the same moral code. Indeed their heroic values, whose ‘broad and inclusive’ (Cairns 1993, 139) standards favour both individual and collective τιμή ‘honour’, are themselves built upon conflicts of interest. In reality, Jason and Medea are more similar than their disagreement implies. Ultimately both prioritise fear for their status over love for their φίλοι ‘friends’.

In extant tragedy, Medea’s concern with hostile laughter is most comparable to that of Sophocles’ Ajax. Each protagonist experiences a sudden shift from security to vulnerability, and both have been dishonoured: Medea has been betrayed by Jason, and Ajax believes that he has been unfairly denied Achilles’ arms.[38] Both consider the laughter of enemies as beneath their status and mention their noble family. Whilst Ajax fears his father considering him a coward (*Aj.* 470-2), Medea refers to her noble father and divine grandfather Helios as reasons she must not be mocked (*Med.* 406). In response, both plan murderous retaliation: Medea against her children with Jason and his new family, Ajax against the leaders who have wronged him. *Ajax*, however, begins after the hero’s revenge has already been thwarted. Just as Ajax regrets the failure of his revenge (*Aj*. 454-5), Medea fears being caught in her act of revenge and punished before its completion: θανοῦσα θήσω τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἐχθροῖς γέλων ‘dying, I will give my enemies reason to mock me’ (*Med*. 383). With verbal similarity to *Ajax* (364-7),[39] Euripides’ Medea addresses herself:

Μή. ὁρᾶις ἅ πάσχεις; οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ' ὀφλεῖν (E. *Med*. 404)

[36] Medea’s comment is even more poignant in the contemporary Athenian context of Pericles’ citizenship law, which demanded that a free male’s mother and father must both be Athenian by birth for him to be classed a citizen (Arist. *Ath. Pol*. 26.3). Allan (2002, 60) notes that the ambiguity of Medea’s status does not justify Jason’s behaviour, but does make his motives more comprehensible.

[37] Jason’s personal fear of embarrassment is caused by broader social customs born out of Athenian society’s xenophobia – itself a fear that creates hostility and ‘in-groups’. For tragedy’s depiction of non-Greek characters, see e.g. Hall (1991).

[38] In the latter case, the case is explicitly made by Teucer (*Aj.* 1135).

[39] ὁρᾷς…;…οἷον ὑβρίσθην and ὁρᾶις ἅ πάσχεις are linguistically and conceptually very close.

Me. Do you see what you are suffering? You must not incur mockery

Medea predicts that the inability to complete her vengeance would make her the object of ridicule, just as Ajax considers his failure deserving of mockery. But Medea's revenge is still potential: her self-directed 'you must not incur mockery' acknowledges that its failure could bring hostile laughter, but its success could offer her the opportunity to escape it. The legal meaning of the verb ὀφλισκάνω '*incur*' (LSJ II) also carries a sense of merited punishment, implying that Medea considers inaction as deserving of laughter.[40] Thus revenge becomes necessary to prevent the injury of mockery: she must inflict suffering lest she herself suffer. Only extreme violence can prevent the *hubris* of ridicule, or so it seems.

Yet in neither *Medea* nor *Ajax* does the hostile, superior laughter that the characters expect and fear actually manifest onstage. Like Creon in *Medea*, Ajax's enemy Odysseus instead chooses to pity the hero's suffering (*Aj*. 121-6) and later advocates for his proper burial (*Aj*. 1332-1345). In *Ajax*, Sophocles' characters question and defy the ethical code that encourages superior laughter (*Aj*. 74-80, 961-970),[41] but in *Medea*, Euripides offers an alternative response in the form of another type of laughter. It comes at a critical moment, in Medea's famous deliberation speech, and almost causes her to give up her plan. The first test of Medea's resolve is expressed as follows:

Μή. φεῦ φεῦ· τί προσδέρκεσθέ μ' ὄμμασιν, τέκνα;
τί προσγελᾶτε τὸν πανύστατον γέλων;
αἰαῖ· τί δράσω; καρδία γὰρ οἴχεται,
γυναῖκες, ὄμμα φαιδρὸν ὡς εἶδον τέκνων. (E. *Med*. 1040-3)

Me. Oh, oh: why do you behold me with your eyes, children?
Why do you smile this last smile at me?
Alas: what shall I do? For my courage is gone,
women, since I saw the bright faces of the children.

Of the three occurrences of γελ- missing from Mastronarde's (2002, 20) otherwise comprehensive list, two occur at 1041. Multiple scholars have noted the importance of the children's smiling appearance here,[42] but less attention has been given to its implications for the tragedy's portrayal of laughter. Perhaps this is because its meaning may not be precisely 'laughter' but smiling, though this is expressed

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[40] On the term, see Mastronarde (2002, 237). Similarly, the phrase γέλωτος ἄξια 'worthy of laughter' appears at E. *Hcld*. 507, expressing the concept that inaction deserves mockery. The phrase is also used in the negative sense at *Alc*. 804 to express the impropriety of laughter in the grieving circumstances.
[41] See 1.2.
[42] Knox (1979, 300), Kovacs (1993, 62), Mastronarde (2002, 336): 'it is finally the simple glance and smile of her children that bring the first effort to step back from her plan'.

by the same Greek verb (γελᾶν) and is certainly among a set of expressions that constitute laughter in ancient and modern social behaviour.[43] The innocent smiles of her children are starkly different to the laughter that Medea has been anticipating thus far, and they seem to catch her off guard. Her experienced reality of their kindly 'bright faces' contrasts vividly with the mockery she fears. Indeed they smile 'towards' her, with the prefix προσ-, inviting her reciprocation rather than excluding or shaming her.[44]

Although seemingly at odds with the 'superior' laughter that pervades the heroic and epic world, familial laughter appears in Homer's *Iliad* too, undermining the notion that hostility is a necessary condition of literary γέλως.[45] In Book 6, Andromache and Hector laugh together at their son's fear of his father's armour: ἐκ δ' ἐγέλασσε πατήρ τε φίλος καὶ πότνια μήτηρ 'but the dear father and queenly mother laughed at this' (*Il.* 6.471). Although superiority theorists such as Billig might still attribute this laughter to a form of social correction, there is certainly nothing intentionally hostile or malicious about Astyanax's φίλος 'dear' (*Il.* 6.468, 471) parents' laughter.[46] The child's innocent fear of danger where none exists means that the adults can enjoy their son's confusion together in the knowledge that he is, for the time being, completely safe. This shared laughter, in the family's final moments together, is testament to the persistence of non-mocking types of laughter even in tragic circumstances. Despite the hostility of war, and the feelings of fear, isolation and vulnerability it produces, the scene concludes with Andromache δακρυόεν γελάσασα 'smiling through her tears' (*Il.* 6.484). There is true shared joy in their laughter and her smile, despite the family's suffering.

Although, in contrast, Medea's family is missing its κύριος 'male guardian', the mother seems similarly aware of the potential for joy behind her children's smiles, and the recompense they could provide for her pain. She laments losing them πρὶν σφῷν ὀνάσθαι κἀπιδεῖν εὐδαίμονας 'before I have enjoyment of you and see you happy' (1025) and admits their shared future would be a γλυκεῖα φροντίς 'sweet imagining' (1036). Instead, as a direct result of her plan, she admits: λυπρὸν διάξω βίοτον ἀλγεινόν τ' ἐμόν 'I shall live out my life in pain and grief' (1037), experiencing suffering that is δίς 'twice' (1047) that of Jason. Unlike their father, Medea stresses that she has already suffered for these children. She describes their births as agonising experiences, recalling her πόνοις 'toils' (1030) and στερρὰς…ἀλγηδόνας 'harsh pains' (1031). Medea's personal feeling about childbirth is evidently negative, emphasised by the famous earlier line ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ' ἀσπιδα / στῆναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ

[43] Although there are distinctions between the two acts, smiling is within the scope of classical 'laughter' for Halliwell (2008, 7) and Beard (2014, 73-5).
[44] Cairns (2003, 41) notes that eye contact in epic is employed for both aggressive and reconciliatory purposes. Medea's children's good-natured eye contact certainly complements their cheerful smiles.
[45] Halliwell (2008, 53) notes that laughter in the *Iliad* ranges drastically from 'intimate shared delight to bloodlust'.
[46] Billig (2005, 109, 198, 204-5) interprets adult laughter at children as a disciplinary means of conveying social rules.

τεκεῖν ἅπαξ 'I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than bear a single child' (250-1). Her revenge is thus a double-edged sword: it will harm Jason, but, simultaneously, it will not only gravely affect Medea's future, but undermine her past suffering too.

Despite the epic *exemplum* of positive familial laughter provided by Hector and Andromache, there is a tragic precedent for laughter's persuasive failure that fittingly comes from Sophocles' *Ajax*. To dissuade Ajax from suicide, his partner Tecmessa asks the hero to consider the fates of herself and their son in the event of his death (*Aj.* 485-524). She paints a vivid picture of the abuse and mockery she will face in the future without Ajax – *hubris* which, by association, will be posthumously levied against the hero and his loved ones too (Finglass 2011, 279): σοὶ δ' αἰσχρὰ τἄπη ταῦτα καὶ τῷ σῷ γένει 'the shame of these words will affect you and your family' (*Aj.* 505). Scholars have commented upon Tecmessa's lack of tact or empathy here, although self-pity is not out of keeping with ancient Greek expressions of grief.[47] In a sense, Tecmessa pre-empts the dirge she will sing upon Ajax's death,[48] but the future she depicts is remarkably influenced by Ajax's particular fears. Firstly, her appeal to Ajax's sense of shame and embarrassment is fitting because these are *precisely* the terms in which he has expressed his pain. As Tecmessa appeals to the specific standards that Ajax abides by as an argument for his survival, it is clearly not just a lament, but a deliberate attempt to change his mind and save his life.[49] Secondly, given the situational precarity of Tecmessa and her young son Eurysaces, it is surely forgivable and necessary that her primary concern is for the continued life of her family.[50] Tecmessa's own fears are apparent from the language of physical violence that she uses to describe the mockery she envisages (*Aj.* 500-505), but she includes hints of these very real anxieties almost subliminally to accentuate her appeal to Ajax's fear of mockery.

In Tecmessa's speech, Sophocles also repeatedly alludes to the scene between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6.[51] Here, Hector imagines the grief that the announcement of his death will cause Andromache (6.462-3), and Sophocles depicts the reverse of this scene: Tecmessa appeals to Ajax's concerns for himself, even beyond his death. Finglass notes that 'disgrace, rather than grief is what he fears' (2011, 284), and it is notably Ajax's *own* disgrace that Tecmessa appeals to. These distinctions lay the groundwork for the fracture between the epic and tragic scenes, each of which comes to a climax

[47] E.g. Davis (1986, 153): 'That Ajax should despair of the possibility of friends is not surprising. Those most 'dear' to him, at least those who can talk, are remarkably self-centred in their reactions to his contemplated and actual suicide'.
[48] Garland (2001, 30): 'A study of surviving dirges suggests that they primarily afforded the bereaved an opportunity to indulge in shameless self-pity by bemoaning the effects upon their own lives occasioned by the loss of the beloved'.
[49] Finglass (2011, 278) notes that Tecmessa's rhetorical strategies are all employed to try to convince Ajax to change his mind.
[50] E.g. Maslow (1943) theorises that physical security (basic needs) is of more importance to human motivation than social standing (psychological needs).
[51] See Finglass (2011, 280) for an analysis of the precise references.

at the interaction with a young child. Whilst Hector and Andromache share joy and grief in the presence of their child, it is only after his parents' initial discussion that Tecmessa first calls for Eurysaces, having earlier sent him away in fear for his life (*Aj.* 533). Ajax addresses the boy, but there is no room for emotion – laughter, or even tears – as he forbids Tecmessa to weep before the house (*Aj.* 578-580). Ajax's refusal to emotionally engage ultimately foreshadows his rejection of his duties of *philia*, and, shortly after, his death onstage by his own sword.[52]

Similarly, Medea must betray her *philia* principles to navigate the moral grey area in which the principle of 'Harm Enemies' involves hurting loved ones too. Like Ajax, she rejects emotion and instead steels herself with the simple binary of superiority theory. With these words she returns to her planned course of action:

Μή. καίτοι τί πάσχω; βούλομαι γέλωτ' ὀφλεῖν
ἐχθροὺς μεθεῖσα τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἀζημίους; (E. *Med.* 1049-50)

Me. But what is coming over me? Do I want to incur mockery,
having released my enemies unpunished?

Fear of hostile laughter continues to motivate her revenge, the verb ὀφλεῖν recurring to emphasise the inevitability of mockery if she fails to retaliate.[53] At the beginning of her hesitation, Medea experiences another type of γέλως, one that reflects shared joy and could help to alleviate her suffering rather than cause or reinforce it. Ten lines later, she rejects it, her imagination captured once again by the anticipation of enemy laughter. Despite Medea's obsession with avoiding hostile laughter at all costs, it is the innocent smiles of her children that seem to touch her most deeply, testing her resolve, and projecting a joy that she cannot reconcile with her determination to avoid mockery.[54] Yet the threat of hostile laughter is still enough to drive her to act on principle, despite anticipating the double damage she will inflict on herself in the process.[55]

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[52] Finglass (2011, 55) interprets Ajax's suicide as a rejection of *philia*. See Belfiore (2000, 101-116) on Ajax's paradoxical friend/enemy relationship to himself in the tragedy. Halliwell (2008, 55-58) also observes that Homer's Telemonian Ajax smiles in battle at *Il.* 7.212, soon after the depiction of the familial laughter. Here, where the two scenes are conflated, Ajax is once again closely connected with hostile laughter, rather than that of *philia*.
[53] See p.28 on ὀφλισκάνω. The rhetorical question also signals her belief that she can prevent ridicule through her own autonomous action.
[54] Similarly, Sophocles' Ajax envies the innocence of childhood, but ultimately still wants his son to harm his enemies (*Aj.* 552-8).
[55] Although some scholars doubt the authenticity of parts of Medea's speech, the suggested deletions do not concern the lines which are important for this argument. Reeve (1972, 261 n39) deletes 1056-1080, whilst Kovacs (1994, 378-381) suggests deleting only 1056-1064.

To an extent, Medea's plan is already beyond the point of no return: the poisoned gifts have been received by the princess (1003-4), whose violent death will soon be announced by a messenger (1121-1230). The final instance of laughter that Mastronarde (2002, 20) omits is in the messenger's speech describing the princess' reception of Medea's wedding gifts:

Ἄγ. ἡ δ', ὡς ἐσεῖδε κόσμον, οὐκ ἠνέσχετο,
ἀλλ' ᾔνεσ' ἀνδρὶ πάντα, καὶ πρὶν ἐκ δόμων
μακρὰν ἀπεῖναι πατέρα καὶ παῖδας σέθεν
λαβοῦσα πέπλους ποικίλους ἠμπέσχετο,
χρυσοῦν τε θεῖσα στέφανον ἀμφὶ βοστρύχοις
λαμπρῷ κατόπτρῳ σχηματίζεται κόμην,
ἄψυχον εἰκὼ προσγελῶσα σώματος. (E. *Med.* 1156-62)

Mes. But she, when she looked upon the finery, did not hold back,
but approved everything to her husband, and before the
father and your children had gone far from the house,
taking the embroidered gown, she put it round herself,
and placing the golden crown around her locks
she arranged her hair in a bright mirror,
smiling at the lifeless image of her body.

Both Mastronarde (2002, 14-15) and Hopman (2008, 165) interpret the bridal imagery in these lines as a metaphorical reflection of Medea's younger self and the first marriage to Jason.[56] Mastronarde (2002, 14) emphasises the association of the κάτοπτρον 'mirror' with the sexual allure of a bride or wife, but it certainly does double duty by conjuring up the image of a second bride – an ἄψυχον εἰκὼ 'lifeless image' displayed in this λαμπρῷ κατόπτρῳ 'bright mirror'. Of course, this sinister image foreshadows the imminent death of the princess herself,[57] but it also projects the fate of Medea, rendered ἄψυχον 'lifeless' first by Jason's betrayal and then by her own decision to kill their shared children. Burnett observes that the poisoning of the princess and Creon render both 'not merely dead but almost unburiable. They have lost all personal identity and have become merely hideous symbols of their debased and soulless world' (1973, 19; see esp. *Med.* 1196, 1215-1220). This emphasis on their loss of identity helps Euripides' audience to conflate the experiences of the princess and Medea, each stripped of their lives as a result of their marriage to Jason. This is doubtless helped by Euripides' decision not

[56] See Hopman (2008, 165) for the particular verbal similarities.
[57] Erdmann (1964, 132): 'ἄψυχος ist gewiß jedes Spiegelbild, hier aber reflektiert der Spiegel eine Person, die schon das Kleid und den Kranz des Todes trägt'.

to name the princess: 'her namelessness is a first indication that her individual being is of no great importance' (de Jong 2003, 371-2).

Simultaneously, the same verb Euripides uses of the children recurs – a form of προσ-γελάω 'I smile at' (1041). Allan (2002, 89) notes that the children serve as both agents and victims in the *Medea* plot, since they convey the poisoned gifts to the princess. Similarly, the princess is positioned as an unwitting agent in the whole affair, her marriage to Jason a catalyst for her own death just as the children's delivery of the gifts seals their own fate. Wallace (2013, 211) notes the verb shared between these two scenes of laughter, and observes that, in each case, the smile triggers a situation in which its audience struggles to continue looking on: first Medea, and then the witnesses of the princess' death (1076, 1167). For Wallace, 'the play registers its loss of balanced perspective by juxtaposing uneasily the tragic and the grotesque, symptomized by the ambiguous resonance of laughter' (*ibid.*). The image is connected to the prior scene in one other important manner: just as the children's innocent smiles precede their deaths at their mother's hands, the νεᾶνις 'girl' (1150) princess too will shortly die in the arms of her father. In this sense, her smiling reaction to the gifts does not so much characterise her as frivolous or materialistic, as some scholars have suggested,[58] but rather as 'a typical young girl' (de Jong 2003, 375). Just as the princess is characterised as a child, so too is Creon positioned as a model parent; the king is so affected by his daughter's suffering that he wishes death upon himself (1207-1210). Although he recovers from this initial fit of grief, Medea's poison has fixed him to the princess' garments, from which he attempts to escape through δεινὰ…παλαίσματα 'terrible wrestling' (1214). Ultimately, and despite his attempts to escape, his death wish is granted. In addition to recalling Medea's wedding to Jason, the scene also offers an ambivalent model for Medea's own infanticide. The vivid narration of the princess' gruesome death will be outdone only by the horror of Medea's murder of her own children, whose screams the audience hear from within the palace (1271-9). Following the murders of her own innocent and smiling children, and despite the parental grief she suffers, Medea, like Creon, will attempt to live on.

There are two final mentions of γέλως-vocabulary, spoken as Medea antagonises Jason from the *mechane*,[59] and both are forms of the vivid compound ἐγ-γελάω 'I laugh at'. Notably, both instances contrast the expectation of derision with its reality. The first is an admission of her former fear:

Μή. σὺ δ' οὐκ ἔμελλες τἄμ' ἀτιμάσας λέχη

[58] E.g. Lesky (1964, 308): 'lieblos eitle Geschöpf'.

[59] In Euripidean tragedy, appearances on the *mechane* were usually reserved for gods, yet here Medea appears, physically invulnerable and isolated above the stage action. *Orestes'* Helen is another potential notable exception to this rule, though her appearance on the *mechane* may be spurious: see West (1990b, 290) and Diggle (1994, 283).

τερπνὸν διάξειν βίοτον ἐγγελῶν ἐμοὶ (E. *Med.* 1354-5)

Me. You were not, having dishonoured my bed,
going to live a pleasant life laughing at me.

In keeping with her earlier imaginings, Medea admits her motivation for her vengeance as a preventative as much as a retaliatory act. She pictures Jason's contented future life as filled with laughter – but unlike the joyful smiles she might have shared with the children, she envisages Jason's laughter as hostile (ἐγγελῶν 'mocking') and specifically at her expense (ἐμοὶ 'at me'). But this is certainly not Medea's experience of her own superior triumph. Although she has successfully completed her deception and revenge acts, she does not celebrate her ability to mock Jason, nor does the text indicate that Medea laughs during their scene. Although she imagines that Jason would have laughed at her, with hostility and also genuine joy, she does not seem to reciprocate.

The second instance of laughter helps to form a more nuanced interpretation of Medea's attitude to laughter in victory. In response to Jason's claim that she too must suffer, she responds:

Μή. σάφ' ἴσθι· λύει δ' ἄλγος, ἢν σὺ μὴ 'γγελᾶις. (E. *Med.* 1362)

Me. You know it well: but it atones for the pain if you cannot mock me.

Medea admits her suffering, but again, her chief concern is Jason's inability to mock her.[60] It could be argued that Medea's claim here is evidence of her lack of emotion, as although there were other mythical maternal infanticides, none were remorseless.[61] However, that is not necessarily her meaning: Page (1938, 177) notes that the sense of λύω here is that of 'does away with', or alternatively 'atones for'. There is ambiguity in the language, but I would argue for a reading that does not 'dissolve' Medea's pain, but renders it endurable. If she were not suffering, why would she have responded to Jason's claim with σάφ' ἴσθι 'you know it well'? Although Swift (2017, 87) emphasises that Medea does not suffer any externally imposed punishment for her action, she does not claim to be immune to internal anguish. Her *compensation* is that she is above mockery. Divine characters often offer consolation to tragic

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[60] Medea is correct that Jason's insults pale in comparison to her act, as evidenced by the repetition of δάκνω 'I sting', first, in Jason's: ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ ἄν σε μυρίοις ὀνείδεσιν / δάκοιμι 'but I could not sting you with ten thousand insults' (1344-5) and later, Medea's: οἵδ' οὐκέτ' εἰσί· τοῦτο γάρ δήξεται 'the children are dead: this will sting you' (1370).

[61] *Medea*'s chorus mention Ino (1283-9). Allan (2002, 78) lists Agave, Procne and Althaea as further examples. Of these, Ino and Agave act whilst afflicted with divine madness. Ino dies with her children and Agave is exiled. Though acting autonomously, Procne sings in remorse at her murder when transformed into a nightingale, and Althaea later ends her own life. Hall (2010, 244) notes that Medea's maternal infanticide is the only premeditated one in extant myth.

heroes for their suffering, but here Medea, in a pseudo-divine staging position on the *mechane*, offers it to herself. Her silencing of the hostile laughter and thus her own fear of it is not an antidote, but a palliative; and her victory presents as a reduction of pain rather than as pleasure. Although she is victorious, there is no joy in her mockery of Jason.

1.4 Conclusion

Here I return to the two questions posed by Dillon (1991, 355), firstly: 'is it not curious that tragedy insists from beginning to end on purely negative laughter?'. This is true for Sophocles' *Ajax*, and Euripides' *Medea* also features a protagonist overwhelmingly concerned with her enemies' mockery. Of course, since the harm of *hubris* can be inflicted by much more than just laughter, γελῶς is a slippery and often abstracted concept: it is not the laughter itself that is feared, but the social humiliation and isolation it represents. Ajax connects his mockery closely to the *hubris* he has suffered, whilst Medea's fear of superior laughter ultimately outweighs her ability to find joy or even consolation in the inclusive, amiable laughter that her children offer. However, across both plays, it is notable that the only signposted laughter that occurs onstage is that of the children. In *Ajax*, hostile laughter is critiqued by Tecmessa and rejected by Odysseus in favour of pity. In *Medea*, Euripides problematises the focus on superior laughter by presenting an alternative, more positive laughter model, indicating the possibility of another happier, and less destructive future.

And finally, 'why is this terrible laughter so often feared and so rarely vented?' (Dillon 1991, 355). Superiority theory has helped to explain why this laughter is feared, due to the negative emotional consequences of embarrassment and social exclusion it evokes. Indeed, the Greek moral code of 'Help Friends/Harm Enemies' renders hostile laughter as a successful psychological means of damaging an enemy, to the extent that it can be deeply felt and feared even in its absence. In his question, Dillon observes that hostile laughter does not often seem to occur onstage in tragic texts, and both *Ajax* and *Medea* are a particularly strong examples of the disparity between the commonplace fear of hostile laughter and its lack of expression in tragedy. Both protagonists act pre-emptively to divert the mockery they anticipate. Although no 'superior' laughter seems to be clearly staged in either tragedy, its anticipation occupies each character so totally that they choose either death or certain grief in its place. These playwrights take their audiences on this psychological journey with them – to the extremes of what fear, and especially the fear of mocking laughter, can provoke.

Chapter 2 – Laughter & *Philia*

2.1 Introduction

The prominence of the laughter of the children in Euripides' *Medea* deserves further exploration, especially as it appears to be the only laughter actualised onstage in a play so thematically centred on the threat of mocking laughter. Some theorists consider superiority theory sufficient to account for all laughter, including that of children.[1] However, tragic texts indicate that laughter is not always interpreted or intended as mockery by its characters – the laughter of adults and children alike may be understood as a signal of 'play' rather than superiority. In neurological terms, play is pursued primarily for pleasure, as human brains release dopamine when play is taken part in, or indeed even anticipated (Boyd 2004, 7). Its adaptive value has also been theorised, as play gives children the opportunity to practise for their later lives; for example, a child might play at being a parent long before they become one (*ibid.*). Similarly, at whatever age, play offers a chance to respond to the unexpected. Play allows its participants, by moving and behaving in unusual ways that are not typical of everyday life, to test their physical, psychological and emotional limits in simulated situations (*ibid.*). Whilst the evolutionary value of play is apparent, it is not appropriate or possible in all life circumstances. In simple terms, it is 'nonpractical activity' (Morreall 2020, 639) and as such play can occur only when situations are not urgent or immediately threatening. Rather, it is 'a luxury to be enjoyed when action is not called for' (Morreall 2020, 644).

Moreover, play is primarily social and is sustained by the complicity of its participants. Indeed, 'play can persist–and animals that play want it to–only if it can clearly be seen by both sides *as* play' (Boyd 2004, 10, original emphasis). Therefore, play depends on social signalling, which its participants express physiologically through laughter.[2] The play theory of laughter is particularly compelling because it accounts for both hostile and inclusive forms of laughter, allowing for the existence of 'the competitive as well as the cooperative' (Boyd 2004, 15). Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne (1984, esp. 311-4) emphasise that play is often idealised despite not necessarily being pleasant for all those engaged in it, or an egalitarian experience. Therefore playful laughter can still be directed at a target, who may experience embarrassment and adapt their behaviour, as outlined by superiority theory (see 1.1).[3] However, the laughter of play may alternatively signal cooperation and solidarity, cultivating *philia* relationships instead of hostility. For this reason, laughter within the domestic sphere of the tragic οἶκος

[1] E.g. Billig (2005, 197): 'children primarily laugh to ridicule'.

[2] This interpretation of laughter builds upon evolutionary evidence from other mammals, aligning human laughter with the relaxed open-mouth expressions exhibited by primates in play: e.g. Provine (2000, 45), Morreall (2009, 38).

[3] Henceforth, I do not entirely conflate superior laughter with competitive playful laughter, primarily because hostile laughter can occur in circumstances either unrelated to play or not clearly recognised as play by the involved parties.

‘house’ is regularly ambivalent, as it has the potential to reinforce either hostile or *philia* relationships. This chapter beings by examining the few references to playful familial laughter across the entire extant tragic corpus, before an in-depth study of perhaps the archetypal dysfunctional *oikos* – the house of Atreus, as depicted in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and Sophocles’ *Electra*.[4] Following this study of the *oikos*, the tragic *symposium* is addressed as another (potentially dysfunctional) site of *philia* relationships in Euripides’ satyric *Cyclops* and his tragic *Alcestis*. Finally, the link between the laughter and the sympotic *kōmos* ‘revel-band’ is assessed in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and Euripides’ *Ion*.

2.2 Laughter & the *oikos*

2.2.1 Introduction

Perhaps unsurprisingly, tragedy does not present many examples of positive, inclusive familial laughter. Indeed its instances of domestic play are themselves loaded with dramatic irony – Heracles’ apparent play-fighting soon develops into a serious episode of hallucinatory violence, Agave’s lion-hunt is truly the *sparagmos* of her son, and Euripides’ Cassandra parodically plays the part of Agamemnon’s bride whilst her family grieves the fall of their city. Each of these cases presents a serious event interpreted as play by a central character, who has been divinely directed to perceive it as such; Heracles and Agave experience temporary episodes of divine ‘madness’, whilst Apollo grants Cassandra the knowledge of her oppressors’ future suffering.[5] Although play in tragedy is often misplaced, as a divine gift or punishment in otherwise serious circumstances, this is not always the case. There is an indication of the possibility of a positive laughter of *philia* in Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, as Clytemnestra presents her isolation to her (falsely promised son-in-law) Achilles. She expresses her loneliness in terms of laughter: there is οὐδὲ φίλος οὐδεὶς γελᾷ μοι ‘no friend to laugh with me’ (*IA* 912). In allying himself with Clytemnestra’s cause to protect Iphigenia, Achilles expresses his sincerity through his disdain for deception: ψευδῆ λέγων δὲ καὶ μάτην ἐγκερτομῶν, / θάνοιμι ‘if I speak lies and mock in vain, may I die’ (*IA* 1006-7). Euripides’ text implies that, if Achilles is to become a *philos*, these two would be expected to share in the playful laughter Clytemnestra suggests and to avoid deception and mockery. Here, playful laughter is depicted as a potential lubricant for *philia*, just as superior mockery is a means of harm.

Elsewhere in tragedy, *philia* is more typically expressed in the terms of Achilles – the lack of hostile mockery rather than the shared pleasure of playful laughter. In Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, the young protagonist assures his father that he is sincere in his friendships: οὐκ ἐγγελαστὴς τῶν ὁμιλούντων ‘I

[4] Of the other extant Oresteian plays, Euripides’ *Electra* contains no textual references to laughter, and his *Orestes* contains only one instance. These plays, however, are both discussed for their parodic qualities in chapter six.

[5] As domestic play is only one feature of these complex examples, they are dealt with elsewhere in this thesis; see 3.2.2 on *Heracles*, 7.2.3 on *Trojan Women*, 3.4.2, 5.4.2 on *Bacchae*.

am not a mocker of my companions' (*Hipp.* 1000). Similarly, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Creon assures his grieving brother-in-law that his intentions are not hostile: οὐχ ὡς γελαστής, Οἰδίπους, ἐλήλυθα, / οὐδ᾽ ὡς ὀνειδιῶν τι τῶν πάρος κακῶν 'I have not come as a mocker, Oedipus, / nor to reproach you about any previous wrong' (*OT* 1422). In these cases, *philia* is expressed by a lack of mockery, but Sophocles' *Ajax* provides evidence that the absence of playful laughter could also be reflective of a strained family dynamic. Here, Ajax's brother Teucer sarcastically evokes their father's agelastic temperament:

Τευ. ἦ πού με Τελαμών, σὸς πατὴρ ἐμός θ᾽ ἅμα,
δέξαιτ᾽ ἂν εὐπρόσωπος ἵλεώς τ᾽ ἴσως
χωροῦντ᾽ ἄνευ σοῦ. πῶς γὰρ οὔχ; ὅτῳ πάρα
μηδ᾽ εὐτυχοῦντι μηδὲν ἥδιον γελᾶν. (S. *Aj.* 1008-1011)

Teu. Surely Telamon, your father and mine,
would receive me kindly with a smiling face,
when I return without you. For why not? He who,
even when he prospers, laughs no more pleasantly!

In this example, Telamon's general lack of playful laughter is interpreted as indicative of his expected reaction to misfortune. This apparently miserable man, reacting μηδὲν ἥδιον 'no more pleasantly' at the happiest of times, is naturally not expected to receive the news of his son's death well. There is evidently a balance of laughter to be maintained within the *oikos*, between the hostility of superior ridicule and the cold absence of playful laughter.

2.2.2 *Choephoroi*

The immediate circumstances of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* are undeniably bleak, for all except perhaps Clytemnestra, who has successfully exacted her vengeance upon her husband and now rules Argos alongside her lover, Aegisthus. The tragedy opens with the enslaved women of the chorus expressing their solidarity with the grieving members of the *oikos*. Their *parodos* describes their physical acts of lamentation, which is expressed by a lack of laughter:

Χο. λινοφθόροι δ᾽ ὑφασμάτων
λακίδες ἔφλαδον ὑπ᾽ ἄλγεσιν,
προστέρνῳ στολμῷ
πέπλων ἀγελάστοις
ξυμφοραῖς πεπληγμένων. (A. *Cho.* 27-31)

Cho. Linen-spoiling rips of my woven garments
have resounded because of grief,
the folds of the robes that covers my breast,
battered by laughterless disasters.

The chorus' mourning is expressed as an agelastic state – they suffer in ἀγελάστοις / ξυμφοραῖς 'laughterless disasters'.[6] The term ἀγέλαστος has been used once before in the trilogy, by the chorus of elders in *Agamemnon*. Here, they reflect on the limits of friendship, and its lack of empathetic depth:

Χο. τῷ δυσπραγοῦντι δ᾽ ἐπιστενάχειν
πᾶς τις ἕτοιμος: δῆγμα δὲ λύπης
οὐδὲν ἐφ᾽ ἧπαρ προσικνεῖται:
καὶ ξυγχαίρουσιν ὁμοιοπρεπεῖς
ἀγέλαστα πρόσωπα βιαζόμενοι. (A. *Ag*. 790-4)

Cho. Every man is ready to groan over
the one who has suffered misfortune, but no bite of sorrow
reaches to their heart:
and they wish joy on others, assuming a like appearance,
forcing their laughterless faces.

Here, Aeschylus idiosyncratically expresses a common fear about *philia* in tragedy–its mutability–through the language of laughter.[7] Just as the extent of a friendship is difficult to verify for certain, so too are its signifiers prone to manipulation. There is a tension between a friend's outward expressions of solidarity (ἐπιστενάχειν 'to groan', ξυγχαίρουσιν ὁμοιοπρεπεῖς 'they wish joy on others, assuming a like appearance') and their distant inner emotional world (δῆγμα δὲ λύπης / οὐδὲν ἐφ᾽ ἧπαρ προσικνεῖται 'no bite of sorrow / reaches to their heart', ἀγέλαστα πρόσωπα βιαζόμενοι 'forcing their laughterless faces'). Although his chorus emphasises the limits of empathy within *philia*, Aeschylus' text implies that, at least outwardly and socially, emotions would be expected to be shared among *philoi*. The potential deception is a cause for concern; Blundell (1989, 36) posits that a *philos* would be expected to speak their mind, with deception only an acceptable means if it is positive for the friend. Thus, the cautionary words of *Agamemnon*'s chorus set the scene for Clytemnestra's upcoming betrayal of the conjugal *philia* relationship: indeed, 'They warn him plainly that he has enemies at home, and that not all that he will hear is to be trusted' (Denniston & Page 1957, 138).

[6] Brown (2018, 178 on 30) notes 'a touch of absurdity is hard to avoid in English but the litotes makes the events deeply (not mildly) ominous'.
[7] See 2.1, 2.2.1, 2.3.1 on Greek *philia* and its expectations.

Although Clytemnestra's persuasion of her husband in the carpet scene of *Agamemnon* is generally regarded as a verbal victory, the tragedy's chorus warn of the emotional signals that can also accompany deception within the *oikos*. It is this that comes to the fore in *Choephoroi*, which begins with the female chorus' expression of solidarity. The women emphasise their torn garments as physical manifestations of their grief – for their ἀγελάστοις / ξυμφοραῖς 'laughterless / disasters'. The repetition of the term ἀγέλαστος, otherwise a *hapax* in extant tragedy, does not seem intended to undermine this chorus' grief or their *philia*, but rather it signals a theme that will come under even more scrutiny in *Choephoroi* – the tension of emotional expression resulting from compromised *philia* relationships within the *oikos*. In *Agamemnon*, the *oikos* is compromised as a locus of reciprocal *philia*; in *Choephoroi*, laughter becomes a key site upon which this tension is played out. Primarily, the conflict exists between Electra and Clytemnestra. The former describes her grief, echoing the chorus' emotional state as she recalls her isolation during her father's funeral:

Ἠλ. μυχῷ δ' ἄφερκτος πολυσινοῦς κυνὸς δίκαν
ἑτοιμότερα γέλωτος ἀνέφερον λίβη,
χέουσα πολύδακρυν γόον κεκρυμμένα. (A. *Cho*. 447-9)

El. But shut in my chamber like an aggressive dog,
I brought forth tears more readily than laughter,
concealed, pouring out my grief with much weeping.

Electra proposes her tears of grief as a direct substitute for laughter – grief that she feels compelled to keep hidden, and is only able to express freely whilst alone (ἄφερκτος 'shut in', κεκρυμμένα 'concealed'). The reference to laughter in her grief may seem incongruous here, and Borowski (2015, 149-51) recounts scholars' three potential interpretations to account for its inclusion: Electra is emphasising that laughter is inappropriate, Electra is suggesting her tears are as freely flowing as laughter is often described as being, or that Electra is contrasting her grief to the feigned happiness she feels expected to project to her mother.[8] Whilst the first two of these readings are plausible, the last seems unlikely, as the Nurse suggests that Clytemnestra also hides her real emotions:

Τρ. πρὸς μὲν οἰκέτας
θετοσκυθρωπῶν ἐντὸς ὀμμάτων γέλων
κεύθουσ' ἐπ' ἔργοις διαπεπραγμένοις καλῶς

[8] For laughter as no longer appropriate, see Moreau (2000, 401); for the 'burst' of tears akin to laughter, see Burian & Shapiro (2003, 123); for the pressure to hide her grief from Clytemnestra, see Rose (1957-8, 161).

κείνῃ (A. *Cho*. 737-740)

Nu. Before the household slaves,
behind eyes feigning sadness she hid her laughter
over the deeds which have been accomplished fortunately
for her.

In front of the other members of her *oikos*, Clytemnestra must conceal her delight in her success, in the same way that Electra is compelled to conceal her grief.[9] Read in light of this, Electra's earlier reference to laughter appears to be more of an acknowledgement and suspicion that others (including her mother) may laugh mockingly at what causes her own pain.[10] This same suspicion is reflected in the Nurse's description of Clytemnestra, which indicates the conflict between joy and grief in the household as a source of tension. The *oikos* is free neither to grieve nor rejoice collectively – and both acts seem only to occur secretly and in private. As such, there is no scope within this *oikos* for the reciprocal laughter of play, which must be regarded *as play* on both sides.

In contrast to the agelastic circumstances (*Cho*. 30, 448), the depiction of Clytemnestra's laughter is jarring. Even if it is not actively superior, this isolated act cannot be the laughter of *philia* because it is not intended to be shared with her *oikos*. Moreover, for a household perceived as being in crisis, the 'non-practical' activity of play is inappropriate, and Clytemnestra's joy is thus marked as evidence for her lack of remorse – her continued betrayal of Agamemnon. However, it is important to specify that this textual instance of laughter is hidden, interpreted as deceptive by the Nurse, and as such is perhaps not intended to be read with as much certainty as scholars have ascribed to it.[11] Rather than a clear insight into Clytemnestra's emotional response, perhaps the Nurse's mention of laughter serves to depict the queen in opposition to the rest of the agelastic *oikos*. In this way, she is stereotyped as an enemy, who would be expected to mock in the circumstances. However, as chapter one establishes, ridicule is a feature of enmity that is imagined far more regularly than it is staged in tragedy. In keeping with this trend, Aeschylus depicts the laughter of Clytemnestra as only potential, filtered through the Nurse as representative of the betrayed *oikos*. Indeed Rosenmeyer (1982, 218) observes of the Nurse, 'She helps to immunize us against Clytemnestra's terror'. Although the laughter is not staged

[9] The Nurse implies Clytemnestra's joy can be expressed in private, and similarly Electra seems to find some solace in her own private grief; Garvie (1986, 166): 'By a kind of oxymoron Electra's pleasure is in weeping (as at S. *El*. 285 f.) rather than in laughing'.
[10] Garvie (1986, 166 on 447-9) notes Electra's expression at 448 'suggests also that there were others who did laugh'.
[11] When Clytemnestra does appear onstage, she seems to speak in sincere grief in light of the news of Orestes' death; Garvie (1986, 233 on 691-99): 'There is...not a word in the speech that need be taken as anything other than the sincere and natural reaction of a mother who has lost her son'.

but supposed, the Nurse's distrust of the queen helps to justify Orestes' pending matricide. The expected laughter, superior or playful, is evidence of Clytemnestra's continuing harm to the *oikos*.

Laughter's potential to inflict harm within the *oikos* is also expressed during Electra's recognition scene with Orestes:

Ἠλ.	ἀλλ᾽ ἦ δόλον τιν᾽, ὦ ξέν᾽, ἀμφί μοι πλέκεις;
Ὀρ.	αὐτὸς καθ᾽ αὑτοῦ τἄρα μηχανορραφῶ.
Ἠλ.	ἀλλ᾽ ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς γελᾶν θέλεις.
Ὀρ.	κἀν τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἄρ᾽, εἴπερ ἔν γε τοῖσι σοῖς. (A. *Cho*. 220-223)

El.	But surely there is some trick, stranger, that you are weaving around me?
Or.	Then I am devising plots against myself.
El.	But you wish to mock my troubles.
Or.	Then to mock my own too, if indeed yours.

In a typical depiction of superior laughter in tragedy, Electra expresses anxiety that this stranger may ridicule her in her troubles.[12] Of course, for Aeschylus' audience, the irony is evident – Orestes is no ξένος 'stranger', but Electra's own brother. Sommerstein (2008, 241) suggests that Orestes may laugh during this scene, which, given his relationship with Electra, would have to be playful rather than superior.[13] However, Electra inhabits an *oikos* at odds, in which Clytemnestra is imagined to privately mock her daughter's grief whilst publicly feigning solidarity. This deception within the *oikos* renders Electra anxious about Orestes' intentions; he is the first family member to offer to share in her distress, which he reiterates by repeatedly aligning her experience with his own (καθ᾽ αὑτοῦ 'against myself', κἀν τοῖς ἐμοῖς 'my own too'). Thus her suspicion of mockery becomes further evidence of the *oikos*' dysfunction, in which brother could be mistaken for stranger, truth for deception, and perhaps even playful for superior laughter.

In *Choephoroi*, the anxiety over laughter centres around Clytemnestra and Orestes, hinting at Orestes' transformation of role – soon he will murder his mother, and in doing so will also step into her

[12] See chapter one on fear of the superior laughter of others.
[13] Sommerstein (2008, 241) suggests that the actor playing Orestes might laugh at line 221, prompting Electra's response. More recently, Brown (2018, 225 on 221) has disputed this suggestion, citing line 223 as evidence that Orestes does not laugh, but this implies that laughter would have a singular implication for the scene – mockery. Rather, although its historical staging is impossible to establish for certain, Orestes' laughter would neatly highlight the contrast between sister and brother at this point in the narrative. Orestes, certain of his identity, could plausibly find Electra's fear that his words are a δόλον 'trick' amusing as she has misread the situation. Her interpretation is incongruous to Orestes and cannot be further from the truth. In this moment, Orestes could feasibly laugh playfully at the incongruity, aware that he is safe in his sister's company. Electra, on the other hand, uncertain of her own safety and the stranger's intentions, is sensitive to the possibility that his laughter is superior and mocking.

shoes as the next avenger in the cycle of familial violence. Zeitlin posits that Orestes is depicted as the 'anomalous male, the logical counterpart of the anomalous female, Clytemnestra' (1978, 161); just as Clytemnestra's androgynous and masculine elements are emphasised in *Agamemnon*,[14] Zeitlin (*ibid*.) emphasises Orestes' ephebic status in *Choephoroi*. He is in a gendered limbo: the son must re-enter the feminine space of his maternal *oikos* before he can assume his role as his father's successor. The concern with the laughter of Clytemnestra and Orestes within *Choephoroi* serves to emphasise the contrast, but also the mirroring between mother and son, reflecting the ambivalence of the vengeance cycle. After Orestes has committed the matricide, the extent of the *oikos*' dysfunction is literally embodied onstage by Aeschylus' chorus of Furies – characters as unrelentingly hostile to Orestes as they are loyal to Clytemnestra. Their laughter is playful and mocking simultaneously, indicating their genuine enjoyment of the vengeance they seek: ὀσμὴ βροτείων αἱμάτων με προσγελᾷ 'the smell of mortal blood smiles at me in welcome' (*Eum*. 254).[15] Their ability to revel in violence itself reveals the paradox of the vengeance cycle within the *oikos*, as enmity is blurred with *philia*, and playful and superior laughter become one. Moreover, these are distinctly feminine deities – ancient and chthonic – representing the mother and thus the 'Rule of Women' (Zeitlin 1978, 151-2). Ultimately, their suppression in the *Eumenides* reflects the re-assertion of male dominance within both the *polis* and the *oikos*.[16] Due to its ambivalence, laughter is an apt signifier for the *oikos* and all its gendered tensions – indeed it is depicted in a similar manner as the role of women under patriarchy. Laughter, like the mother, is necessary for the ideal functioning of an *oikos*, but it is perceived as dangerous outside of the specific limitations imposed by its culture. Thus the *Oresteia* presents the laughter of women as a source of patriarchal anxiety, as it offers the opportunity for defiance and deception.

2.2.3 Sophocles' *Electra*

Sophocles' *Electra*, which depicts very similar events to *Choephoroi*, contains seven references to laughter – nearly double that of its Aeschylean counterpart. The first two in the play are voiced by Electra and both refer to Clytemnestra laughing (277, 807). At 277, Electra describes her mother's monthly sacrifices as a celebration of her triumph over Agamemnon, which she performs ὥσπερ ἐγγελῶσα τοῖς ποιουμένοις 'as if laughing at her deeds' (277). This appears in keeping with Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra's joy as somewhat covert in expression; as Aeschylus' Nurse imagines Clytemnestra laughing in private (*Cho*. 737-740), so too does Electra interpret Clytemnestra's actions as mockery despite an apparent lack of actual laughter. In this instance, Kells reminds the reader that laughter in tragedy is 'not necessarily physical: it may be metaphorical' (1973, 99). Here, ὥσπερ 'as if' signals that the laughter is imagined – Electra's description of Clytemnestra's joy rather than a

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[14] Clytemnestra's speech is described as masculine within the text (*Ag*. 351) and its interpretations: e.g. Goldhill (2004, 35-6), Doyle (2008, 61): 'masculine in its political diction'.
[15] On the Furies as a *kōmos,* see 2.4.1.
[16] Within the *oikos*, this is expressed particularly by Apollo's favouring of the father in reproduction – even in the case of carrying children, the father and not the mother is the τοκεύς 'begetter' (*Eum*. 658-61).

physically enacted reality. However, in the Sophoclean version of events, Clytemnestra's joy is revealed to the audience much more plainly. In *Choephoroi*, the Nurse suspects Clytemnestra's joy and mockery, but it is not shown to the audience – either she performs her grief well, or her emotional response is not as clear-cut as suggested. In Sophocles' *Electra*, the false news of Orestes' death is received by Clytemnestra with an honest ambivalence – she reflects on the sense of relief the news brings her (766-8) but also expresses her parental grief (770-1). Evidently, no love is lost between the mother and daughter, and Clytemnestra speaks of their relationship plainly:

Κλ. ἥδε γὰρ μείζων βλάβη
ξύνοικος ἦν μοι, τοὐμὸν ἐκπίνουσ᾽ ἀεὶ
ψυχῆς ἄκρατον αἷμα (S. *El*. 784-6)

Cl. for she was a greater plague
who shared my home while all the time consuming
undiluted my life-blood

The idea of Orestes, out of sight and mind, and possibly dead, is less frustrating to Clytemnestra than the reality of life with her daughter. The cause of Electra's great βλάβη 'harm' to her mother is the contrast in their emotions, which Clytemnestra is exposed to so acutely precisely because Electra is ξύνοικος 'within the home' with her. When Clytemnestra exits the scene, Electra ponders aloud about whether Clytemnestra seemed remorseful, and concludes: ἀλλ᾽ ἐγγελῶσα φροῦδος 'no, she laughed and is gone' (807).[17] Whilst this does not seem to capture Clytemnestra's complicated emotional response entirely, it is possible to read this line as a stage direction for Clytemnestra's exit of the scene. This is suggested by March (2001, 192): 'Clytemnestra left the stage with an exultant air and no trace of grief, maybe even a mocking laugh. This echoes her earlier exultation over Agamemnon's death'. Whilst the comparison to her emotional reaction to Agamemnon's death is fitting, it is important not to conflate the emotions of Clytemnestra's exit with her response to the news of Orestes' death. Whilst she explains that her grief is curtailed somewhat by her relief, Clytemnestra's laughter–if indeed it occurs onstage–is instead directed at Electra. Her parting words are aimed at her daughter: τήνδε δ᾽ ἔκτοθεν βοᾶν / ἔα τά θ᾽ αὑτῆς καὶ τὰ τῶν φίλων κακά 'leave her outside to shout aloud / her misfortunes and those of her friends.' (802-3). If Clytemnestra does exit with a laugh, as Electra suggests, it is a mocking laugh directed towards her daughter, reflective of their compromised *philia*.

Like many other characters in tragedy, Electra is sensitive to the laughter of her enemies, and her fear of familial laughter reveals the extent of the dysfunction within the *oikos*. As in *Choephoroi*,

[17] Finglass (2007, 351 on 807): 'the verbless phrase forms a curt climax to a long emotionally-charged sentence'. Like her mother's treatment of her, Electra's coldness to her mother is captured in her description of the scene.

Electra needs convincing of Orestes' arrival and expresses her disbelief in terms of mockery to her sister, Chrysothemis:

Ἠλ. ἀλλ᾽ ἦ μέμηνας, ὦ τάλαινα, κἀπὶ τοῖς
σαυτῆς κακοῖσι κἀπὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς γελᾷς;

Χρ. μὰ τὴν πατρῴαν ἑστίαν, ἀλλ᾽ οὐχ ὕβρει
λέγω τάδ᾽, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκεῖνον ὡς παρόντα νῷν. (S. *El.* 879-882)

El. But, are you raving, miserable one?
Are you laughing at my troubles and your own?

Chr. No, by our father's hearth, I do not say these things
to harm, but say that he is present with us.

Finglass (2007, 373) notes the similarity between the reactions of Electra and the *Odyssey*'s Penelope to news of their missing loved one's arrival, and the compelling similarities between the texts are not only structural.[18] However, for this study of γέλως, it is better to compare the Aeschylean recognition scene, in which Electra fears Orestes is a stranger playing a δόλον 'trick' on her.[19] Orestes' repetitive and playful responses to Electra's accusation of mockery contrast greatly with the strong denial of Chrysothemis. Coming from without the *oikos* in *Choephoroi*, Orestes has not experienced the fractured domestic sphere first-hand. *Electra*'s Chrysothemis, however, also living ξύνοικος 'within the home', is a witness to the gravity of its dysfunction. She immediately denies the accusation, swearing: μὰ τὴν πατρῴαν ἑστίαν 'no, by our father's hearth'.[20] With this short reference, Chrysothemis aligns herself with Agamemnon, attesting to her *philia* relationship with Electra as evidence that she is not mocking her. Unlike Aeschylus' Orestes, Sophocles' Chrysothemis is sensitive to Electra's heightened sensitivity to the threat of mockery from within the *oikos*, and this is emphasised by Sophocles' choice to have the news delivered by her in the first place. In Sophocles' tragedy, Electra does not fear the mockery of a potential stranger, but her own sister.[21]

The threat of mockery from within the *oikos* is expressed a final time by Electra, who aligns her mother's joy with the laughter of their enemies:

[18] See 2.2.4 for the link between women's laughter in tragedy and Homer's *Odyssey*.
[19] For further discussion of these recognition scenes, see 6.3.
[20] This echoes a phrase used by the chorus of *Choephoroi*, where Orestes and Electra are called σωτῆρες ἑστίας πατρός 'saviours of the father's hearth' (*Cho*. 264).
[21] Electra also conflates laughter with madness, on which see 3.2.

Ἠλ. γελῶσι δ᾽ ἐχθροί: μαίνεται δ᾽ ὑφ᾽ ἡδονῆς
μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ (S. *El*. 1153-4)

El. Our enemies laugh at us; and our mother,
who is no mother, raves with joy

Clytemnestra's close emotional association with the house's enemies is so far removed from the expectations of *philia* that it is depicted as madness – μαίνεται 'she raves'.[22] As such, her reaction makes her a paradoxical figure in the *oikos* – she is a mother to the family only in name, a μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ 'mother who is no mother'. Orestes also associates Clytemnestra closely with the enemies of the *oikos*:

Ὀρ. ἃ δ᾽ ἁρμόσει μοι τῷ παρόντι νῦν χρόνῳ
σήμαιν᾽, ὅπου φανέντες ἢ κεκρυμμένοι
γελῶντας ἐχθροὺς παύσομεν τῇ νῦν ὁδῷ.
οὕτω δ᾽ ὅπως μήτηρ σε μὴ 'πιγνώσεται
φαιδρῷ προσώπῳ νῷν ἐπελθόντοιν δόμους:
ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἐπ᾽ ἄτῃ τῇ μάτην λελεγμένῃ
στέναζ᾽: ὅταν γὰρ εὐτυχήσωμεν, τότε
χαίρειν παρέσται καὶ γελᾶν ἐλευθέρως. (S. *El*. 1293-1300)

Or. But explain the things which fit with our present situation,
where openly or in secret ambush,
we may stop our enemies laughing with our present mission.
Therefore, do not let our mother figure it out
by your bright face when we have both entered the house,
but groan as if for the disaster falsely told of,
for when we succeed, then
there will be the occasion to rejoice and laugh freely.

Like Electra, his priority is to end the mocking laughter of their enemies, and he is aware of the potential need for duplicity in the situation: the siblings may have to keep themselves κεκρυμμένοι 'hidden'.[23] Whilst Clytemnestra is not named as an enemy, again the mention of γελῶντας ἐχθροὺς 'laughing enemies' is immediately followed by a reference to their μήτηρ 'mother'. More insidiously, Orestes expresses the need for deception in dealing with Clytemnestra, evoking the hidden laughter that has appeared throughout this text, and indeed in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. Just as Aeschylus' Clytemnestra physically hid her laughter θετοσκυθρωπῶν ἐντὸς ὀμμάτων 'behind eyes that feigned grief' (*Cho*. 738),

[22] See 3.2 on laughter as a symptom of madness.
[23] The same verb is used of Electra's concealed grief at *Cho*. 449.

Orestes instructs his sister to conceal her joy, lest she be given away φαιδρῷ προσώπῳ 'by [her] bright face'.

Sophocles depicts familial circumstances reminiscent of the ἀγελάστος 'laughterless' (*Cho*. 30) *oikos* of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, for Sophocles' Electra has no fear her laughter will give her away:

Ἠλ. ἣν σὺ μὴ δείσῃς ποθ᾽ ὡς
γέλωτι τοὐμὸν φαιδρὸν ὄψεται κάρα.
μῖσός τε γὰρ παλαιὸν ἐντέτηκέ μοι,
κἀπεί σ᾽ ἐσεῖδον, οὔ ποτ᾽ ἐκλήξω χαρᾷ
δακρυρροοῦσα: (S. *El*. 1309-1313)

El. Don't you ever fear
that she will see my face bright with a smile.
For my long-standing hatred has sunk deep into me,
and since I saw you, I will never entirely stop weeping
with joy.

Here it is Electra's μῖσός…παλαιὸν 'long-standing hatred' of her mother that makes joy impossible in Clytemnestra's company. This hate does not encourage Electra's mockery, but rather the image of γέλωτι τοὐμὸν φαιδρὸν…κάρα 'my face bright with a smile' hints at the playful laughter the family might have shared in different circumstances. As Borowski (2015, 86) observes, the text repeats the adjective φαιδρὸν 'bright' twice in quick succession, indicating a joyful laughter rather than one of mockery (1297, 1310). Indeed it is the ὄμμα φαιδρὸν ὡς εἶδον τέκνων 'bright faces of the children' (E. *Med*. 1043) that nearly stop Euripides' Medea from committing her final act of vengeance (see 1.3). The trauma of the siblings' situation is captured by Electra's expression of her deep joy through tears: οὔ ποτ᾽ ἐκλήξω χαρᾷ / δακρυρροοῦσα 'I will never entirely stop weeping / with joy'. Whilst it is not unusual for characters to simultaneously express laughter and tears in Greek literature,[24] the combination of the cold agelastic *oikos* with the uncontrollable emotion of true *philia* serves to emphasise the extent of the dysfunction of the familial home. For now, the damage is so extreme that Electra does not envision playful laughter, but only the cathartic relief of tears.

Orestes does not grasp this as firmly as his sister, and the siblings' exchange foreshadows the dysfunction inherent within their own acts of vengeance. Orestes pictures a bright future for the pair: ὅταν γὰρ εὐτυχήσωμεν, τότε / χαίρειν παρέσται καὶ γελᾶν ἐλευθέρως 'for when we succeed, then / there will be opportunity to rejoice and laugh in freedom'. Here, Orestes does not seem to describe the

[24] For example, Andromache at *Il*. 6.484

laughter of triumph or mockery, but the playful laughter of siblings who can once again act ἐλευθέρως 'freely', having paid their debt to their father.[25] This is naive in the short term; Sophocles ends his play before the murder of Aegisthus is announced, let alone celebrated. In the Aeschylean and Euripidean versions of the myth, Orestes is plagued by Furies until his trial and pardon at Athens. Ultimately, the pair inherit Clytemnestra's ambivalent situation – exactors of justice on one level, but also polluted murderers. As such, playful laughter and joy will remain alien to them, at least for now. They cannot behave entirely ἐλευθέρως 'freely', as divine justice demands that they must first be held accountable. It is with these two futures in mind that the siblings go on to enact their violence – Electra's sense of relief and Orestes' optimistic hope for a joyous, laughter-filled freedom.

2.2.4 Women's laughter & the *Odyssey*

In both Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' *Electra*, laughter is used to explore tensions within the *oikos*. As a multiplicitous, ambivalent and mutable social signal, it is a fitting source of anxiety for characters who fear the betrayal of *philia* relationships, and the potential for hostile mockery this betrayal might enable. There is also, however, a distinctly gendered element to this concern with laughter that requires further discussion. The *oikos* is a space that is assertively gendered as feminine within tragedy as well as Greek culture, and as such its laughter is governed by the same norms that apply to all female social interactions. Most textual references to laughter in this section have been spoken by female characters, concerned with who is or is not expressing laughter in the *oikos* and why. Most of their suspicions are also directed towards female characters; Aeschylus' Nurse and Sophocles' Electra are concerned with the laughter of Clytemnestra, whether it is suspected (as in *Cho*. 737-740) or even potentially voiced (as in S. *El*. 807). This focus on Clytemnestra's laughter has parallels in Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus finally finds himself within his own *oikos*, but unable to reveal his identity. While he is disguised as a stranger, the Ithacan maids laugh twice (*Od.* 18.320, 20.8), both in the context of sleeping with the suitors. As with Clytemnestra, their sexual alliances with the house's enemies are framed as treachery from within, and again their laughter becomes a focus for Odysseus, the *oikos*' betrayed guardian.[26] In the first instance, the maids look at one another and laugh following Odysseus' order that they should spend the evening assisting Penelope. Melantho, one of the maids, rebukes Odysseus for his words, and her description aligns her loyalties with her lover Eurymachus, one of the suitors, instead of Penelope. To her words, Odysseus responds with a threat of violence and the women run away in terror.

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[25] March (2001, 215) and Borowski (2015, 234) interpret this laughter as at least in part playful. Finglass (2007, 487) notes the irony of their situation: 'The success of Orestes and Electra will be marked by their appropriation of the state elsewhere associated solely with their enemies'.
[26] Stanford (1965, lv): 'Treachery within the household was considered the basest of crimes'.

Levine suggests that Odysseus' anger is sparked by the implications of the maids' laughter, rather than the act itself: 'Since laughter generally presupposes superiority in the epics, the laughter of servants is especially abhorrent to their master and mistress' (1987, 24 n4). He also observes that Eurycleia, despite her loyalty, is twice upbraided for her mockery of the house's enemies (*ibid.*; *Od.* 22.409ff, 23.58ff). This sensitivity to mockery befits the Sophoclean depiction of Odysseus in *Ajax*, who is reluctant to laugh at the hallucinating hero despite the clear enmity between the two men (see 1.2). Here, the combination of the maids' laughter with Melantho's chastisement gives Odysseus reason to interpret the laughter as superior, and his aggressive response is not out of keeping with the Greek interpretation of superior laughter as *hubris*. In the second instance, however, the maids walk past the door of the sleepless Odysseus engaging in evidently *playful* laughter: ἀλλήλῃσι γέλω τε καὶ εὐφροσύνην παρέχουσαι 'making laughter and merriment among themselves' (*Od.* 20.8). Although their playful laughter may be inappropriate, it is not aimed at Odysseus, and yet it triggers an even greater anger in him than before: κραδίη δέ οἱ ἔνδον ὑλάκτει 'his heart barked like a dog' (*Od.* 20.13).[27] In his rage, he must remind himself of the Cyclops devouring his crew, an event even κύντερον 'more shameful' (*Od.* 20.18).[28] The character's need even to make this comparison is telling, and Levine observes of the maids' laughter here: 'Their carefree manner of going to sleep with the suitors upsets him more than anything else in the poem' (1987, 23). Odysseus will punish the suitors for these betrayals, but the maids too will be murdered for their compliance with the enemies of the *oikos* (*Od.* 22.417-73), and it is their *laughter* that incenses the Homeric Odysseus most among all his struggles.

Whilst, in the first instance, Odysseus' reaction is in response to laughter he interprets as superior, in this second instance he responds to the group's playful laughter as if it is a personal affront. Levine reads Odysseus' discomfort as an inversion of social roles of the free and enslaved characters, but the similar interest in Clytemnestra's laughter within tragedy indicates that gendered expectations are also at play here. Although the *oikos* is an ostensibly feminine space, the *philia* relationships that define it are controlled by its men. Zeitlin follows the development of Clytemnestra's character across the *Oresteia*, and notes *Choephoroi* as a turning point for the breakdown of the *oikos*' *philia* relationships: 'adulterous wife is now fully equated with hostile mother. The faithless wife who betrayed her husband and has taken his usurper into her bed has now betrayed her other children to gratify her own sexuality' (1978, 157). At this point in the narrative, Clytemnestra represents an impasse, a problem that will be resolved only with her extrication from the *oikos* through violence – her inability to sustain a functioning household as justification for Greek patriarchy and gendered oppression. With this reading of the *Oresteia* in mind, it is unsurprising that the section of the myth

[27] Rose (1979, 226): 'The sole internal state expressed by the bitch-simile is fury, not self-restraint in addition, as some have supposed'. The dog simile is shared with Electra's isolated grief in *Cho.* 447.
[28] Literally '*more dog-like*' (LSJ I).

depicted in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' *Electra* – dealing with the impasse, as it were – becomes a site for the exploration of laughter.

In the dysfunctional *oikos* depicted in this narrative, laughter becomes a fixation for the parties that consider themselves betrayed. Whether or not it is seen or enacted, laughter is expected to accompany female betrayal and sexual license and as such it must be curtailed. Clytemnestra's laughter, like that of the *Odyssey*'s maids, is stopped by means of her death. Sophocles' Orestes may anticipate a future of uninhibited, joyful laughter, but Electra is right to be cautious. Not only is she aware that women's laughter can fuel retaliatory violence, but of all the characters in Sophocles' tragedy she is most fixated on policing the laughter of her mother. Thus Electra, particularly in Sophocles' play, becomes a mouthpiece for patriarchy in her preoccupation with Clytemnestra's laughter.[29] In essence, laughter in the *oikos* – playful and superior – is subject to intense scrutiny in tragedy. Particularly within the dysfunctional *oikos*, playful laughter is seen to ambiguously teeter towards mockery – it may be interpreted as offence when it is not shared as it signals a lack of urgency for serious action. This particularly seems to be the case when it is expressed by female members of the *oikos* – Clytemnestra's laughter is censured even when it is only potential, imagined and criticised by the Nurse and Electra respectively. Unlike the *Odyssey*, in which the maids' laughter fuels Odysseus' violent revenge, these tragedies present laughter in the dysfunctional *oikos* as primarily policed by its female inhabitants, whose complicit condemnation serves to justify the male violence that follows.

2.3 Laughter & the *symposium*

2.3.1 Introduction

The negative readings of the *oikos*' laughter in the previous section are undoubtedly influenced by oppressive ideological attitudes towards women, and particularly enslaved women. However, laughter still retains many of its ambivalent and dangerous characteristics within overwhelmingly male environments, such as the *symposium*.[30] Theatrical depictions of the Greek *symposium*, or drinking party, offer much insight into laughter's potential for facilitating both community and social exclusion on the stage. Catalysed by drinking, games, and sexual activity, the dramatic *symposium* functions as a distinct space of play, and as such is a prime site for the exploration of cooperative and competitive laughter.[31] The object of this study is not to reflect upon the role of laughter within the historical *symposium*, but rather to address the 'imagined symposia' (Hobden 2013, 6) of extant tragedy. But, simultaneously, as Greek literature depicts the *symposium* with intergeneric coherence, the recurring

[29] Cixous (1976, 878): 'Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves.'
[30] Although *symposia* may have included enslaved people, sex workers and performers of various genders, evidence indicates that its guests and hosts were at least intended to be Greek men. On *erōs* and the *symposium*, see Murray (2018, 198-214).
[31] For a holistic study of the *symposium* as it appears in Greek literature, see Hobden (2013).

themes of these 'abstract conceptualizations' (Hobden 2013, 3) can still provide insight into perhaps real anxieties surrounding the *symposium* as a social space. Here, I use 'symposium' as an umbrella term, considering its related terms and activities in tandem with the drinking party itself – particularly the *deipnon* 'dinner' and *kōmos* 'revelry' elements that generally bookend depictions of the drinking event.[32] Halliwell dedicates a chapter of his monograph *Greek Laughter* to the *symposium*, within which he discusses the role of laughter in three dramatic depictions of sympotic behaviour: Euripides' only extant satyr play, *Cyclops*, as well as his tragedies *Bacchae* and *Alcestis*. The *symposium* is closely tied to Dionysus, as the patron divinity of wine, and as such I cover laughter in *Bacchae* in more detail later in the thesis (3.4.2). Here, I address sympotic laughter in *Cyclops* and *Alcestis*, alongside depictions of the *kōmos* in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Ion.*

2.3.2 *Cyclops*

The *symposium*, a serio-comic institution itself, has much in common with the Greek satyr play.[33] Neither tragedy nor comedy, the satyr play functioned as the final instalment of the tragedians' tetralogy, and shared traits with both of the other dramatic genres on display. Formally defined by its chorus of satyrs led by Silenus, characters costumed as if they had arrived from tragedy would interact with chorus members dressed as the ancient, rustic, equine creatures of myth.[34] The contrast between human characters and satyrs is mirrored by the satyrs' tendency to colloquialisms and innuendo, flirting with styles and topics more akin to comedy. Like their patron god Dionysus, satyrs are poised to elude social boundaries, adjacent to civilisation but never wholly answerable to its demands. In their early literary appearances in hexameter, they are lazy creatures who pursue bodily desires above all else.[35] Despite the satyrs' transgressive traits, Hall notes that their gender identity is absolute – they are caricatures of 'hyperbolic maleness' (Hall 2006, 144), and are encouraged to be physically interpreted as such by the erect *phalloi* displayed as a part of their costumes (Stehle 2002, 383). Similarly, they are predominantly homosocial, and their interactions with women and female mythic figures are generally sexually charged, if they take place at all. Within the satyr play, a setting that is 'monochromatically male' (Hunter & Laemmle 2020, 33), it is possible to observe the intrasexual cooperation and competition inherent within the laughter of imagined all-male environments. From here, comparison with similar themes as they appear in tragedy helps to elucidate the anxieties and tensions of the *symposium* as it appears on stage.[36]

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[32] Bowie (1997, 2) groups these terms to discuss the Aristophanic *symposium* and Hobden (2013, 13-14) notes Pindar's flexible use of this terminology.
[33] Plato's *Symposium*, a serio-comic dialogue, is the *locus classicus* of the claim that comedy and tragedy could be written by the same playwright: Pl. *Sym*. 223d. On Alcibiades' particularly satyric entrance to this *symposium*, see Sheffield (2001).
[34] See Csapo's entry, 'Satyr-play' in Kennedy (2010).
[35] Hesiod fr. 123.2, *Hom. Hymn.* 5.262-3.
[36] In Old Comedy, Bowie (1997) analyses the political and moral tensions of the dramatic *symposia* in Aristophanes, many of which are shared by the satyric *Cyclops* and tragic *Alcestis*.

As there are relatively few extended *symposium* scenes within tragedy, Euripides' consistently sympotic *Cyclops* provides a helpful introduction to some of the gelastic tensions at play within the staged social setting, tensions which also emerge in the *symposia* of his tragedies. Unlike most extant tragedies, the satyric *Cyclops* does not contain a female character.[37] It dramatises the capture of Odysseus and his crew by the cyclops Polyphemus, a famous episode from Homer's *Odyssey* (9.105-566). In Euripides' retelling, the chorus of satyrs have been enslaved by the cyclops, and are eager to trade their food for Odysseus' wine. When Polyphemus arrives, Silenus, as chorus-leader, accuses Odysseus of violence and stealing, and intent to harm the cyclops himself. Polyphemus leads the men into his cave, where he proceeds to eat some of them, until Odysseus emerges and informs the chorus of his plan to get the cyclops drunk and blind him – freeing his men and the enslaved satyrs too. The satyrs agree to help with the plan, and persuade Polyphemus to drink with them instead of seeking out his fellow cyclopes. Drunk, Polyphemus attempts to rape Silenus, and the chorus ask Odysseus to help their leader. After some back and forth, Odysseus successfully blinds the cyclops, whom the chorus then taunt and distract whilst the surviving crew escapes the cave. As in the Homeric version, Odysseus reveals his name to the cyclops as the men make to leave.

The sympotic elements of Euripides' *Cyclops* are central to its plot, and appear to be in keeping with the staged tradition of cyclops plays. These were popular in satyr drama and comedy, and a fragment of Aristias of Phlious (fr. 4) indicates that Odysseus' plan to get the cyclops drunk on wine had likely already been established in the satyric tradition before Euripides' play.[38] The sympotic emphasis of these cyclops plays is reflective of their focus upon Greek hospitality and friendship, themes that are more common in satyric and comedic drama than in tragedy (O'Sullivan & Collard 2013, 29). Notably, however, the sympotic elements are also the source of the play's conflict. *Cyclops* depicts its titular character being introduced to wine, but not quite the experience of an ideal *symposium*. In a sense, this begins with the cyclops himself, whose approach to hospitality is decidedly self-centred. Before the drinking commences, the *deipnon* portion of the event involves Polyphemus' consumption of Odysseus' men, a clear violation of *xenia* (396-404). The unconventionality of his behaviour is compounded by Odysseus and the satyric chorus, who decide to get the cyclops drunk and isolate him before they exact their punishment. As such, the *symposium* that follows occurs in a similarly unusual manner, depicting the cyclops failing to conform to Greek social values.

[37] Hall (2006, 169) considers this feature reflective of the ideological aims of the genre: 'satyr drama offers the insurance of a reaffirmed sense of unindividuated masculinity, based in libidinal awareness, in order to protect against the painful 'feminine' emotions which tragedy has unleashed'.

[38] Hunter & Laemmle (2020, 5-6) note that drinking and dining also played an important role in the Cyclops comedies of Epicharmus of Syracuse and Callias (434BC), whilst Cratinus' comedy similarly depicted the cyclops as a skilled cook and gourmet.

When he begins to drink, Polyphemus desires a *kōmos*, seeking to involve the other cyclopes in his fun: ἠλίθιος ὅστις μὴ πιὼν κῶμον φιλεῖ 'whoever drinks and does not love a *kōmos* is foolish' (537). The satyrs, however, deny him this, on which Hunter & Laemmle reflect: 'the Cyclops is taught some of the practices of the *symposium*, but he is made by Odysseus and Silenos to deny its true, communal essence by drinking alone' (2020, 18). Hall observes a similar theme regarding the depiction of the cyclops' sexuality, and his attempted rape of Silenus. Sexual assault is a commonly expressed desire of satyrs, and in *Cyclops*, Euripides depicts them imagining the 'multiple rape' of Helen of Troy (179-187).[39] But Polyphemus' act is self-centred: 'The Cyclops' uncontrolled sexuality is portrayed as the impulse of an autarkic, tyrannical individual who in threatening Silenus threatens the whole community of satyrs. In contrast the satyrs' eroticism, however rampant, is presented as fun rather than as dangerous partly because it is unindividuated, even egalitarian' (Hall 2006, 148). The social and sexual energies of Polyphemus' *symposium* are both culturally misdirected, and his selfish behaviour singles him out as 'a solipsistic anti-image of the symposium' (Halliwell 2008, 128).

Fittingly, Polyphemus is punished in a manner correcting his selfish action – in the playful spirit of a more communal *symposium*. At first this 'play' is verbal. Once the cyclops has been blinded, Odysseus, his crew and the satyrs attempt their escape. As Polyphemus emerges from the cave seeking vengeance, the Homeric version becomes a source of wordplay for the satyrs:

Κυ. Οὖτίς μ' ἀπώλεσ'.
Χο. οὐκ ἄρ' οὐδεὶς ἠδίκει.
Κυ. Οὖτίς με τυφλοῖ βλέφαρον.
Χο. οὐκ ἄρ' εἶ τυφλός.
Κυ. ὡς δὴ σύ—
Χο. καὶ πῶς σ' οὔτις ἂν θείη τυφλόν;
Κυ. σκώπτεις. ὁ δ' Οὖτις ποῦ 'στιν;
Χο. οὐδαμοῦ, Κύκλωψ. (E. *Cyc*. 671-5)

Cy. Nobody destroyed me.
Cho. Then no one has done wrong.
Cy. Nobody has blinded my eye.
Cho. Then you are not blind.
Cy. Why you –
Cho. And how could no one make you blind?

[39] See Hall (2006, 148) on the satyrs' imagined rape of Helen.

Cy. You mock me. But where is this Nobody?

Cho. Nowhere, Cyclops.

Unlike the fellow-cyclopes in Homer, who are genuinely confused about Polyphemus' claims that 'no one' has blinded him, the satyrs play with the cyclops' misunderstanding of his attacker's identity (*Od.* 9.398-414).[40] In addition to their verbal play with the cyclops, the other performers appear to play a physical game with Polyphemus similar to a 'blind man's buff' (Hunter & Laemmle 2020, 239) to avoid being caught by him:

Χο. οὗτοι σιωπῇ τὴν πέτραν ἐπήλυγα
λαβόντες ἑστήκασι.
Κυ. ποτέρας τῆς χερός;
Χο. ἐν δεξιᾷ σου.
Κυ. ποῦ;
Χο. πρὸς αὐτῇ τῇ πέτρᾳ.
ἔχεις;
Κυ. κακόν γε πρὸς κακῷ· τὸ κρανίον
παίσας κατέαγα.
Χο. καί σε διαφεύγουσί γε.
Κυ. οὐ τῇδ'· ἐπεὶ τῇδ' εἶπας;
Χο. οὔ· ταύτῃ λέγω.
Κυ. πῇ γάρ;
Χο. περιάγου, κεῖσε, πρὸς τἀριστερά.
Κυ. οἴμοι γελῶμαι· κερτομεῖτέ μ' ἐν κακοῖς. (E. *Cyc*. 680-687)

Cho. They are standing here in silence
in the shade of the cliff.
Cy. On which hand, right or left?
Cho. To your right.
Cy. Where?
Cho. Right by the cliff.
Do you have them?
Cy. Indeed, I have evil upon evil!
I have knocked my head and shattered it.
Cho. And they have escaped you too.

[40] In contrast to the sincere cyclopes, it is Odysseus whose reaction is gelastic in the *Odyssey*: ἐμὸν δ' ἐγέλασσε φίλον κῆρ 'my heart laughed within me' (*Od*. 9.413).

Cy. Did you not say somewhere here?

Cho. No. I say over here.

Cy. Where exactly?

Cho. Turn yourself this way, towards your left side.

Cy. Alas, I am mocked. You taunt me in my troubles.

The humorous potential of this scene is evident, as Euripides combines wordplay and slapstick in the conclusion of his satyr drama. Whilst the lack of stage directions makes it impossible to confirm whether or not the satyric chorus genuinely try to deceive the cyclops, their manner is playful and they do not express any sympathy for his struggle.[41] Similarly, whilst it is unclear whether Euripides' audience would have unanimously found humour in this potential deception scene, the appearance of comic styles and devices certainly make audience laughter a strong possibility. Bevis (2013, 96) captures the ambiguity of the scene and its possible interpretations for an audience: 'The play seems to offer reassurance—'no real Cyclops was harmed during the making of this drama'—yet at the same time draws out our sympathy for the victim.'

Despite the potential use of humour, γέλως-vocabulary is used only once in the satyr play, by the blinded Polyphemus. The cyclops reflects on his being mocked in language similar to that of the Sophoclean Ajax upon realising that Athena has diverted his attack on the Greeks.[42] Polyphemus grasps one aspect of the laughter aimed at him: it is superior, used as a social corrective to punish the cyclops' transgression from social norms. But its dynamic is complicated by the apparent parody of tragedy (or paratragedy) throughout the scene, and particularly of Euripides' *Hecuba*. In this tragedy, Polymestor is punished by Hecuba and her Trojan attendants for his murder of her son, Polydorus. To achieve this, he is similarly isolated, deceived and punished with physical violence in the form of blinding. Like the cyclops, Polymestor senses Hecuba's joy in harming him, which he expresses in terms of *hubris*:

Πλ. χαίρεις ὑβρίζουσ' εἰς ἔμ', ὦ πανοῦργε σύ;

Εκ. οὐ γάρ με χαίρειν χρή σε τιμωρουμένην; (E. *Hec*. 1257-8)

Pol. Do you rejoice in violating me, you total villain?

Hec. Surely I must rejoice, having avenged myself upon you?

In both plays, the blindings are socially agreed upon and performed communally: Agamemnon approves Hecuba's desire for vengeance (*Hec*. 850-904) and the Trojan women help her to effect it

[41] Ward (2018, 58) notes that the intentional taunting of Polyphemus has become a widely accepted reading of the text, despite the lack of stage directions to confirm this.

[42] ὤμοι γέλωτος, οἷον ὑβρίσθην ἄρα (*Aj*. 367); Hunter & Laemmle (2020, 244) consider there to be a 'touch of paratragedy' in the lament and compare it to A. *Eum.* 789, 819; S. *Ant*. 839. I see the closest parallel as with *Ajax* given the shared sense of deception integral to both instances of mockery.

(*Hec*. 1150-1175), whilst the satyrs agree to help Odysseus in his plan to blind Polyphemus (*Cyc*. 441-475). However, whilst the action is similar, O'Sullivan and Collard (2013, 220) observe that the tragic chorus of *Hecuba* express some sympathy towards Polymestor (1085-6), whilst the satyrs are at best indifferent towards the blinded Polyphemus. They attribute this to the genre's typical depiction of the punishment of monsters, citing 'a simple punitive ethic of transgression and punishment' (2013, 29) that appears throughout the satyric fragments.[43] Thus, what distinguishes the satyric chorus of *Cyclops* from the tragic chorus of *Hecuba* is its ability to mock and play simultaneously. The satyrs punish Polyphemus' deviation with mockery, whilst simultaneously reinstating playful laughter as a feature of the functional and positive *symposium*.

Although, on the one hand, the 'blind man's buff' style game that the satyrs play with the cyclops may encourage Euripides' audience to find humour in Polyphemus' pain, in another sense the game itself intensifies his suffering. In either case, the satyrs' willingness to toy with the blinded Polyphemus reveals a lack of empathy. Indeed their playful, rather ambivalent response to his suffering is much more in keeping with the reactions of divine characters, particularly that of their patron god Dionysus as presented in Euripides' *Bacchae*.[44] Whilst it might not be possible to confidently ascertain the precise differences of audience reaction intended or indeed elicited from the two genres, both certainly depict the same anxieties about laughter and its ability to cause harm. Ward (2018, 69) observes that 'The chorus invite the audience to take advantage of their sight to join in the joke at the expense of the blinded Cyclops, highlighting their superior vision'. Whilst the choral invitation is certainly clear, the audience's response remains uncertain.

2.3.3 *Alcestis*

Euripides' *Alcestis* lacks a chorus of satyrs, and as such is not formally defined as a satyr play.[45] However, it occupied the position of a satyr drama at its debut in 438, and centres around the theme of hospitality typical of that genre.[46] *Alcestis* dramatises the death and resurrection of its titular character, who offers to die on behalf of her husband, Admetus, so long as he promises to never remarry. Following her death, Admetus laments his decision to allow his wife to die on his behalf, chastising his elderly father for refusing to do so in her place. Into this grieving palace enters a particularly excited Heracles, expecting hospitality. With his guest in mind, Admetus pretends that the house is grieving for someone external to the *oikos* rather than its matriarch. In a rather embarrassing scene between a

[43] As evidence for this recurring theme, O'Sullivan & Collard (2013, 29) cite Aeschylus' *Cercyon* (f. 102–7) and 'Justice' play (f. 281a, esp. 17–19), Sophocles' *Amycus* (f. 111–12) and Euripides' *Sciron* (f. 678) and *Syleus* (f. 692).
[44] See 3.4.2.
[45] Due to its shared characteristics with satyr play, *Alcestis* has been described as prosatyric. On its generic classification, see e.g. Marshall (2000).
[46] Conacher (1988, 35) notes that whilst *Alcestis* is the only non-satyr play recorded to have come fourth in its tetralogy, as only eight of Euripides' plays are described as 'satyric' in ancient sources it is reasonable to assume that this non-satyr play in fourth place may not be anomalous.

confused slave and an indignant Heracles, the truth of the matter comes to light and Heracles leaves to fight Death for Alcestis' return. He is successful, but is sure to punish his lying host before revealing the resurrected Alcestis. He claims to have won a new bride for Admetus, and presents the veiled Alcestis to her conflicted husband. Tearfully, Admetus agrees to accept the woman into his home, and, in betraying his promise, is reunited with his wife.

Conacher (1988, 32) notes the folkloric elements of *Alcestis*, in which Euripides merges the conventional anthropomorphic gods of drama with a seemingly older depiction of Death. Additionally, the burlesque elements of Heracles' characterisation are more in keeping with his appearances in satyr play and comedy than tragedy.[47] On the surface *Alcestis* centres on an isolated symposiast who misunderstands their circumstances, similar to *Cyclops*. But whilst Polyphemus' missteps are cultural, Heracles' are situational. His behaviour is not fundamentally problematic, but inappropriate for the context, encouraged by the dishonesty of a host that is too eager to please. Cairns (1993, 288) plots the sense of *aidos* at play in this act of *xenia*: 'Heracles finds the imbalance in mood between the two parties uncomfortable and Admetus attempts to play it down, each considering both the awkwardness of the situation and the position of the other party'. However, whilst Heracles would rather excuse himself, Admetus prefers to deceive his *philos* to prevent him from leaving (289). In doing so, he gives preference to the decidedly male 'social virtue of hospitality' (Conacher 1988, 44) over his marital duty to grieve his wife. Segal (1992, 145) reflects that 'in first welcoming Heracles within the house, Admetus essentially denies Alcestis' death'; Admetus effects this both temporally (implying Alcestis' death is in the future, 518-529) and spatially (indicating she is an outsider to the family, 520-535)'. Although Admetus' *xenia* is founded on his own dishonesty, it is Heracles that suffers discomfort and embarrassment when the truth is revealed. Evidently, the situation is more complex than the transgression-punishment narrative of *Cyclops*, which charts the playful deception of a violent host. In *Alcestis*, Admetus' dishonest act of *xenia* leads to a solitary *symposium* for Heracles, and in turn a *kōmos* that could easily become a *katabasis* to retrieve Alcestis from Death. In the intricate weaving of grief and celebration, Euripides depicts the potential positive and negative consequences of sympotic laughter.

Even before the sympotic elements arrive with Heracles, laughter's negative potential is evidenced in the relationship of Admetus and his father, Pheres. In a notably unpleasant *agon*, Pheres and Admetus disagree on whether the father ought to die on behalf of his son. Admetus views Pheres' desire to live as cowardice, whilst Pheres is suspicious of his son's eagerness for his death:

[47] Halliwell (2008, 131) describes *Alcestis'* Heracles as 'a magnified embodiment of sensual appetites (both gastronomic and sexual), as well as a figure readily imaginable as breaking into hearty laughter'. This is similar the hero's depiction in Ar. *Ran.* 42-6.

Αδ. κακὸν τὸ λῆμα κοὐκ ἐν ἀνδράσιν τὸ σόν.

Φε. οὐκ ἐγγελᾷς γέροντα βαστάζων νεκρόν.

Αδ. θανῇ γε μέντοι δυσκλεής, ὅταν θάνῃς.

Φε. κακῶς ἀκούειν οὐ μέλει θανόντι μοι.

Αδ. φεῦ φεῦ· τὸ γῆρας ὡς ἀναιδείας πλέων.

Φε. ἥδ᾽ οὐκ ἀναιδής· τήνδ᾽ ἐφηῦρες ἄφρονα. (E. *Alc*. 723-728)

Ad. Your courage is poor, and not fitting for a man.

Ph. You will not mock me, carrying my elderly corpse.

Ad. But you will die as a shameful man, whenever you die.

Ph. It is not a concern of mine, if I am ill spoken of when I am dead.

Ad. My goodness! How old age is full of shamelessness.

Ph. She was not shameless. You found her lacking in sense.

Neither come across particularly well, as Admetus evidently projects his own anxieties onto his father, who openly prioritises his life over his reputation: 'Pheres' disregard for his reputation after death would have disgusted the Greek audience. But for Pheres (as it was, perhaps, for Admetus) *living* is the paramount consideration' (Conacher 1988, 183, original emphasis). Although he apparently cares little for his public reputation, Pheres expresses his distaste at giving his son the opportunity to laugh at him, had he chosen to die in his place. Parker (1997, 195) interprets Pheres' comment as reflective of a broader social anxiety among Athenian men, citing Aristophanes *Wasps* (1352-9) as a comedic reversal of this trope – in which a father eagerly awaits the death of his son.[48] Although fear of mockery from a familial *philos* is not an uncommon theme in tragedy (see 2.2), Pheres' image of the funerary laughter seems both shocking and relatively ungrounded. Rather, Admetus' lamentation for his wife indicates that he would have similarly appreciated his father's sacrifice. However, his grief for Alcestis leads him to berate the elderly man for allowing her to die, a burden that Admetus here shifts onto his father. As Admetus directs his anger over Alcestis' death onto his father, Pheres takes this enraged grief at face value, and imagines Admetus' hostility as implicit mockery. He feels vindicated, considering laughter as another form of the *hubris* his son currently expresses. The two arrive at an impasse, and the unravelling of their familial bond weighs heavily on the already grieving household.

In light of the familial *agon*, Euripides' decision for Admetus to lie to Heracles is perhaps clearer. His grief, in all its raw anger, has already compromised one *philos* relationship too many. In a two-handed dialogue mirroring this *agon*, the next scene features the unaware Heracles trying to enjoy his host's *xenia*. The comic elements of this scene are often remarked upon, and the scene certainly features a clash in attitudes between the casual Heracles and the enslaved worker, who is σεμνὸν καὶ

[48] The subverted age relations in *Wasps* are discussed further at 5.3.

πεφροντικὸς ‘sincere and care-worn’ (773). The slave sets the scene for this clash, labelling Heracles κακίονα ‘worse’ (750) than any previous guest,[49] and describing the extent of his sympotic indulgence. This is similar to Odysseus’ depiction of Polyphemus’ greed in *Cyclops*. Both offend regarding the *deipnon*; Heracles demands more than is offered to him (*Alc*. 755) and the cyclops eats Odysseus’ men (*Cyc*. 396-410).[50] Regarding their drinking, Euripides emphasises the physical details in both cases, describing the extent of their indulgence: Heracles drinks εὔζωρον μέθυ ‘unmixed wine’ (*Alc*. 757) from his bowl, whilst the cyclops accepts multiple refills from Odysseus (*Cyc*. 416-423). When inebriated, both symposiasts begin to sing, jarring with the expressions of grief from their companions:

Ὀδ. ᾄδει δὲ παρὰ κλαίουσι συνναύταις ἐμοῖς
ἄμουσ’, ἐπηχεῖ δ’ ἄντρον. (E. *Cyc*. 425-6)

Od. So he sings his tuneless song next to my fellow sailors
who are weeping, and it echoes in the cave.

Θε. στέφει δὲ κρᾶτα μυρσίνης κλάδοις,
ἄμουσ’ ὑλακτῶν· δισσὰ δ’ ἦν μέλη κλύειν·
ὃ μὲν γὰρ ᾖδε, τῶν ἐν Ἀδμήτου κακῶν
οὐδὲν προτιμῶν, οἰκέται δ’ ἐκλαίομεν
δέσποιναν· (E. *Alc*. 759-763)

At. He garlanded his head with shoots of myrtle,
howling tuneless songs. And there were two types of melody one could hear:
for he was singing, paying no heed to the troubles
in Admetus’ house, but we household slaves were wailing
for our mistress.

Both speakers emphasise the contrast in emotion between the symposiast and their attendants, whose grief exposes the impropriety of the symposiast’s singing.[51] The similarities between these two sympotic depictions are striking, but fracture in the events that follow. *Cyclops* follows a simple transgression-punishment narrative: the isolated symposiast is made a figure of fun by the satyric

[49] Parker (2007, 201) points out this is the first extant occurrence of a theme that comes up in comedy, e.g. Ar. *Nu.* 627ff.
[50] Whilst Polyphemus’ love of food was likely in keeping with satyric depictions of cyclopes, the gluttonous Heracles is more reminiscent of extant comedy than tragedy; see e.g. Ar. *Ran.* 549-550.
[51] Heracles’ behaviour incites a similar contrast in reaction at E. *Her*. 950, where an enslaved attendant remarks on the household’s difficulty in discerning Heracles’ intentions, and thus their oscillation between laughter and fear; see 3.2.2.

chorus, who play their own sympotic game with him, re-establishing the *symposium* as a communal social space. The sympotic narrative of *Alcestis* is less straightforward, as it is founded on a well-meaning deception, rather than an act of intended aggression. When the drunken cyclops arrives onstage, irreversible damage has been done and the plot to blind him has already been established. When Heracles arrives onstage, there is a foundational misunderstanding yet to be resolved upon which the play's *anagnorisis* depends.

Arguably, this misunderstanding is revealed *because* of Heracles' sympotic overindulgence. When he enters, Heracles' casual tone is immediately evident from his address of the slave; οὗτος 'you there' (773) is a colloquial term much more common in Aristophanic comedy.[52] In his speech on mortality, which is surely somewhat ironic coming from the canonically deified Heracles, the hero invites the enslaved worker to forget his troubles and drink with him. The man responds by expressing the impropriety of the *symposium*, and its accompanying laughter:

Θε. ἐπιστάμεσθα ταῦτα· νῦν δὲ πράσσομεν
οὐχ οἷα κώμου καὶ γέλωτος ἄξια. (E. *Alc*. 803-4)

At. We understand this. But now we are enduring
things unworthy of revelry and laughter.

This confuses Heracles, who reveals that he believes Alcestis to still be living. He quickly senses that something has been concealed from him, and seeks confirmation that the recent death came from outside the household:

Θε. οὐ γάρ τι κωμάζοντ' ἂν ἠχθόμην σ' ὁρῶν. (E. *Alc*. 815)

At. No, or I would not have been vexed at seeing you revelling.

In this exchange, Euripides subtly highlights the importance of Heracles' sympotic misbehaviour for the plot's development. Because the enslaved man cannot conceal the truth from Heracles any longer, Alcestis' death is soon revealed. But this exchange might not have happened if Heracles had not driven him to vexation, and Conacher (1988, 40) is right to attribute the saving of Alcestis indirectly to Heracles' indulgent speech.

[52] Parker (2007, 205) attests 55 instances in Aristophanes, compared to 6 in Euripides. An occurrence in Sophocles is addressed at 7.3.2.

This reading is supported by Euripides' use of specific sympotic terms; in both descriptions of Heracles' behaviour, the slave uses cognates of κῶμος, relating to the *kōmos* element of the *symposium*. This is also the verb Admetus uses when he vows to forego the *symposium* in light of Alcestis' death:

Αδ. παύσω δὲ κώμους συμποτῶν θ' ὁμιλίας
στεφάνους τε μοῦσάν θ' ἣ κατεῖχ' ἐμοὺς δόμους. (E. *Alc*. 343-4)

Ad. But I shall put an end to revels and the company of fellow-drinkers
and garlands and music which once filled my home.

Clearly, Admetus has failed to keep this promise, as Heracles engages in all these behaviours in his stay at the house. Once Heracles realises his error, he understands the impropriety of his behaviour and poses the rhetorical question, again referring to the *kōmos*:

Ἡρ. κᾆιτα ἐκώμαζω κάρα
στεφάνοις πυκασθείς; (E. *Alc*. 831-2)

Her. Then can I now go on revelling
with my head decked with garlands?

Heracles is embarrassed by the extent of his own transgression, and understands that he has been deceived by Admetus. But Heracles also takes accountability for ignoring his own intuition, admitting that he entered the house βίᾳ δὲ θυμοῦ 'in violence against [his] heart' (829). Although Admetus deceived him, Heracles still ultimately considers him to be φιλοξένος 'hospitable' (830). To make up for his error, Heracles hopes to win Alcestis back by wrestling with Death, who incidentally is imagined as another improper symposiast, drinking from the blood at the tomb (845).[53] Heracles finally understands that his sympotic behaviour is inappropriate, but, ironically, now *is* the time for his *kōmos*. He must leave his *symposium*, suitably inebriated, to lure out Death, and ideally Alcestis too. This tragedy depicts a sympotic catch-22: the *symposium* is both improper in the funerary circumstances, and also necessary to alter them.

The reversal of mortality that Heracles achieves is mirrored by a switch of the roles of deceiver and deceived: Heracles brings back Alcestis but presents her to Admetus disguised, claiming to have won him a new bride in a contest (1021-1029). This is evidently a game to Heracles, who temporarily

[53] This connection is not unprecedented; Conacher (1988, 188) reflects that at *Od*. 10.517-37, 11.23-50, blood rituals are connected to the dead.

toys with Admetus and deceives him in the same way that he was deceived. On one level, this is a ‘pleasant, private joke’ (Parker 2007, 252) that provides a reversal of Heracles’ own embarrassing circumstances. Just as Heracles celebrated in a time of grief, he allows Admetus to weep whilst concealing the cause for celebration. But Parker describes a deeper reason for this scene: ‘If Heracles’ joke seems drawn out to almost a sadistic length, that serves to prolong our enjoyment of the scene. But that is not all. We, the audience, want to see Admetus suffer. Before Alcestis is restored, we want to be assured of how much her husband loved her, of how much he grieves for her’ (*ibid.*). The audience *Schadenfreude* that Parker describes could be attributed to a didactic arc in the play regarding conjugal love and duty; Admetus must fully realise his error before he can be reunited with his wife.[54] But simultaneously, the importance of the tragedy’s sympotic consequences are evident here. In his transgression of *xenia*, Admetus has also displayed exceptional *philia* towards Heracles: indeed, ‘Euripides fairly hammers home the point that it is Admetus’ choice in deceiving Heracles that will save Alcestis…Only an act of truly extraordinary nobility could have induced him to undertake the equally extraordinary task of bringing Alcestis back from the dead’ (Parker 2007, 221-2). Admetus’ selfless behaviour is returned by Heracles, as each goes beyond expectation to please the other. However, the transgression-punishment narrative reminiscent of *Cyclops* underlies this simultaneously. Heracles has suffered the embarrassment of being deceived and consequently behaving inappropriately. It is primarily for this reason that Admetus’ extended suffering is required in the reunion scene, and it appears that critics downplay the importance of Heracles’ game because it concludes with the couple’s reconciliation.

The tragedy’s emphasis is on male homosocial relationships, apparent from Alcestis’ relatively side-lined role within the play: indeed, ‘The play is called *Alcestis*, but the real center is Admetus, and the real concern is male rather than female experience’ (Segal 1992, 155). This is evident through its sympotic themes, and the valuation of male *philia* and *xenia* above marital loyalty. The relationships intricately explored in the tragedy are all between men, and ultimately Alcestis returns in silence to be used as a prop in Heracles’ playful test of Admetus. Laughter is a key feature in both the father-son and non-kin *philia* relationship. Pheres retrospectively suspects his son’s mockery, whilst Heracles’ attitude presents an antidote to this anxiety: he does not seem to mind being, temporarily, the embarrassed party.[55] In the same vein, Admetus reveals his respect for his *philos* through withholding his feelings, contrasting with his earlier emotional overspill to his father. Ultimately, there is empathy between these two *philoi*. Heracles is deceived and embarrassed, but recognises Admetus’ devotion to *xenia* and

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[54] This reading is also complicated by Admetus’ reunion with Alcestis entirely coinciding with his betrayal of her only parting request, that he not remarry. Although he protests and does not explicitly accept Heracles’ request to wed this new bride, he also does not exactly pass the loyalty test with flying colours.
[55] Heracles’ ability to cope with uncomfortable and undesirable social isolation is mirrored, at a greater extreme, in Euripides’ *Heracles*; see 3.2.2.

returns the favour. Admetus is similarly deceived and must break his own rules for Heracles' game, but is rewarded with the return of his wife and the reversal of his grief. Neither man holds a grudge for the other's deception, and they amicably part ways. As a result, the *symposium* is established as a force for good within the tragedy, as it provides a safe space for these boundaries of *philia* to be tested, and balance to be found. Laughter punctuates this: Pheres' unfounded fear of mockery is the result of a tested father-son relationship, whilst Heracles' transgressive laughter results in embarrassment, reciprocal transgression-embarrassment of Admetus, and the restoration of a positive social order. This is certainly 'a salvation enacted partly, and paradoxically, through the force of laughter' (Halliwell 2008, 131).

2.4 Laughter & the *kōmos*

Euripides' *Cyclops* and *Alcestis* both present an isolated symposiast who socially transgresses, and each contains a subverted *kōmos*. In *Cyclops*, Polyphemus' *symposium* noticeably lacks a *kōmos*, whilst in *Alcestis* it is replaced by Heracles' struggle with Death. The *kōmos* does, however, feature thematically throughout other tragic works, bringing with it both the social ideology of the *symposium* and its associations with both cooperative and competitive laughter. In this section, connections between laughter and the *kōmos* are assessed in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides' *Ion.*

2.4.1 *Oresteia*: the Furies

In the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus presents the arrival of the Furies as a sort of *kōmos*. This association begins in *Agamemnon*, where Cassandra foresees the immediate future of the House of Atreus beyond her death:

> Κα. τὴν γὰρ στέγην τήνδ' οὔποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸς
> σύμφθογγος οὐκ εὔφωνος· οὐ γὰρ εὖ λέγει.
> καὶ μὴν πεπωκώς γ', ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,
> βρότειον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,
> δύσπεμπτος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων. (A. *Ag*. 1186-1189)

> Ca. For a chorus never leaves this house,
> singing in unison without harmony, for it does not speak of pleasant things.
> And so, drunk, to be more emboldened,
> on human blood, a *kōmos* remains in the house,
> hard to banish away, of kindred Furies.

The shared sympotic associations with *Cyclops*' Polyphemus and *Alcestis*' Heracles are immediately clear: the Furies' singing is οὐκ εὔφωνος 'not harmonious' and they are πεπωκώς 'drunk'.[56] Like the cyclops, their consumption is perverse, as they drink βρότειον αἷμα 'human blood' instead of wine.[57] However, these are not isolated symposiasts. The communality of the Furies' literal κῶμος 'revel-band' is also emphasised; they are a χορός 'chorus', chanting σύμφθογγος 'in unison'.[58] Whilst the other two plays deny their characters a *kōmos* or at least present it as offstage action, Aeschylus presents the House of Atreus as the destination of this *kōmos* of Furies. Sommerstein (2008, 142) notes that a *kōmos* 'might force its way into a house where a symposium is in progress and demand drink or entertainment; normally, once this was supplied, they would leave and try their luck elsewhere'. Instead, this *kōmos* of Furies outstays its welcome, and is δύσπεμπτος ἔξω 'hard to banish away' because it is drunk on human blood.[59]

Cassandra's two metaphors come together in Aeschylus' later portrayal of the Furies as the literal chorus of *Eumenides*, who, like the perverted *kōmos* evoked in *Agamemnon*, are enticed by murder:

Χο. ὀσμὴ βροτείων αἱμάτων με προσγελᾶι (A. *Eum*. 254)

Cho. The smell of mortal blood smiles at me in welcome

Their intention to consume Orestes' blood (264-8) characterises the Furies as monsters, the 'true primordial dragon figures' (Zeitlin 1978, 164) that have been textually alluded to throughout the trilogy.[60] This is additionally emphasised by their costuming, as they likely sported masks resembling the heads of Gorgons, and formed a chorus which is notoriously said to have shocked its fifth-century audience.[61] Despite this monstrous characterisation, their laughter does not appear to be straightforward mockery: προσγελᾷ 'smiles at' is the same verb that describes the children's innocent smiles in *Medea* (1041).[62] Sommerstein stresses that this verb also commonly means 'greets', indicating an exchange of

[56] Raeburn & Thomas (2011, 194) note the double meaning of the singing as οὐκ εὔφωνος, both 'ugly and ill-omened'.
[57] *Alcestis*' Death is also depicted drinking human blood, on which see chapter 2, n53.
[58] The fact that the *kōmos* is made up συγγόνων Ἐρινύων 'of kindred Furies' is reflective of their function as avengers of intrafamilial crimes as much their own familial communality; see Denniston & Page (1957, 178); Raeburn & Thomas (2011, 195).
[59] Raeburn & Thomas (2011, 195) note the consecutive construction ὡς θρασύνεσθαι 'so as to be more emboldened', which indicates that the lingering is a direct consequence of their blood-drinking.
[60] Zeitlin (1978, 164) notes the monstrous imagery at *Ag*. 1233-36, *Cho*. 249, 994, 835.
[61] See Belfiore (1992, 9-33) on the recurring imagery of the Gorgon at the symposium in Greek literature, esp. 20-2 on the appearance of the chorus of *Eumenides*; *Vit. Aesch.* 9 records that the chorus of *Eumenides* allegedly caused children to faint and pregnant women to miscarry in the theatre.
[62] And the princess, before her gruesome death; E. *Med*. 1041, 1162, see 1.3.

xenia between the Furies and their host – literally, 'the smell of mortal blood'.[63] Similarly, they desire a reciprocal exchange, as they ask for Orestes ἀντιδοῦναι 'to give in return' (264) his blood, as payment for his mother's. The form of laughter depicted is the playful laughter of the *symposium*, grounded in the expectations of *xenia*. This, arguably, is a key part of what makes Aeschylus' Furies so unsettling: their gelastic language evokes a genuine enjoyment of the vengeance they seek.[64]

The Furies' revelry in punishment is similar to that of the satyric chorus of *Cyclops*, but lacks the simple transgression-punishment narrative due to the complicated circumstances of Orestes' matricide. Additionally, in stark contrast to the satyrs, this chorus is specifically gendered as female – avengers of the mother figure.[65] Zeitlin convincingly reads the *Oresteia*'s Furies as the 'negative feminine principle' (1978, 163), and their ultimate defeat in trial as a justification and an ideological aetiology for Greek patriarchy. This reading tracks with the laughter within the texts; by the end of the trilogy, the Furies' perverted sympotic laughter is socially corrected as they are instituted in the city-state as the Eumenides. Much like in *Cyclops*, the improper symposiasts perceive themselves to be punished with laughter, as, in this reversal, the Furies twice describe themselves as objects of mockery (*Eum*. 789, 819). In *Eumenides*, Aeschylus sets the stage for the Furies' defeat by presenting them as a transgressive and perpetual *kōmos*, opposing the gender norms of the *symposium* and Greek society at large. As with *Cyclops* and *Alcestis*, the perversion of the *symposium* in the *Oresteia* serves to reaffirm the preferential valuing of male social ties.

2.4.2 *Ion*: the birds

In *Ion*, Euripides uses the image of the *kōmos* with similar textual subtlety, in the development of the role of Delphi's local birds. These first appear in Ion's entrance monody as an ἀγέλη 'flock' (106), which Ion scares away τόξοισιν 'by means of [his] bow' (107). Though Ion's fairly humble job is to sweep the temple steps and drive the birds away (102-7), he addresses his broom rather formally (111-15) and takes great pride in performing his task (128-135). The style of this song, not atypical of Euripides, is parodied by Aristophanes (*Ran.* 944, 1331-63) for the seemingly incongruous combination of 'high-flying lyric form given to earth-bound content' (Knox 1979, 259). Due to this incongruity, scholars debate whether this scene is more 'tragic' or 'comic', but tend to agree that its tone is more light-hearted than the majority of tragedy's scenes.[66] As Ion turns to his task of shooing the birds, he singles out three individual animals, each of a different species: a Ζηνὸς / κῆρυξ 'herald of Zeus' or

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[63] Sommerstein (1989, 127): 'To the Erinyes the scent of human blood is as delightful as the face of a friend'.
[64] Podlecki (1989, 151) compares the laughter language here to the non-human instances of *Il*. 19. 362 and E. *Tro*. 1176-7. For discussion of the latter instance, see 3.5.3.
[65] The Furies' depiction as female figures is in keeping with wider extant Greek mythology, though Pausanius indicates that their monstrous characterisation may have been an Aeschylean innovation, Paus. 1.28.6. See also Mitchell-Boyask (2009, 25-27).
[66] For comic readings of the scene, see Knox (1979, 257-270), Seidensticker (1982, 217-222); for emphasis on the work as tragedy, see Zacharia (1995, 45-53), Lee (1996, 85-109), Taplin (2003, 52-5).

‘eagle’ (158-9), a κύκνος ‘swan’ (162) and an unidentified καινὸς ‘strange’ bird (171). Ion shouts at these birds, and aims at them with his prop bow, admitting he is reluctant to kill them because of their prophetic duties – τοὺς θεῶν ἀγγέλλοντας φήμας / θνατοῖς ‘announcing words of the gods to mortals’ (180-1).[67] The apparent lack of consequences for either Ion or the birds, alongside Ion’s sincere tone despite the low stakes of the situation, gives this episode the feel and rules of a game.[68] Both Ion and the birds seem to know that there is no danger of harm here, only the exasperation of the temple attendant if he fails to keep Apollo’s shrine clean. Their play is interrupted by another low-stakes scene – the *parodos* of the chorus, arriving at Delphi as holidaying ‘day-trippers’ (Barlow 1997, 37).

The next time Delphi’s birds appear, the circumstances are much more serious. Ion’s offstage sympotic event forms a key turning point of the narrative as it is the scene of the attempt on his life. A messenger narrates the events of the ‘civic banquet’ (Gibert 2019, 299), a celebration led by Ion for his (false) reunion with his birth father, presumed to be Xuthus. To cater for the event, Ion erects a tent to host the people of Delphi (1132-1140) and decorates it with tapestries of the gods (1141-1166).[69] Gibert (2019, 299) notes that this banquet soon develops to resemble a *symposium*, in which the *deipnon* portion of the event goes ahead without a hitch until the *paedogogus* character enters:

Θε. γέλων δ’ ἔθηκε συνδείπνοις πολύν,
πρόθυμα πράσσων: (E. *Ion.* 1172-3)

At. and he caused much laughter among the diners,
with his eager activity.

Contextually, this playful laughter is neither unusual nor unprecedented. The sated symposiasts are amused at the elderly man’s assumption of the cupbearer role, which was traditionally taken on by a young boy.[70] This sympotic laughter mirrors that of the gods in the *Iliad*, triggered ὡς ἴδον Ἥφαιστον διὰ δώματα ποιπνύοντα ‘at the sight of Hephaestus bustling through the palace (*Il.* 1.600).[71] But in contrast to the guests’ playful interpretation of their sympotic setting, the elderly assistant carries poison

[67] A similar action is staged in E. *Or*. 268-276, where a hallucinating Orestes threatens the Furies with his (likely mimed) bow (*Or.* 276). Taplin (1977, 34) notes that *Ion*’s birds are most likely imaginary. For the possibility of extra chorus dancers playing the roles of the birds, see Ruck (1976, 250) who cites the choice to include specific large birds as evidence for their staging. This is a speculative and unpopular reading, but the joke of the third καινὸς ‘strange’ bird is very appealing from a comic perspective.
[68] Surely it is also unexpected that Ion mentions an ἀγέλη ‘flock’, and yet describes three seemingly unconnected individual birds acting alone? Nevertheless, this strange occurrence does not undermine the specific thematic and divine links of each bird; Lee (1997, 174) links the eagle with Zeus and power, the swan with Apollo and singing, and the third bird with the intent of a prolonged visit.
[69] For the *ekphrasis* of the tapestries and their relevance to the themes of the tragedy, see Goff (1988) and Zeitlin (1989, 166-182).
[70] Zeitlin (1989, 193 n117).
[71] For discussion of the gods’ playful laughter in tragedy, see 3.3.1.

for the intended murder of the host. Following an ill-omened cry from another present attendant, Ion orders that the poured wine be thrown onto the ground, and soon there enters κῶμος πελειῶν 'a *kōmos* of doves' (1197). Just like a *kōmos* might demand drink from their host, the birds quickly descend upon Ion's spilled wine (1197-1200).[72] Unsurprisingly, the dove that swallows Ion's wine immediately dies a violent death, and the plot to kill the host is revealed.[73]

Although critics have noted the link between the birds in the opening and sympotic scenes of the tragedy, and their depiction as a *kōmos*, the significance of their assumption of this role is generally understated.[74] If scholars are correct to read the opening bird scene as light-hearted, if perhaps not quite humorous, this latter scene presents a reversal on multiple levels. Tonally, the birds first bring levity into the tragedy in their game with Ion and his bow. Ion's insistence that he is reticent to harm them is compounded by the messenger's later comment that these birds Λοξίου γὰρ ἐν δόμοις / ἄτρεστα ναίουσ' 'live, fearless, / in the house of Loxias' (1197-8). Throughout this early scene, there is a strong contrast between Ion's sincere monody and the relatively low stakes drama that the birds are causing. In their second appearance, the birds interrupt a sympotic scene filled with laughter, which has recently turned to solemn silence with Ion's sensing of an ill omen and the refreshing of the wine-bowls (1194). The death of one dove reveals the hidden severity of the event that was intended to be a celebration, and that Ion's newfound identity could have catalysed his death instead of his salvation. Here, the birds reveal the underlying stakes behind the relaxed sympotic setting. Furthermore, this tonal shift mirrors the development of a key theme of *Ion*, which Zeitlin identifies as 'the allegiance of others, of non-kin' (1989, 179). The birds transform from disparate individual animals into a single-species *kōmos* that saves the day, a development that mirrors the formation of a hybrid family by Xuthus, Creusa and Ion. The tragedy repeatedly highlights the loyalty of non-family members, such as the *paedogogus*, the chorus and Ion's friends at Delphi, and exposes the failures of kinship in the near miss attempt on the life of Ion, and the reciprocal plan to punish of Creusa. *Ion*'s birds, and their relationship with tone, ideologically reinforces the *symposium* as a source of patriarchal community.

2.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, playful laughter has proved to both form and test the boundaries of *philia* in both intra- and extrafamilial spaces. Whilst the functioning *oikos* should facilitate the cooperative laughter of play, the tragic *oikos* in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' *Electra* appears to produce

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[72] Gibert (2019, 302): 'No doubt many an actual symposium was interrupted by drunken revellers arriving from outside'.

[73] It is notable that the scheme to kill Ion fails at all; Lee (1997, 279) observes that the *mechanema* of other extant Euripidean plays (*Electra*, *IT*, *Helen*) all succeed, though I would add that *Orestes* presents a similarly complicated case of a plot that partially fails in its execution.

[74] Zeitlin (1989, 144) emphasises the importance of the birds in foiling the murder plot and considers them exemplary of the paradoxical themes of the tragedy; Ruck (1987, 250) and Lee (1997, 287) note the birds' comparison to a band of revellers and dove's violent death, but do not comment any further on the imagery.

only competitive or even hostile laughter – and, moreover, the suspicion that it is occurring privately. Mirroring the domestic space it occurs within, this laughter is overwhelmingly gendered as a potentially dangerous feminine phenomenon. Simultaneously, it is imagined and critiqued by female characters, characterised with an internalised attitude towards Clytemnestra's gelastic expression much like Odysseus' anger at the enslaved maids' laughter within Homer's *Odyssey* (20.5-25). In each genre, the women's laughter is overshadowed by male violence. In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus and his father execute several of the enslaved women of the household for their sexual relationships with the suitors. Sophocles' *Electra* and Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* both end with Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra, putting an abrupt end to the mockery she is suspected to be engaging in privately. Altogether, the ideological anxiety concerning women's laughter is epitomised by laughter's functioning within the tragic, dysfunctional *oikos*. Its close association with Clytemnestra's sexual and marital infidelity invites its suppression by the *oikos*' male guardian, who must silence the laughter to reimpose the overthrown patriarchal order. The ambivalent laughter of Clytemnestra in these tragedies, secretive and dangerously mutable, is ultimately rendered mute.

The tragic *symposium*, ideally a site for playful cooperation, shares much of the same negative laughter with the *oikos*. The satyric *Cyclops* depicts the punishment of an isolated symposiast who fails to adhere to the *symposium*'s social rules. Polyphemus' antisocial behaviour is repaid in kind, only communally – by the chorus of satyrs who playfully taunt him. Their game, emblematic of the socially corrected *symposium*, is simultaneously the hostile mockery of the cyclops, who is punished for his betrayal of *xenia*. In *Alcestis*, Heracles' misinformed sympotic laughter serves to intensify the suffering of Admetus and his household. This tragedy depicts another isolated symposiast, but Heracles is redeemed through his recourse to another of the symposium's fixtures: the *kōmos*. By means of his unusual *kōmos*, Heracles amends his earlier transgression by returning Alcestis from the dead – playing a game with Admetus in the process. The games of *Cyclops* and *Alcestis*, one cruel and one ultimately kind, emphasise the mutability of playful laughter in the *symposium*. The sympotic *kōmos* is further connected to laughter in both the *Oresteia* and *Ion*. In the *Oresteia*, the revelling Furies are driven by mockery and smile in sadistic play. In *Ion*, disparate birds that punctuate a light-hearted early scene become a *kōmos* critical to the plot. It is their intervention that prevents the protagonist's death, following the playful laughter of a *sympotic* scene. Each *kōmos* further highlights both the advantages and dangers of playful laughter. Like the chorus of satyrs, the Furies enjoy a playful laughter that is simultaneously the superior mockery of another. This sort of play is certainly not interpreted as such by all its involved parties. Although *Alcestis*' Heracles and *Ion*'s birds are critiqued for their inappropriate presence and behaviour, both prevent a death by means of their *kōmos*, reinstating the *symposium* as an ultimately positive site of *philia*.

Chapter 3 – Divine Laughter

3.1 Introduction

In *Greek Laughter*, Halliwell addresses the laughter of gods in Homeric epic, observing two general rules about their gelastic habits. Firstly, that the only instances of uncontrollable laughter that are *not* associated with madness occur among the divinities (2008, 52, 61; *Il*. 1.599, *Od*. 8.326). And secondly, that the gods never directly laugh at human beings, only at each other (2008, 52). Although the textual laughter of gods is rarer than that of human characters in extant tragedy, the two examples of the uncontrolled laughter of madness are exhibited by human characters: the protagonists of Euripides' *Heracles* and Sophocles' *Ajax*. However, the link between mad laughter and the divine is evident, and therefore laughter's connection to not only madness, but divinely-inspired madness is discussed with reference to these two tragedies in section 3.2. To establish the types of divine laughter evidenced in tragedy, the extant instances of laughing gods are addressed in section 3.3, alongside Sophocles' association of human mockery with divine justice. In section 3.4, Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Bacchae* are discussed as extended portrayals of divinities interacting with human characters, with the changeable direction of mockery as a central feature in each play. To conclude this chapter, section 3.5 addresses the two contextualised instances of laughter in association with the natural world that fall outside of the scope of anthropomorphised gods in tragedy.

3.2 Laughter as a symptom of divinely-inspired madness

3.2.1 *Ajax*

Sophocles' *Ajax* contains the greatest number of textual references to laughter in a single play of all the extant tragedies. Indeed Grossman (1968, 65) notes that 'the laugh of Ajax' became a phrase pertaining to specifically a 'mad' sort of laughter in later antiquity.[1] However, in Sophocles' text, Ajax himself is only described as laughing once. This means that laughter only appears once as a 'symptom' of madness, a term borrowed from Holmes (2010, 2): 'a disruption–without obvious cause and often, though not always, painful–either to the experience of self or to the outward presentation of self'.[2] Nevertheless, I will argue that Ajax displaying laughter as a symptom is crucial in informing the discussion of and response to laughter across the course of this tragedy, both by the other characters and Ajax himself. At the beginning of the play, Ajax appears onstage in front of Athena and Odysseus. In this episode of the drama, he is still under the influence of hallucinations sent by Athena, which have diverted his attack on the Greek generals. Although he has murdered livestock and shepherds instead

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[1] The origin of the phrase is unknown: Grossman (1968, 68-71) suggests that Sophocles' dramatisation of the 'mad' laughter is based upon a scene in the lost *Little Iliad*, and Pucci (1994, 10) notes that Aeschylus' prior *The Judgement About The Arms* also recounted Ajax's madness.

[2] Although 303 is the only textual instance of laughter as a symptom, the actor playing Ajax may laugh onstage whilst experiencing hallucinations; see 1.2.

of his intended victims, he believes himself to have successfully carried out his revenge – motivated by his failure to secure the arms of Achilles in the contest following the hero's death.

The next scene centres on Tecmessa, Ajax's concubine and the mother of his child, Eurysaces. She gives a graphic account of Ajax's violence to the chorus of Salaminian sailors, ναὸς ἀρωγοὶ 'shipmates' (201) of Ajax. During this narration, she describes Ajax laughing:

Τέ. τέλος δ' ἀπᾴξας διὰ θυρῶν σκιᾷ τινι
λόγους ἀνέσπα τοὺς μὲν Ἀτρειδῶν κάτα,
τοὺς δ' ἀμφ' Ὀδυσσεῖ, συντιθεὶς γέλων πολύν,
ὅσην κατ' αὐτῶν ὕβριν ἐκτείσαιτ' ἰών· (S. *Aj*. 301-4)

Te. Finally he darted out through the door, drawing up words
for some shadow, now against the sons of Atreus,
now about Odysseus, including much mocking laughter,
about how great the abuse that he had avenged on them in his raid.

Laughter is only one of the unusual behaviours attributed to the hero by Tecmessa: in addition, Ajax leaves during the night for apparently no reason (285-7), he treats animals ὥστε φῶτας 'as though men' (300), he speaks σκιᾷ τινι 'to some shadow' and laughs (301-304), he slowly realises the truth of his actions and displays a marked change in mood (305-310), he is silent for a period of time (311), he demands to know what he has just done (312-315) and finally he responds with uncharacteristic grief (319-322). The majority of these behaviours are instances of symptoms that regularly appear in tragedy accompanying scenes of madness – most notably mistaking the identities of his victims, realising his error with the help of a witness, and his resultant emotional shift.[3] His restlessness, silence and laughter, the more ambiguous symptoms, are sandwiched in between the more clear-cut signs that Ajax's actions are mistaken or out of character.[4]

Beyond Odysseus and Athena, Tecmessa is the first of the characters to attribute this behaviour specifically to μανίᾳ 'madness' (217). In their *parodos*, the chorus wonder if Ajax is the target of divine vengeance from Artemis or Ares (172-181). They suspect a divinity has sent a νόσος 'disease' (186),

[3] These are all key to the arc of Heracles' and Agave's episodes of madness too: mistaken identities (*Her*. 967-1009, *Ba.* 1105-24), realising the error (*Her*. 1311-39, *Ba*. 1280-84) and grieving its consequences (*Her*. 1240-1162, *Ba*. 1282-1300).

[4] Holmes (2010, 240): 'Tragic symptoms, in short, are surrounded by a nimbus of uncertainty'. These three behaviours are only sometimes symptoms of tragic madness. See Bond (1981, 310 n1) on restlessness and madness in *Heracles*; Papadopoulou (2005, 64) on silence; Halliwell (2008, 86-99) on laughter and madness in Homer's *Odyssey*.

and they share this term with Tecmessa, who also uses its cognates to describe Ajax's actions (206, 269, 271, 274).[5] This is only intensified when they hear Ajax's offstage shouts of grief, to which the chorus respond:

Χο. ἀνὴρ ἔοικεν ἢ νοσεῖν, ἢ τοῖς πάλαι
νοσήμασι ξυνοῦσι λυπεῖσθαι παρών. (S. *Aj*. 337-338)

Cho. The man seems either to be sick, or to be pained still
by the disease recently with him, in his present state.

Although Ajax is now seemingly ἔμφρων 'in his senses' (306), he suffers because of what he has done under Athena's divine influence – and in this sense, traces of the νόσος remain with him. His loud wails here, and as described by Tecmessa (317-322), are the physiological and emotional reverse of the laughter and silence he displayed during his episode,[6] and as such they simultaneously mark its end and act as a symptom too – evidence that he was briefly 'out of his senses' (or ἔκφρων, in later Greek).

Although Ajax's laughter is a symptom of his madness, it is by no means a random act. Crucially, Ajax only laughs *after* he has successfully captured and begun to torture and kill the livestock. As such, the laugh is a result of his perceived success at his act of vengeance, fitting Hobbes' description of superior laughter as an expression of glory.[7] Of course, given his mistaken identification of his victims, this laughter is misjudged – and because this superiority is inappropriate, it is positioned to become a great source of humiliation to the ἔμφρων Ajax.[8] This is one strong aspect of the shame that he feels, which he repeatedly expresses in terms of mockery.[9] Tecmessa describes this phenomenon as the reason for Ajax's intense suffering now:

Τέ. ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος, ἡνίκ' ἦν ἐν τῇ νόσῳ,
αὐτὸς μὲν ἥδεθ' οἷσιν εἴχετ' ἐν κακοῖς,
ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς φρονοῦντας ἠνία ξυνών·

[5] See Padel (1995, 159-162) on madness as disease in Greek literature.
[6] Human laughter and tears share much of the same physiology, see Plessner (1970). Some scholarly studies of Greek literature have analysed the two phenomena side by side, e.g. Arnould (1990), Alexiou & Cairns (2017).
[7] Hobbes (1651, 45), Stanford (1963, 101 on 304): 'Literally '<laughter at> how much violence he had avenged on them in full [ἐκ] in his foray [ἰών]', Arnould (1990, 228-9): 'le rire de triomphe et l'insulte', Halliwell (2008, 18): 'roaring with derision as he imagines himself gloating in front of the army's commanders'.
[8] According to Goffman (1956, 269), embarrassment arises 'when the self projected is somehow confronted with another self which, though valid in other contexts, cannot be here sustained in harmony with the first'. The ἔμφρων Ajax realises that his ἔκφρων self had no reason to feel superior.
[9] Ajax thrice expresses concern about being an object of mockery, in general terms (367) and regarding his enemies (382, 454). Padel (1995, 155): 'Ajax is shamed and dishonoured by having been mad, having failed to do what he meant, and having let his enemies live; and he is ashamed at killing cattle... All these are elements of his shame'.

νῦν δ’ ὡς ἔληξε κἀνέπνευσε τῆς νόσου,
κεῖνός τε λύπῃ πᾶς ἐλήλαται κακῇ,
ἡμεῖς θ’ ὁμοίως οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἢ πάρος.
ἆρ’ ἔστι ταῦτα δὶς τόσ’ ἐξ ἁπλῶν κακά; (S. *Aj*. 271-277)

Te. That man, at the time when he was in his sickness,
himself took pleasure in the evils that held him,
but to us in our right minds, his presence grieved us.
But now, since he has ceased and recovered from his sickness,
that man is wholly plagued by terrible grief,
and we are in the same way, no less than before.
Are these things not a double evil in place of one?

Ajax is implicated not only by the slaughtering of the livestock, but because of his reaction to it: his witnesses know that ἥδεθ’ ‘he took pleasure’ in his attempted violence on the Greeks. Athena has already indicated that she influenced Ajax’s vision, rather than his intentions (51-4), and so Euripides implies that this joy and laughter is entirely genuine. Thus his laughter, beyond being a symptom of his ἔκφρων episode, further incriminates the ἔμφρων Ajax because it communicates how he genuinely feels about the act he is attempting to commit.[10]

The importance of laughter in this equation is highlighted by its other appearances in the text, as Ajax is further isolated by his perception that he is now being mocked by the men he failed to kill. The vast majority of laughter in this text is the mockery of the Greek generals – not enacted, but imagined by Ajax and his close companions (199, 382, 454, 957, 958, 961, 1043; on these, see 1.2). Whilst Ajax laughs alone, egged on in his hallucinations by Athena, the projected laughter of the Greeks is largely social (199, 454, 958, 961). Ajax and his companions expect the hero’s highly antisocial attempted crime to be corrected socially – perhaps he will be λιθόλευστος ‘stoned’ (254) alongside his shipmates, a group execution which the Greeks will share culpability for, presumably following trial and sentence before the army. Ultimately, Ajax is not persuaded by Tecmessa to protect her and their son. Instead, Ajax chooses a solitary death that mirrors his solitary laughter, and his suicide forms the turning point of the play. This strong contrast reveals another aspect of tragic laughter – when it appears as a symptom of madness, it is generally solitary, the contagious aspects of superior laughter overcome

[10] Arguably Athena’s baiting might provoke his gelastic response, but his intention to commit the crime is undeniable. See e.g. *Aj*. 454-6.

by the difference in perception between the 'mad' character and their internal audience of witnesses.[11] In *Ajax*, laughter is presented amongst the symptoms of madness, discussed in pathological terms as a νόσος 'disease'. However, because Athena only affects Ajax's sight and not his responses, the laughter still follows the general pattern of superior laughter in tragedy – it is an expression of glory over an enemy. Superior laughter, when misplaced, is a solitary and isolating experience. In this way, it sets up the 'mad' laughing subject for a reversal, soon becoming vulnerable to the shared mockery of the enemies they previously imagined they had bested.

3.2.2 *Heracles*

In contrast to *Ajax*, Euripides' *Heracles* contains only two direct textual references to laughter in total, but both occur in relation to the hero's episode of madness. Whilst Sophocles presents his hero's laughter as a misplaced expression of superiority, Euripides' example is more ambiguous and as such encourages differing responses from his internal audience of witnesses. The depiction of laughter as a potential marker of play, in conjunction with Euripides' focus on Heracles' domestic qualities, is instrumental in emphasising the fundamental conflict within the personality of the hero. As in *Ajax*, the audience of *Heracles* are presented with an early *deus ex machina*–or two *deae* in this case–who take responsibility for inflicting madness upon the protagonist. Iris and Lyssa appear to the chorus in the middle of the tragedy to punish Heracles on Hera's behalf. The emphasis on madness is immediately evident from the identity of Lyssa, the divine manifestation of madness itself (823). It is revealed that Heracles must kill his own children (831-2), and this will be accomplished by means of Lyssa's ability to inflict μανίας τ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ 'madness upon the man' (835). Unlike in *Ajax*, Iris encourages Lyssa to control the hero's actions too, and Euripides uses multiple imperatives to emphasise the goddess' total control of the hero and his actions: ἔλαυνε 'drive [him]', κίνει 'set [him] in motion', ἐξίει 'shake out [the sails of death]' (837). Once Lyssa has agreed to the plan, she promises:

> Λύ. ὁ δὲ κανὼν οὐκ εἴσεται
> παῖδας οὓς ἔτικτ' ἐναίρων, πρὶν ἂν ἐμὰς λύσσας ἀφῇ (E. *Her*. 865-6)

> Ly. but the one killing will not know
> that he is slaying the children he engendered, until he is released from my madness

Like Sophocles' Ajax, Heracles will not recognise the true victims of his slaughter while he enacts it, and his altered perception becomes a key symptom of his mad episode. Additionally, Heracles' madness manifests itself in other physiological and behavioural symptoms, and Lyssa describes the (offstage)

[11] Padel (1995, 90) notes that Democritus listed solitary behaviour and laughter as symptoms of madness, and in *Ajax* these converge. This is also the case with Cassandra's solitary and perhaps 'mad' laughter in Euripides' *Trojan Women*; see 7.2.3.

hero tossing his head, rolling his eyes in silence and panting like a bull (867-9). These initial symptoms are much more physical than those of Ajax in Sophocles' text, perhaps because Euripides does not place Heracles onstage during his episode of madness, and therefore the logistical challenges of staging these physical symptoms are not applicable.[12]

Rather, the description of Heracles' madness comes after the fact, from an enslaved attendant who witnessed the murders within the house. His initial description of Heracles has much in common with Lyssa's: Heracles stops suddenly in silence, he is οὐκέθ' αὑτὸς 'no longer himself' (931), his eyes are rolling and bloodshot, he is ἐφθαρμένος 'corrupted', and foaming at the mouth (930-35).[13] As he begins to communicate in this new state, he laughs:

Ἄγ. ἔλεξε δ' ἅμα γέλωτι παραπεπληγμένῳ (E. *Her*. 935)

Mes. Then he spoke with a maddened laugh

In the words and narrated actions that follow, Heracles states that he will go to Mycenae to kill his enemy Eurystheus, and begins to act out the entire imagined episode before his family and their attendants (942-967). Before long, Heracles' actions develop into real violence, and he murders his wife and children, mistaking them for his enemy's family (967-1009). Like Tecmessa, this witness relates the events in retrospect, and as such has a clear understanding that Heracles has just been subject to an episode of madness. However, they also share the reactions of the witnesses at the time, before the hallucinating Heracles becomes violent:

Ἄγ. διπλοῦς δ' ὀπαδοῖς ἦν γέλως φόβος θ' ὁμοῦ.
καί τις τόδ' εἶπεν, ἄλλος εἰς ἄλλον δρακών·
παίζει πρὸς ἡμᾶς δεσπότης ἢ μαίνεται; (E. *Her*. 950-2)

Mes. But upon the attendants was a twin feeling, laughter and fear together.
And someone said, as they looked at one another:
is the master playing with us or is he mad?

In this short reflection, the messenger reveals the ambiguity of the situation that appears so obvious in hindsight. What he now understands to be a γέλως παραπεπληγμένος 'madman's laugh', is evidently

[12] While offstage, Euripides' Agave is also described as rolling her eyes (*Ba*. 1122-23) and Sophocles' Ajax is compared to a bull (*Aj*. 322).
[13] Papadopoulou (2005, 64) notes Agave is also foaming at the mouth and affected cognitively at *Ba*. 1122-1123, whilst silence and foaming at the mouth also appear as symptoms at *IT* 308, 310, *Or*. 219.

far from apparent at first.[14] Indeed, it is unclear whether Heracles 'is mad' (μαίνεται) or is in fact rather 'playing with us' (παίζει πρὸς ἡμᾶς).[15] As such, the attendants experience a διπλοῦς 'twin' reaction: γέλως φόβος θ' ὁμοῦ 'laughter and fear together'.

There is no immediate logical explanation for Heracles suddenly laughing at this point in the plot, hence the attendants' fear that this might be the misplaced laughter of madness. But in contrast to Ajax, whose misplaced superior mockery isolates him, Heracles' attendants are at least somewhat inclined to join in with the hero's laughter. Although clear in retrospect, the attendant expresses two alternative readings for Heracles' actions as they occur: madness or play. In this way, Heracles' laugh can be read either as a symptom, producing φόβος 'fear', or as a signal for play, inviting reciprocal γέλως 'laughter'.[16] Of course this must be read in tandem with Heracles' actions in the scene thus far. Heracles has just expressed his intention to return to Mycenae, and immediately begins to enact his journey:

Ἄγ. ἐκ τοῦδε βαίνων ἅρματ' οὐκ ἔχων ἔχειν
ἔφασκε, δίφρου δ' εἰσέβαινεν ἄντυγα
κἄθεινε, κέντρωι δῆθεν ὡς θείνων, χερί. (E. *Her*. 947-9)

Mes. But going, although he did not have a chariot,
he asserted that he did, and went to mount the rail
and struck, as if he really had a goad.

In a similar fashion, following the twofold reaction of his attendants, Heracles claims the men's chamber is the city of Nisus, prepares to feast, takes off his mantle to wrestle with thin air and names himself victor (953-962); only then do his thoughts turn to exacting vengeance on Eurystheus. Given the relative harmlessness of Heracles' actions in the run up to his violence, it is totally feasible for the attendants to interpret them as acts of play. Their interpretation of the situation is further supported by Euripides' depiction of Heracles throughout as 'a family man' (Papadopoulou 2005, 78).[17] Megara specifically refers to Heracles playing with the children earlier in the drama:

Μεγ. σοὶ μὲν γὰρ Ἄργος ἔνεμ' ὁ κατθανὼν πατήρ,

---

[14] Padel (1995, 121 n9) notes that this term is used for 'mad' laughter elsewhere in Greek comedy and literature, citing Ar. *Ecc.* 139, *Lys.* 831, *Pl.* 242; Hdt. 5.92.
[15] LSJ (II 1) for the usage of παίζειν with πρὸς; on the attendants' reaction, Wilson (2004, 71) observes: 'It is hard to believe that the rational and kindly Heracles could mistake his own family for that of his enemy, Eurystheus'.
[16] For an introduction to playful laughter, see 2.1.
[17] This is notably distinct from his appearance in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, in which he acts as a demanding father and vengeful husband, see Silk (1985, 3).

Εὐρυσθέως δ’ ἔμελλες οἰκήσειν δόμους
τῆς καλλικάρπου κράτος ἔχων Πελασγίας,
στολήν τε θηρὸς ἀμφέβαλλε σῷ κάρᾳ
λέοντος, ᾗπερ αὐτὸς ἐξωπλίζετο·
σὺ δ’ ἦσθα Θηβῶν τῶν φιλαρμάτων ἄναξ,
ἔγκληρα πεδία τἀμὰ γῆς κεκτημένος,
ὡς ἐξέπειθες τὸν κατασπείραντά σε·
ἐς δεξιάν τε σὴν ἀλεξητήριον
ξύλον καθίει δαίδαλον, ψευδῆ δόσιν. (E. *Her*. 462-471)

Meg. For to you your dead father was allotting Argos,
and you were meant to live in the palace of Eurystheus
holding power over the Pelasgian lands, rich in fine fruit,
and he used to throw over your head his garment, made of lion’s
skin, with which he himself was dressed.
And you were the lord of Thebes, fond of chariots,
together with my inherited plains of acquired earth,
just as you persuaded the man that begot you.
Into your right hand he would place the carved
club, his defender, as a pretend gift.

In this scene, Megara paints a picture of her sons’ prosperous future, which she anticipates will be robbed from them when they are killed by Lycus. Her description of the scene is domestic and, much like Hector in the *Iliad* (6.466-93), Heracles is presented as a doting father playing with his young sons.[18] In this bittersweet image, Megara recalls Heracles placing his lion-skin on the eldest boy and giving in to the middle child’s request to play as king of Thebes, receiving the club as a ‘pretend present’ (Bond 1981, 184). Not only does the everyday realism of the scene increase its pathos, as in its *Iliad* counterpart, but it is rife with dramatic irony: Heracles is not dead but will be his family’s killer, and the weapons the children play with in Megara’s memory will shortly become the means of the family’s deaths.

Moreover, Euripides employs nautical imagery throughout which conflates concepts of protection and play. Before their father arrives, Megara reveals her hope that her boys’ future marriages could provide stability for them: ὡς ἀνημμένοι κάλῳς / πρυμνησίοισι ‘as fastened to cable on a stern’

[18] This *Iliad* passage is discussed in reference to *Medea* and *Ajax* (1.3) and *Trojan Women* (3.5.3).

(478). Soon after, Barlow (1981, 146) observes that Heracles himself also uses a nautical image to convey the protection he can offer his sons:

> Ἡρ. ἄξω λαβών γε τούσδ’ ἐφολκίδας χεροῖν,
> ναῦς δ’ ὣς ἐφέλξω· (E. *Her*. 631-2)

> Her. At any rate, I shall lead them, taking them by the hand as towboats,
> and I will tow them as a ship.

Even if he is perhaps not explicitly playing here, the game is implied, and Wilson (2004, 86) observes that ‘the great Heracles enjoys playing the game of pretending to be like a ship for his children’. Indeed Heracles’ light-hearted mood is further evidenced by his comment καὶ μέθεσθ’ ἐμῶν πέπλων· / οὐ γὰρ πτερωτὸς οὐδὲ φευξείω φίλους ‘and release my robe; / for I am not feathered, nor do I wish to escape from my loved ones’ (627-8), which Bond (1981, 184) interprets as ‘a joke for the children’. As this is the last the audience see of Heracles before the hallucinatory episode, the attendant’s description of the witnesses’ confused reaction is even more convincing. The coexistence of the violent hero and doting father in this character renders him volatile, and this ambivalence is reflected in the complicated reactions of the witnesses.[19] Finally, the tragedy ends on a final bittersweet image of play, recalling the earlier nautical reference to Heracles’ image of the children as ἐφολκίδας ‘towboats’ (Bond 1981, 415). Heracles uses this word again, announcing: Θησεῖ πανώλεις ἑψόμεσθ’ ἐφολκίδες ‘totally destroyed, I will follow as a towboat in the wake of Theseus’ (1424). Wilson (2004, 86-7) observes ‘childlike or boatlike dependency is no longer even partly a joke. Heracles has been reduced to the level of his own little children and must be led away by Theseus, who stands in for the loved ones he has killed’. Here, the repetition of the phrase gestures towards the importance of the cooperative social aspects encouraged by play. The protection offered by friendship, with play as its expression, is gently suggested by this image as a partial relief for tragic suffering.[20]

Ultimately, like Ajax, Heracles’ madness causes his violence to be misplaced onto innocent victims. But Heracles’ laughter is not obviously a misplaced expression of superiority, and it is confused for the laughter of play. As his laughter precedes his violence, it remains ambiguous to its witnesses, who cannot determine whether it is misplaced or intended as an invitation to play. As there is no clear evidence to suggest that Heracles’ laughter is superior or even competitive early in the episode, it is unsurprising that the onlookers are inclined to γέλως themselves. However, it is tragically their φόβος

[19] Papadopoulou (2005, 81) regards this conflict of character as a central theme of the tragedy, which Euripides uses divinely-inspired madness as a device to demonstrate.

[20] This may be interpreted as a partial alleviation of suffering (Bond 1981, 415), or the only means of its endurance (Wilson 2004, 87).

that proves to be the more fitting response, as Heracles' misplaced playful laughter proves to be a signifier of his madness. In both these plays, when laughter appears as a symptom of madness it also serves another function regarding its subject – Ajax's mocking laugh implicates him further in his decision to murder the Greek leaders, whilst Heracles' tendency towards domesticity is further evidenced by his ambiguous laugh being mistaken at first for play. Therefore, whilst laughter as a symptom may appear 'hysterical' (Finglass 2011, 228) or indeed 'deluded' (Papadopoulou 2005, 67 n26), this is only because it is misplaced, influenced by its subject's divinely influenced hallucinations. Divinely inspired 'mad' laughter is by no means a random symptom, but is a simultaneous signifier of the afflicted characters' emotional and cognitive states as much as a physiological manifestation of their madness.

3.3 Laughter amongst the gods

3.3.1 Laughing gods

As for the laughter of the gods themselves, there are only three textual descriptions of specific Olympian gods laughing: Euripides' *IT* 1274, *Helen* 1349 and *Bacchae* 380. The instances in *IT* and *Helen* are found in their 'dithyrambic stasima' (Kranz 1933, 254)–mythological narratives delivered in a high style by the tragedy's chorus–and *Bacchae*'s also comes in a choral song. Each of these instances focuses on a particular god; *IT*'s stasimon tells of Apollo's birth and possession of Delphi and *Helen*'s of Demeter's search for her daughter Persephone. Likewise, *Bacchae*'s chorus describes Dionysus' habits in a prayer that resembles cult song (Seaford 1996, 181). In the case of *Helen* and *IT*, the *Homeric Hymns* to these respective gods appear more directly influential than epic, particularly as laughter has an important role to play in each. In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the earth smiles at Apollo's birth (3.115-8), and Apollo later smiles at the concerns of his followers (3.524-538), exposing the contrast in human and divine cares. It is this theme that comes to the fore in the Euripidean text, which tells the story in a light-hearted manner, revealing the chasm between divine and human cares. The chorus depict Apollo killing the serpent when he is only a baby (*IT* 1250-5), and his immaturity is further apparent when he rushes to Zeus for help establishing himself, clasping his father's throne with a χέρα παιδνὸν 'youngster's arm' (*IT* 1271). His father laughs at Apollo's eagerness for the honours that Gaia has temporarily reclaimed from him (*IT* 1270-1275), and soon returns them to his son.[21]

Whilst Zeus' laughter at Apollo can be read as corrective and therefore superior, it is not levied at a human character and it can just as easily be read as playful laughter at Apollo's eagerness.[22] As in

[21] Cropp (2000, 251) notes the striking similarity of Zeus' attitude towards Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn* that bears his name (4.389-390). Apollo himself laughs twice in this hymn too: once at his realisation of Hermes' deception (4.281) and once in delight at music (4.420), much like Aphrodite in *Hel.* 1349 and Dionysus in *Ba.* 380.

[22] Similarly, the πρόθυμα 'eagerness' (*Ion* 1173) of the tutor in Euripides' *Ion* incites laughter from the dinner-guests, and the Olympian gods laugh at the ποιπνύοντα 'bustling' (*Il.* 1.599-600) of Hephaestus.

the *Homeric Hymn*, Zeus' laughter seems grounded in the relative ease of divine existence – he finds amusement in Apollo's overreaction to a situation that is easily remedied if you are an Olympian. *Helen*'s link to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is perhaps more apparent. In the hymn, the goddess' pain is somewhat assuaged by Iambe, who makes her smile and laugh by telling her jokes (2.200-4). For the same purpose in *Helen*, Zeus orders the Graces to cheer Demeter with music and dance (*Hel*. 1338-1345). Instead of Demeter, it is Aphrodite who laughs whilst interacting with the instruments.[23] In both the Homeric and Euripidean examples, the laughter depicted is positive, playful and improves each goddess' mood. Whilst Euripides does evoke Dionysus' *Homeric Hymn* in *Bacchae*, here the chorus depicts Dionysus similarly to Aphrodite in *Helen*.[24] He too is described as laughing with the pipes (*Ba.* 380), alongside joining choral dances and helping mortals forget their cares by means of wine.[25] The three explicit examples of laughing gods in tragedy conform to the second of Halliwell's rules: the Olympian gods are generally depicted as laughing among themselves, and not at human beings.[26]

3.3.2 Sophoclean laughter & divine justice

Apparent in Sophoclean tragedy is the idea that the gods have influence over mortal circumstances, expressed in terms of human laughter. As a maxim, the chorus of *Ajax* observe: ξὺν τῷ θεῷ πᾶς καὶ γελᾷ κὠδύρεται 'whoever laughs and mourns is up to the god' (*Aj*. 383). In more personal circumstances, Sophocles' Antigone interprets her chorus' words as mockery, and also invokes the gods:

Ἀν. οἴμοι γελῶμαι.
τί με, πρὸς θεῶν πατρῴων,
οὐκ οὐλομέναν ὑβρίζεις,
ἀλλ' ἐπίφαντον; (S. *Ant*. 839-841)

An. Alas I am mocked.
Why, in the name of my father's gods,
do you not mock me once I have departed,
but to my face?

[23] Burian (2007, 274) notes the recasting of the object of laughter from jokes to music, but does not comment on the recasting of the laughter's subject from Demeter to Aphrodite. This may be because of her mythical proximity with Helen, but Aphrodite is also elsewhere commonly associated with gelastic behaviour. One of her most frequently occurring epithets in extant literature is φιλομμειδὴς 'smile-loving' (*Hom. Hymn.* 5.17, 49, 56, 65, 155), which may also contain an erotic double-meaning concerning genitalia; see Cyrino (2010).
[24] On *Hom. Hymn.* 7 in *Bacchae*, see chapter 3.4.2.
[25] See 3.4.2 for the significance of this depiction of Dionysus within *Bacchae*.
[26] Notably, the subjects of laughter in all these examples are singular divinities. This is also in keeping with epic, as Halliwell (2008, 67) notes that there is only one instance of shared laughter among the gods in the *Iliad* (1.599-600): 'It is the cumulative impression of both epics that the scarcity of shared divine laughter is itself a symptom of the state of the world'.

This strong reaction reveals Antigone's frustration with the chorus, who try to suggest a positive outlook on her hopeless situation.[27] The mention of the gods seems to act as an intensifier for her rhetorical question rather than a comment on the relationship between her mockery and the divine. However, her phrasing is notably in keeping with the tragedy's emphasis on competing concepts of divine and human justice. Creon, in contrast, is concerned with the laughter of his enemies, and makes no mention of the gods (*Ant*. 483, 647).

Most extensively in a singular tragedy, Philoctetes twice bemoans his situation and mockery as a reflection of the gods' attitude towards him. In the first instance, he considers how his lack of fame reflects upon himself: ὦ πόλλ' ἐγὼ μοχθηρός, ὦ πικρὸς θεοῖς 'o very wretched, o hateful to the gods' (*Phil*. 254). He then stresses the injustice of his situation in terms of laughter: ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν ἐκβαλόντες ἀνοσίως ἐμὲ / γελῶσι σῖγ' ἔχοντες, 'but those who threw me out impiously / laugh silently' (*Phil.* 257-8).[28] Although the implication is that the gods dispense the circumstances, their reasoning does not necessarily reflect Philoctetes' idea of justice, and the laughter of those he perceives to have acted ἀνοσίως 'impiously' stresses this contrast. The second instance once again concerns mockery and the concept of justice:

Φιλ. ἀλλ', οὐ γὰρ οὐδὲν θεοὶ νέμουσιν ἡδύ μοι,
σὺ μὲν γέγηθας ζῶν, ἐγὼ δ' ἀλγύνομαι
τοῦτ' αὔθ', ὅτι ζῶ σὺν κακοῖς πολλοῖς τάλας,
γελώμενος πρὸς σοῦ τε καὶ τῶν Ἀτρέως
διπλῶν στρατηγῶν, οἷς σὺ ταῦθ' ὑπηρετεῖς. (S. *Phil*. 1020-4)

Phil. But, because the gods grant me nothing sweet,
you are alive and rejoice, but I am pained
in this way, that I, miserable, live with many woes,
mocked by you and the sons of Atreus,
the two generals for whom you do this service.

Philoctetes expresses the contrast between his enemies' success and his own suffering in terms of the gods' will – and the pain he suffers above all is the mockery. Webster (1970, 132) notes that Philoctetes' 'particular pain', expressed in τοῦτ' αὔθ', refers specifically to the participle γελώμενος – that he is 'mocked'. Whilst neither the gods' involvement in human affairs nor the fear of mockery is unusual in

[27] Brown (1987, 194): 'Antigone is conscious only of the cruelty and injustice of Creon's sentence, and the 'mockery' and 'insult' lie in trying to present it as a privilege'.
[28] Silent or concealed laughter also appears in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, discussed at 2.2.2.

tragedy, this close association between the two appears to be a particularly Sophoclean concern. In *Philoctetes*, the sense that unjust human mockery may not be corrected by the gods implies a divine ambivalence towards laughter. As will become evident in *Eumenides* and *Bacchae*, this is certainly not the case when mockery is directed towards the gods themselves.

3.4 Laughter between gods and humans

3.4.1 *Eumenides*

Aeschylus' *Eumenides* tracks the transference of power and justice from the Furies, ancient chthonic divinities, to the Olympian gods – the γραίας δαίμονας 'old women deities' (150) and the νεώτεροι θεοί 'younger gods' (162) respectively. Whilst the Furies vie for Orestes to be punished for his matricide, the Olympian Apollo and Athena set a precedent for the Athenian Areopagus by putting him on trial.[29] In this clash of values, Aeschylus depicts Furies that are driven by their desire to prevent human ridicule. They are first awakened as the tragedy's chorus by Clytemnestra's ghost, who conflates Orestes' escape with mockery:

Κλυ. ὁ δ' ἐξαλύξας οἴχεται νεβροῦ δίκην,
καὶ ταῦτα κούφως ἐκ μέσων ἀρκυστάτων.
ὤρουσεν ὑμῖν ἐγκατιλλώψας μέγα. (A. *Eum.* 111-113)

Cly. But he has escaped and goes in the manner of a fawn,
and, indeed, lightly out of the middle of the nets.
He has rushed away making great mocking glances at you.

Clytemnestra incites the Furies to vengeance by depicting Orestes' escape as an insult to them, κούφως 'lightly' implying that he has bested his avengers with ease, before ἐγκατιλλώψας μέγα 'making great mocking glances' in their direction.[30] The Furies seem to have a similar interpretation of the events, though they do not use the language of laughter. They consider their loss of Orestes, the θήρ 'beast' (147) who they perceive as their ἄγραν 'prey' (148), to be an ἄφερτον κακόν 'unbearable evil (145).[31] For Michelini, the Furies of this play never recover from this initial loss, their 'humiliation' (1987, 109 n63).[32] Whilst they do not yet mention their concern with mockery, it is telling that Clytemnestra's

[29] See Goldhill (2004, 7-11) on the political and cultural background of the *Oresteia*.
[30] Podlecki (1989, 139) describes Clytemnestra's image of Orestes' escape as 'almost jaunty'; Sommerstein (1989, 104-5) notes this unusual participle form is a derivative of the adjective ἰλλός 'squinting', 'winking', 'ogling' or 'mocking glances' citing Ap. Rh. 1.486, 3.791, 4.389 for the latter meaning. The prefix ἐγ- brings the sense of mockery, as with ἐγγελᾶν 'laugh at'.
[31] Similar imagery is used at *Ba*. 434 of the capture of Dionysus, see 3.4.2.
[32] According to Michelini (1987, 109), Aeschylus gave the Furies 'a strong hint of comic quality that was suited to their grotesqueness and that suggested from the start their inadequacy as adversaries for the Olympians, Athena and Apollon'.

ghost invokes them with this interpretation of the events, encouraging them to consider themselves divine objects of human laughter.

Despite Clytemnestra's depiction of her son's superior laughter, the Furies do not explicitly express the desire or intention to mock Orestes in return. The depiction of the Furies as a perverted *kōmos* is discussed at 2.4.1, where their link to playful sympotic laughter is explored: for example, in their claim ὀσμὴ βροτείων αἱμάτων με προσγελᾶι 'the smell of mortal blood smiles at me in welcome' (254). Within the trilogy, the only laughter the Furies are the subjects of is playful, rather than superior, and grounded in the language of *xenia*. However, in their second choral ode, they do depict divine laughter aimed towards humans:

Χο. γελᾷ δὲ δαίμων ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θερμῷ,
τὸν οὔποτ' αὐχοῦντ' ἰδὼν ἀμηχάνοις
δύαις λαπαδνὸν οὐδ' ὑπερθέοντ' ἄκραν· (A. *Eum.* 560-1)

Cho. The divinity laughs at the hot-headed man,
seeing him who boasted that this would never happen,
powerless in helpless anguish and unable to escape the cresting wave.

Whilst this generalisation seems to reflect the Furies' own approach to laughter at humans, Sommerstein (1989, 180) notes the masculine participle ἰδὼν here. This indicates that the subject of this laughter could be any δαίμων 'divinity' and not just the Furies, who are specifically female deities. Regarding the quality of the laughter, for this example LSJ gives the translation '*laughs scornfully*' (II). However, γελάω with the preposition ἐπὶ 'at' also evokes the compound verb ἐπιγελάω '*laugh approvingly'* (LSJ I). Borowski (2015, 156) is surely correct to interpret the laughter as an expression of *Schadenfreude*; though the laughter itself is neither clearly superior nor playful, the δαίμων expresses either a detached amusement at the boastful man's suffering or a superior sense of approval.

In either case, this instance of divine laughter is entirely hypothetical and unspecific. Indeed, the Furies' use of δαίμων 'deity' rather than θεός 'god' is telling – the νεώτεροι θεοί 'younger gods' (162, 778, 808) evoked throughout do not laugh at Orestes, but come to his aid. Here, the Furies seem to evoke an archaic divine/human mockery that is not evidenced by the Olympian characters of the tragedy. Rather, upon learning of Orestes' acquittal, the Furies consider themselves targets of superior human laughter:[33]

[33] The passive γελῶμαι 'I am mocked' reflects that the Furies view themselves as objects of laughter, such as e.g. *Ant*. 839, *Phil*. 1023.

Χο. ἰὼ θεοὶ νεώτεροι, παλαιοὺς νόμους
καθιππάσασθε κἀκ χερῶν εἵλεσθέ μου
…
στενάζω; τί ῥέξω;
γελῶμαι· δύσοιστ' ἐν
πολίταις ἔπαθον· (A. *Eum*. 778-779; 788-790)[34]

Oh younger gods, you have trampled over
ancient laws and have taken them from my hands:
…
I groan. What should I do?
I am mocked. I suffer unbearably
before the people.

For the Furies, their mockery ἐν / πολίταις 'before the people' places them as the objects of human ridicule in a total reversal of divine order and justice.[35] Together with Clytemnestra, their advocacy for reciprocal vengeance presents mockery as a zero-sum game: either their success will direct divine laughter towards Orestes, or his acquittal will be the cause of their mockery. As such, although they do not explicitly express it themselves, Aeschylus presents the Furies attempting to direct divine laughter at humans. Ultimately, this fails because their worldview is not shared by the Olympian gods. In the transferral of power from the ancient divinities to the θεοὶ νεώτεροι 'younger gods', Aeschylus implies that divine-human relationships will not be driven by the laughter of *Schadenfreude*. Instead, the Olympian θεοὶ of *Eumenides* are ambassadors of more entwined and complex divine-human relations; they do not laugh at human characters and, in turn, do not consider themselves objects of mockery. However, relationships between humans and θεοὶ are not always depicted so positively in tragedy. In the case of Euripides' *Bacchae*, laughter becomes a prime site for the exploration of how *hubris* aimed at an Olympian θεός might be returned in kind.

3.4.2 *Bacchae*

Although Dionysus' connection with laughter is influenced by his divine patronage of the *symposium*, the laughter he encourages and engages in is more nuanced than the homosocial and patriarchal instances discussed in the sympotic tragedy *Alcestis* and the satyr play *Cyclops* at 2.3. Whilst the

[34] The latter half of this excerpt is repeated exactly, after Athena's first attempt to assuage the Furies' anger (*Eum*. 788-790; 818-820).

[35] Zeitlin (1978) reads the overthrowing of these archaic, female deities as an ideological aetiology for Greek patriarchy; see 2.2.

influence of Dionysiac themes can be felt in all parts of the dramatic Dionysia festival, no extant tragedy engages with the god as extensively as Euripides' *Bacchae*.[36] Euripides' *Bacchae* is also exceptional in the range of laughter it presents – spanning divine and human, superior and playful interactions, and multiple genders. This range is spanned by no fewer than ten instances of laughter across the text, placing *Bacchae* second only to Sophocles' *Ajax* in the frequency of its gelastic language. In this late tragedy, Euripides stages Dionysus disguised as a human character, rather than only featuring him as *deus ex machina*.[37] The god is depicted returning to Thebes, the home of his late mother, the mortal Semele, to confirm his divinity as the son of Zeus. For their lack of recognition, Dionysus has afflicted his mortal aunts and the rest of the Theban women with madness (μανίαις, 33), and they begin the tragedy living in the mountains (32-8). Dionysus is not yet set on punishing the city's leader, Pentheus, but promises that he will defend his maenads if they are attacked (50-52). In the meantime, he will appear to the Thebans as human in εἶδος θνητὸν 'mortal form' (53), specifically gendered εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν 'into the nature of a man' (54). He is referenced throughout as the ξένος 'stranger' or 'guest' (233, 247, 642, 1047, 1068), fitting his double role as disguised deity and patron of the *symposium*. The chorus of Asian maenads who worship Dionysus act as an onstage mirror for the maddened Theban women in the local mountains, and create a great physical contrast with the first two named characters that appear onstage, the aged Tiresias and Cadmus.

Their scene has attracted attention for its potentially humorous readings, as the two elderly male characters appear to have adopted maenadic accoutrements similar to those of the tragedy's female chorus.[38] Arguments for and against this humorous reading often cite the play's first instance of textual laughter, which comes from Pentheus and is directed at the two elders:

Πε. ἀτὰρ τόδ' ἄλλο θαῦμα, τὸν τερασκόπον
ἐν ποικίλαισι νεβρίσι Τειρεσίαν ὁρῶ
πατέρα τε μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς—πολὺν γέλων—
νάρθηκι βακχεύοντ'· ἀναίνομαι, πάτερ,
τὸ γῆρας ὑμῶν εἰσορῶν νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον (E. *Ba*. 248-252)

[36] This is not to say Dionysian myth was not popular in dramatic works; for example, among the tragic fragments, Wright (2019, 22-3, 28, 45) notes that Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia* tetralogy likely also centred on the introduction of the god's worship. In extant drama, Dionysus also appears as a comedic protagonist in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.
[37] Mastronarde (2005, 327) notes that Dionysus may have appeared disguised in Aeschylus' lost *Edonoi*, in which Lycurgus levies insults at the captured god (A. fr. 61). Of course, Dionysus does still appear *ex machina* in *Bacchae*, but he is much more involved in the play's stage action than most gods in tragedy.
[38] The potential humour of the scene is discussed at 5.3.4. In contrast to Halliwell (2008, 134), I do not consider Pentheus' negative laughter as evidence against a humorous reading of the scene, nor do I follow the reading of Seidensticker (1978, 314-5) who views the comment as a cue for the audience's laughter.

Pe. But here is another wonder, the prophet
I see in dappled fawnskins, Tiresias,
and the father of my mother –how ridiculous–
acting like a bacchant with a *thyrsus*. I am ashamed, father,
to see your old age lacking sense.

Pentheus' distaste at his elders' adoption of the maenadic dress is evident, and the laughter he refers to with the clause πολὺν γέλων 'how ridiculous' is framed as superior laughter with his admission ἀναίνομαι 'I am ashamed'. Whether the actor playing Pentheus laughs remains impossible to discern, but this instance of γέλως is certainly one of the closest to a stage direction within extant tragedy.[39] Either way, Pentheus appears to employ the threat of laughter as a social corrective for his grandfather, whose outfit reveals to Pentheus a lack of νοῦν 'sense'. As such, the context indicates that Pentheus' implied or voiced laughter here is entirely superior; indeed, it 'epitomises the malevolently jeering tone that stamps the whole of Pentheus' tirade against Dionysus' (Halliwell 2008, 134).

Notably, his sense of shame specifically seems to be triggered by his grandfather Cadmus, as opposed to the seer Tiresias. Pentheus first comments on the scene and the soothsayer's appearance as a θαῦμα '*wonder*' (LSJ I), an ambiguous term which in Homer's *Odyssey* is equally applied to a beautiful woman (11.287) and the monstrous cyclops (9.190). Although Pentheus' particular focus on his grandfather may be reflective of their familial relationship, Ruffell (2022, 247) aptly reminds readers that Tiresias is one of the more celebrated trans characters of Greek mythology.[40] Perhaps Pentheus is only ashamed to see his grandfather in the feminine-coded maenadic dress because it appears at odds with his prior gender expression, whilst this is perhaps unusual (hence, a θαῦμα 'wonder') but not out of the question for the expectations Pentheus has of the seer. Despite this apparent exception made for Tiresias, Pentheus still finds fault with his grandfather's behaviour and aims to correct it by means of mockery. As such, Dillon (1991, 351) is correct to note Pentheus' rather unique connection with mocking laughter in this tragedy: 'while the typical tragic characters fear scorn, *he* dispenses it'.

Despite Pentheus' rather vague expression of superior humour, Euripides makes it clear that Tiresias interprets his approach as mocking from the multiple compound verbs he responds with. In the exchange that follows, the seer makes three references to mockery within fifty lines, using two forms

[39] Halliwell (2008, 134): 'a tone it is not difficult to imagine an actor conveying with some gelastic vocalisation'. The phrasing is reminiscent of γέλων πολύν (*Aj*. 303) which some scholars also interpret as a stage direction, see chapter 1, n13.
[40] Hes. fr. 275, Gantz (1993, 528-30). In Roman literature, Ovid, *Met*. 3.316-338 tells of Tiresias twice changing sex, and being approached by Juno and Jupiter to settle their dispute on whether men or women enjoyed greater sexual pleasure.

of διαγελάω 'laugh at' (272, 322) and one of καταγελάω 'laugh down at, mock' (286).[41] In the first instance, the subject of Pentheus' interpreted mockery is Dionysus: οὗτος δ' ὁ δαίμων ὁ νέος, ὃν σὺ διαγελᾷς 'this new god, whom you laugh at' (272). In the second reference, the reason for the mockery is phrased as a question, but the laughter itself is not in doubt: καὶ καταγελᾷς νιν, ὡς ἐνερράφη Διὸς / μηρῷ 'and do you mock him because he was sewn up in Zeus' / thigh?' (286-7). Dodds (1960, 107) notes the ancient 'ribald humour' that used the thigh birth of Dionysus as material, which might explain Tiresias' specific reference here.[42] Despite Tiresias' more sophistic approach to Dionysus' origin story (Segal 1997, 294-7), the seer does not totally omit the double birth which foregrounds the paradoxical elements central to his worship. In the final reference to mockery, Tiresias describes the implications of Pentheus' mockery:

Τει. ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν καὶ Κάδμος, ὃν σὺ διαγελᾷς,
κισσῷ τ' ἐρεψόμεσθα καὶ χορεύσομεν,
πολιὰ ξυνωρίς, ἀλλ' ὅμως χορευτέον,
κοὐ θεομαχήσω σῶν λόγων πεισθεὶς ὕπο.
μαίνῃ γὰρ ὡς ἄλγιστα, κοὔτε φαρμάκοις
ἄκη λάβοις ἂν οὔτ' ἄνευ τούτων νοσεῖς. (E. *Ba*. 322-327)

Ti. But I and Cadmus, whom you laugh at,
shall crown our heads with ivy and dance with the chorus,
a grey-haired pair, but nevertheless we must dance,
and I shall not fight against the god, persuaded by your words.
For you are mad in the most distressing way, and you cannot
take drugs as a cure and nor are you sick without them.

Although the mockery is levelled at Cadmus specifically, with ὃν 'whom' as a singular relative pronoun, Pentheus' hostile laughter puts him in opposition to the god. Tiresias' claim κοὐ θεομαχήσω 'I shall not fight against the god' implies that this is exactly what Pentheus is doing by means of his mockery.[43] Furthermore, Tiresias exposes an awareness of the incongruity of the choral dancing for the πολιὰ ξυνωρίς 'grey-haired pair', and yet reflects its necessity in the accusative absolute ἀλλ' ὅμως χορευτέον 'but nevertheless we must'. Whilst their behaviour may appear inappropriate to Pentheus, it is certainly not as illogical as waging war against a god. This is the reason for Pentheus' perceived madness, which stands in contrast to the situationally appropriate yet incongruous behaviour of Dionysus' maenads;

[41] I follow Dodds (1960, 107) on reading 286 as a form of καταγελάω, as opposed to a form of διαγελάω as printed by Seaford (1996, 82).
[42] For this humour, Dodds (1960, 107) cites e.g. Luc. *Dial. Deor*. 9.
[43] The regular interpretation of mockery as hubris within tragedy is discussed at 1.1.

indeed, 'Pentheus stands for insanely sane human containment, for imprisonment. Dionysus stands for the sanely mad, for not being bindable, for divine release: physical, psychic, moral, social' (Padel 1995, 88).[44] For Tiresias, Pentheus' laughter, just like his madness, is paradoxical. Pentheus tries to single out Cadmus and correct his perceived *faux pas* through mockery, but Dionysus' worship is inherently social. Tiresias twice repeats the verb χορεύω 'dance with the chorus', and indeed there are already two choruses for Tiresias and Cadmus to join, the worshippers from Asia minor and the Theban women on the hillside. Tiresias refuses to allow Pentheus to isolate Cadmus, considering the two elders as a ξυνωρίς 'pair'. Therefore Pentheus' attempt to isolate his grandfather backfires, singling himself out in the process as an opponent to the god.[45]

The tragedy's next mention of laughter comes from the chorus, and describes the playful laughter of Dionysus' divine patronage in a prayer song:

Χο. Ὁσία πότνα θεῶν,
Ὁσία δ' ἃ κατὰ γᾶν
χρυσέαν πτέρυγα φέρεις,
τάδε Πενθέως ἀίεις;
ἀίεις οὐχ ὁσίαν
ὕβριν ἐς τὸν Βρόμιον, τὸν
Σεμέλας, τὸν παρὰ καλλι-
στεφάνοις εὐφροσύναις δαί-
μονα πρῶτον μακάρων; ὃς τάδ' ἔχει,
θιασεύειν τε χοροῖς
μετά τ' αὐλοῦ γελάσαι
ἀποπαῦσαί τε μερίμνας,
ὁπόταν βότρυος ἔλθῃ
γάνος ἐν δαιτὶ θεῶν, κισ-
σοφόροις δ' ἐν θαλίαις ἀν-
δράσι κρατὴρ ὕπνον ἀμ-
Φιβάλλῃ. (E. *Ba.* 369-385)

Cho. Righteousness, mistress of the gods,

[44] Although Tiresias links Pentheus' laughter with madness here, I do not consider his laughter a symptom of divinely inspired madness as in S. *Aj.* 303 and E. *Her.* 935. Pentheus does not appear to be under Dionysus' influence until later in *Bacchae*, and so Tiresias' language is figurative – more closely comparable to e.g. S. *El.* 1153-4. Seaford (1996, 179) notes that Clytemnestra is similarly asked if she is under the influence of any drugs when she murders Agamemnon at *Ag.* 1407-9.

[45] Socially isolated superior laughter is a symptom of Ajax's madness in Sophocles' play, see 3.2.1.

Righteousness, who across the earth
bears golden wings,
do you hear these words from Pentheus?
Do you hear the unrighteous
hubris against Bromius, the son
of Semele, the first divinity
of the blessed gods at the beautiful
crowned festivities? These are his gifts:
to celebrate bacchic rites with dances
and to laugh with the *aulos*
and to bring an end to anxieties,
whenever the joy of the grapes comes
at the banquet of the gods,
and in ivy-wreathed festivities
the wine-bowl throws sleep
over men.

The chorus reference Dionysus' sympotic associations, both at banquets of the gods and mortal festivities. His laughter comes μετά τ' αὐλοῦ 'with the *aulos*' and does not target anyone, divine or human. Rather, his realm is a space for play and rest; by means of dance, music, laughter and wine, Dionysus offers mortals respite from their μερίμνας 'anxieties'. Indeed, Seaford (1996, 182) notes the change of tone from the ecstatic *parodos*, considering the 'quietist mood' of the song here as fitting 'the calm well-being of mass participation in the festival'. Notably, this choral song also comes soon after Pentheus has refused to let Cadmus place a garland on him,[46] distancing himself from his elders' μωρίαν 'foolishness' (344), and has threatened to punish the disguised Dionysus with death (345-351). In stark contrast to the relaxed good will of Dionysus, the chorus, like Tiresias, interpret Pentheus' behaviour as ὕβριν ἐς τὸν Βρόμιον 'hubris against Bromius (Dionysus)'. Although the chorus certainly seem to be referring to his recent threats of violence as opposed to his earlier language of mockery, this description of Dionysus sets the two characters in opposition to each other by means of their connection with laughter.[47] In simple terms, Pentheus engages in mockery as a means of control, whilst Dionysus encourages the cooperative laughter of play. These cannot coexist without conflict; the king's superior laughter places him in opposition to the *symposium* as an institution, and he becomes 'an embodiment of the aggressive, alienating laughter that is incompatible with sympotic concord' (Halliwell 2008, 135).

[46] Concern for control of one's own costume is a recurring theme in this play and Greek drama more generally, see 5.4.2 on Pentheus' dressing scene.
[47] Halliwell (2008, 134) notes the *hubris* described at 375 has 'unmistakable connotations of antagonistic ridicule'.

This conflict continues with the next instance of laughter, in which an attendant of Pentheus describes their attempt to capture the stranger:

Θε. Πενθεῦ, πάρεσμεν τήνδ’ ἄγραν ἠγρευκότες
ἐφ’ ἣν ἔπεμψας, οὐδ’ ἄκρανθ’ ὡρμήσαμεν.
ὁ θὴρ δ’ ὅδ’ ἡμῖν πρᾶος οὐδ’ ὑπέσπασεν
φυγῇ πόδ’, ἀλλ’ ἔδωκεν οὐκ ἄκων χέρας
οὐδ’ ὠχρός, οὐδ’ ἤλλαξεν οἰνωπὸν γένυν,
γελῶν δὲ καὶ δεῖν κἀπάγειν ἐφίετο
ἔμενέ τε, τοὐμὸν εὐτρεπὲς ποιούμενος.
κἀγὼ δι’ αἰδοῦς εἶπον· Ὦ ξέν’, οὐχ ἑκὼν
ἄγω σε, Πενθέως δ’ ὅς μ’ ἔπεμψ’ ἐπιστολαῖς. (E. *Ba*. 434-442)

At. Pentheus, we are present having caught this prey
for which you sent us, and we have not set out in vain.
This beast was gentle to us and did not withdraw
in flight on foot, but gave his hands not unwillingly
neither pale, nor did he alter his wine-coloured cheek,
but laughing he allowed us to bind him and to lead him away,
and he waited, making my task straightforward.
And out of shame, I said: ‘Oh stranger, not willingly
do I lead you, but by the orders of Pentheus who sent me.

This description is strongly reminiscent of the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (7), in which pirates attempt to bind Dionysus, thinking him a mortal prince. In this hymn, the bonds fail to hold the god, which elicits a smile from him: ὃ δὲ μειδιάων ἐκάθητο / ὄμμασι κυανέοισι ‘and he sat smiling / in his dark eyes’ (7.14-15). To resolve the situation, Dionysus ultimately transforms himself into a lion and seizes the helmsman. The other pirates quickly jump ship and are changed into dolphins (7.52-3), but Dionysus is merciful towards the helmsman too, making the man πανόλβιον ‘truly blessed’ (7.54) and revealing his divine identity. In the *Homeric Hymn*, as in this excerpt of *Bacchae*, Dionysus is the target of men who wish to seize him, and in both he responds with gelastic behaviour. Indeed, Dionysus’ response is only altered slightly by Euripides in *Bacchae*, γελῶν ‘laughing’ replacing his μειδιάων ‘smiling’ and an οἰνωπὸν γένυν ‘wine-coloured cheek’ in place of ὄμματα κυάνεα ‘dark eyes’. When read in tandem with the hymn, Euripides’ references to Dionysus as ἄγραν ‘prey’ and as a θὴρ ‘beast’ reflect the irony of the men’s perception of the god as a hunted animal, instead of the powerful λέων ‘lion’ he may

become (7.44).[48] Moreover, the associations with the *Homeric Hymn* further make the case for Dionysus' link with playful, cooperative laughter. Even in the case of his abduction by pirates, he chooses to be merciful; the sailors' transformation into dolphins is portrayed as a positive outcome, as they avoid the otherwise κακὸν μορόν 'terrible fate' (7.51) of drowning. At this point in the narrative, Pentheus too may escape his own κακὸν μορόν, should he correctly interpret the signs of the god's powers. The attendant reveals that he distanced himself from the task of binding the god δι' αἰδοῦς 'out of shame', stating that he acts οὐχ ἑκὼν 'not willingly' but under the orders of Pentheus. In contrast, Pentheus' sense of αἰδώς is caught up in the optics of his grandfather's behaviour, at the expense of considering the consequences of his own actions. Moreover, the attendant's address to the god as ὦ ξένε 'o stranger/guest' draws attention to his maltreatment. The irony of Dionysus' rejection is doubly felt; he is not only a misidentified god, but he is the divinity of the *symposium* itself –an institution founded on *xenia*– and is denied acceptance from his mortal host. In essence, Pentheus' hostility and the superior laughter that reflects it is countered by Dionysus' acceptance of his reluctant host's insult, undermining Pentheus' act of aggression by turning it into a site of play.

The next two references to laughter in *Bacchae* return the audience swiftly to the realm of mockery, social corrective and punishment. These sandwich Pentheus' dressing scene, in which Pentheus adopts the dress and behaviour of a maenad whilst under the influence of Dionysus. At this point, Pentheus has decided upon violence as the means to deal with the women on the mountains, but here the stranger interrupts to suggest that he instead should disguise himself as a bacchant to infiltrate the group (809-846). Stevens (1988, 248) considers Dionysus' dominion of Pentheus as incomplete in this scene, and Pentheus certainly does betray elements of his previous protestations despite his increasing open-mindedness. He evokes his shame at wearing clothing that is perceived as feminine: τίνα στολήν; ἦ θῆλυν; ἀλλ' αἰδώς μ' ἔχει 'What dress? Female? But shame holds me' (828). Pentheus, who earlier ridiculed his grandfather for wearing maenadic accoutrements (250-2), unsurprisingly holds himself to similar standards of dress. To don specifically θῆλυν 'female' clothing would transgresses further than Tiresias and Cadmus. If Pentheus is to do this, he wants to avoid the citizens of Thebes, whom he refers to as the Καδμείους 'Kadmeians' (840), emphasising their shared heritage and norms. Dionysus (falsely) promises ὁδοὺς ἐρήμους 'empty roads' (841) and Pentheus responds with an insight into his view of laughter:

Πε. πᾶν κρεῖσσον ὥστε μὴ 'γγελᾶν βάκχας ἐμοί.
ἐλθόντ' ἐς οἴκους . . . ἂν δοκῇ βουλεύσομαι. (E. *Ba.* 842-843)

[48] See Segal (1997, 27-54) on the mythic connections between Dionysus, hunting and animals, and the role of these associations in *Bacchae.*

Pe. Anything is better than the bacchants mocking me.
Going into the palace . . . I will deliberate on what seems best.

This superlative statement from Pentheus is the last insight into his personal viewpoint before he returns to the stage clothed as a maenad and totally enthralled by Dionysian worship. On a basic level, his anxiety is that he will become the object of superior laughter, evident from his use of the compound ἐγγελάω 'mock'.[49] More specifically, the laughing subjects he imagines are not the citizen-males of Thebes, but the βάκχας 'bacchants', the female followers of Dionysus that he recently suggested using physical violence against. Stevens (1988, 247) is correct to emphasise that the mockery Pentheus fears from the bacchants is not regarding his maenadic appearance, but rather is an expression of the bacchants' triumph over him. However, the gendered aspect of his fear of laughter should not be removed entirely from this instance. Earlier in this thesis, section 2.2 explored the policing of female laughter in Greek tragedy, and Pentheus' expression here serves as another example of the particularly strong emotional quality regarding the interpretation of female laughter. Just as the maids' laughter evoked Odysseus' anger more than any other of his mistreatments in the *Odyssey*, the bacchants' mockery is the worst imaginable fate to Pentheus – worse indeed than the ridicule of his fellow citizens.[50]

When read in terms of the policing of female laughter and the sexual licence it is associated with, the climax of *Bacchae* presents an averted *Odyssey* 22 – Pentheus, dressed as a maenad, will instead suffer the violence he had intended for the women of Thebes.[51] As Pentheus leaves the stage, Dionysus promises his punishment at the hands of the bacchants, following his humiliation in front of the male citizens of Thebes:

Δι. πρῶτα δ' ἔκστησον φρενῶν,
ἐνεὶς ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν· ὡς φρονῶν μὲν εὖ
οὐ μὴ θελήσῃ θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν,
ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐνδύσεται.
χρῄζω δέ νιν γέλωτα Θηβαίοις ὀφλεῖν
γυναικόμορφον ἀγόμενον δι' ἄστεως
ἐκ τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν πρίν, αἷσι δεινὸς ἦν. (E. *Ba*. 850-6)

Di. But first drive him out of his mind,

[49] The commonplace fear of mockery in tragedy is discussed at 1.1.
[50] See 2.2.4 on anger, laughter and female sexuality in the *Odyssey*.
[51] As in the *Odyssey*, Pentheus imagines the women freely engaging in sexual activities (E. *Ba*. 215-225), and imagines the stranger's motivations to be sexual too (E. *Ba*. 234-9, 353-5).

inspire a light-headed madness; as thinking rightly
he would not want to put on female dress,
but driving outside of his senses he will put it on.
I desire for him to incur laughter from the Thebans
as he is led through the town woman-shaped
after his earlier threats, with which he was terrible.

Here, Dionysus clearly distinguishes between Pentheus' personal wishes and those that are divinely inspired. He calls for an ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν 'light-headed madness' to remove Pentheus' remaining self-control, and contrasts Pentheus' desire not to wear the clothing with the lack of inhibitions he will feel whilst ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν 'driving outside his senses'.[52] The verb ὀφλισκάνω 'incur' appears as in *Medea* (404, 1049) to emphasise the sense of merited punishment, which Dionysus also stresses that Pentheus has earned ἐκ τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν πρίν 'after his earlier threats'. The irony of Pentheus' punishment is only increased when the parallels with his observations about the stranger are noted, as Ruffell (2022, 246) notes that Dionysus' use of γυναικόμορφον 'woman-shaped' evokes Pentheus' earlier (condemning) description of Dionysus as θηλύμορφον 'female-shaped' (353). It is not just Pentheus' maenadic and feminine dress, but also the reversal of his attitude towards the Dionysian that constitutes his humiliation.[53] Evidently, the γέλωτα is a key part of Dionysus' revenge on Pentheus, but it seems to serve as a more general warning too. Dionysus' specific reference to the Θηβαίοις 'men of Thebes' as subjects of the superior laughter indicates that he intends to parade Pentheus before his own citizens.[54] They are expected to find Pentheus ridiculous just as he found Cadmus so. However, at the same time, Pentheus' public humiliation acts as a social corrective to his subjects, warning them of the gods' power to punish those who reject him.

As the chorus of worshippers encourage the vengeance of their god, they describe him in gelastic terms:

Χο. ἴθ', ὦ Βάκχε, θηραγρευτᾷ βακχᾶν
γελῶντι προσώπῳ περίβαλε βρόχον
θανάσιμον ὑπ' ἀγέλαν πεσόν-
τι τὰν μαινάδων. (E. *Ba*. 1020-1023)

[52] Tiresias earlier observed Pentheus' μανία 'madness' (326) in rejecting the god, and here he is ironically punished with true divine λύσσαν 'madness' (851), much like the women on the hillside (33). This connection between perceived madness and mockery is similar to that of Cassandra in *Agamemnon*, on which see 7.2.2.
[53] The costuming similarities between Dionysus and Pentheus are further discussed at 5.4.2.
[54] Whilst the parallel is somewhat vague, Seaford (1996, 217) notes that these lines evoke the mockery of the mystic initiands on the road to Eleusis, and observes the role of humiliation and status reversal in rites of passage more generally.

Cho. Go, o Bacchus, onto the hunter of the bacchants
with a laughing face throw a deadly noose
as he falls under the herd
of maenads.

Here, for the first time in the tragedy, Dionysus' own laughter is no longer that of harmless play. On the surface, this laughter appears to be that of superiority, and the connotations are certainly present. The chorus stress the god's capacity for violence at the same time as his smiling expression, implying he will act as Pentheus' hangman γελῶντι προσώπῳ 'with a laughing face'. Immediately this evokes the laughter of superiority that is commonly feared and anticipated in tragedy. However, as became evident in section 1.4, this ethic is rarely presented without complication in extant works, and *Bacchae* is no exception. To fully appreciate the chorus' evocation of Dionysus' appearance, it is important to consider the visual dimension of the tragedy's performance so far. The chorus' description here is the only textual evidence for an idiosyncratic piece of the god's costume: his smiling mask.[55] As actors would generally only wear one mask throughout a tragedy, this same smiling mask would most likely have represented Dionysus both as the stranger and the manifest divinity *ex machina*.[56] As such, the ambiguity of the gelastic expression allows for this intense shift in Dionysus' intentions – it has the range to reflect the stranger's playful demeanour and the god's vengeful satisfaction. In the *Odyssey*, Halliwell (2008, 88) observes a contrast between smiles and laughter – namely that smiling is 'laden with oblique, knowing significance' whilst characters' laughter can often betray their ignorance. The same appears to be true of Dionysus' smile throughout *Bacchae*, which acts as a constant reminder of his divinity and ultimate control over the events of the tragedy. Foley stresses the smiling mask's metatheatrical reminder to the audience of Dionysus' identity: 'the audience sees by his mask that the stranger is a god, but Pentheus has no such theatrical cues by which to recognise him' (1980, 128). Therefore, the chorus' evocation of Dionysus' smiling vengeance is not necessarily a sudden expression of superiority. Rather, it serves to pull focus to the smiling mask which has been present throughout the tragedy, and is emblematic of Dionysus' godhead.

Nevertheless, the persistence of Dionysus' gelastic expression is arguably more unsettling than the superior laughter at an enemy, precisely because it still holds its playful connotations. Throughout the tragedy thus far, Dionysus has been closely associated with playful laughter, and therefore his

[55] Taplin (1996, 199) rightly distinguishes Dionysus' gelastic mask from those of Old Comedy, which were distinguished by their grotesque features as opposed to the expression they depicted. In contrast, tragic masks were usually blank and expressionless (1996, 189).
[56] Foley (1980, 128): 'One mask represents two meanings in a manner that captures the central irony of the dramatic action'.

smiling mask has come to signify this to Euripides' audience. Regarding Dionysus' punishment of Pentheus, Halliwell observes: 'The god *replicates* his own enemy's derisive disposition in the act of punishing it' (2008, 137, original emphasis). Certainly, the god emphasises his intention to inspire the derisive laughter of the Thebans (854-6), but his own gelastic expression remains unchanged and he does not mock Pentheus directly. Moreover, his punishment of Pentheus is decidedly playful. The chorus' reference to Dionysus' smiling mask comes after Dionysus' final staged conversation with Pentheus, a dressing scene in which Pentheus adjusts his maenadic clothing and consults Dionysus about the appropriate way to act as his bacchant (see 5.4.2). Regardless of the scene's tonal quality, it certainly depicts Dionysus toying with his prey; the god exerts physical control over Pentheus' maenadic costume (932-934), guiding the non-believer on how best to act as a bacchant (941-944). The great deal of attention Pentheus pays to his clothing and role jars strongly with his earlier outright rejection of Dionysiac costuming and rites. In an ironic reversal of his opposition, he now enthusiastically adopts an exaggeratedly gendered version of the maenadic costume that he considered ridiculous on his grandfather (πολὺν γέλων, 250). Therefore, Dionysus playfully makes Pentheus transgress his own standards and become an object of derision to the Thebans, whilst abstaining from mockery himself. Despite appearances, the chorus' reference to the god's smiling mask does not reflect his sudden adoption of ridicule, but rather a more sinister side to the god's association with playful laughter. Dionysus' playful approach to human punishment and even death reflects the god's detachment, and his consistent gelastic expression reveals this ambivalent aspect of divinity. Winnington-Ingram invites comparison to Dionysus' earlier playful laughter: 'now at last the meaning of the enigmatic smile with which the "gentle beast" surrendered to his captors (439) is made clear' (1948, 127). He is right to consider these smiles as one and the same; there is no shift from play to mockery, but all is play to the divinity. In this instance, the lack of empathy displayed by the god's playful laughter is more sinister, more reflective of his divinity and his total control, than mockery could ever be.

The final instance of textual laughter in *Bacchae* comes in a messenger speech detailing the events leading up to Pentheus' *sparagmos*, and it seems to reveal Dionysus' justification for the punishment:

Ἄγ . ἐκ δ' αἰθέρος φωνή τις, ὡς μὲν εἰκάσαι
Διόνυσος, ἀνεβόησεν· Ὦ νεάνιδες,
ἄγω τὸν ὑμᾶς κἀμὲ τἀμά τ' ὄργια
γέλων τιθέμενον· ἀλλὰ τιμωρεῖσθέ νιν. (E. *Ba*. 1078-1081)

Mes. A voice, Dionysus so far as one can guess,
shouted out from the sky: 'O young women,

> I lead to you the man who has made you and me and my rites
> a source of laughter; but punish him.

Although the messenger is not certain of the divinity's identity, he attributes the words to Dionysus and recalls the tragedy's only reported direct communication between the god and the women on the hillside. This communication has been pre-empted by Dionysus' earlier offstage shouts to the chorus, inciting the palace fire with direct imperatives as he does here with τιμωρεῖσθέ 'punish' (κλύετε 'hear', 576; σεῖε 'shake', 585; ἅπτε 'light', 594; σύμφλεγε 'burn up', 595). Particularly as the god is granted little undisguised communication with his followers until his final appearance as manifest *deus ex machina*, it is telling that he focuses specifically on Pentheus' connection to laughter. Borowski (2015, 371) interprets the laughter as referring to all of Pentheus' *hubris*, from his ridicule to his aggression, but the specificities of Pentheus' punishment invite another simultaneous reading. By means of Pentheus' dressing scene, Dionysus engineers a situation in which the king emulates the god, the bacchants and their rites. It is evident that Pentheus has thus far cultivated a culture of mockery at Thebes, as Dionysus expects his adoption of maenadic dress to invite the laughter of the townsmen (854). Pentheus has not only mocked the god directly, as Tiresias indicates (272, 286, 322), but, ironically, he has encouraged the ridicule of the Thebans towards those he emulates through his divinely-inspired costume change.[57] Thus Dionysus' parading of Pentheus before the townspeople becomes, in effect, a temperature check of Thebes' tolerance. Although the Thebans' reaction is not mentioned again after 854, presumably Dionysus succeeds in his effort to make the king an object of mockery. Pentheus tried to levy superior laughter at his grandfather to socially correct his adoption of maenadic accoutrements, and now his own costume change is judged by others according to the social expectations he has personally reinforced. As with much of the *Bacchae*, there is a double meaning here; Pentheus has made Dionysus, the bacchants and their rites a source of γέλων 'laughter' both by his outright rejection of the god, and through the mockery incurred by his belated adoption of its cult signifiers.

Certainly, Dionysus punishes Pentheus for his mockery, and in part that punishment involves inciting the superior laughter of the Thebans. However, Dionysus does not seem to actively engage in the mockery himself. His enigmatic smiling mask, though it can be interpreted as mocking from its vengeful context, is just as successfully explained by Dionysus' close association with playful laughter throughout the tragedy. The disarming Dionysus who escapes his bonds is responsible for literal *dis-arming* violence in the *sparagmos* of Pentheus, and he achieves both with the same playful smile. Halliwell (2008, 52) observes that the gods of epic do not laugh at human characters directly, and this

[57] Pentheus himself seems to anticipate a negative response from the Thebans, and wants to avoid their gaze (840).

appears to be true of the gods of extant tragedy too.[58] Despite the mocking intentions of Aeschylus' Furies and the ambivalence of Euripides' Dionysus and his playful smile, direct divine mockery of humans remains at best hypothetical in these works. Divinities may incite the ridicule of other human characters towards their adversaries, such as Athena's encouragement of Odysseus (*Aj*. 79) and Dionysus' baiting of the Thebans (*Ba*. 854). More common, however, is deities' objection to the mockery they perceive themselves to experience; Aeschylus' Furies twice lament their ridicule (*Eum*. 778-779, 788-790), and Euripides' Dionysus similarly expresses Pentheus' mockery as the reason for his punishment (*Ba*. 1080-1081).

3.5 Laughter & the natural world

3.5.1 Introduction

The extant instances of divine laughter in tragedy indicate that anthropomorphised gods are not depicted as directly laughing at human characters. Despite this, the persistence of their playful laughter in tragic circumstances reflects a detachment and ambivalence that is rarely shown by human characters.[59] Similarly, when the natural world is described in gelastic terms, its motivations and interpretations are ambiguous. In Greek myth and religion, the gods and the natural world exist on a continuum; for example, the sun may appear as the natural phenomenon (ἥλιος) or its deification as the sun god (Ἥλιος). For this section, I only assess the instances of laughter that are ascribed to elements of the natural world that are not otherwise anthropomorphised in their contexts. Given laughter's association with both superiority and play, it is a fitting metaphor for the ambivalent, changeable, and often indecipherable elements of the natural world. Nevertheless, only two examples survive in context from the tragic corpus, meaning that the vast majority of textual laughter in tragedy is ascribed to humans or anthropomorphic deities.

More broadly, laughter is not an uncommon metaphor for natural phenomena in Greek poetry. In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (3.118), the earth smiles as Leto gives birth to the god, mirroring her act: μείδησε δὲ γαῖ' ὑπένερθεν 'and the earth smiled from beneath' (3.118).[60] The laughter of the sea, sky and earth in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (2.13-14) is arguably not so supportive:

κῶζ' ἥδιστ' ὀδμή, πᾶς τ' οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὕπερθεν

[58] Two potential exceptions, Athena at S. *Aj*. 79 and Apollo at A. *Ag*. 1264-1272 are dealt with elsewhere in this thesis, 1.2 and 7.2.2 respectively. They are omitted here because their connection to laughter is brief and has a facilitating purpose: Athena's invitation is for Odysseus' laughter whilst Cassandra similarly interprets Apollo as causing her own mockery.

[59] Rather, human characters expected to mock instead are often depicted as sympathetic to their opponent's suffering; e.g. Odysseus (*Aj*. 121-126), Creon (*OT* 1422).

[60] The imagery of the smile acts as a reflection of the birth in the natural world. See chapter 3, n23 on the yonic connotations of φιλομμειδὴς 'smile-loving' Aphrodite. Similar also is Theog. 9-10: ἐγέλασσε δὲ γαῖα πελώρη 'and the huge earth laughed'.

γαῖά τε πᾶσ᾽ ἐγελάσσε καὶ ἁλμυρὸν οἶδμα θαλάσσης. (*Hom. Hymn.* 2.13-14)

The scent smelled very pleasant, and the whole of the wide heaven from above
and the whole earth laughed, and the salty swell of the sea.

Here, the elements laugh at the scent of the narcissus flower, signalling their appreciation.[61] However, the earth's laughter proves to be a precursor and perhaps a foreshadowing of the earth opening to swallow Persephone. As soon as she moves to pick the narcissus, χάνε δὲ χθὼν εὐρυάγυια 'the wide earth gaped open' (2.16). Despite this reversal, and the earth's complicity in her rape, the sight of the natural world becomes a solace for Persephone, and she finds hope in the γαῖάν 'earth', οὐρανὸν 'heaven', πόντον 'sea' and αὐγάς…ἠελίου 'rays of the sun' (2.33-37).

In these two poetic examples, the laughter of the natural world is unpredictable; it may reflect the divine events depicted in the hymns, but it is neither a clear warning nor a sign of security for the anthropomorphic protagonists. The same is the case for the two extant tragic examples, from *Prometheus Bound* and *Trojan Women*. Neither of the gelastic words used pertain specifically to mockery, nor is there sufficient context given to indicate that the laughter is playful. As such, discerning the type of laughter presented is not the aim of this section. Rather, these two examples serve to capture the ambivalence of laughter as a signifier in the natural world. Unlike the omniscient narrator of the *Homeric Hymns*, these tragic examples are spoken by characters with key roles in the dramatic action. As such, the existence and significance of the laughter is open to the interpretation of its witnesses and is influenced by their own experience of their circumstances.

3.5.2 *Prometheus Bound*

The first example comes from the pseudo-Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound*, which opens with its titular character being bound to a mountain rock by the anthropomorphised Κράτος 'Power' and Βία 'Force' (12).[62] Power informs the audience that this is Prometheus' punishment for bestowing fire upon mortals (7-11), and Hephaestus accompanies the two agents of Zeus despite his reservations – he himself is ἄτολμος 'undaring' (14), and does not wish to personally use force against a συγγενῆ θεὸν 'kindred god' (14).[63] Nevertheless, the Olympian describes Prometheus' punishment:

Ἥφ. τῆς ὀρθοβούλου Θέμιδος αἰπυμῆτα παῖ,

[61] The elements' reaction to the flower is similar to gods' playful enjoyment of music, see section 3.3.1.
[62] I am hesitant to ascribe the authorship to Aeschylus, following the evidence presented by Griffith (1977) and West (1979). I do, however, consider the tragedy to have been composed during the 440-430s due to its similarities to early Sophocles and Euripides, and as such consider it valuable evidence as a source of laughter in fifth-century tragedy. See Griffith (1977, 9-13, 252-4).
[63] The dynamic of willing and unwilling agents is like that of Iris and Lyssa in *Heracles*, on which see 3.2.2.

ἄκοντά σ' ἄκων δυσλύτοις χαλκεύμασι
προσπασσαλεύσω τῷδ' ἀπανθρώπῳ πάγῳ,
ἵν' οὔτε φωνὴν οὔτε του μορφὴν βροτῶν
ὄψῃ, σταθευτὸς δ' ἡλίου φοίβῃ φλογὶ
χροιᾶς ἀμείψεις ἄνθος· ἀσμένῳ δέ σοι
ἡ ποικιλείμων νὺξ ἀποκρύψει φάος,
πάχνην θ' ἑῴαν ἥλιος σκεδᾷ πάλιν· (Ps-A. *PB* 18-25)

Heph. High-thinking son of wise-counselling Themis,
unwilling, I shall fix you, unwilling, with indissoluble
brazen bonds to this uninhabited rock,
where you will neither [hear] a mortal voice nor see a
mortal form, but burnt by the bright flame of the sun
you will lose the bloom of your complexion; and
starry-spangled night will hide you, glad, from the light
and in the morning the sun again will melt the frost.

In the absence of anthropomorphic companionship from either gods or the βροτῶν 'mortals' he has championed, Prometheus' only company will be the realities of the natural world: ἥλιος 'sun' and νὺξ 'night'. As for the nature of these companions, the benefits and disadvantages of day and night are juxtaposed so that neither is particularly preferable, but each offers solace from the pains of the other. On the one hand, the sun will make Prometheus σταθευτὸς 'burnt', but it will also melt the πάχνην 'frost' that freezes him by night. Similarly, the night-time will protect the Titan from the φάος 'light' that scorches, and he will be ἄσμενος 'glad' for it despite the cold it brings. In this way, the natural world will provide both his punishment and his companionship: it is neither ἐχθρός 'enemy' nor φίλος 'friend', but displays elements of each.

This same ambivalence is reflected in Hephaestus' own attitude towards the Titans' treatment. He is reticent, equally as ἄκων 'unwilling' as Prometheus to exact the punishment on account of their shared divinity. At the same time, Hephaestus appreciates Prometheus' act as a transgression of that shared status – the Titan has overstepped: θεὸς θεῶν γὰρ οὐχ ὑποπτήσσων χόλον 'for as a god, you did not bow to the wrath of the gods' (29). As such, he suffers the loss of divine privileges, instead facing a punishment that historically seems to have been inflicted upon low-class criminals and traitors – exposure.[64] In light of this great reversal of status, Prometheus' isolation presents a conundrum: 'for

[64] As ancient sources for the punishment, Griffith (1983, 88) cites Hom. *Od*. 22.173-99, Hdt. 7.33, 9.120, Ar. *Th*. 931ff, Plut. *Per*. 28.

Prometheus the prospect of total separation from the humans whose cause he espoused arouses mixed feelings: with part of his soul he is glad not to have the humiliation and abuse to which he is being subjected on public view, while at the same time he regrets the absence of any witnesses to his maltreatment' (Podlecki 2005, 159-160). Following reversals, human characters of tragedy often seek concealment, solitude, or death, but relief usually comes from the companionship of others in their suffering.[65] Of course, Prometheus is already isolated, and death is not an option for the immortal. So, in the absence of any anthropomorphic companions, the Titan calls upon the natural elements as witnesses to the injustice of his suffering:

Πρ. ὦ δῖος αἰθὴρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί,
ποταμῶν τε πηγαί, ποντίων τε κυμάτων
ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, παμμῆτόρ τε γῆ,
καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ·
ἴδεσθέ μ' οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός. (Ps-A. *PB* 88-92)

Pr. O heavenly ether and swift-winged winds,
and river springs, and countless laughter
of sea waves, and mother of all, Earth,
and all-seeing sphere of the sun, I call:
see the sort of things I, a god, suffer from the gods.

Griffith (1983, 101) notes that it is commonplace for isolated speakers in tragedy to address the air, sky and sun, to the extent that the trope was parodied in comedy.[66] In many of these cases, the speakers express a sense of isolation, but nowhere is the address to the elements so literal as here, as Prometheus is bound in a potentially permanent solitude.[67] Among the witnesses of his suffering, he lists the ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα 'countless laughter' of the sea's waves.

In terms of the phrase's meaning, Borowski (2015, 171) observes that the laughter metaphor most likely refers to the visual image of the sunlight upon the sea as opposed to the sound of the crashing waves.[68] On the one hand, this laughter reflects the sea's ambivalence; in the same way as the sun and

[65] For requests for concealment, solitude and death, see e.g. S. *OT* 1409-1412, *Aj*. 361, E. *Her*. 1146-1162, *Med*. 143-7, *Ba*. 1381-1387. For companionship as relief, see e.g. E. *Her*. 1313-1339.
[66] Griffith (1983, 101) cites S. *El*. 86, 424, *Ph*. 936ff., E. *Med*. 57-8, *Andr*. 93, *Hec*. 68ff, *IT*. 42-3. For comedy, see Theognetus fr. 1.9 K, Philemon fr. 79.1-2 K, Plautus *Merc*. 3ff. In the address to the sun as πανόπτην 'all seeing', Podlecki (2005, 164) notes the similarity to the prayers of Aeschylus' Orestes and Cassandra, both of which concern justice for the speaker; *Cho*. 985-6 (Orestes), *Ag*. 1323-6 (Cassandra).
[67] The punishment's eternal nature is certainly at least implied by Hephaestus, describing it as αἰεὶ 'always' (26).
[68] See also Griffith (1983, 102 on 90) on γέλασμα as 'the twinkling of the sunlight on the surface', comparing the image of the earth laughing 'by means of bronze' at *Il*. 19.362. This visual reading is also most sense-related

night will burn and freeze the god respectively, the sea will continues to sparkle with ἀνήριθμον 'countless' laughter despite the injustice done to Prometheus. At the same time, the image evokes the beauty of the natural world which provided such respite for Persephone in her time of need. The laughing appearance of the sea's waves provides a stark contrast to the ugly faces of the anthropomorphic Power and Force, perhaps offering some consolation to Prometheus.[69] The gods, and not the elements, are his true adversaries. Thus the indecipherable laughter here may be read as a projection of his enemies' triumph, or the beauty of the natural world that continues on in spite of his personal suffering. Notably, Prometheus does not explain to his audience what the laughter means to him, so the γέλασμα of the waves remains as interpretively open as it is ἀνήριθμον 'countless'.

3.5.3 *Trojan Women*

The second example of the natural world's laughter comes from Euripides' *Trojan Women*, in which the Trojan queen Hecuba laments the death of her grandson, Astyanax, before performing his burial (1156-1250). The young boy has recently been thrown from the walls of Troy, and Hecuba grieves over his body:

Ἑκ. δύστηνε, κρατὸς ὥς σ' ἔκειρεν ἀθλίως
τείχη πατρῷα, Λοξίου πυργώματα,
ὃν πόλλ' ἐκήπευσ' ἡ τεκοῦσα βόστρυχον
φιλήμασίν τ' ἔδωκεν, ἔνθεν ἐκγελᾷ
ὀστέων ῥαγέντων φόνος, ἵν' αἰσχρὰ μὴ στέγω. (E. *Tr*. 1173-7)

Hec. Wretched one, how miserably your father's walls,
furnished with Apollo's towers, have shorn from your head
the curl which your mother often tended,
and gave kisses, from where laughs out
murder from broken bones, lest I hide shameful things.[70]

due to Prometheus' placement at the top of a mountain, far from the sea but at a high vantage point. Borowski (2015, 170) observes another reference to a laughing sea in the tragic fragments, as fr. 336 reads ἀκύματος δὲ πορθμὸς ἐν φρίκῃ γελᾷ 'the calm sea laughs in its ripples (transl. Borowski). Unfortunately, the context is lost, but the image reinforces the reading of the sea's laughter as referring to its reflection of sunlight as opposed to its waves.

[69] Podlecki (2005, 160-161) considers ὅμοια μορφῇ γλῶσσά σου γηρύεται 'your mouth speaks similarly to your appearance' (78) as evidence that 'their masks and attire show them to be unpleasant types', which have 'almost parodic horror'.

[70] Diggle (1981, 233) amends the manuscripts' λέγω to στέγω 'lest I *hide* shameful things', which provides a convincing justification for Hecuba's choice of words. The alternative reading with λέγω 'lest I *speak* shameful things' is explained by Lee (1997, 262) as 'an apology for the metaphor which may have seemed offensive'.

In its sheer gruesome horror, this is arguably the bleakest use of gelastic language in the extant tragic corpus, and it paints a vivid image to Euripides' audience of the damage inflicted upon the child's body.[71] The pathos of the scene is enhanced by Hecuba's focus on the extreme change in both the boy's body and the value ascribed to it. Mouths are repeatedly evoked in her speech, from the φιλήμασίν 'kisses' of his mother Andromache, to the φίλον στόμα 'dear mouth' (1180) of the boy himself, whose words Hecuba quotes. The vivid picture Hecuba paints of the intimate familial memories jars with the reality of the child's death; his φίλον 'dear' and animated face is now disfigured, substituted by the laughing face of his fatal wounds.

In this context, the use of the verb ἐκγελάω 'laugh out loud' is unusual, and LSJ emphasises the aural qualities of the metaphor.[72] Alternatively, some scholars highlight the visual dimension of the image, ascribing the more general image of a smile to the verb.[73] In a reading that captures the verb's aural and visual elements simultaneously, Arnould (1990, 139) proposes a double meaning for the phrase, exploiting the multiple meanings of the verb's subject: φόνος, as 'murder' or 'blood'. Paired with ἐκγελάω, the metaphor depicts the visual dimension of blood escaping the head, and also captures an aural aspect that reflects the cruelty of the crime: 'murder laughs out'. For Arnould (*ibid.*), the metaphor acts as a reflection of the mocking laughter of the Greeks in triumph.[74] Although ἐκγελάω does not specifically pertain to mockery, Hecuba's interpretation of the sight as αἰσχρὰ 'shameful' supports this reading, as she uses the same word to describe a hypothetical inscription concerning the Greeks' infanticide (1191). Another fruitful explanation for the gelastic verb comes from Allen-Hornblower (2014), who notes the recurrence of the phrasing from *Iliad* 6.471-475. In these lines, Hector and Andromache laugh aloud at their son's fear of Hector's helmet: ἐκ δ' ἐγέλασσε πατήρ τε φίλος καὶ πότνια μήτηρ 'dear father and queenly mother laughed aloud' (6.471).[75] Allen-Hornblower posits that their laughter brings shared relief from the anxieties of the war, allowing for Hector's brief expression of hope for his son's future (6.476-481). In this reading, Euripides evokes the moving, gelastic Homeric scene just as its hopes are dashed. Hector's plans for his son's future are now impossible, emphasised all the more by his burial in his father's shield: an emblem of both Hector's defensive defeat, and the armour that briefly brought the family emotional respite through laughter.

[71] Barlow (1986, 221): 'an extremely bold, not to say grotesque, metaphor'; the gelastic metaphor is, as Lee (1997, 262) suggests, likely to substitute for a visual representation of the boy's wounds, and arguably strikes the audience's imagination more vividly than a dramatic portrayal would render possible.
[72] LSJ (I) on *Tr.* 1176-7: 'a liquid that comes out with a *gurgling* sound'. Lee (1976, 262) contests this reading on the grounds that blood coming from a head-wound would be too slow to make a sound resembling laughter.
[73] Kovacs (1999, 125): 'the blood now appears in a smiling gash, to speak the ugly truth plainly'; Denniston (1936, 116): 'the white strip of bone between two strips of blood is compared to a set of teeth smiling between two red lips'.
[74] Arnould (1990, 139): 'à la fois éclat lumineaux du sang et de la cervelle, et éclats de rire des ennemis, satisfaits de leur crime'.
[75] This is discussed as an example of playful familial laughter at 1.3.

The rich variety of scholars' interpretations of this instance of laughter is testament to the quality of the gelastic metaphor in its context. Scholarship has teased out the visual and aural aspects of the vivid description, and its potential to evoke both the mockery of enemies (Arnould) and playful familial laughter (Allen-Hornblower). Surely, it is the ambivalence of the laughter of the natural world that enables these multiple readings to coexist. In each of these tragic examples, laughter acts as a touchstone for the ambivalence of the natural world to personal suffering, whether human or divine. This can be read by its interpreters as either reassuring, as perhaps is the case in *Prometheus Bound*, or as reflective of the world's cruelty, as in the case of *Trojan Women*. In both instances, the nature of the laughter remains enigmatic; as it is read onto natural phenomena, it is neither obviously superior or playful. Rather, it is used metaphorically by tragic characters to describe their perception of the world in relation to their suffering.

3.6 Conclusion

Laughter associated with the divine can be theorised by the same principles that govern laughter between human characters, the social theories of superiority and play. Divinely-inspired 'mad' laughter is in one context clearly superior, and in another, ambiguously playful; Ajax mocks the generals, as he believes he is punishing them, whilst Heracles' laughter is easily mistaken for play due to his depiction as a loving father. The relatively few examples of laughter among the gods are generally associated with play, though there is a trend in Sophoclean tragedy for heroes to attribute human laughter, both superior and playful, to the will of the gods. The majority of this chapter centres on laughter between gods and humans, as depicted in two works in which deities consider themselves mocked by mortals – Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Bacchae*. Although these divinities retaliate to being mocked, neither play appears to present their action uncritically. The Furies, unable to secure Orestes' punishment, lament their loss in terms of their own humiliation. Similarly, *Bacchae* depicts a Dionysus who, although he is content toying with his human adversary, does not decide to punish Pentheus until he threatens his followers with physical violence. In both plays, mockery from the divinities is implied, or encouraged from others, rather than explicitly staged. Halliwell's (2008, 52) observation of epic, that gods do not laugh at humans, holds true of these tragedies, although these deities wish mockery upon their human enemies. Finally, the relatively scarce metaphorical usage of γέλως-vocabulary referring to the natural world is studied in two examples, from the pseudo-Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*. In the former, laughter is a fitting metaphor for the ambivalent natural world Prometheus faces – his only comfort and his punisher. In the latter, the laughter of the natural world reflects upon its insensitivity to human affairs and suffering, simultaneously evoking happier times.

Chapter 4 – Tragic Jokes

'I have often said, and oftener think, that this world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel — a solution of why Democritus laughed and Heraclitus wept'
Horace Walpole, 'Letter to Sir Horace Mann, 31 December 1769' (1937-1983, 166).

4.1 Introduction

The jokes assessed in this section are all identified as distinct from other types of humour by their inclusion of a punchline, a trigger word or phrase which provides an unexpected shift in meaning.[1] Many theorists maintain that all types of humour rely on a shift in expectations to a different degree, namely those who accept incongruity as a necessary condition of humour. Incongruity theory, though the basis of the most popular existing theory of humour, has been overlooked so far in this thesis on laughter. For the most part, this is due to its limitations regarding laughter as a phenomenon that extends beyond humour; Eagleton (2019, 89) suggests that even if incongruity theory can explain *what* we laugh at, it still does not account for *why*. Whilst superiority and play theories give a better account of laughter's social purposes, incongruity theory does help to explain what precisely it is that renders something amusing. Although some indications towards such a theory are found in Aristotle (*Rh.* 3.11.6), Hutcheson is generally cited as bringing incongruity theory to prominence in his eighteenth-century *Reflections upon Laughter*, which specifically critiques Hobbes.[2] For Hutcheson, the most successful type of wit contains 'the pleasure of surprise' (Hutcheson 1750, 18), which stems from the fusion of unexpected ideas (1750, 19). This is the key to incongruity theory, which posits that comic amusement derives from deviation from an expectation or norm. Therefore, incongruous humour depends upon its audience having a knowledge of the shared norms and 'congruities' that exist within cultures (Carroll 2014, 27). For example, incongruity is a key aspect of this one-liner from Ken Cheng, winner of Dave's Funniest Joke of the Fringe (The Scotsman 2017): 'I'm not a fan of the new pound coin, but then again, I hate all change.' The wordplay in this joke will only be appreciated by an audience aware of the double meaning of the word 'change', an important congruity on which the joke functions. All the jokes considered in this chapter contain a punchline that triggers some sort of incongruity, or deviation from an expectation.

Despite the increasing amount of work concerning the existence of humour within and in response to the most devastating of human circumstances,[3] jokes in tragedy remain a relatively

[1] OED: 'the final phrase or sentence of a joke, story, etc., providing the humour or some other crucial element'. On the punchline, see Oring (1989).
[2] For Hobbes and superiority, see 1.1.
[3] Studies such as Gournelos & Greene (2011), *A Decade of Dark Humor: How Comedy, Irony and Satire Shaped Post-9/11 America*; Lionis (2016), *Laughter in Occupied Palestine*; Slucki, Finder & Patt (2020), *Laughter After: Humour and the Holocaust*.

contentious issue. Criticism tends to arise from three areas of engagement: ethics, aesthetics and affect. Ethics has a rather insidious bearing upon the reception of tragic jokes, in that it is rarely announced as a reason for their dismissal. Rather, it manifests as an absence of work on the topic. A similar pattern has emerged in scholarship on Old Comedy. Henderson, writing on obscenity in Aristophanes, observes scholars' general avoidance of the topic: it is 'something of an embarrassment to writers on ancient comedy' (1991, xiiv). Embarrassment, as described at 1.1, typically leads to an avoidance or distancing from its cause. On Aristophanic obscenity, some of the critiques are aesthetic: 'the notion that none of this material has any relevance to the actual meaning and value of the plays; it is usually assumed that the plays would be better without it' (Henderson 1991, xiv). Historically, many of these critiques have also had ethical dimensions, such as the suggestion that obscenity is difficult to reconcile with the other aspects of the text because of its baseness, or the (classist) view that it is intended to entertain only the uneducated.[4] Whilst ethics is, of course, culturally defined, these critics seem to lack the self-awareness of their own specific cultural situation and the limits on ethical and aesthetic evaluations they impose. As Donna Haraway has theorised, each individual has only their 'limited location and situated knowledge' (1988, 583) with which to make sense of the world. By paying further attention to Old Comedy's obscenities, Henderson reaches the conclusion: 'The obscenity in Aristophanes is almost always integrally connected with the main themes of the plays; it is an important part of the stage action, the development of plots, and the characterization of personae, and can no more readily be excised from the plays than can any other major dramatic or poetic ingredients' (Henderson 1991, xiv).

In the tragic tradition, jokes have received much the same side-lining in scholarship as comedic obscenity, and similarly demand closer attention. Their repeated dismissal appears to be inherited from literary criticism that arose later within the classical period. In response to negative criticism of poetry, such as Plato's ban on poetry within his ideal state (*Rep.* 10.607b), Aristotle, though not himself hostile to drama, responds to this ethical criticism of poetry by making further ethical distinctions.[5] In *Poetics*, his generic distinctions between tragedy and comedy are couched in ethical terms, particularly the notion that comedy depicts a μίμησις φαυλοτέρων 'representation of lower people' (1449a32-3). 'Low' comedy is contrasted with its sister genre; μίμησίς ἐστιν ἡ τραγῳδία βελτιόνων ἢ ἡμεῖς 'tragedy is the representation of those better than us' (1454b8-9). These same ethical evaluations bear upon Aristotle's (elitist) assessment of poetry's aesthetics in regard to audiences: εἰ γὰρ ἡ ἧττον φορτικὴ βελτίων, τοιαύτη δ᾽ ἡ πρὸς βελτίους θεατάς ἐστιν ἀεί, λίαν δῆλον ὅτι ἡ ἅπαντα μιμουμένη φορτική 'for if the less vulgar is better, and it is this sort which is always for the better spectators, then it is clear that the

[4] Murray (1933, 1) identifies Aristophanic obscenity as seemingly incompatible with his comedies' other modes of expression, Wit-Tak (1968, 357) critiques the prevailing critical opinion that obscenity in Old Comedy acts as 'a sort of concession to the groundlings, for which the upper strata of the audience were indemnified by the high intentions, the lyrics and the aesthetic forms of comedy'.
[5] Aristotle responds to specific ethical critiques at e.g. *Poet.* 1461a.

[art] which imitates everything is excessively vulgar' (1461b27-9).[6] This sort of aesthetic value judgement has unfortunately affected more recent criticism of tragedy, which often assumes that there is a 'correct' way of engaging with and interpreting ancient texts.

For example, Taplin observes that 'those who enjoy seeing jokes in tragedy rarely have much sense of theatre beyond the text' (1986, 272). The implication that jokes cannot cohesively be employed in the performance of tragedy is an argument I seek to counter in this thesis, but this criticism does also strike at the heart of a historical problem in the study of theatre as literature: its abstraction from its performance context. Simultaneously, much study of jokes has focused on their linguistic or textual qualities rather than their performance aspects. Fortunately, the performative turn in the humanities and social sciences, greatly influenced regarding classical theatre by Taplin himself, has generated much greater scholarly attention to the performance context of both tragedy and jokes.[7] More recent humour theorists have observed the limitations of divorcing jokes from the instances of their utterance. Jokes do not occur in a vacuum; the same joke told by an array of different people in different circumstances may be open to completely distinct interpretations in each of its instances. As context has such a great influence on the reception of jokes, Gaut (1998, 53) concludes that: 'We should talk at the most basic level not of joke-types, but of the production of joke-tokens in a context (that is, of joke-utterances, not of jokes as abstract texts)'. Similarly, writing on Old Comedy, Ruffell (2011, 58) has rightly emphasised the importance of joke context, that their 'serious' elements cannot be entirely extracted from their humour. For a theatrical audience, the placement of the joke amidst the play's narrative is important to consider, as well as its metatheatrical situation in the performance context of the dramatic festival and the culture sustaining it. As such, the jokes I analyse in this section will be addressed with regards to their narrative and performance contexts, as joke-tokens, rather than as isolated excerpts of text, joke-types. Assessing joke-tokens within the dramatic context in which they have been transmitted, rather than solely seeking to justify their abstracted 'types' in modern ethical or aesthetic terms, is surely the more productive approach to jokes within ancient texts. Having said that, in this chapter I also offer some theoretical perspectives on jokes which help to elucidate the relationship between joke-tokens and ethical criticism.

The aesthetic and ethical criticism outlined above has its roots in Aristotle, and so too does scholarship on classical drama and affect. For Aristotle, comedy is concerned with τὸ γελοῖον 'the laughable', which is ἁμάρτημά τι καὶ αἶσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν 'some failure or ugliness that does not cause pain and is not destructive' (1449a34-35). Whilst comedy is concerned with τὸ γελοῖόν,

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[6] In a similar vein, Aristotle also insists on a class divide within humour itself: *Nic. Eth*. 4.8.

[7] On Greek tragedy, see e.g. Taplin (1986, 2003) and Wiles (2000). In Wilson & Taplin (1993, 169), some generic distinctions regarding self-referentiality made in Taplin's 1986 article are revisited and somewhat retracted.

tragedy is μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας 'the representation of serious action' (1449b24).[8] Comedy's imitations are inherently harmless, but tragedy is primarily concerned with emotionally consequential action. Famously, the philosopher considers that tragedy specifically provides an emotional release for its audience, or *catharsis*, achieved δι᾽ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου 'through pity and fear' (1449b27). These general distinctions seemingly do not leave much scope for jokes in tragedy, as these are generally considered a subset of τὸ γελοῖον. For some theorists, laughter cannot coexist with these strong emotions as it prevents feelings of empathy, instead effecting 'something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart' (Bergson 2013, 11).[9] However, laughter is not always the result of humour, in the same way that humour is not always the cause of laughter.[10] Humour theory, therefore, need only be concerned with laughter that arises specifically from *comic amusement* (Carroll 2014, 16). Critics disagree on whether amusement should be considered an emotional or purely intellectual experience. For Morreall (2020, 639), amusement is not an emotion but a distancing: 'In amusement we are practically and epistemically disengaged from the object, while in emotions we are practically and epistemically engaged with the object'.[11] Following Bergson and Morreall, it is possible to understand why jokes have not been well received in scholarship on Greek tragedy; the comic amusement elicited will surely distance an audience from their emotional experience of the play. However, the problem with dismissing tragic jokes on account of their perceived affective impropriety is that it assumes that the jokes are indeed intended to and successful in eliciting comic amusement. But jokes can have very different purposes and emotional consequences too, and this does not mean that they are no longer jokes.

To confront some of the ethical, aesthetic and affective arguments against tragic jokes, I borrow some terms from theoretical work on speech. Austin has observed three acts simultaneously occurring in speech: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts (Austin 1975, 94-108). The 'act of "saying something" in [a] full normal sense' (Austin 1975, 94) is locutionary, whilst the illocutionary act refers to the performance of the act *in* saying that thing (Austin 1975, 99-100). As an example of this act, Nannicelli (2020, 198) cites an adult telling some rowdy children 'keep behaving like this…' as a warning that, if they do, they will soon be in trouble. In this case, what has been conveyed implicitly (the warning) is distinct from the ordinary sense of what has been spoken (technically, an invitation). Finally, the perlocutionary act refers to the consequential feelings and thoughts that might arise in the speaker or their audience as a result of the speech act, consequences which may or may not be an intentional part of the utterance (Austin 1975, 101-3). Writing on the aesthetics of comedy, Gimbel

[8] Aristotle's further distinctions between the two genres are discussed and critiqued by Silk (2000, 53-97).
[9] This is a particularly popular attitude for proponents of superiority theory, such as Billig (2005, 225-8).
[10] Gaut, for example, critiques the focus upon laughter as a gauge for humour; 'as well as expressing amusement, laughter can express anxiety, derision, embarrassment, or nothing at all' (1998, 53).
[11] Other critics consider humour a sustained emotion or mood, such as Carroll's 'comic mood' (2014, 57).

(2017, 12.26-12.52) has applied Austin's terms to comedy performances and joke-telling. For Gimbel, joke-telling aims at specific goals regarding these three speech acts. Firstly, the locutionary purpose is that the joke is recognised as being a joke (*ibid.*, 12.39). Secondly, the illocutionary aim is to demonstrate the cleverness of the speaker (*ibid.*, 12.40). Thirdly, the perlocutionary goal is to elicit a reaction from its audience, often, but not always, laughter (*ibid.*, 12.43).[12] I will be applying a version of this framework, with some further elucidation of the locutionary aim and one revision regarding the perlocutionary aim. In the first instance, the locutionary purpose of the joke (being recognised as a joke) does not necessarily indicate that the joke is entirely non-serious. In some instances, jokes require their speaker and/or audience to entertain attitudes that they do not share, and, just as often, jokes are based upon attitudes genuinely held by their speaker and/or audience (Gaut 1998, 57-8). Rather, the locutionary purpose of the joke is simply to be recognised as having a punchline, with no particular bearing on whether or not the joke's implications are serious.

Gimbel outlines two different types of joke-token, the *pure* and the *impure*, each of which is determined by its perlocutionary act.[13] For Gimbel, a pure joke-token has a perlocutionary force of eliciting laughter: 'we are not telling the joke for any other reason than we think the other person will find it funny and laugh' (Gimbel 2017, 12.46). An impure joke has any perlocutionary force 'other than "that you laugh"' (*ibid.*, 12.47). However, it has been established above that not all laughter is related to comic amusement. On account of laughter's broad expressive potential, the focus of ethical and aesthetic evaluations of jokes should centre only upon amusement. As such, the perlocutionary goal is here adapted to specifically eliciting amusement from its audience, rather than laughter. With this revision adopted, Gimbel's two types of joke-token are outlined below:

A 'pure' joke-token is a speech act with the following aims:

a) Locutionary: joke understood to be a joke
b) Illocutionary: to be clever
c) Perlocutionary: eliciting *amusement*

An 'impure' joke-token is a speech act with the following aims:

[12] Nannicelli (2020, 201) argues that in stand-up comedy the perlocutionary goal is always to elicit laughter. However, more experimental forms of stand-up, such as Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* (2018), indicate that this might not always be the case.

[13] I apply these terms with caution, acknowledging both the limitations of a binary framework (especially that which is expressed in moralistic terms) and the problematic aggregating of a universal 'audience response'. This methodology does not account for the variable responses of individual audience members (as outlined by Revermann, 2006) but its limited scope helps to distinguish joke-tokens with multiple clear perlocutionary aims from those which may only be included to elicit amusement. Given the lack of evidence detailing the responses of ancient audiences, the strength of this methodology lies in its capacity to use the dramatic joke-tokens themselves to hypothesise potential audience responses to different tragic jokes.

a) Locutionary: joke understood to be a joke
b) Illocutionary: to be clever
c) Perlocutionary: eliciting *amusement* / other feelings and thoughts

For Gimbel, impure joke-tokens have perlocutionary aims other than eliciting laughter. For example, these joke-tokens may be told to elicit sympathy or relaxation in the listener, or alternatively to disgust or intimidate them (*ibid.*, 12.43). On account of these further perlocutionary aims, impure joke-tokens invite ethical evaluations from audiences. This is because pure joke-tokens help to establish a contextual 'play frame', which is 'a performance space where this sort of non-bona fide communication can take place removed from the real world' (*ibid.*, 15.1). Impure joke-tokens, on the other hand, are not shielded by a play frame as pure joke-tokens are. As many joke-tokens are impure, comedians must carefully balance their performances so as not to diverge too far from a play frame, and risk no longer being received as comedy (Nannicelli 2020, 202-3). One obvious caveat when applying this ethical theory to tragedy is that it has been developed in relation to stand-up comedy as opposed to theatre. In this performance medium, a performer is generally expected to have written their own material. Although comedians present onstage *personae* distinct from their everyday selves, the impure joke-tokens reflect on their own writing and speech acts in performance.[14] In tragedy, playwrights write not only for actors, but for the specific characters those actors convey onstage. Of these three distinct figures, only the actor is generally exempt from ethical criticism, as they are typically perceived as a mediator between the playwright's text and the fictional character.[15] As a result, each joke is tokened in two contexts simultaneously; metatheatrically, as an act of the playwright, and dramatically, as an act of the tragic character who speaks the joke.

4.2 Tragic jokes

4.2.1 *Agamemnon* 1443

Chronologically the first of the examples assessed here, this *Agamemnon* line also provides some helpful insight into the reception of jokes in the scholarly tradition. The line in question occurs soon after Clytemnestra's announcement of her murder of Agamemnon, in an *epirrhēma*, dialogue between herself and the singing chorus of Argive elders (1407-1576):

Κλ. κεῖται γυναικὸς τῆσδ' ὁ λυμαντήριος,
Χρυσηίδων μείλιγμα τῶν ὑπ' Ἰλίωι,

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[14] This applies only to stand-up comedy that does not clearly rely on distinct characters. Even in these cases, the distinction between performer and their character can be blurred. On the comic persona, see e.g. Haggins (2007, 5-6).

[15] This is a simplification, of course, as it assumes that actors do not develop the text in rehearsal or interpolate; on actors' interpolations, see Page (1934).

ἥ τ' αἰχμάλωτος ἥδε καὶ τερασκότος
καὶ κοινόλεκτρος τοῦδε, θεσφατηλόγος,
πιστὴ ζύνευνος, ναυτίλων δὲ σελμάτων
ἱστοτρίβης. (A. *Ag*. 1438-1443)

Cl. And the ravager of this woman lies here,
soothing thing of the Chryseides at Troy,
and here is his prisoner and prophetess
and his bedfellow, the oracular,
loyal concubine, and 'mast-rubber'[16]
of the sailors' benches.

Here, I translate the text as transmitted by the manuscript tradition, which has been subject to much scholarly scrutiny and emendation concerning the word ἱστοτρίβης. One conjecture for the manuscripts' ἱστοτρίβης is instead ἰσοτρίβης, which would translate simply as something like 'equal presser of the sailors' benches'.[17] However, Fraenkel (1950, 681-2 on 1442f) has observed that ἰσο- does not appear compounded with verbs elsewhere, and this vague allusion does not offer much to Clytemnestra's abusive list of descriptors. Keeping the manuscripts' ἱστοτρίβης, West (1990a, 262 on 1442) suggests the reference is to the ἱστός '*beam* of a loom' (LSJ II), intended as a reference to the work Cassandra is expected to undertake as an enslaved woman.[18] Although this language of enslavement is in keeping with Clytemnestra's earlier descriptions of Cassandra (1065-7), Sommerstein (2002, 155) notes the incongruity of a reference to loom-weaving in the nautical setting. Certainly, the immediate context is highly sexual; in addition to Cassandra's descriptions as κοινόλεκτρος 'bedfellow' and ζύνευνος 'concubine', Agamemnon's presumed multiple infidelities are emphasised in his description as Χρυσηίδων μείλιγμα 'soothing thing of the Chryseides'.[19] Lloyd-Jones (1978, 58-9) suggests that ἱστοτρίβης may be a reference to the Greek punishment of women (possibly for sexual misdemeanours) by forcing them to sit on top of a ἱστός (here also most likely a loom, rather than a mast). This reading also allows for the simultaneous sexual and servile implications, but is such a precise reference that it is far from the most obvious reading of the line.[20]

[16] The translation of ἱστοτρίβης is borrowed from Raeburn & Thomas (2011, 21 on 1443) who capture the pun well. Sommerstein (2002, 156) notes that its comedic parallels (Ar. *Vesp.* 739, 1344, *Ach.* 1149) suggest its implied meaning as 'one who gives hand jobs'.
[17] As accepted by Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1914, 234 *app. crit.* ad 1443; Campbell (1936, 53, 116) conjectures instead ἵστωρ τρυφῆς.
[18] West (1990a, 262 *app. crit.* ad 1442) suggests 'coniugis nauticae nocturno muneri diurnum additur'; this is evidently sexual as well as manual labour, as at *Il.* 1.31.
[19] Denniston & Page (1957, 202 on 1439) 'a contemptuous plural'; Foley (2001, 94) observes that Cassandra has become the new Chryseis (as in *Il.* 1.113-5), 'the slave mistress Agamemnon prefers to his wife'.
[20] Sommerstein (2002, 155) notes that there is no evidence that this punishment was practised at Athens.

Admittedly, the obscenity is rare even in Old Comedy: there are only three surviving dramatic examples, Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* (595, 1062) and *Lysistrata* (441-2), of female characters using a 'primary obscenity' (Bain 1991, 53) in conversation with men.[21] Nevertheless, certain scholars embrace the 'crude, nautical double-entendre' (Young 1991, 295), and Sommerstein makes a strong case for its role in *Agamemnon*: 'It may be alien to tragedy, but it is far from alien to this particular tragic character. The whole point about Klytaimestra, especially in this scene, is that she breaks all the rules; and this word, prominently placed at the beginning of a line before a pause, is the culmination of her rule-breaking' (2002, 156). Moreover, he considers the further implications of the pun upon Agamemnon: 'it is being insinuated that Agamemnon had been suffering from erectile dysfunction and had needed manual assistance to overcome it' (2002, 156).[22] Others note that Clytemnestra's description of Cassandra with the masculine φιλήτωρ 'lover' (1446) reverses the expected gender and sexual roles of the pair (Raeburn & Thomas 2011, 221). For Sommerstein, this is enhanced by the staging, prominently featuring the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra. As the dummy representing Agamemnon is wrapped in a long robe, Sommerstein (2002, 156) suggests that it would have appeared more like a feminine than a masculine garment to the audience. To take these associations further, Raeburn & Thomas (2011, 221) note Clytemnestra's claiming of Cassandra for her own sexual pleasure, describing her as a παροψώνημα 'appetiser' (1447) to her own bed.[23] Sommerstein's focus upon the joke's nuanced linguistic context and its staged setting make the joke particularly appealing; in essence, the tokening of the joke within the tragedy helps to elucidate its dramatic meaning and aesthetic purpose within Clytemnestra's speech.

In the suggested framework of Austin and Gimbel, the joke nearly falls at the first hurdle – being identified as a joke within its context. Although its locutionary aim has had varied success, it has largely been dismissed on account of its impropriety *because* it has been identified as an obscenity – a type of speech famously associated with comedic expression.[24] The manuscript tradition and Sommerstein's case for the joke both indicate that the pun is likely to have been understood as a joke in its performance context. In illocutionary terms, the joke is certainly clever; it relies on specific wordplay that both befits its nautical setting and acts as sexual innuendo. However, in perlocutionary terms, the joke-token is impure because it is intended to harm and mock. In Freud's terms, this is a

[21] Sommerstein (1990, 176) observes the relatively few instances, and notes that female characters tend to moderate their language for audiences of the opposite sex, whilst male characters do not.
[22] This is supported by the implication of the phrase in *Wasps*, in which the sex act is listed among ὅσα πρεσβύτῃ ξύμφορα 'the many things appropriate for an old man' (Ar. *Vesp*. 737).
[23] All of this gender play is in keeping with the general portrayal of Clytemnestra as having 'masculine' qualities throughout the tragedy, e.g. *Ag*. 351. On Clytemnestra's gendering and its broader political implications throughout the Oresteian trilogy, see Zeitlin (1978).
[24] The line's salience and the emendations of it are largely based upon it being 'an obscenity…unparalleled in tragic diction' (O'Daly 1985, 13). On obscenity in comedy, see Henderson (1991).

tendentious joke; 'either a *hostile* joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defence) or an *obscene* joke (serving the purpose of exposure)' (transl. Strachey 1960, 97, original emphasis). In this case, it is evidently both. Clytemnestra's internal audience are the allies and subjects of the deceased Agamemnon, who subsequently express their horror and wish for death (1448-1454). In the circumstances, the impropriety of this impure joke-token invites ethical criticism of Clytemnestra, feeding into her characterisation.

Nevertheless, whilst Clytemnestra speaks the joke, its history of emendation is based upon its perceived misplacement in Aeschylus' dramatic composition. Here is an example of how, unlike in stand-up comedy, a double-tokening occurs in theatrical performance: simultaneously yet distinctly, the joke is tokened on a metatheatrical level. Classical Greek is not short of obscenities, so it is significant that one of tragedy's rare transgressions into this mode of speech is couched in the form of a pun. In illocutionary terms, it certainly qualifies as a clever utterance – the unexpected double meaning marks it as a joke as well as an obscenity. In departing from tragic convention by including the rude joke, Aeschylus must be mindful of transgressing both aesthetic and ethical generic norms. In the circumstances of the tragedy, it is probably unlikely that Aeschylus intended audience amusement at this joke. Therefore, on a metatheatrical level, it is still an impure joke-token. However, Aeschylus' aim, though it might be to shock or even disgust his audience, is above all to characterise the transgressive Clytemnestra. Thus the joke functions on two levels. It is tokened within the drama as impure, with a hostile perlocutionary aim; metatheatrically, it is still impure, but its perlocutionary aim is the characterisation of its speaker. As such, whilst it is not free from ethical criticism, it is ethically defensible on a metatheatrical level because its aims, unlike Clytemnestra's, are not tendentious towards its audience. This important distinction reveals that the ethical and aesthetic arguments against the joke give too much weight to its typing, as an obscenity, and not enough weight to the explanations provided by its dramatic and metatheatrical tokening.

4.2.2 *Ajax* 1089-1090

The next joke in question comes from Sophocles' *Ajax*, a play that is particularly concerned with laughter.[25] The line is delivered by Menelaus, at the climax of a speech warning Ajax's brother, Teucer, not to bury the disgraced hero (1052-1090):

Με. καί σοι προφωνῶ τόνδε μὴ θάπτειν, ὅπως
μὴ τόνδε θάπτων αὐτὸς εἰς ταφὰς πέσῃς. (S. *Aj.* 1089-1090)

Me. And I warn you not to bury this man, lest

[25] On laughter and *Ajax*, see chapters 1.2 and 3.2.1.

while burying him you fall into the grave yourself.

Here, Menelaus relies on the multiple senses of πίπτω '*fall down*' (LSJ I A); in literal terms, it evokes the visual image of Teucer tumbling into the grave he digs for Ajax, and metaphorically it refers to Teucer's own death.[26] A very similar double sense is captured in a phrase in Euripides' later *Phoenissae*, though here the 'fall' is exchanged for a double burial.[27]

Αν. ἐγώ σφε θάψω, κἂν ἀπεννέπῃ πόλις.

Κρ. σαυτὴν ἄρ' ἐγγὺς τῷδε συνθάψεις νεκρῷ. (E. *Ph.* 1657-8)

An. I will bury him, even if the city forbids it.

Cr. Then you will bury yourself with this body.

The *Ajax* example, as well as providing a strong visual image of a slapstick tumble, seems to allude to one additional meaning that the Euripidean counterpart lacks. If the verb is interpreted as '*cast oneself down*' (πίπτω, LSJ I A) instead of '*fall down*', there is potentially a third layer of the joke; that Teucer, while burying his brother post-suicide, will reveal himself to have a death-wish too. Read in conjunction with the attitudes towards laughter expressed throughout the play, Sophocles' inclusion of this joke invites further contextual situation. Ajax is overwhelmingly concerned with his enemies' laughter (367, 382, 454), though notably Odysseus, one of these enemies, refuses the invitation to mock the hero in his madness (79-80). Odysseus is discouraged from mockery by the sense that he himself could just as easily have suffered in the same way as Ajax (121-126).

The same idea is expressed by Menelaus in the speech preceding his joke, but with a starkly different conclusion:

Με. πρόσθεν οὗτος ἦν

αἴθων ὑβριστής, νῦν δ' ἐγὼ μέγ' αὖ φρονῶ. (S. *Aj.* 1087-8)

Me. Before this man was

burning insolent, but now I think big instead.

Whilst Odysseus fears Ajax's fate for himself, Menelaus instead wills himself to be the next Ajax, an approach that the chorus directly warn him against:

[26] For the metaphorical use of πίπτω, Jebb (2004, 165 on 1089) cites Thuc. 3. 82. 2 εἰς ἀνάγκας πίπτειν 'to fall upon necessities'.

[27] The *Phoenissae* comparison is flagged by Finglass (2011, 445).

Χο. Μενέλαε, μὴ γνώμας ὑποστήσας σοφὰς
εἶτ' αὐτὸς ἐν θανοῦσιν ὑβριστὴς γένῃ. (S. *Aj*. 1091-2)

Cho. Menelaus, do not, after you have laid down wise opinions.
then yourself become insolent towards the dying.

Menelaus' cruel joke-token about Teucer falling into the grave –gloating at his enemies' expense– is situated in a context that has already exposed the devastating effects of *hubris*. Had this joke appeared earlier in the tragedy, it might have produced a different effect. Here, however, its consequences are twofold; it invites ethical criticism of the ὑβριστὴς 'insolent' Menelaus, and it also acts as the only instance of Ajax's fear of mockery coming to pass. Menelaus' hostility towards Ajax is evident in his interpretation of the events as a site for joking, and the joke-token is at the expense of the late hero and his bereaved family member. However, despite the powerful bogeyman that mockery has become in this tragedy, all the audience witness of it is Menelaus' wordplay, poorly received in the dramatic circumstances: is this really what Ajax was so afraid of?

Ajax's joke-token shares many qualities with the *Agamemnon* pun; each joke is delivered to an internal audience with a vastly different emotional response to the situation in question, each is intended to be clever, and each is also tokened as impure, and specifically tendentious. Whilst the *Agamemnon* joke is both hostile and obscene, Menelaus' is overwhelmingly hostile. Its formulation is an indirect prohibition and a result clause, meaning that, in locutionary terms, the phrase itself is evidently a warning as well as a joke. However, in illocutionary terms, it is not just a warning but a coded threat: by giving the warning, Menelaus also implies that he will arrange Teucer's death should he disobey. Both joke-tokens invite ethical criticism of their speakers, characterising both as cruel and gloating in their victories. Despite these similarities between the joke-tokens, Menelaus' joke has not received a great deal of critical attention or attempts to recast it as a regular speech-act. Perhaps this is on account of its lack of obscenity, and the aesthetic and ethical questions that would be raised by the text's apparent transgression into comedic forms of speech. Rather, this joke is delivered with more traditional forms of tragic speech, and, in a sense, this formal generic framing acts as a protection from ethical criticism in a similar way to a pure joke's play frame. Together, these two jokes reveal the great potential differences between a joke's tokening in its dramatic context, and the tokening of a joke on a metatheatrical level. Notably, both joke-tokens are impure within their dramatic contexts, performed as expressions of their speaker's cruelty, to internal audiences whose grief and hostility are likely to prevent comic amusement. On a metatheatrical level, these joke-tokens appear to be intended for the perlocutionary purpose of their speakers' characterisation instead of eliciting amusement from the theatrical festival audiences. As such, the argument that tragedy cannot allow for jokes because of the

affective qualities of amusement is not applicable to these two instances. For the more complicated issue of tragic jokes potentially eliciting amusement from their theatrical audiences, it is necessary to turn to some examples from Euripides.

4.2.3 *Trojan Women* 1049-1050

The third tragic joke is from *Trojan Women*, following a particularly delayed *agon* between Helen and Hecuba. In the Trojan women's devastating circumstances, Menelaus' entry into the tragedy is especially light-hearted, and he greets the women with a rather upbeat sentiment (860-2).[28] The entrance seems to have a similar effect to the entrance of Heracles in *Alcestis*, though the hero there is unaware of his host's grieving; here, in contrast, Menelaus' cheerful demeanour appears almost gloating. This character is full of contradictions. On the one hand, he states:

Με. ἥκω δὲ τὴν Λάκαιναν (οὐ γὰρ ἡδέως
ὄνομα δάμαρτος ἥ ποτ' ἦν ἐμὴ λέγω)
ἄξων. (E. *Tr*. 869-871)

Me. I have come for the Spartan woman (for I cannot
gladly speak the name of the wife who was once mine)
to fetch her.

He then promptly uses Helen's name at 877.[29] He announces his plans to kill his wife once he has returned her to Sparta (876-879), and Hecuba warns of Helen's persuasive potential:

Ἑκ. ὁρᾶν δὲ τήνδε φεῦγε, μή σ' ἕλῃ πόθῳ. (E. *Tr*. 891)

Hec. But avoid looking at her, lest she captures you with desire.[30]

When Helen enters, she wishes to put her case forward, which Hecuba asks Menelaus to allow (906-910). He agrees, claiming that he grants this specifically for Hecuba, as τῆσδε δ' οὐ δώσω χάριν 'I will not grant it for [Helen's] sake' (913). However, Menelaus also couches his arbitration as a non-serious luxury rather than a demand of justice, describing his agreement to hear their arguments as a σχολῆς τὸ

[28] Barlow (1986, 208): 'blatant insensitivity of mood'; Goff (2009, 63): 'the jarring contrast in tone with the chorus's song is almost comical', and Menelaus 'blithely oblivious'; Blondell (2013, 185): 'jarringly cheerful'.
[29] It is possible that he has already mentioned Helen by name at 862, though many commentators and critics consider the line spurious. See Page (1934, 74), Barlow (1986, 209).
[30] This warning itself contains a pun on the name Helen with a form of the verb αἱρεῖν 'to grasp'; as another instance of this wordplay on Helen's name, Barlow (1986, 209) cites A. *Ag*. 689-90.

δῶρον 'gift of leisure' (911).[31] The *agon* is framed as an ironic sequel, within the same dramatic trilogy, to the earlier trial of the framed Palamedes, persecuted despite his innocence. Conversely Helen, who has not been framed, seems destined not to face a genuine trial.

As a result of the *agon*, Menelaus tells Helen to go to be stoned (1039-1041), but seems to have some awareness of the insufficiency of the act: that her death can only make up for the πόνους...μακροὺς 'protracted sufferings' (1040) of the Greek army ἐν σμικρῶι 'in a short space of time' (1040). Helen supplicates her husband and Hecuba warns him not to change his mind, but Menelaus refuses to listen to either woman any longer (1046). He gives the order for his men to take Helen to the Greek ships, to be returned to Greece. Hecuba warns him once more, and they exchange some final sentiments before his, and Helen's, departure:

Ἑκ. μή νυν νεὼς σοὶ ταὐτὸν ἐσβήτω σκάφος.
Με. τί δ' ἔστι; μεῖζον βρῖθος ἢ πάροιθ' ἔχει; (E. *Tr*. 1049-1050)

Hec. Do not let her travel on the same ship-hull as you.
Me. Why is that? Is she heavier than she was before?

Here, Hecuba once again expresses her fear of Helen's persuasive potential, similar to her earlier warning: ὁρᾶν δὲ τήνδε φεῦγε, μή σ' ἕλῃ πόθῳ 'but avoid looking at her, lest she captures you with desire' (891). It is the apparent *non-sequitur* from Menelaus that is incongruous, and seems to form an unexpected punchline to Hecuba's unintentional set-up. Hecuba's answer seems like an obvious place to search for clues as to his meaning, but she only clarifies her own concern for his romantic relationship with Helen: οὐκ ἔστ' ἐραστὴς ὅστις οὐκ ἀεὶ φιλεῖ 'he is not a lover, whoever does not always love' (1051).[32] Menelaus says that he will follow Hecuba's advice, and he and Helen promptly leave the stage (1052-9).

Line 1050 has received much critical attention, and there have been many attempts to explain Menelaus' statement, both as a serious question and as a joke. Torrance (2013, 284) is right to raise an

[31] In part, this is surely a demonstration of his power. Gregory (1991, 156) notes of the Trojan women: 'Their present leisure is that of slaves whose time is at their master's disposition'. Moreover, intertextually, Menelaus' view of their arguments as 'leisure' is reminiscent of the work of the Greek sophist Gorgias, a contemporary of Euripides who composed a defence of Helen as a παίγνιον 'plaything' (21). Scodel (1980, 90 n26) considers Gorgias' defence speeches for Helen and Palamedes as sources for Euripides' Trojan trilogy, which Gregory (1991, 180 n7) describes as 'an unprovable but plausible and attractive suggestion'.

[32] Hecuba not acknowledging Menelaus' joke should certainly not be considered evidence against it, as Kidd (2014, 162) observes that characters in Aristophanes often also ignore jokes. In these cases, 'the other characters either pretend the joke-utterance had never occurred, or they "translate" the utterance into some serious, non-joke form'.

issue with one reading of the line, that Helen's potential weight gain is meant to be a joke about her reduced attractiveness.[33] In the *Odyssey*, she notes that Athena makes Penelope taller and thicker (*Od.* 18.190-196) when granting her immortal beauty. This association between divinity and greater weight is, for Kovacs (1998, 553-6), an explanation of the confusing question: Menelaus genuinely wonders whether his semi-divine wife is heavier than expected, out of fear she might sink his ship.[34] For Torrance, the concern is not so much the weight itself, but what it might represent. Her reading, attributed to a suggestion of a student of Matthew Wright, is that Helen may have gained weight on account of being pregnant.[35] Thus, she concludes: 'It is possible, at least, that Menelaus' question is not a random joke for deflection, but rather raises a serious concern' (Torrance 2013, 284). This sincere reading of the line is certainly creative and narratively compelling, but lacks further textual support and. is conjecture at best. Perhaps just as likely is that Menelaus, in a more playful reference, could even be referring to Helen's extravagant clothing and accessories, with which Hecuba claimed she wanted literally κατακλύσειν '*deluge*, *inundate*' (995, LSJ I) the city of Troy, implying it might do the same to his ship.[36]

Advocates for the joke tend to cite its implications for the characterisation of Menelaus. For Seidensticker, the 'verblüffend' (1982, 89) joke reveals that the Trojan women will receive neither understanding nor compassion from their enslavers. Specifically, Seidensticker considers Menelaus' joke as a deliberate evasion (1982, 90-1): he does not want to engage with Hecuba's warning. This reading of the joke renders it tendentious, as it is a purposeful and defensive deflection. In favour of the reading, it does account well for the sudden shift in approach that Gregory observes of Menelaus in the scene: 'Although a few lines earlier he had irritably enjoined her silence, at this point he seems absorbed in puzzling out her meaning' (Gregory 1999-2000, 70). With Seidensticker's interpretation of the line as a deliberate deflection, Menelaus would further encourage Hecuba's silence by conveying, in illocutionary terms, that he does not wish to continue the conversation. Read in this way, the joke-token is impure and tendentious, and invites ethical criticism of Menelaus. As such, this Euripidean character is in keeping with the Menelaus of Sophocles' *Ajax*, whose cruel joke at 1089-1090 reveals a lack of sympathy for the grieving Teucer. This interpretation is preferable to reading the statement as entirely sincere, as it does not require from its audience the mental gymnastics of ascertaining Menelaus' meaning – it is his illocutionary aim, and not his locutionary aim, that is important. In this sense, it would be, as Torrance describes, 'a random joke' (2013, 284).

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[33] Gregory (2000, 71) and Goldhill (2006, 93) both note that a negative approach to women's weight gain is unattested in antiquity.
[34] For Kovacs (1998, 556), the weight gain is a reference to her apotheosis. He also cites a fragment in which Heracles is not allowed on the Argo for fear he would sink the ship (*FGrH* 3 F 111a).
[35] Torrance (2013, 254 n82).
[36] Menelaus' fear of shipwreck is loaded with dramatic irony. Many of the Greeks at Troy will suffer tumultuous *nostoi*, including Menelaus (A. *Ag*. 617-680); e.g. Euripides' *Helen* has Menelaus wash up in Egypt.

The two readings outlined above (Menelaus as inquisitive or evasive) are incompatible; however, there is a third solution to Menelaus' question that allows for both approaches to coexist. What if, on a dramatic level, it is an unintentional joke? Perhaps Euripides intends his audience to interpret Menelaus' question as sincere.[37] Even if the text does not make its exact meaning clear, it is at least phrased as a sincere question: Menelaus repeats the phrasing τί δ' ἔστι 'why is that' (1050) from another question he asks, sincerely, at 889 (Gregory 1999-2000, 71).[38] In this reading, Menelaus misunderstands Hecuba entirely; he quite literally misses the boat. Menelaus is not making a joke, but asking a serious, if confusing, question in response. Presumably, this is in relation to one of the concerns listed above, though its purpose is more to depict Menelaus missing Hecuba's point than posing a sensible concern of his own. Unlike Menelaus, Euripides is making a joke, and it is at Menelaus' expense. In this reading, it is only necessary to token the joke on a metatheatrical level. This is because, within the dramatic context, the line is not a joke: it is a sincere question, a regular speech act. Metatheatrically speaking, this would be an impure joke-token from Euripides, as its inclusion is tendentious in the sense that it pokes fun at the character who speaks it. The *non-sequitur* reveals Menelaus as blissfully unaware of his circumstances, an outlook that is not shared by Euripides' audience, and as such may be amusing due to the stark incongruity of his misunderstanding.[39] If it is intended to trigger laughter, the joke may even be tokened as pure, with Euripides' primary perlocutionary aim being to elicit comic amusement from his audience. In the *Agamemnon* example, it became apparent that tragic jokes may require distinct tokening in their dramatic and metatheatrical contexts; the same joke could have very different perlocutionary aims on a dramatic and metatheatrical level. Here, in *Trojan Women*, a study of Euripides reveals that a tragic joke might only function as such on a metatheatrical level, remaining a regular speech act within its dramatic context. The tokening of the metatheatrical joke as pure or impure largely depends upon the likely impact it is considered to have had on its audience—in essence, on whether or not it elicits comic amusement.

4.2.4 *Orestes* 1520-1

Much like the *Trojan Women* example, the *Orestes* joke-token appears amidst a scene that has been noted for its comic potential.[40] Within the play, the immediate context for the joke is an exchange between Orestes and an enslaved Trojan messenger, an attendant of Helen who has emerged from the

[37] This sincerity would not necessarily detract from the potential humour. In Old Comedy, Ruffell (2011, 58) observes Aristophanes' amusing use of sincere speech in *Lysistrata* (1114-1177): 'the earnest aspects of the speech are…part of the humour'.
[38] Of course, it is possible that this version of τί δ' ἔστι was delivered with sarcasm, in which case it would support the deflection reading.
[39] The potential for comic amusement is heightened by the audience's awareness that Helen is not about to be executed; on the basis of *Odyssey* 4, Easterling (1997, 175) posits the audience would have had an image of the couple 'happily settled back home'.
[40] The humorous performance potential of the scene is discussed in section 7.3.4.

palace following the attempt of Orestes and Pylades to murder her. The Trojan messenger has informed the chorus and audience of the bloodshed, and the shocking news that Helen seemed to vanish into thin air before the men could kill her (1494-5). This messenger scene has a particularly high emotional register, and the Trojan appears to be personally affected by his recent trauma more than any other extant tragic messenger. Into these confused and anxious circumstances emerges Orestes, who threatens the messenger with death should he decide to help Menelaus, demanding that he swear his support for Helen's killing. The language draws much attention to Orestes' sword (1506, 1518-9), and the messenger evidently feels its physical threat intensely. The messenger asks Orestes to move the sword away (1519), and noticing his fear, Orestes responds:

Ορ. μὴ πέτρος γένηι δέδοικας ὥστε Γοργόν' εἰσιδών;
Φρ. μὴ μὲν οὖν νεκρός· τὸ Γοργοῦς δ' οὐ κάτοιδ' ἐγὼ κάρα (E. *Or*. 1520-1)

Or. Do you fear turning to stone just like one who has seen a Gorgon?
Phr. No, but a corpse; I do not know the head of the Gorgon well.

There is an obvious clash between the characters' 'scripts';[41] Orestes speaks of the messenger's fear in mythological terms with poetic simile, whilst the messenger outlines the literal reason for his fear, claiming no knowledge of Orestes' reference. The mythology concerned is the Perseus and Medusa story, and likely also functions as an allusion to Euripides' own *Andromeda* (Wright 2008a, 123).[42] Moreover, Zeitlin (2003, 317) observes that the figure of the Gorgon appears throughout both Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (831, 1046) and Euripides' own earlier *Electra* (461), so its Oresteian associations are not new. In the Euripidean *Electra*, O'Brien (1964, 22) observes further allusions to the Gorgon, which culminate in Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra; much like Perseus and Medusa, Orestes cannot look at his mother as he kills her (E. *El*. 1218-21). O'Brien (1964, 24) notes that these references continue in *Orestes* (387, and here at 1520), where Orestes himself becomes the Gorgon figure. As this reference ties in neatly with wider Oresteian imagery and the concept of cyclical vengeance within the trilogy, the messenger's response is particularly jarring, as it instead returns the scene's focus to the immediate circumstances.

One obvious reading of the joke is that the messenger is sincere, and simply does not understand what Orestes means. The only suspicious element of his phrasing is his mention of τὸ Γοργοῦς…κάρα 'the head of the Gorgon', which seems to hint at Perseus' famous decapitation of Medusa. Perhaps the

[41] A 'script' being a bundle of information attached to a concept; see Raskin (1985, 81), Ruffell (2011, 87-8).
[42] *Andromeda*, staged the same year as *Helen*, features a Perseus who has recently slain the Gorgon.

messenger knows more than he is revealing. However, periphrasis is in keeping with tragic style; for example, Sophocles' Antigone refers to her sister as Ἰσμήνης κάρα, literally 'the head of Ismene' (*Ant.* 1). If the messenger is sincere, then the periphrasis is simply incidental, and the joke has much the same effect as I argue for Menelaus' response in *Trojan Women*; it is unintentional. In this case, it is not a joke in the dramatic context, but a metatheatrical joke at the messenger's expense. This reading works well with the messenger's modes of expression throughout the scene, which are as confused as his ambiguous message.[43] Alternatively, his reference to the Gorgon's head may be taken as a sign that he does know what Orestes means, but just has no interest in code-switching in the circumstances.[44] In this case, the joke may be tokened within the text as tendentious; it is intended defensively by the Trojan messenger, to deflect from having to adopt the linguistic terms of his aggressor.[45] Each of these readings seems plausible; unlike the *Trojan Women* example, there is no 'random' element that requires explanation. The messenger clarifies his own position, and he either misunderstands Orestes or he dismisses him. Even if the joke is played as unintentional, ostensibly at the expense of the messenger, Orestes does not totally escape its embarrassing ramifications. Critics have noted the mirroring between these two characters, each perhaps 'worthy' (Burnett 1971, 219) of the other on account of their multiple failures of both communication and action.

Though this line has long been identified as a joke, it has not always been greeted enthusiastically; in the first instance, the scholiast describes it as 'comical and low'.[46] Moreover, the joke occurs within a scene that is itself superfluous to the plot and dramatic structure of the tragedy; Orestes has a dialogue with the messenger, who unusually remains onstage even though he has finished his speech.[47] This formal anomaly has rung alarm bells for some readers; apparently the first critic to seriously question the authenticity of the lines is Grüninger (1894), who argues that the entire scene between Orestes and the messenger is an interpolation.[48] Building on his case, Gredley argues against the authenticity of the lines in terms of their implications for the play's emotional affect: 'The structural symmetry and cumulative emotional effect which such a sequence produces seems to me irreparably disturbed by the intervention of the humorous dialogue between Orestes and the Phrygian' (1968, 416). Alternatively, others have approached the dialogue with the messenger as an instance of *Orestes*' peculiarly parodic and comic qualities, which are further outlined at 6.2.4 and 7.3.4. Burnett, for example, observes that throughout the scene 'There is an almost Aristophanic use of standard comic tricks, most apparent in the idiotic joke about the Gorgon' (1971, 218). Situating the tragedy in its

[43] The confusion leads the chorus to ask for the news delivered σαφῶς 'clearly' (1393).
[44] Willink (1986, 333): 'he seems to take the allusion'; Wright (2008b, 11) 'it sounds as if he has indeed heard of the Gorgon's head'.
[45] Arguably, this reading is more in keeping with this character's adoption of other features of a 'fool-type' messenger, on which see 7.3.4.
[46] Σ ad *Or.* 1521, Schwartz I.230.12: ταῦτα κωμικώτερα ἐστι καὶ πεζά.
[47] Burnett (1971, 219) notes that messengers usually depart once they finish delivering their speech.
[48] Page (1934, 45-8) argues against considering the scene as interpolated, and most editors print it.

intertextual context helps to elucidate its metatheatrical tokening, as it becomes apparent that Euripides' inclusion of comedic technique in this scene is carefully connected with clear tragic resonances. The Gorgon joke-token is a fantastic emblem of this generic fusion, as the traditionally Oresteian image of the Gorgon is rejected in favour of the literal and direct language of survival, couched in the comedic form of a joke. Whilst the messenger's literal response to Orestes' question perhaps does not come across as particularly witty, the joke's intentional fusion of tragic and comedic styles makes it a credit to 'Euripides' cleverest play' (Wright 2008a, 115).

As in the *Trojan Women* example, Euripides seems to have selected a scene with humorous performance potential into which he inserts his joke. Together, these two jokes are distinct from the Aeschylean and Sophoclean examples, and they share certain qualities. Firstly, whilst the *Agamemnon* and *Ajax* jokes are obviously intended by their speakers and tendentious, each Euripidean joke has the potential to be played as unintentional humour on the part of its speaker. Moreover, they appear in two scenes that contain other potentially humorous performance elements, both of which feature the entrance of a character in a mood starkly distinct from that of the other characters in their respective tragedies. In the case of the Aeschylean and Sophoclean jokes, it is fair to anticipate their failure to elicit amusement from their theatrical audience, just as they likely fall flat for the internal audience of dramatic characters. These tendentious jokes are included precisely for their impure tokening, inviting ethical criticism of the characters who speak them. However, Euripides' two jokes are distinct. The playwright includes jokes which, I argue, may not be intended to be regarded as jokes by the dramatic characters. If this is the case, the lines still invite ethical criticism and characterise their speakers, but they also cannot be tokened as impure, tendentious joke-tokens within their dramatic context. Instead of tendentious deflection, they reveal their speaker's confusion and as such are not so ethically problematic.

Metatheatrically, the placement of these jokes within scenes that may otherwise contain humour means that, on a performance level, they may well be intended to elicit amusement. In essence, these joke-tokens are more likely to elicit comic amusement from Euripides' theatrical audience because they do not invite such strong ethical criticism as the dramatic tendentious jokes of Aeschylus and Sophocles. If this is the case, there is an argument to be made that Euripides' metatheatrical jokes may be tokened as pure; they are received as jokes, they exhibit an intertextual and cultural cleverness, and they elicit audience amusement. This would mean that Euripides should benefit not only from the protection of the formal tragic convention that these utterances largely adhere to in their dramatic contexts (as regular speech acts and not jokes), but also that the pure metatheatrical jokes should also be protected from ethical criticism by their creation of a play frame. Despite the many varied readings and arguments to

the contrary, these conclusions should help to promote the ethical and aesthetic acceptance of jokes as an integral part of Euripidean style.

4.3 Conclusion

In response to ethical, aesthetic and affective criticism of tragic jokes, I seek to approach jokes in their dramatic contexts, as tokens and not abstract types. In this chapter, I apply joke theory from Gimbel (2017), himself influenced by Austin (1975), to address some of the aesthetic and ethical concerns raised. Based on their apparent locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary aims, the jokes are tokened as either pure or impure, primarily based on their apparent affective qualities. This also serves to elucidate the many affective aims a joke may have alongside, or in opposition to, eliciting laughter or comic amusement. In classical theatre, a double-tokening of jokes occurs: they achieve different aims within their dramatic context and on a metatheatrical level. This means that ethical evaluations applied to the character speaking the joke may not bear upon their playwright, and vice versa. The first example, from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, proves a strong example of this double-tokening. On a dramatic level, Clytemnestra's impure, tendentious joke-token invites a negative ethical evaluation from her audience on account of her cruel perlocutionary aims. Conversely, Aeschylus' own perlocutionary aim, which is to characterise Clytemnestra, is not tendentious but rather serves a clear aesthetic purpose for his tragedy. As such, ethical criticism of the character and her obscene joke may be avoided by the playwright, despite the apparent generic transgression of adopting a typically comedic form of speech.

In the case of Sophocles' *Ajax*, another impure, tendentious joke-token is spoken by Menelaus, whose dramatic perlocutionary aim is intimidation. Sophocles may avoid ethical criticism, despite the joke being tokened as impure on a metatheatrical level too, because his aim, like that of Aeschylus, is clearly to characterise the cruel hero. In conjunction with the tragedy as a whole, in which laughter and its potentially hostile connotations are a source of much anxiety and debate, the joke-token also serves as the only staging of an otherwise unrealised fear held by Ajax – the potential laughter of his enemies. As the joke is unlikely to elicit comic amusement on a dramatic or metatheatrical level, Menelaus' joke-token proves simultaneously to reveal the excessive nature of Ajax's obsessive fear. These two tragic jokes from Aeschylus and Sophocles share much in common in their dramatic and metatheatrical tokening, and both reveal the separate ethical evaluations each encourages. Euripides, however, includes jokes that are potentially only intended to be tokened on a metatheatrical level. That is to say that they are perhaps not intended to be received as jokes within their dramatic contexts. As such, they invite ethical evaluations of their characters as regular speech acts do, but these are likely to be less intensely negative as, if unintended, each only reveals their speaker's confusion and/or ignorance. Arguably, on a metatheatrical level, these jokes may even be tokened as pure, intended for the perlocutionary purpose of audience amusement as opposed to the characterisation of their speakers. In

this case, Euripides may well encourage audience amusement at the expense of tragedy's characteristic pity and fear, depending on the joke-token's play frame to prevent ethical criticism that may lead to audience criticism.

Chapter 5 – Comedic Tropes, Tragic Contexts

5.1 Introduction

A thesis on tragic laughter and humour and would not be complete without a chapter dedicated to Greek tragedy's sister genre, Old Comedy. Whilst this chapter does not directly centre on humour, the examples of shared intergeneric tropes are chosen because they have been identified as humorous by scholars in at least one of their tragic contexts.[1] On a simple level, this is likely because they appear generically incongruous, and have humorous resonances within their comedic contexts. Jendza's *Paracomedy* (2020) is the first monograph to extensively address the parody of Old Comedy in Euripides, or tragic paracomedy. Whilst this makes exciting strides into the study of reciprocal generic interplay, this thesis chapter refrains from identifying any particular instances of paracomedy, preferring to simply outline the evidence for the shared and cumulative associations tropes gain from their appearances in each genre. With this aim, this chapter addresses three tropes of Euripidean tragedy that are more prominent in extant Old Comedy: doorkeeper, rejuvenation and dressing scenes. In each of these examples, the resonances these tropes gain in their specific comedic contexts appear to be adopted and adapted by the tragedian to suit the aims of his plays.

5.2 Doorkeeper

5.2.1 Introduction

In Aristophanic comedy, the doorkeeper scene is a recurring trope that appears in multiple extant plays.[2] The trope consists of an interaction occurring at the threshold of a home, between a guest who is seeking the homeowner and the member of the household who answers the door. In many of these scenes, the requests of the guest(s) are not met by the doorkeeper: either because they are not possible (e.g. *Peace*), or because the doorkeeper refuses (e.g. *Acharnians*, *Frogs*). In almost all cases the homeowner is eventually summoned, but in all of these comedic examples the scene provides some relatively low-stakes and amusing conflict between guest and doorkeeper.[3] Typically, the doorkeeper is an enslaved person of a lower status than the house's guest(s). These enslaved characters are usually depicted as foils to their enslavers, often acting as mirrors to the personalities of the homeowners.[4] However, Aristophanes often adapts the trope for comic effect; for example, in *Clouds* (*Nu*. 131), the expectation

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[1] Bakhtin (1981, 237) lists tropes as a subset of the comic, alongside irony, parody and the joke.

[2] I consider there to be seven in total: Ar. *Ach*. 394-406, *Nu*. 131-183, *Pax* 179-233, *Av*. 57-92, *Ra*. 37-165, 460-479, *Plut*. 1097-1170. Burian (2007, 216) also lists *Lys*. 424ff., which I omit as an instance of the trope on account of its lack of a clear doorkeeper, though the older women of the chorus certainly take on many of the role's attributes.

[3] Brown (2008, 349) notes that it is precisely due to the multiple variations upon these themes that the comedic door-keeper scene could be 'kept alive as a source of entertainment for the audience'.

[4] Olson (1998, 102 on 180): 'As a rule…Aristophanic doorkeepers reflect the character or habits of their master: Euripides' is a sophistic quibbler (*Ach*. 395-401); Socrates' is initially haughty and convinced of the profundity of the Thinktank's trivial researches (*Nu*. 133-217); the Hoopoe's is silly and was himself once a man (*Av*. 60-84); Agathon's is full of wordy nonsense (*Th*. 39-70); and Pluto's is cold and threatening (*Ra*. 464-78)'.

that a slave will open the door of Socrates' *phrontisterion* is subverted when a young student answers instead.[5] Similarly, Heracles opening the door of his own home in *Frogs* (*Ra*. 37) serves to cue the immediate visual joke of his costume doubling that of Dionysus.[6] Typically, these doorkeepers are male, though they are not always human; Tereus' doorkeeper used to be an enslaved man, but is now a bird (*Av*. 97), and Hermes in *Peace* is, of course, a divinity.

5.2.2 *Helen*

In extant tragedy, there are two very brief door-knocking scenes, occurring in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (653-664) and Euripides' *IT* (1304-8). In both, the guest meets the person they are seeking within ten lines of text and the action continues. There is only one surviving doorkeeper scene that evidences the extended conflict of the comedic examples, and it appears in Euripides' *Helen*.[7] This play stages the reunion of Helen and Menelaus following the Trojan war, and their escape back to Sparta. In the tradition of Stesichorus as opposed to Homer, the tragedy depicts a Helen that never actually went to Troy.[8] Rather, the war has been fought for her phantom double and Euripides' Helen has been living in Egypt the entire time. The play is set there, a common setting for comedies and satyr plays but potentially new ground for the tragic genre.[9] In the same way that the character Helen is mirrored by her phantom, the doorkeeper scene occurs as a part of a wider structural mirroring of Helen and Menelaus' entrances. First, Helen enters and converses with Teucer, who tells her that Menelaus has disappeared. She then enters the palace, with the chorus in tow. Despite arriving after the choral *parodos*, Menelaus enters next, to an empty stage.[10] Thus, the monologue he delivers to the theatrical audience serves as a second prologue in the tragedy, and it is almost as if the play is starting anew (Dale 1967, 93 on 386, Burnett 1971, 80). He then has an interaction with the palace's doorkeeper, an elderly woman, who tells him Helen lives there and that he should flee. Following this, he delivers a second monologue before the chorus, and Helen, return.

Kannicht (1969, 130 on 435-83) and Burian (2007, 212) note structural similarities between these double entrances: Helen and Menelaus both converse with minor characters who confuse their understanding of the situation (68-163; 435-82), and Helen's lyric song is mirrored by Menelaus'

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[5] Aristophanes' aim is likely to humorously emphasise the scarce resources of the school. Sommerstein (1987, 204-5 on 57): 'It would appear, in fact, that the school, which is too poor to feed itself except by stealing (175ff), is also too poor to have any slaves'.
[6] In both *Clouds* and *Frogs*, an unconventional doorkeeper answers following the guest's traditional address of παίδιον 'little boy' to the doorkeeper, cuing the audience for an unexpected incongruity.
[7] On the more ambiguously indicated door-knocking scenes in tragedy, see Brown (2000).
[8] In Pl. *Phaedr*. 243a-b, Socrates recounts the story of Stesichorus' *Palinode* to Helen, in which the poet is blinded and then has his sight restored after he denies that Helen ever went to Troy. See also Isoc. *Hel*. 64.
[9] Hall (2010, 280) notes that Euripides' own satyr play *Busiris* was also set in Egypt.
[10] Allan (2008, 185 on 327-8) notes that on only five occasions in extant tragedy do the chorus exit in the middle of the action (A. *Eum*. 231-4, S. *Aj*. 814-66, E. *Alc*. 746-861, *Hel*. 385-515, [*Rhes*.] 564-674). This is the only example in extant tragedy in which the chorus exit into the *skene* building itself.

second monologue (164-251; 483-514). This structure shares similarities with the Aristophanic doorkeeper scene, and particularly that of *Birds*. In this comedy, Gelzer (1976, 4) observes the mirroring effect created by its duplicated doorkeeper scene, in which the comedic protagonists Peisetaerus and Euelpides seek the hoopoe Tereus. In the first instance, the door is opened by an enslaved hoopoe whom they mistake for a monster, which results in the guests' fear and then their attempt to save face (*Av*. 54-84). The second time the door opens, the homeowner Tereus appears at the threshold, and the guests laugh at his ridiculous appearance, attempting to hide the reason for their amusement (*Av*. 91-106). This same structural and tonal doubling seems to be employed by Euripides in *Helen*'s mirrored entrances of its central Greek characters. In Helen's first scenes, Teucer's report of Menelaus' death is received with grief and elicits her lament (125, 133, 139, 164-178), comparable to the panic and fear of Peisetaerus and Euelpides. Similarly, Menelaus' conflict with the enslaved doorkeeper serves to produce the same bathetic effect as the anticlimactic arrival of the oddly costumed Tereus. Although the influence of the doorkeeper scene is only made explicit in its second occurrence, the structural and tonal qualities of this double-doorkeeper scene are set up in Helen's entrance and interaction with Teucer too. However, unlike the Aristophanic guests, Euripides separates his two protagonists so that each is only party to half of the information shared with the theatrical audience. The Aristophanic trope, along with its structural and tonal aspects, are adapted to fit the tragedy and its distinct aims, but still seem to maintain much of their comic potential.

When Menelaus arrives upon the empty stage, he laments his suffering and seemingly endless *nostos* from Troy with a typically tragic sentiment: that suffering is felt more keenly when it involves a fall from prosperity (417-9).[11] He reveals that he believes he has hidden his recaptured wife in a nearby cave (424-5), but that he also lacks any knowledge of his current whereabouts because he is ashamed at his current state of affairs; he has so far felt too embarrassed to approach any of the land's inhabitants (414-5). This is doubtless exacerbated by his appearance, shipwrecked and bedraggled, with repurposed ship equipment as clothing in place of his πέπλους δὲ τοὺς πρὶν λαμπρά τ' ἀμφιβλήματα / χλιδάς τε 'clothes from before, both my bright cloaks / and expensive garments' (423-4). Critics have observed that Menelaus' situation is reminiscent of *Odyssey* 6, in which Odysseus is shipwrecked at Phaeacia on his similarly troublesome *nostos* from Troy.[12] Odysseus' first encounter in Phaeacia is with the young princess Nausicaa, and he pauses to deliberate whether he should beg the girl on his knees or entreat her from afar (*Od.* 6.135-148). He decides distance is best, influenced by the fear his nudity and strangeness has inspired in her companions, and Nausicaa responds well to Odysseus' rather suggestive

[11] For similar expressions to 417-419, Allan (2008, 197 on 417-19) lists *Hec*. 375-6, *Tro*. 639-40, *IT* 1117-1122. Among the Euripidean fragments, Burian (2007, 216 on 418-9) lists fr. 821 and fr. 964.
[12] The comparison with Homer's Odysseus is made by Austin (1994, 156-8), Foley (2001, 313) and Allan (2008, 26-8).

speech as Athena has already put marriage in her mind (*Od*. 6.15-47). Nausicaa agrees to offer *xenia* to the shipwrecked hero, and he is helped on his journey back to Ithaca.

In *Helen*, Menelaus' first local encounter is not so successful. In place of the impressionable and royal Nausicaa, Euripides substitutes an elderly enslaved doorkeeper whom Menelaus must win over. Perhaps the only similarities between these two characters are that both are female, and each, in their respective homelands, offers the hero access to a royal palace. The incongruity of this apparent intrusion of a comedic trope is exaggerated by the stakes for which the scene is played. Not only does the woman immediately tell Menelaus to leave lest he be killed (437-440), but the text indicates that she physically pushes the hero from the door (445). The use of physical force is rarely staged in tragedy, and, when it features offstage, is often an act of *hubris* that may well result in violent retaliation.[13] The most famous example of this type of interaction between strangers is undoubtedly the 'road rage' of Sophocles' Oedipus (*OT* 800-813), who retaliates to being violently forced from his path in kind, killing the entire group involved (including the man later revealed to be his biological father, King Laius). Here in *Helen*, however, the woman's use of force with Menelaus appears to do no more than confirm his fear that his former status holds no weight in this foreign location. Although the doorkeeper raises the stakes in her handling of him, Menelaus does not retaliate but instead continues with a script reminiscent of an Aristophanic doorkeeper scene and the *Odyssey* all at once.

Typically, the Aristophanic doorkeeper scene stages an interaction between an enslaved member of the household and a guest seeking the homeowner. It is not unusual for this request to be resisted or rejected by the enslaved doorkeeper, and the script of *Helen* neatly follows this comedic structure. Menelaus' persistence, also typical of the comedic guest figure, is supported by his call on epic convention: ναυαγὸς ἥκω ξένος, ἀσύλητον γένος 'I have come as a shipwrecked guest, a protected breed' (449). This reasoning, which evokes the welcoming words of Nausicaa,[14] reveals the chasm between Odysseus' successful epic precedent and Menelaus' developing tragic failure. The clash between the characters' two distinct scripts, the comedic directness of the enslaved doorkeeper and the epically inspired Menelaus, shapes the immediate conflict of their interaction. Menelaus' commitment to an epic perspective means that he does not actually listen to the enslaved doorkeeper's reason for rejecting him, i.e. that Theoclymenos is hostile to Greeks and is likely to have him killed (479-480). Her resistance to informing the king of Menelaus' arrival is in fact an act of compassion, as her final words reveal:

Γρ. εὔνους γάρ εἰμ' Ἕλλησιν, οὐχ ὅσον πικροὺς

[13] Burian (2007, 218) describes the status-violation inherent in the scene's physicality as 'the most extraordinary feature of the exchange'.
[14] Burian (2007, 218 on 449) compares *Od*. 6.206-8.

λόγους ἔδωκα δεσπότην φοβουμένη (E. *Hel*. 481-2)

DK. For I am well disposed to Greeks, as much as I offered
you harsh words in fear of my master

Critics have speculated on whether the enslaved doorkeeper's gender bears upon her reaction in this scene, suggesting, for example, that it is more likely that a female doorkeeper would let Menelaus escape.[15] Certainly, *Helen*'s female doorkeeper is anomalous in extant drama, though that is not necessarily to say that female doorkeepers were unusual in Greek drama or life.[16] Her sympathy towards Menelaus distinguishes her from the extant comedic doorkeepers, as too does her distinct characterisation from her enslaver and his hostile ideals. In this Euripidean character, comedic attributes and their tragic adaptations facilitate dramatic associations and expectations that bring greater levels of interpretive depth to the tragedy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the comedic associations offered by the doorkeeper's identity.

Although no straightforward examples of comedic female doorkeepers survive, the older women of *Lysistrata* have a similar function (*Lys*. 424ff), serving to protect the women inside from unwanted male intrusion.[17] Similarly, Henderson (1987, 125) notes the maid of *Frogs*, who willingly invites Dionysus and Xanthius into Hades' home and offers to procure dancing girls for them (*Ra*. 503-518). In *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes parodies one such elderly female pimp in the cross-dressing of his Euripides, who adopts the disguise to tempt the Scythian archer away from guarding his Relative by means of his sexual attraction to a dancing girl (*Th*. 1160-1202). These older female comedic stereotypes, though they are not formal doorkeepers as such, indicate some cultural and comedic connotations that Euripides' doorkeeper may well introduce to the *Helen* scene. It seems likely that her gender is not chosen so much for psychological plausibility, but rather for the ambivalent associations of the comedic older woman as doorkeeper. In the same way that Helen is currently in an existential and marital limbo, the doorkeeper of Theoclymenos' home may either become her protector or her procurer, reuniting her with Menelaus or aiding Theoclymenos' pursuit. Thus the scene's comedic interplay serves to elucidate the tragic tensions of the doorkeeper's role, employing what might be described as an anxious humour to heighten the tone of the scene.

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[15] Dale (1967, 96 on 437) considers a merciful female doorkeeper more 'plausible', Kannicht (1969, 130 on 435-82) considers the choice 'psychologisch möglich'.

[16] For the closest allusion to another female doorkeeper in extant tragedy, Burian (2007, 217) cites E. *Tro*. 492 in which Hecuba imagines her potential future role as an enslaved doorkeeper.

[17] Burian (2007, 216) includes this example among his list of doorkeeper scenes in comedy.

The clash of scripts between Menelaus and the doorkeeper is further reflected in the confusions that arise from their discussion: namely, the initial misunderstanding of whether Proteus is alive or dead (465-6), and subsequently the more complicated issue of whether the Helen inside the palace is the same Helen that Menelaus found at Troy (470-6). The second of these questions is not resolved, and the doorkeeper leaves Menelaus to ponder her meaning in another monologue. In addition to the doorkeeper scene itself, some critics detect humour in this response of Menelaus too. Despite the eerie similarities between the Helen described by the doorkeeper and his wife, Menelaus recounts these and concludes: οὐδὲν οὖν θαυμαστέον 'nothing to be amazed about' (499). Additionally, he refuses to heed the enslaved woman's advice, deciding instead that his ὄνομα 'name' (502) will be enough to convince the king to offer him *xenia*. Again, Menelaus expresses an epic view of his situation, albeit with an understanding of his dire need; his status demands not honour, but βοράν 'food' (502).[18] Menelaus' brash self-confidence jars with his immediate needs, creating a bathetic effect that is only enhanced by his ignorance of his name's actual resonance in Egypt's royal house – a signifier of the final obstacle between Theoclymenos and his desired marriage to Helen. In a sense, it is this sustained ignorance that protects him from an understanding of the intense threat to his life, or indeed 'his resilience seems to be based in part on incapacity for hard thought' (Burian 2007, 213). Here, as elsewhere, the Euripidean Menelaus is a comic figure who remains particularly resilient towards his own mockery and embarrassment.

In this tragedy, Euripides adapts the popular Aristophanic trope of the doorkeeper, including its structural and tonal aspects, to fit his complex tragedy. In addition to the comedic influence, a clashing Homeric script is introduced to achieve Menelaus' suspenseful misunderstanding. For both doorkeeper and guest, the scene concludes in something of a grey area between success and failure. The enslaved female doorkeeper defies aspects of her comedic role, particularly in her personal sympathy towards Menelaus and defiance of Theoclymenos. However, the complicated situation means that she neither entirely protects Helen nor finds her a partner, making her unsuccessful as a comedic protector or procurer. This grey area also extends to Menelaus, and the effects of the scene upon his characterisation. Menelaus is, of course, embarrassed by the situation; 'mocked as a nobody' (Blondell 2013, 217), he is certainly 'worsted and humiliated' (Foley 2001, 313) by the doorkeeper. Indeed, Burnett (1971, 81) notes that Menelaus' fearful behaviour has only one tragic parallel, and they are a low status character – the enslaved Phrygian messenger of Euripides' *Orestes*.[19] Despite this, whilst Menelaus fails to achieve his Odyssean aim of reaching the royal homeowner, he escapes without being

[18] Seidensticker (1982, 178); Burian (2007, 220 on 501-2) also notes that Euripides generally uses βοράν to refer to food in a deprecatory manner (*Hipp*. 112, *Supp*. 865, *El*. 425), or else to associate it with wild animals and cannibals (*Cyc*. 127, *IT* 388, *Ph*. 1603).

[19] Burnett (1971, 81) emphasises that the hero's lack of bravery is instead 'a chief ingredient in the standard satyr character'. On the Trojan messenger, see 7.3.4.

revealed to the hostile king. Moreover, the embarrassment of his degradation before someone of a lower status is somewhat expunged by the fact that the scene's only onstage witness is the doorkeeper herself. Papi (1987, 30) emphasises that Menelaus can cry before the doorkeeper precisely because she is of a lower status than him. Similarly, Austin suggests that the doorkeeper is moved by these tears, becoming kinder 'when Menelaus' humiliation has been adequately exposed' (1994, 158). Even his ragged clothing serves to aid his escape, as it later supports the false version of the shipwreck tale that Helen and Menelaus tell to Theoclymenos (Allan 2008, 197 on 421-4). Undoubtedly, all the elements of Menelaus' humiliation are also key parts of his survival; Euripides' theatrical audience, observers of their hero's degradation, are also aware that it has unfolded to successfully save his skin. It is a social failure, but an existential success, and the ambiguity of this result is reflected in the scene's oddly humorous tone.

5.3 Rejuvenation

5.3.1 Introduction

Rejuvenation, specifically the restoration of an old man's youthful qualities, is a commonly used trope in Old Comedy.[20] Its frequency may be explained at least in part by the regularity of older men appearing as protagonists in the genre.[21] Most often, the rejuvenation that these characters undergo is depicted in sexual terms, portrayed through the characters' renewed interest in sexual activity. This may have been reflected physically too; men's costumes in Old Comedy generally displayed exaggerated *phalli*, which were rarely erect except in the case of uncontrolled desire or rejuvenation (Foley 2014, 261). Though their successes may not be presented altogether uncritically, this is the type of rejuvenation straightforwardly offered to many Aristophanic heroes, such as Dicaeopolis, Trygaeus, Demos, Peisetaerus and (perhaps) Blepyrus.[22] Heightened sexuality, though the most prominent aspect, is only one part of the broader rejuvenation process. The euphemistic language used in *Knights*, *Acharnians* and *Peace* has strong sexual overtones, but at the same time highlights the civic qualities of a rejuvenated life: peace, agriculture and sport respectively.[23] More explicitly, the older men of *Lysistrata* express that, to them, erection represents a more general virility and military ability, in addition to dominance over women (*Lys*. 598, 631-5, 661, 671-681; Henderson 1991, 98).[24] Despite the great emphasis *Lysistrata*'s male chorus place upon sexual ability, they are depicted as implausibly old

[20] As observed by e.g. Sommerstein (1984, 320-321), Rothwell (1990, 57), Henderson (1991, 61-85).
[21] When young protagonists are featured in Aristophanic comedy, their older counterparts generally experience more success, and particularly that of a sexual nature. See e.g. Sommerstein (1984, 320 n42).
[22] Whilst the rejuvenations are straightforwardly successful, their meaning may still receive scrutiny from Aristophanes, e.g. Ruffell (2014, 212): 'In *Knights*, the rejuvenation of the old, deaf Demos (People) to the time of the Persian Wars and Athenian success (1319-34) is a sleight-of-hand that achieves a happy ending that only serves to accentuate the central criticism of political practice as it has been skewered in the play.' On Blepyrus' less obvious rejuvenation, see Rothwell (1990, 57-9).
[23] For double-meanings and word play, see *Eq.* 1390-1, *Ach.* 995-8, *Pax* 896-904.
[24] Despite the enhanced military ability offered by comedic rejuvenation, war itself is associated with sterility (*Acharnians*; Henderson 1991, 60) and a lack of sexual activity (*Lysistrata*).

and it is implied that they are impotent and/or incontinent (399-402).[25] Although these exaggeratedly elderly men are reconciled with their elderly female counterparts by the comedy's end (1014-1042), this is achieved by means of the women's intimate but non-sexual physical care for the men rather than their erotic rejuvenation. Rejuvenation is certainly not the only route to reconciliation in Old Comedy.

Moreover, rejuvenation is not always unambiguously successful for comedic old men. The case of *Wasps*' Philocleon reveals that just because an elderly man may feel himself rejuvenated, it does not mean that others experience him in the same way. Upon kidnapping an enslaved female pipe-player from a *symposium*, Philocleon reveals his sexual intentions in a speech that indicates his rejuvenation (1341-1363). On the one hand, Philocleon admits his equipment is not what it once was: σαπρὸν τὸ σχοινίον 'the rope is decayed' (1343). From this reference, critics have noted the invitation for Aristophanes' audience to direct their attention towards the character's visible and limp *phallus*, hardly the mark of a sexual rejuvenation.[26] He expresses fear that the woman will laugh at his appendage, aware of the implications of his aged physicality: κἀγχανεῖ τούτῳ μέγα 'you will laugh open-mouthed at this thing' (1349).[27] Nevertheless, he simultaneously presents himself as experiencing a rejuvenated youth, claiming explicitly:

Φιλ. νῦν δ' οὐ κρατῶ 'γὼ τῶν ἐμαυτοῦ χρημάτων·
νέος γάρ εἰμι. (Ar. *Vesp*. 1354-1355)

Phil. Currently I am not in control of my money,
for I am young.

Not only does the old man depict himself as youthful, but his claim that he does not yet control his finances indicates he is 'pretending to be no more than sixteen or seventeen years old' (Sommerstein 1983, 238). In a total role-reversal, in confused references throughout the speech Philocleon depicts his son, the young Bdelycleon, as his own father.[28] Although he calls Bdelycleon his son, he also makes

[25] Ruffell (2013, 267-9) observes that 285 implies the men have fought at Marathon, making them over a hundred years old. Other references age them further beyond this, to the beginnings of democracy (616-635, 664-670; Ruffell 2013, 267 n47). Conversely, O'Higgins notes the hemi-chorus of older women are described with reference to cult as opposed to historical events, granting them 'a "timeless" youthfulness denied their male peers' (2003, 167).
[26] Vaio (1971, 344 n41): 'we may infer that this part of his costume had a less sturdy look than the *phalli* of the other actors.'
[27] Sommerstein (1983, 237) notes τούτῳ refers to Philocleon's *phallus*: 'He fears she will laugh at it because she will think him impotent'. The superior connotations of ἐγχάσκω are captured in LSJ (II) '*grin* or *scoff at*', but evidently the verb is also chosen for its sexual innuendo 'open one's mouth (in laughter or otherwise) at someone' (Sommerstein 1983, 237) which is exploited for its double meaning at 1350.
[28] Sommerstein (1983, 283) suggests that Philocleon presents a topsy-turvy world in which the words 'father' and 'son' are essentially exchanged. The theme of the father restraining his son's love affair became a common theme in later comedy.

promises to be fulfilled upon his death, as if awaiting the demise of an elderly relative: ἐπειδὰν οὑμὸς υἱὸς ἀποθάνῃ 'when my son dies' (1352). Briefly, and with plenty of innuendo, Philocleon tries to persuade his son that the pipe-player is a torch (1372-8). Following this, Bdelycleon tries to take her away from his father on account of him being σαπρὸν 'decayed' (1380) – echoing Philocleon's earlier term for his own *phallus* (1343; Henderson 1991, 82). The scene resolves (if you could call it that) with Philocleon punching his son in the face (1382-7). The example from *Wasps* serves as a cautionary comedic tale for dramatic rejuvenation. Philocleon's situation borders on the pathetic, as the old man longs for a physical rejuvenation that the plot does not permit him.[29] However, there is evidently much humour in the contrast between Philocleon's view of himself and his presentation to the world.[30] His repeated insistence on his rejuvenated state is almost contagious, and his refusal to admit his error allows him to continue misbehaving, unchecked, with implications that he will continue to do so beyond the end of the play. Whilst perhaps he is not the most admirable comic hero, he is still ultimately fortunate, protected by his son's φιλοπατρίαν καὶ σοφίαν 'love of his father and wisdom' (1465).

5.3.2 *Heraclidae*

In the extant tragic corpus, successful rejuvenation occurs only once unambiguously, for Iolaus in Euripides' *Heraclidae*. Notably, this is the earliest example of the trope in extant drama, predating the Aristophanic instances. In this tragedy, Heracles' family remains under threat by his enemy Eurystheus, and a defensive battle looms on the horizon. Following an oracle demanding a virgin sacrifice in exchange for victory, an unnamed daughter of Heracles offers herself as the victim and leaves to be killed. Instead of a messenger speech describing the battle, Euripides depicts an exchange between an enslaved attendant and Iolaus, a family friend of Heracles. Upon hearing that Heracles' son Hyllus has arrived with reinforcements, Iolaus decides to join the fight. Although Iolaus was typically portrayed as an age-mate of Heracles himself, in Euripides' tragedy he appears as an elderly man.[31] As such, to participate in the battle defending the children of Heracles, Iolaus requires a miracle, and indeed he receives one that is 'without parallel in surviving Greek tragedy' (Hall 2010, 245).[32] Iolaus is successful in channelling the military strength of his youth, and succeeds in capturing Heracles' enemy, Eurystheus. The rejuvenation trope is also found, more ambiguously, in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Here, the elderly Cadmus and Tiresias appear onstage dressed in maenadic gear, intending to join the Theban women in their worship of Dionysus. In both cases, unlike the Aristophanic parallels, rejuvenation is

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[29] Henderson (1991, 82): 'this rejuvenation is not really a rejuvenation but simply the drunken re-enactment of youthful exploits long past'.
[30] Vaio (1971, 343-4 n41): 'much of Philocleon's boasting must be interpreted as humorous because incongruous with the real state of affairs'.
[31] Allan (2001, 27) notes that Iolaus' cult in Thebes was connected to youth, where he was depicted as a hero of young men (Diod. 1.24.4).
[32] Despite the successful rejuvenation being an anomaly in extant tragedy, given the cultic associations it is not necessarily the case that it was a Euripidean invention. However, see Scullion (1999-2000, 222-5) on the potential Euripidean invention of the cult of Eurystheus at the end of this tragedy (1026-1044).

not depicted on stage; rather it is either reported (as in *Heraclidae*) or alluded to (as in *Bacchae*). Instead of showing successful rejuvenation itself, stage time is granted to the anticipation of rejuvenation by those wishing to undergo it. As such, within these anticipatory scenes, there remains some doubt as to whether the rejuvenations will successfully occur.

The rejuvenation of Iolaus falls into three distinct parts: his agreement to fight (680-701), his arming scene (720-747), and the messenger speech relating his success in battle (784-866). The first of these scenes begins with Iolaus showing signs of his age, as he describes himself as weak (636) and admits he is forgetful (638). After a brief confusion, in which Alcmene mistakes the attendant for a herald from Eurystheus (646-659), the attendant shares the news that Hyllus' forces have arrived and reveals his plan to join the fight. In response, Iolaus decides to do the same, and the attendant attempts to dissuade him on account of his age, undermining his confident assertions with seemingly 'humorous ripostes' (Allan 2001, 183). His arguments centre entirely on Iolaus' age and ability: his strength is waning (688), his contribution would be σμικρὸν 'small' (690). Iolaus is more likely to hurt himself than anyone else (686), and his intentions do not align with his realistic ability (692). Despite the excuses he recently made for his age, Iolaus now refuses to be discouraged, and requests that armour be brought from the temple to equip him (695-9). When the attendant returns with the weapons, beginning the second of the three 'rejuvenation' scenes, Iolaus does not arm himself but accepts the attendant's suggestion that he carries the equipment to the battlefield for him (723-8). The younger man's doubt in his elder's ability, paired with Iolaus' own admission of his physical struggles, reveals that the rejuvenation is not yet in effect.

However, in their final exchange before the battle, there are textual hints at Iolaus' upcoming rejuvenation ironically placed among the attendant's doubts, such as:

Θε. ἦ παιδαγωγεῖν γὰρ τὸν ὁπλίτην χρεών; (E. *Hcld.* 729)

At. Is it really necessary to lead the soldier like a child?

On the one hand, this 'intentionally ludicrous combination' (Allan 2001, 189) highlights the impropriety of the aged Iolaus joining the battle. However, there is dramatic irony in the reference to Iolaus becoming young again, as soon the rejuvenation will renew his youth, though admittedly not that of his childhood. Iolaus also indicates his potentially improved mobility:

Ιο. οὔκουν ὁρᾷς μου κῶλον ὡς ἐπείγεται;
Θε. ὁρῶ δοκοῦντα μᾶλλον ἢ σπεύδοντά σε.
Ιο. οὐ ταῦτα λέξεις, ἡνίκ' ἂν λεύσσῃς μ' ἐκεῖ.

Θε. τί δρῶντα; βουλοίμην δ' ἂν εὐτυχοῦντά γε.

Ιο. δι' ἀσπίδος θείνοντα πολεμίων τινά.

Θε. εἰ δή ποθ' ἥξομέν γε· τοῦτο γὰρ φόβος. (E. *Hcld.* 734-739)

Io. Do you not see my leg, how it makes haste?

At. I see you willing more than hurrying.

Io. You will not say this, when you see me there.

At. Doing what? Faring well I should hope, at any rate.

Io. Striking one of the enemies through his shield.

At. If indeed we ever reach the place; for this is the fear.

Evidently, the attendant does not perceive Iolaus as he does himself, and the optimistic suggestion of the rejuvenation is met with curt expressions of doubt. Although these lines are laden with irony, Euripides sows the seeds of Iolaus' successful rejuvenation throughout the scene precisely through these expressions; on the one hand, Iolaus' wishful thinking, and on the other, the attendant's doubt and disbelief. As the scene concludes with Iolaus' wish for strength and heroism (739-747), the tone seems to shift to that of sincere pathos. Euripides' audience are reminded of the stakes of the battle and the fragility of their champion, who cannot even make a reliable σύμμαχος 'ally' (742) of his own spear-arm.

These two scenes featuring Iolaus and the attendant share a similar comic potential, and the humour of these *Heraclidae* scenes is regularly accepted by scholars.[33] This reading is supported by Euripides' inclusion of an established comedic device in both scenes – namely, the disagreement between a stubborn older man and a younger, enslaved one.[34] However, the purpose of the comedic tropes and the comic scenes is perhaps less tangible. Seidensticker (1982, 99-100) argues that these scenes' humour foregrounds the ironic ending of the play, which concerns itself with Alcmene's vengeful killing of Eurystheus. The narration of the battle somewhat supports this reading, as Iolaus' rejuvenation is depicted in particularly physical terms: νέων / βραχιόνων ἔδειξεν ἡβητὴν τύπον 'he revealed / the youthful shape of his new arms' (857-8). Burnett observes the parallels to the revival of Laertes at *Odyssey* 24, and this comparison certainly helps to bridge the gap between the comic and vengeful depictions of his rejuvenation.[35] In the epic, Laertes' rejuvenation by Athena allows him to exact his vengeance upon the suitors, and similarly Iolaus is aided by Hebe and Zeus to capture Eurystheus and present him to Alcmene for punishment. Here, with the trope shifting its generic

[33] For a comic reading, see Seidensticker (1982, 92-100), Allan (2001 183-185), Gregory (2005, 266); against a comic reading, see Wilkins (1993, 137-8).
[34] On the trope, see Allan (2001, 184), Hall (2010, 248).
[35] Burnett (1998, 157 n64), *Od.* 24.365-71.

associations from Old Comedy to epic, the rejuvenation is no longer a site for humour. In retrospect, from the tragedy's end, the humour of the earlier scenes may now be loaded with a darker and more ambivalent affect for its audience.

On top of this contrast in mood, Allan posits that the humour 'encourages the audience to feel affection for Iolaus, while at the same time inviting them to share the servant's gentle irony and amused disbelief, only to reverse this reasonable attitude in the next episode and so magnify the impact of Iolaus' success' (2001, 185). The audience sharing the attendant's interpretation of the situation is key here, and this has striking similarities to the rejuvenation scene of Aristophanes' later *Wasps*. Both plays share a marked contrast between the determinedly youthful behaviour of the elderly men characters, and the doubt expressed by their younger interlocutors.[36] From a physical perspective, Iolaus' decision not to put on his armour onstage also leaves the entire rejuvenation up to the audience's imagination. As he leaves the stage, accompanied by the attendant, he does so entirely in the costume he has worn throughout the tragedy, indicating a continuity of age and character. This is comparable with the contrast offered by Philocleon's insistence on his youth despite the reality of his aged body in *Wasps* (1342-1363). However, as the possibility of failure for Iolaus' rejuvenation carries more weight than that of the amorous Philocleon, the humour in *Heraclidae* therefore adds to the suspense and tension of the scene by encouraging its audience to entertain doubt about Iolaus' success.[37] Euripides uses humour to set up Iolaus for a failed rejuvenation, increasing the audience's anticipation of his success whilst providing an engaging mood shift.

5.3.3 *Heracles*

Arguably, a similar effect can be felt in Euripides' *Heracles*, which likely debuted a few years after Aristophanes' *Wasps*. This tragedy is concerned with a different retelling of the Heracles myth, in which the hero returns from the completion of his labours, only to be afflicted with madness from a vengeful Hera. As a result, he murders his wife and children, thinking them to be the family of his enemy, Eurystheus. Iolaus is not involved in this telling, but aspects of his characterisation are evoked in Heracles' father Amphitryon, who accompanies the hero's wife, Megara.[38] The aged Amphitryon is an ἀσθενῆ φίλον 'weak friend' (228), just as Iolaus in *Heraclidae* (636, 688, 690). When Iolaus decides to fight, the chorus of old men warns against it on account of his age (705-7). In *Heracles*, when the hero enters the palace to punish his enemy, the (similarly) elderly male chorus sings of the pains of old age (639-671). Barlow (1981, 153) considers Heracles, who has just returned from the dead, as the model

[36] And, indeed, the mockery expected from Philocleon's potential lover (1349).
[37] This is even more important for the play's impact if, as Allan (2001, 27) suggests, Iolaus' rejuvenation was an established myth.
[38] The ambiguous and dual aspect of Heracles' paternity is a persistent theme within the play (148-150; 1264-1265); Heracles is also depicted as a heroic alternative to Zeus, see e.g. Burnett (1971, 161), Griffiths (2006, 98).

for their song. However, their song contains a reference to rejuvenation that seems more applicable to the old Amphitryon or themselves:

Χο. εἰ δὲ θεοῖς ἦν ξύνεσις
καὶ σοφία κατ᾽ ἄνδρας,
δίδυμον ἂν ἥβαν ἔφερον (E. *Her.* 655-7)

Cho. But if the gods had comprehension
and wisdom according to men,
[men] would have a second youth.

Despite the unreal conditional clause, the reference to a δίδυμον…ἥβαν 'second youth' acts as a reminder that such a rejuvenation of an elderly hero is not unheard of in Euripidean tragedy. Both Amphitryon and the chorus view old age, λυγρὸν φόνιον τε 'baneful and murderous' (649), as a threat to their safety. Their longing for youth is expressed in particularly military and physical terms; Falkner (1995, 173) notes that just as Iolaus addresses his spear-hand (740) so too do *Heracles*' chorus (268), and both Iolaus (743-4) and Amphitryon (232-5) imagine their respective enemy cowering before their weapon. The verbal and thematic links are striking, and by creating these parallels to *Heraclidae*, Euripides diverts his audience's expectations from the upcoming narrative of his *Heracles*. Whilst the emphasis on the spear in *Heraclidae* predicts a rejuvenation and civic triumph, Amphitryon will experience no such transformation. Instead, this foreshadowed divine intervention will manifest in madness, afflicting the youthful and strong Heracles, who is champion of the bow rather than the spear.[39] Thus Euripides seems to exploit the subtext of *Heracleidae* to present a perversion of rejuvenation. Here, he evokes the light-hearted and comedic rejuvenation trope to deny it to his audience. Instead, the military success obtained from positive physical transformation is substituted with the violent and devastating consequences of Heracles' madness.

5.3.4 *Bacchae*

Rejuvenation is anticipated early in Euripides' *Bacchae*, as the elderly Cadmus and Tiresias adopt maenadic dress for their worship of Dionysus (170-369). The scene begins with Tiresias' entry, notably lacking a young boy to guide him as happens in Sophocles' *OT* (299, 444). Seidensticker (1978, 313) suggests that the effect of the blind Tiresias using his bacchic *thyrsus* to feel his way onstage may be deliberately comic.[40] The *thyrsus* may have a double duty during Cadmus' entry too, as Chaston (2010,

[39] Notably, Heracles perceives himself to be punishing Eurystheus and his enemy's family during his mad episode (*Her.* 962-1015), evoking Iolaus' rejuvenated defeat of this same enemy.
[40] Although the blinding of Polyphemus in Euripides' satyr play *Cyclops* may be played for laughs too (see 2.3.2), it is nevertheless dangerous to bring ableist assumptions to the ancient text here. On classical reception

202) notes that it could also function as a walking stick. The sight of the Apolline prophet in maenadic dress would surely have been somewhat incongruous, even if the atmosphere it provokes is ‘not comic but festive’ (Seaford 1996, 167).[41] As this scene is juxtaposed with the *parodos*, the use of these props by the elderly characters noticeably contrasts with the mobile chorus’ use of *thyrsi* in their dancing (Goldhill 1986, 262). The two elderly characters express their youthful feelings alongside their advanced age:

Κα. ποῖ δεῖ χορεύειν, ποῖ καθιστάναι πόδα
καὶ κρᾶτα σεῖσαι πολιόν; ἐξηγοῦ σύ μοι
γέρων γέροντι, Τειρεσία· σὺ γὰρ σοφός.
ὡς οὐ κάμοιμ’ ἂν οὔτε νύκτ’ οὔθ’ ἡμέραν
θύρσῳ κροτῶν γῆν· ἐπιλελήσμεθ’ ἡδέως
γέροντες ὄντες.
Τε. ταὔτ’ ἐμοὶ πάσχεις ἄρα·
κἀγὼ γὰρ ἡβῶ κἀπιχειρήσω χοροῖς.
Κα. οὐκοῦν ὄχοισιν εἰς ὄρος περάσομεν;
Τε. ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὁμοίως ἂν ὁ θεὸς τιμὴν ἔχοι.
Κα. γέρων γέροντα παιδαγωγήσω σ’ ἐγώ.
Τε. ὁ θεὸς ἀμοχθὶ κεῖσε νῷν ἡγήσεται. (E. *Ba*. 184-194)

Ca. To where must we dance, to where must we place our feet
and shake our grey heads? You give me directions
an old man to another, Tiresias. For you are wise.
As I would not tire either night or day
banging the earth with my *thyrsus*. Gladly we have forgotten
that we are old.
Ti. You are experiencing the same things as me, then.
For I too am young and undertake the dances.
Ca. Shall we not drive up the mountain in a chariot?
Ti. No, the god would not have as much honour this way.
Ca. Shall I lead you as a child, even though you and I are both old?
Ti. The god will lead us both there without toil.

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and disability studies, see Silverblank & Ward (2020, 521): ‘with the insights of disability studies research, activism, and scholarship, scholars working in classical reception studies can unpick the tropes that persist in present day assumptions about disability, and examine the impact of the construction of these ancient narratives as ‘traditional’.’

[41] The trope of characters adopting costumes to play a part is common to Old Comedy, but this is generally associated with disguise, see 5.4.

Here, Euripides juxtaposes references to their age alongside assertions of their rejuvenated youth, phrased more strongly than Iolaus' hopes for himself (*Hcld*. 734-9). Despite this, Cadmus' claim that they have both 'forgotten' their age is juxtaposed with repeated references to their elderly status (κρᾶτα…πολιόν, 185, γέρων γέροντι, 186, γέροντες ὄντες, 189, γέρων γέροντα, 193). There seems to be a marked distinction between what Cadmus says and what he sees, and the claim of 'forgetting' his age is somewhat undermined by his multiple references to it. His tentative position is further evident when he suggests that they travel ὄχοισιν 'by chariot', despite feeling capable of dancing all day and night. Moreover, in phrasing closely reminiscent of Iolaus' attendant (*Hcld*. 729), he expects to have to lead Tiresias 'as a child' in spite of their apparent physical rejuvenation. Perhaps Cadmus is not so confident in the rejuvenation as he suggests.

This scene has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention for its potentially humorous elements, and many conflicting interpretations have been suggested and staged.[42] These range from an entirely sincere reading of the characters' Dionysiac rejuvenation as presented by Euripides (e.g. Seaford 1996, 167) to playing the scene for laughs (e.g. Seidensticker 1978, 310-316). Some consider the attempt to argue for humour as impossible, such as Winnington-Ingram, or, more recently, Torrance, who opts to study Euripides' metatheatrical elements without seeking to determine their tonal qualities.[43] For those who do consider the scene's humour, the sincerity with which the rejuvenation is presented is often cited as the deciding factor for its presence or absence. Nihard (1912, 44) draws on Iolaus' rejuvenation as a parallel to argue that Tiresias and Cadmus should also be interpreted as successfully revived. However, as discussed above, when Iolaus appears onstage, the success of his anticipated rejuvenation appears to be far from guaranteed; though he is hopeful, he still fundamentally appears old and somewhat physically impaired. Instead, the enslaved attendant offers a pessimistic perspective on Iolaus' hopes, and *Bacchae* provides a similar foil in the guise of Cadmus. Although Tiresias also acknowledges the age and status of the pair (175), Cadmus repeatedly expresses doubt in his frequent references to their age and his questioning of the seer. Whilst the two share a similarly high status, Cadmus' consistent undermining of the rejuvenation creates a similar effect to that of the enslaved attendant rebutting Iolaus' suggestions in *Heraclidae*.[44] Shortly, however, this role will be filled by another character that better fits the description of doubtful young companion. Cadmus asks a final question, again betraying both his age and doubt over the implications of his intended behaviour:

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[42] *Bacchae* is one of the most popular tragedies for reperformance in the modern world, reflected in the wealth of scholarship devoted to study of the play and its various productions, e.g. Stuttard (2016).

[43] Winnington-Ingram (1948, 40): 'the presence of humour cannot be argued; it can only be felt'; Torrance (2013, 285): 'deciding what might or might not be funny in Greek tragedy is a veritable minefield with no straightforward answers'.

[44] For example, Gregory (2005, 266) compares the *Heraclidae* scene as evidence for humour in this scene of *Bacchae*.

Κα. ἐρεῖ τις ὡς τὸ γῆρας οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι,
μέλλων χορεύειν κρᾶτα κισσώσας ἐμόν; (E. *Ba.* 204-5)[45]

Ca. Will someone say that I am shameless in my old age,
intending to dance and wreathe my head with ivy?

On a light-hearted level, Euripides' use of the comedic device elicits humour from the scene, but it also reveals a lack of belief from Cadmus which might be disturbing in the circumstances. For Tiresias, the motivation to worship Dionysus appears to be rational, in keeping with his role as Apolline prophet.[46] As such, his attitude may be interpreted as a successful integration of Dionysus into the order of the polis, as he worships the god without fully giving in to bacchic excess (Segal 1997, 330).[47] Conversely, Cadmus reveals a misunderstanding of the levelling god when he asks to go to the mountain in a chariot (Seaford 1996, 168). Moreover, it seems that Cadmus is only 'playing safe' (Grube 1935, 40) by embracing Dionysus. His advice to Pentheus is to pretend to follow the god, reinforcing his own lack of certainty: καὶ καταψεύδου καλῶς 'and lie well' (334). Obscured by the scene's light-hearted humour are the fundamental flaws in Cadmus' own assumption of Dionysiac worship, which in turn will fail to convince Pentheus.

Right on cue, Pentheus enters ten lines later to chastise his elderly relative in exactly the terms Cadmus fears, just as Bdelycleon undermines his father's 'rejuvenation' in *Wasps*:

Πε. ἀτὰρ τόδ' ἄλλο θαῦμα, τὸν τερασκόπον
ἐν ποικίλαισι νεβρίσι Τειρεσίαν ὁρῶ
πατέρα τε μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς—πολὺν γέλων—
νάρθηκι βακχεύοντ'· ἀναίνομαι, πάτερ,
τὸ γῆρας ὑμῶν εἰσορῶν νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον (E. *Ba.* 248-252)[48]

Pe. But here is another wonder, the prophet
I see in dappled fawnskins, Tiresias,
and the father of my mother –how ridiculous–
acting like a bacchant with a *thyrsus*. I am ashamed, father,

[45] These lines are attributed to Cadmus by Diggle (1994, 300) as the last of his series of questions.
[46] Tiresias' speech (266-327) is 'sophisticated in content' (Seaford 1996, 178).
[47] However, Segal (1997, 212) critiques the content of the speech itself: 'Tiresias fluctuates between empty Polonian rhetoric and discredited sophistic rationalism'.
[48] θαῦμα (248) is also used to describe Iolaus' successful rejuvenation in the messenger report (*Hcld.* 853).

to see your old age lacking sense.

In the same way that Bdelycleon verbally echoes his father's age-related anxieties (σαπρὸν 'decayed' *Vesp*. 1343, 1380), Pentheus repeats Cadmus' concern: that he will be shamed for acting as a bacchant in spite of his γῆρας 'old age' (204, 252). Both the comedic and tragic scenes are also concerned with the laughter of mockery. In *Wasps*, in addition to the anticipated laughter of the pipe-player (1349), Philocleon expresses his intent to ridicule his son (1362-1363). Upon entering, Bdelycleon too criticises his father in mocking terms that emphasise the incongruity of his behaviour based on his age:[49]

Βδ. ὦ οὗτος οὗτος, τυφεδανὲ καὶ χοιρόθλιψ,
ποθεῖν ἐρᾶν τ' ἔοικας ὡραίας σοροῦ. (Ar. *Vesp*. 1364-5)

Bd. Hey, you, you – you demented old twat-rubber!
You seem to be lovingly yearning for an attractive young coffin!
(transl. Sommerstein 1983, 132-3)

Philocleon's mocking protest (1367) is met with more chastisement from his son on account of his improper behaviour:

Βδ. οὐ δεινὰ τωθάζειν σε τὴν αὐλητρίδα
τῶν ξυμποτῶν κλέψαντα; (Ar. *Vesp*. 1368-9)

Bd. It is not clever for you to mock after you have
stolen the pipe-player from the *symposium*.

However, this still does not stop Philocleon continuing to spar with his son, again implying that Bdelycleon is the older one of the two (1370). In *Wasps*, even though Philocleon is evidently not rejuvenated, father and son each mock the other in terms of old age and the incongruity of their behaviour. As both refuse to back down from their own interpretation of the events, this continues until the comedy's end.

As established in section 3.4.2, Pentheus' comment in *Bacchae* (πολὺν γέλων 'how ridiculous', 250) also has a mocking quality, as he tries to use laughter as a social corrective for his grandfather's unusual behaviour. However, he is met with no mockery in return, and instead Tiresias emphasises the harmful implications of Pentheus' attitude. Notably, this brings a tonal shift; the 'festive' mood is

[49] Lines attributed to Bdelycleon by Sommerstein (1983, 238).

punctured by Pentheus' unreciprocated mockery, paired with his outright rejection of Dionysus and his threats to punish the worshippers, and even kill the stranger. Ironically, the mention of laughter, as it is superior and paired with sincere threats, seems to curtail the humour of the scene–much like Iolaus' sincere prayer to his spear-hand in *Heraclidae* (739-747). On the basis of the laughter's mocking connotations, Halliwell (2008, 134) and Gredley (1996, 207) consider Pentheus' laughter as evidence against a humorous reading of the scene. On the other hand, Seidensticker (1978, 314-5) views the comment as a cue for the audience to laugh with Pentheus at the expense of the elderly characters he mocks. Given the tonal complexity of the scene, Pentheus' superior laughter–expressed vaguely rather than necessarily voiced–does not seem sufficient evidence on which to base a reading of the entire scene's humour.

The tone of the scene has been developed for nearly fifty lines without Pentheus' presence, in which an audience may have found humour similar to that of *Heraclidae*. As applicable there too, to assess humour only retrospectively is to do a disservice to the audience's experience of both drama and laughter in performance. At 3.4.2, the role of both superior and playful laughter within *Bacchae* is established. Before Dionysus' vengeance, the laughter associated with his worship is consistently playful, and this is surely the type of laughter most likely to be encouraged by the Tiresias and Cadmus scene. This kind of laughter is able to sustain cooperation within a group without isolating a target of mockery, unlike superior laughter.[50] Pentheus' entry into the scene undoubtedly brings a shift in tone, especially as the sincerity with which he levies his threats becomes increasingly clear. Thus, his request for laughter becomes all the more pertinent and ironic if Euripides' audience *have* been laughing at the elderly figures, albeit in perhaps a less ridiculing manner. This effect is confusing; the shared response means that not all of Euripides' audience, especially if laughing themselves, may recognise the offensive nature of Pentheus' reaction. Indeed, as has been observed by Seidensticker (1978, 314), an audience who have an embodied understanding of how Tiresias and Cadmus might trigger laughter are more likely to empathise with the reasoning behind Pentheus' harsh response. Just as Allan (2001, 185) argues for *Heraclidae*, so too are *Bacchae*'s audience encouraged by the scene's humour to feel affection for the elderly bacchants and *simultaneously* to understand why doubts are levelled in turn by Cadmus and then Pentheus. Yet if the audience laugh along with Pentheus, are they not then partially implicated in his *hubris* too? This ambiguity further confirms the audience's unusual position, suspended between empathy with divine and human protagonists. Rather, as Seidensticker (1978, 316) emphasises, the tragic irony is heightened in this scene *because* Pentheus' first interaction with Dionysus' religion is so humorous. The king comments upon the comic nature of the elders' worship, but mocks both the religion and their appearance. He is closed off to the possibility of sharing in the inclusive comic tone that the worshippers and the audience enjoy, and isolates himself through his

[50] For superiority theory, see 1.1; for play theory, see 2.1.

mockery. Yet the humorous tone obscures Pentheus' isolation and *hubris* as it is mingled with the comic reaction of the audience.

Finally, one argument against the humour of the Tiresias and Cadmus scene is that their rejuvenation is successful, due to the close association between Dionysus and rejuvenation in Greek myth.[51] This link seems to exist in Old Comedy too. In *Ecclesiazusae*, a later Aristophanic comedy featuring rejuvenation and its failure, Strauss (1966, 266) observes that the only character to swear by Dionysus is the one who succeeds in his youthful revival – Blepyrus (344, 357, 422). The connection to *Ecclesiazusae* is perhaps fruitful for comparison to *Bacchae*, as both dramas are concerned with gender as much as they are with age. In *Ecclesiazusae*, Blepyrus' sexual rejuvenation is one that stands in stark contrast to the old women characters of the comedy, who compete for the affections of the young Epigenes (942-1111).[52] Unlike Blepyrus, the comedy does not permit these women the same straightforward success with their potential lover. Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* depicts society under the rule of women (*gynaikokratia*), but it is unusual in its license for depicting citizen women soliciting sex from outside of their household.[53] The Epigenes scene in particular is reflective of the sexual ramifications of their new communist political system; 'the most planned of any utopian scheme in Old Comedy' (Ruffell 2014, 214).

Women in Old Comedy generally did not require rejuvenations to reignite their erotic interest, as they are stereotypically depicted as obsessed with sex.[54] As such, perhaps the elderly women do not require a rejuvenation of libido, as it is something they already do not lack. This would explain the lack of language of rejuvenation in the scene, but Aristophanes goes as far as to present a reverse rejuvenation – or indeed, their *mortification*.[55] Sommerstein notes 'the language of rejuvenation is nowhere used of the old women in this scene; on the contrary, they are persistently associated with the idea of death (cf. on 905, 996, 1030-5, 1073, 1105-11) and, far from contact with Epigenes revitalizing them, we are given the impression that contact with them will be, almost literally, the death of him'

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[51] In terms of ancient sources, Dodds (1960, 90) cites A. fr. 50 on Medea's rejuvenation of the 'nurses of Dionysus'; Burnett (1998, 157 n64) notes Aristides 41.7; cf. Ar. *Ran*. 345 ff.

[52] The play depicts Blepyrus' development from feeling apathy towards sex (465-470, 537-8) to renewed interest and ability; Rothwell (1990, 58) suggests, regarding the τὰς μείρακας 'the young girls' (1138) he accompanies at the end of the comedy: 'we may suppose that the attraction between Blepyrus and the girls is fundamentally erotic'.

[53] *Lysistrata*, though its topic is sexual, centres on sex within its characters' marriages. On the allusions to historical women in Old Comedy, O'Higgins observes: 'A woman's involvement or alleged involvement in politics was invariably sexualized by the comic poets' (2003, 112). This rings equally true of the plays more structurally interested in women and politics.

[54] Ruffell (2013, 257) notes the obsession with male sexuality in comic plots: 'This obsession leaves little room for genuine female subjectivity, short of some determined reading against the grain'.

[55] I use this term to express both the thwarting of the older women's sexual advances, and the shaming of their bodies and desires (see O'Higgins 2003, 133-5 on the shaming of older women in comedy, and 222 n59 on their lack of rejuvenation in Aristophanes.). There is also, of course, the linguistic link to death, for which Greek rituals traditionally involved the participation of women.

(2021, 21). Shortly after the old women drag the protesting Epigenes inside, presumably to sexually assault him (1111), Blepyrus enters with two young women on his arm.[56] The Aristophanic hierarchy is evident: age certainly triumphs over youth, and so too do the rejuvenated old men triumph over the mortified, if sexually gratified, old women.[57]

Even more directly, and prior to *Bacchae*, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* stages a conversation in which Aristophanes' female characters outline the inequality of the effects of age on men and women. Following a dressing scene in which the *proboulos* is costumed in women's clothing (532-8), Lysistrata observes the marked difference in sexual opportunity for old men and women. Whilst old men will succeed at finding a young bride, women have a narrow window in which to find a partner or else face sexual rejection (594-7).[58] To silence his objections, Lysistrata instructs the *proboulos*, costumed as a working woman, to die, and the women swiftly dress him for a (woman's) funeral (599-607). When the *proboulos* is unable to understand the women's arguments on account of his privileged gendered experience, Lysistrata's solution is to force him into a woman's role to elicit his empathy. When dressing him in women's clothing proves not to be enough, the women force him to undergo a metaphorical 'death' mirroring the social death that Lysistrata has just depicted as the experience of ageing, unmarried women. In place of the rejuvenation common to older men in Aristophanic comedy, the *proboulos* similarly has a *mortification* enforced upon him; he is forced into a woman's role, and metaphorically rendered 'dead'. Again, the femininity of the *proboulos*' costuming brings with it associations of death instead of renewed youth.

To return to *Bacchae*, the potentially gendered coding of the costuming and behaviour of Tiresias and Cadmus are important not to overlook. As it stands in the tragedy, Dionysiac worship is strongly gendered as a feminine pursuit. The god's only followers thus far in the tragedy are his chorus of maenads from Asia minor and the maddened Theban women in the mountains. The women are Pentheus' immediate concern when he enters the scene, and he mistakes the bacchic inspiration for pretence; instead, he imagines the women drinking and having sex with men (215-225). Similarly, he is suspicious of the young stranger (the disguised Dionysus) and his imagined active sexuality (236,

[56] Sommerstein (1998, 232): 'in the first we saw the young man Epigenes compelled by the new female authorities to become the sexual prisoner of two hideous old women, in the second we see the old man Blepyrus invited by those same authorities, indeed by his own wife, to feast in the company of (at least) two beautiful women'.

[57] Ultimately the old women are still successful in their sexual pursuit of Epigenes. Ruffell (2013, 266): 'Although the old women are undoubtedly grotesque, they are also the dominant agents: the butt is in large part the young man'. O'Higgins (2003, 178) also suggests a more ambivalent reading of the scene, acknowledging these old women's link to the Scira festival: 'these lascivious old women do indeed embody a power to restore life and fertility, a power all the more astounding because it is belied by their aged bodies'.

[58] Sommerstein (1990, 184): 'for there was simply no place in Greek society for the adult woman who remained unmarried: her virgin state would exclude her from the world of wives, her age from the world of maidens, and her family would look on her as a failure'. Preventing young woman from marrying is depicted as a crime at Lys. 12.21

487). For Pentheus, the sight of his grandfather donning maenadic accoutrements associates him with the sexual freedom of the imagined mountainside antics, ironically casting him in the role of rejuvenated comedic protagonist. The rejuvenation that the elders expect is expressed in entirely non-sexual terms, but here Euripides seems to evoke the comedic trope of sexual rejuvenation to add colour to Pentheus' embarrassment at his grandfather's behaviour.

Unlike *Heraclidae*, the rejuvenation of Cadmus and Tiresias is never fully resolved in *Bacchae*. However, in the form of Pentheus' dressing scene, an alternative 'rejuvenation' is offered as the king is dressed by the god himself as a maenad. Throughout the tragedy, Pentheus and his men express concern with Dionysus' gender presentation (353, 453-9). Therefore, in a deliberately ironic reversal, the god dresses Pentheus in traditionally feminine clothing, under the pretence of disguising him so that he can infiltrate the Theban maenads.[59] Like the hero's madness in *Heracles*, Pentheus' dressing and subsequent *sparagmos* on the mountain acts as an alternative to the rejuvenation evoked by the tragedy's earlier scene. Similarly, the subject of rejuvenation is inappropriately young, and here he is also depicted as feminine. As in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Lysistrata*, *mortification* is offered to Pentheus in place of rejuvenation. Here, its double meaning is even more literal: as Pentheus leaves the stage, Dionysus announces that he will be killed on the mountain (847), but not before being ridiculed by his Theban subjects (854).

In *Heraclidae*, the humour heightens the audience's anticipation and anxiety for Iolaus' rejuvenation, as it emphasises the extreme incongruity of the elderly man taking on the role of soldier. Similarly, by evoking rejuvenation in *Heracles*, Euripides introduces an ironic red herring to the plot; Amphitryon will not be the subject of a divine rejuvenation, but the already powerful Heracles will be inflicted with a perverted version of the trope, in the form of madness from a vengeful Hera. Finally, the anticipated rejuvenation of Tiresias and Cadmus entwines both earlier uses of the trope. As with *Heraclidae*, the humour of the scene is soured for its theatrical audience by the tragedy's end, but serves to enhance empathy for all of the characters within the scene. As the humour introduces doubt into Iolaus' successful rejuvenation, so too is Cadmus' belief exposed as wanting, and Pentheus' concerns with the social implications of the cult are rendered more understandable in the comic context. However, just as in *Heracles*, the rejuvenation is replaced instead with Pentheus' divinely inspired adoption of maenadic dress that transgresses far beyond the accoutrements of his elders. His adoption of a costume particularly gendered as feminine evokes the comedic trope of *mortification* in place of rejuvenation, in which older female characters (as in *Ecclesiazusae*) or indeed men in women's clothing (as in *Lysistrata*) are associated with death rather than renewed youth.

[59] Pentheus' dressing scene explored in detail at 5.4.2.

5.4 Dressing

5.4.1 Introduction

Disguise is a relatively common trope in Aristophanic comedy, wherein a comedic protagonist adopts the costume of another character for an extended period of their stage time.[60] The adoption of this disguise does not always occur onstage, but *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae* contain a dressing scene in which the character adopts the disguise before the audience. Notably, these two comedies both feature Euripides as a character, who helps to fit the disguises for their wearers, Dicaeopolis and Euripides' own Relative respectively. *Thesmophoriazusae* also features another tragedian, Agathon, who supplies much of the costume for Euripides' Relative. The inclusion of these tragedians is at least in part due to Aristophanes' use of the disguise trope as tragic parody or 'paratragedy'. Euripides' fragmentary *Telephus* (438) notably featured its protagonist disguising himself as a beggar, and this tragedy is parodied by Aristophanes in both of the comedies explored here. In *Acharnians*, the protagonist Dicaeopolis disguises himself as Euripides' Telephus, himself disguised as a beggar, and in *Thesmophoriazusae*, the Relative, having had his disguise exposed, attempts to escape punishment though parodies of Euripides' *Telephus*, *Palamedes*, *Helen*, and *Andromeda*.[61]

The double parody of Euripides' *Telephus* reveals Aristophanes' interest in using disguise to explore the differences between tragedy and comedy as performance art forms.[62] Disguise is a site of great play for Old Comedy, particularly as its generic base costume is already much more exaggerated than that of tragedy.[63] Most likely, it comprised 'a grotesque mask with squinting eyes, a snub nose, and a gaping grin, as well as a padded rump and belly, and, in the case of male characters, a large, visible phallus' (Foley 2000, 275). In contrast to tragedy, where costume would conceal the actor's body instead of enhancing it, the padding and enlarged sexual characteristics of the base costume and comedic 'body' prove more difficult to conceal by means of added costuming.[64] In this way, comedic characters are firmly sexed and gendered by the sexual characteristics of their constructed 'body'

[60] The comedies that fit this description of disguise are *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*, the last of which is omitted due to its lack of a dressing scene. Costume change also occurs in *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*, but these new costumes are not worn for an extended enough period to qualify as 'disguise' here.

[61] Indeed Ruffell (2020, 353 n70) observes that the fourteen-year gap between Aristophanes' two comedies indicates that comedic parodies of the tragedy may even have become self-sustaining, as the later comedy repeats a trope central to its predecessor. The hostage trope occurs twice (*Ach*. 325-351, *Th.* 688-764) and is explored further at section 6.2.

[62] Tragic composition and *mimesis* is discussed at Ar. *Th.* 148-170, as the playwright Agathon wears women's costume to write female characters. Similarly, in *Acharnians*, Euripides is depicted wearing rags and writing characters from low social classes (Ar. *Ach*. 410-515).

[63] On visual and textual evidence for this comedic costume and its problems, Foley (2000, 298-307). Ruffell (2020, 339 n20) acutely observes: 'For a genre as relentlessly metatheatrical as Old Comedy, the lack of delving below the comic body is striking, even if it is possible to talk *about* the comic mask (on which see Wiles 2008) or (on one obscure occasion) the body-stocking, *somation*.'

[64] On tragic costume, see Wyles (2011). The prominence of the comedic 'body' is emphasised by the Relative's *phallus* exposing his disguise at *Th.* 643-8.

(Ruffell 2020, 352). At the same time, actors would play multiple roles with most of the same base costuming, lending this comedic 'body' a certain androgyny and artificiality (Foley 2000, 291-2).

On top of this already exaggerated 'body', Aristophanes draws humour from the intricacies of the disguises his characters seek; for example, Dicaeopolis does not want to disguise himself as a beggar, inspired by Telephus, but *as Telephus himself*, at the point in Euripides' tragedy at which he was disguised as a beggar. To add further to the ridiculousness of the choice, Dicaeopolis chooses a tragic precedent that fails to maintain his disguise; Euripides' Telephus has his disguise exposed, and is forced to change tact after it fails.[65] In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis' unnecessary and fanciful mental gymnastics lead to a complication of the disguise, which in turn confuses the costume of the Dicaeopolis-Telephus-beggar character.[66] Here we have a character wearing a comedic male 'body', disguised as a high-status tragic hero in rags, in turn disguised as a disabled character from a low social class.[67] It is this layered metatheatricality that distinguishes comedic disguise from that of tragedy; its failure 'threatens to return the characters to the world of the audience' (Taplin 1986, 170). In a sense, the disguise is constructed to fail, as the dressing scene serves to highlight the artificiality of the disguise. Indeed, Dicaeopolis even announces:

Δι. τοὺς μὲν θεατὰς εἰδέναι μ' ὅς εἰμ' ἐγώ,
τοὺς δ' αὖ χορευτὰς ἠλιθίους παρεστάναι,
ὅπως ἂν αὐτοὺς ῥηματίοις σκιμαλίσω. (Ar. *Ach*. 441-4)

Di. The audience should know me for who I really am,
but the chorus should stand there as fools,
so that I can jeer at them with my rhetoric.

In this metatheatrical comment, the actor playing Dicaeopolis stresses that there is never any question of Aristophanes' audience being fooled by the disguise they have just witnessed him dress in. Instead, they may simply enjoy him attempting to pull it off, making others ἠλιθίους 'foolish'.

[65] Wright (2019, 199-200) outlines the plot as it survives. The connection between the disguise failure and the hostage scene is my interpretation based on the fragments.
[66] Dicaeopolis borrows rags (431), a felt cap (439), a staff (448), a burnt basket (453-455), a tiny cup with a broken lip (459), a jar plugged with a sponge (463), some dry vegetable leaves (469), and the herb chervil from Euripides' mother, which the playwright refuses (478).
[67] Some of these props and costume adorned Telephus before his disguise, such as the rags, which Euripides often dressed his heroic characters in (Olson 2002, 181 on 412-3; e.g. E. *El*. 184-5, *Hel*. 420-4, Ar. *Ra*. 842). The sponge-plugged jar may also have been carried by the undisguised Telephus, containing ointment for his wound (Sommerstein 1980, 179 on 463). The basket, intended to carry scraps of food (Sommerstein 1980, 178 on 453) and the vegetable leaves are for the beggar's costume. The denied herb request continues a running joke in Aristophanes that Euripides' mother is a greengrocer (see e.g. *Th*. 387, *Eq*. 19, *Ra*. 840).

Despite his ridiculous and complex disguise, Dicaeopolis does manage to carry it off, testament to his success as a comedic protagonist. Compton-Engle (2003, 507-8) suggests that, in Old Comedy, the control of one's own costume is a demonstration of mastery, and, in a similar vein, to control another character's costume is a sign of superiority.[68] This rule of costume control extends to disguise in the same way that it applies to the characters' original layers of costuming. Indeed, 'seeing disguise dynamics as an extension of physical competition helps us to understand why the language of sexual aggressiveness is so often employed by Aristophanes in disguising scenes, both in the physical manipulation of costume and in the less tangible permeation of disguises' (Compton-Engle 2015, 89). Compton-Engle reads Aristophanic costume control in terms of culturally prescribed gender roles, themselves entwined with specific sexual practices: Dicaeopolis' costume control is reflective of 'assertive mastery and aggressive masculinity' (2015, 90), whilst the Relative's failure in *Thesmophoriazusae* is linked to his emasculation (2015, 94). Certainly, gender and its social classification are critical themes within the two plays, but these multilayered Aristophanic plots are by no means simple morality tales with uncomplicated heroes. Dicaeopolis' success with his costume and his 'aggressive masculinity' are not presented totally uncritically, and are certainly not an antidote to 'the anxieties that are evident in the presentation of the male citizen in the sexual and political order of things' (Ruffell 2013, 260). Moreover, the Relative's public exposure is a humiliation that is ultimately resolved by the exploitation of his guard, the Scythian archer, who is distracted by a dancing girl. The comedy concludes not with the embarrassment of the half-dressed Relative, but with the archer's predictable sexual response. Here, masculinity is not so successful: 'The phallus is central to the humor, but rather than signifying mastery, it signifies lack, weakness, submission, and subordination–in short, ridicule' (Ruffell 2013, 264). Whilst costume control and its superiority connotations certainly provide a useful framework for approaching the dynamics of these dressing scenes, its implications for interpretations of characterisations and plots should not be overstated.

In contrast to *Acharnians*, the gender transgression of the Relative's disguise in *Thesmophoriazusae* is of critical importance to the drama. Ruffell (2020, 339-353) differentiates between the different performances of gender at play in *Thesmophoriazusae*'s cross-dressing, contrasting the transgendered experiences as suggested by Agathon and Cleisthenes with the incongruous drag of the Relative.[69] In the former case, Agathon's gender assimilation goes beyond costuming, and involves forming an embodied experience of the τρόπους 'habits' (150) of the female characters the playwright is currently composing. Moreover, it is inspired by personal preference (159-160). Similarly, Cleisthenes is described as a woman when approaching the women (571), seemingly

[68] This theory of costume control shares much with the superiority theory of laughter and also links to *hubris*, see 1.1.
[69] Indeed Ruffell (2020, 337) observes within the comedy 'up to seven different transgendered modes in which it explores a variety of motivations and audience response'.

for the perceived gender transgression of not having a beard (574-5). These two characters each have a claim to a narrative of 'passing', of being recognised as a woman, which each does with at least some level of success.[70] For Euripides' Relative, however: 'There is no question of him passing for the audience: they will always read him as a comic male in drag. The underlying mask, hairstyle and the after-effects of a comic depilation all maintain those bodily indicators, not to mention the *phallos* – already exposed and to be so once again' (Ruffell 2020, 349). As such, much of the comedy's humour arises from his ability to successfully pass among the women at the Thesmophoria, despite his clear adoption of the drag model.

5.4.2 *Bacchae*

Here, I focus on the dressing scene as an important site for mediating between the two forms of cross-dressing in *Themophoriazusae* identified by Ruffell, as outlined above. Using Compton-Engle's costume control framework, I seek to address the dressing scene of Euripides' *Bacchae* and its varied reception by scholars of tragedy. In terms of its importance to the tragic plot, Pentheus' adoption of the maenadic costume and *thyrsus* is the visual representation of his reversal, as he dons the accoutrements he previously mocked his grandfather for wearing, and more costuming besides. The prospect of adopting maenadic dress initially fills Pentheus with αἰδώς 'shame' (828), the same reaction Cadmus fears (204-5) and which Pentheus expresses towards his grandfather's costuming (250-2). Ultimately, his reasoning for accepting the costume change reveals the full irony of Dionysus' punishment. As discussed at 3.4.2, Pentheus justifies his adoption of the costume in terms of laughter: πᾶν κρεῖσσον ὥστε μὴ 'γγελᾶν βάκχας ἐμοί 'anything is better than the bacchants mocking me' (843). In his attempt to avoid the victorious laughter of the women, he will risk the αἰδώς of being perceived in their costuming. Ultimately Dionysus realises both of Pentheus' fears, and his shame is twofold: the bacchants will be victorious, and the Thebans will mock the king's appearance (854-5).

Before the dressing scene, Euripides suggests an alternative ending for the tragedy, hinting towards the traditional military confrontation between Pentheus and the maenads depicted in other myth. In Pentheus' final words before his costume change, he hesitates, echoing the potential action predicted in Dionysus' prologue (50-2):

Πε. ἢ γὰρ ὅπλ' ἔχων πορεύσομαι
ἢ τοῖσι σοῖσι πείσομαι βουλεύμασιν. (E. *Ba*. 845-6)

Pe. For either I will march bearing arms

[70] Ruffell (2020, 341) observes that despite the tragedian's emphasis upon passing, some of the comedy's signifiers, most notably the costume, reveal incongruities that encourage Aristophanes' audience to instead read Agathon with the 'drag' model too.

or I will obey your plans.

Although it is impossible to argue with certainty that Pentheus' adoption of maenadic dress is a Euripidean innovation, there is notably no evidence from extant Greek art that Pentheus was traditionally disguised as a bacchant in myth.[71] Rather Pentheus is typically portrayed as armed on vases (both before and after the date of *Bacchae*), and Aeschylus also refers to the king's military encounter with the bacchants in *Eumenides*.[72] In *Bacchae*, Euripides associates the traditional image of Pentheus ὅπλ' ἔχων 'bearing arms' with the king's autonomous inclination, and the comedic use of disguise with Dionysus' βουλεύματα 'plans'. The play could feasibly end with Pentheus' traditional military attack on the maenads, but instead Euripides includes a dressing scene that is unique in extant tragedy. Indeed, the dressing scene is presented as an alternative to an arming scene common in epic (Segal 1997, 169), and depicted too in *Heraclidae* (720-747). Not only due to Euripides' use of the comedic trope of the dressing scene, but also because of its similar interplay with costume control and 'drag' as a medium of gender performance, *Thesmophoriazusae*'s dressing scene has much in common with that of *Bacchae*.

The most obvious similarity between the two scenes is Pentheus' adoption of dramatic costume typical of female characters in order to enter a women-only space, just as Euripides' Relative does in Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae*. In the comedy, Compton-Engle (2015, 96) notes the relatively passive agreement to the disguise that the Relative voices (212) – an offer which he quickly expresses regret for (217). Borrowing equipment from the tragedian Agathon, Euripides shaves his Relative's face (221-231) before singeing his pubic hair (238-248) and lending him a saffron gown (253), breastband (255), headpiece (258), mantle (261) and shoes (262). Finally, Euripides half-heartedly instructs his Relative on how to behave amongst the women:

Εὐ. ἢν λαλῇς δ', ὅπως τῷ φθέγματι
γυναικιεῖς εὖ καὶ πιθανῶς (Ar. *Th.* 267-8)

Eu. But if you chatter, do it well
and persuasively, in the voice of a woman

Austin & Olson (2004, 140) posit that this throwaway line may be used to inform Aristophanes' audience that they should understand the Relative to be successfully passing among the women onstage, however implausible his disguise might be to the theatrical audience. Ruffell (2011, 353) is right to

[71] Dodds (1960, xxxv), Seaford (1996, 222).
[72] In *Eumenides*, the military language of ἐξ οὗτε Βάκχαις ἐστρατήγησεν θεός / λαγὼ δίκην Πενθεῖ καταρράψας μόρον (*Eum.* 25-6) hints at a Pentheus in arms, see Dodds 1960, xxxv.

observe a great contrast between internal and external audiences of the disguise: although the Relative passes successfully among the women at the Thesmophoria, the implausibility of the costuming is obvious to the Aristophanic audience who have viewed the dressing scene. In part, this is a ramification of the scene itself: the Relative's adoption of disguise is barely consensual, fairly half-hearted and purely functional. The character has very little control over his own disguise, extending even to the manipulation of his original costume. To 'shave' the Relative, Euripides would have detached the actor's stage-beard (Austin & Olson 2004, 128) and the 'singeing' draws attention to the Relative's threatened *phallus* which Euripides instructs him to protect from the flames (239). Indeed, the sexual coding of the 'singeing', requiring the Relative's bending over, has led Stehle (2002, 386) to interpret it as a 'symbolic rape'. More generally, Ruffell describes the entire dressing sequence as an 'extended torture scene' (2013, 262), as the Relative is subject to physical pain throughout at the hands of his disguiser. Although the Relative largely dresses himself in the clothing provided by Agathon, Euripides helps to adjust the costume on the Relative's request (255, 256).[73] Moreover, Compton-Engle (2015, 96) counts twenty imperatives from Euripides in lines 213-278; it is clear that Euripides, rather than the Relative, is primarily responsible for the disguise.

In *Bacchae*, the first disguise introduced is that of the god Dionysus, who appears throughout the play in εἶδος θνητὸν 'mortal form' (53), specifically gendered εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν 'into the nature of a man' (54). To the human characters, he appears and is described throughout as the ξένος 'stranger' or 'guest' (233, 247, 642, 1047, 1068). His costume would not have been markedly different to that of the other characters, as gods did not tend to be given special characteristics in tragedy. Rather, they were usually distinguished by their appearance in prologue or epilogue scenes, positioned on the *mechane* equipment or roof of the *skene* building.[74] In *Bacchae*, the only unusual feature that can be attributed to Dionysus' costume with relative confidence is his smiling mask.[75] In 3.4.2, Dionysus' connection to playful laughter and the symposium are discussed with reference to this mask. Crucially, Dionysus as ξένος manages to pass as a human throughout the tragedy, until he decides to reveal himself as manifest god. In this sense, he has total control over his costume throughout; though he also chooses to adopt a disguise, he is his own disguiser, his deception is successful, and he discards the disguise on his own terms.

Although Dionysus' disguise of Pentheus shares much with the *Thesmophoriazusae* dressing scene, Pentheus' initial agreement is solicited in a markedly different fashion to the Relative's. One complicating factor is that Dionysus seems to begin to exert some sort of divine control over Pentheus

[73] This possibly also happens at 260, 263, in response to the Relative's question of whether the garment will fit him.
[74] On the gods in tragedy, see Mastronarde (2005).
[75] On Dionysus' mask, see p.93-94.

over the course of this scene, making it difficult to entirely parse out Pentheus' autonomous wishes from divine compulsion. To make some headway here, Ruffell (2022, 245-6) notes that Dionysus appeals to Pentheus in terms that he has already expressed his concern in, namely the anxieties Pentheus has about the women's behaviour on the hillside. Pentheus expresses a voyeuristic desire for seeing his fears manifest before him, captured in Dionysus' question: ὅμως δ' ἴδοις ἂν ἡδέως ἅ σοι πικρά; 'nevertheless you would gladly see things that are bitter to you?' (815). Acknowledging that he will not be able to stalk the women in secret, Pentheus agrees to go ἐμφανῶς 'openly' (818), and Dionysus suggests dressing him in βυσσίνους πέπλους 'linen robes' (821).[76] This prompts an important question from Pentheus:

Πε. τί δὴ τόδ'; ἐς γυναῖκας ἐξ ἀνδρὸς τελῶ;
Δι. μή σε κτάνωσιν, ἢν ἀνὴρ ὀφθῇς ἐκεῖ. (E. *Ba.* 822-3)

Pe. What is this then? Shall I, from a man, classify myself among women?
Di. Lest they kill you, if you are seen there as a man.

Ruffell (2022, 245) notes that Pentheus adopts the language of political classification with τελῶ, to indicate that, for himself, he perceives dressing in women's clothing as an act of gender reclassification.[77] For Pentheus, Dionysus' suggestion implies undergoing a transgendered experience more akin to *Thesmophoriazusae*'s Agathon, or indeed Cleisthenes, who claims to be at least aligned with the women's lifestyle and interests (574-6). Dionysus, however, is quick to counter and clarify, offering instead a compulsion narrative for Pentheus' disguise. Whilst he does not deny the reclassification, Dionysus evokes the primarily comedic trope of a male character cross-dressing out of necessity, as Ruffell (2020, 347-8) observes in Aristophanes' later *Ecclesiazusae* and *Lysistrata* as well as here in Euripides' *Bacchae*. This form of cross-dressing is also akin to the Relative in *Thesmophoriazusae*, who similarly only adopts Agathon's clothing for the purposes of disguise.

Despite the αἰδώς 'shame' (828) Pentheus describes at the thought of himself in female dress, he asks multiple questions about the nature of the costume. Dionysus describes himself in the role of dresser (827), adorning Pentheus with long hair (831),[78] robes and sash (833), and finally a *thyrsus* and fawnskin (835). Pentheus' final protest at the costume occurs here, and requires further reassurance from Dionysus:

[76] Dodds (1960, 177) notes that at the point of *Bacchae*'s performance, linen had gone out of fashion among Athenian men, and evidence from this time depicts it worn only by women or in ceremonial dress by priests, musicians and charioteers.
[77] Dodds (1960, 177) observes the progression of the meaning of τελῶ from 1) to pay taxes, 2) to be classified for taxation, 3) to be classified (generally), as at S. *OT* 222.
[78] Perhaps a wig: see Dodds (1960, 177), Seaford (1996, 214).

Πε.	οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν.
Δι.	ἀλλ’ αἷμα θήσεις συμβαλὼν βάκχαις μάχην. (E. *Ba.* 836-7)

Pe.	I would not be able to put on female dress.
Di.	But you will cause bloodshed by meeting the bacchants in battle.

Pentheus appears not to be entirely convinced by Dionysus’ compulsion narrative, which the god repeats here by emphasising the violent alternative. However, Pentheus’ protest is entirely ironic: the king may not feel he is able to put on the costuming, but, in a sense, he does not have to. As has just been described by Dionysus, Pentheus will not be his own dresser but will be entirely in the hands of the god as disguiser. This costume control goes further than *Thesmophoriazusae*, where Euripides supplies, adjusts and fixes the costume his Relative puts on (*Th.* 255, 256). Here, seemingly to distance himself from accepting the transgendered experience he still associates with the adoption of the costume, Pentheus entrusts total costume control to Dionysus.

Before the two leave the stage to dress Pentheus, a final element of the disguise is discussed: its social reception.

Πε.	καὶ πῶς δι’ ἄστεως εἶμι Καδμείους λαθών;
Δι.	ὁδοὺς ἐρήμους ἴμεν· ἐγὼ δ’ ἡγήσομαι.
Πε.	πᾶν κρεῖσσον ὥστε μὴ ’γγελᾶν βάκχας ἐμοί. (E. *Ba.* 840-842)

Pe.	And how shall I escape the notice of the Cadmeians as I go through the town?
Di.	We shall travel on empty roads; and I will lead you.
Pe.	Anything is better than the bacchants mocking me.

Pentheus is concerned with being observed by both the male citizens of Thebes, and the mockery of the women on the hillside. Ultimately, in keeping with gendered views of laughter, Pentheus considers the mockery of the women as unacceptable.[79] However, a key part of Dionysus’ punishment is turning Pentheus into an object of mockery for the Thebans:

Δι.	χρῄζω δέ νιν γέλωτα Θηβαίοις ὀφλεῖν
	γυναικόμορφον ἀγόμενον δι’ ἄστεως

[79] Seaford notes the women’s victory is ‘the worst thing of all, even worse than having to dress as a woman’ (1996, 215).

ἐκ τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν πρίν, αἷσι δεινὸς ἦν. (E. *Ba.* 850-6)

Di. I desire for him to incur laughter from the Thebans
as he is led through the town woman-shaped
after his earlier threats, with which he was terrible.

As noted at 3.4.2, the reversal of Pentheus' attitude towards the rites and its dress feeds further into his humiliation, as the king sincerely engages with all that he had previously deemed ridiculous (250). He will be made an *exemplum* to his subjects, a warning to all who deny the god. Ironically, given his earlier criticism of Dionysus' non-conventional gender presentation (esp. 353; Ruffell 2020, 240),[80] Pentheus *will not pass*. Instead, Dionysus intends Pentheus' cross-dressing to incur the superior laughter of his subjects, becoming an object of mockery by means of his failed and incongruous disguise. Notably, the superior laughter the god encourages is reflective of his costume control of Pentheus; the king is degraded first by the superior connotations of Dionysus' costume control, and then by the superior laughter of the Theban citizens. At no point in Pentheus' narrative is he permitted an accepting internal audience who welcome him as one of their own. Euripides' audience therefore hold the opposite position to that of *Thesmophoriazusae*; in the comedy, the external audience see the Relative in drag even when he passes onstage, whilst *Bacchae*'s audience are given access into what appears to be, at least partially, a genuine transgendered experience for Pentheus, despite Dionysus' encouragement of the compulsion narrative.

When Pentheus re-enters the stage, he is already dressed as a bacchant (915), and so the theatrical audience are not permitted access to the dressing scene in its entirety, as Aristophanes' audience are in *Thesmophoriazusae*. As such, the boundaries between the transgendered experience (as anticipated by Pentheus) and the drag (as promised by Dionysus) begin to blur. In part, this is due to Dionysus' deception; he does not intend for Pentheus to pass among the women, but to be singled out and killed by them (857-9). It is in this moment that the boundaries between divine Dionysus and mortal Pentheus are simultaneously most permeable and clear, as the two seem to appear as mirror images. Foley (1985, 250) suggests that Pentheus' claim καὶ μὴν ὁρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ 'and indeed I seem to see two suns' (918) reflects the king's appearance as a double of Dionysus. The δύο…ἡλίους are potentially mirrored in the two saffron gowns of the characters, and so the audience may also witness the visual doubling of the two.[81] Although produced after *Bacchae*, this effect is strikingly similar to the meeting of Dionysus and Heracles in *Frogs*, in which the god 'burlesques' (Sommerstein 1996, 11) the hero by adopting the same costume as him. Just as Dionysus' copying of Heracles is used to show

[80] Segal (1997, 50) notes Dionysus is 'despised and degraded as female, licentious and soft'.
[81] Stehle (2002, 379) emphasises that beyond its gendered cultural significance, the saffron gown also has 'festival and erotic overtones'.

his inadequacy in *Frogs*, so does Pentheus' transgressive parody of Dionysus reveal his inferiority to the god. With matching costumes, the only distinguishing feature between the two may be their masks, where Euripides starkly juxtaposes the enigmatic smiling mask of Dionysus with the unmistakably tragic visage of Pentheus. Moreover, the adoption and subsequent failure of Pentheus' costume foreshadows Dionysus' autonomous abandonment of his own disguise. The two stand in parallel: whilst Pentheus fails to blend in with the bacchants despite his costuming, Dionysus proves to be an ambivalent divinity in spite of his μορφὴν…βροτησίαν 'mortal form' (4). Just as Pentheus' mockery of his elders distanced him from the audience, Dionysus' play with Pentheus now has the same effect. Chaston (2010, 219) considers this scene as the point at which the audience's experience begins to diffract; those anticipating the god's mercy may still experience a comic tone, whereas those expecting Pentheus' fall begin to see the cruelty in Dionysus' smile.[82]

In this visual context, Dionysus instructs Pentheus on how to act the part of a bacchant, with much greater attention to detail and care than *Thesmophoriazusae*'s Euripides. Dionysus fixes a lock of Pentheus' hair (928-933), the belt and pleats of the dress (935-6) and instructs his bacchant on how to hold the *thyrsus* (941-4).[83] All the while, Pentheus responds with a willingness for the god to physically alter the costume, in stark contrast to his earlier response to Cadmus' attempt to touch him (343-4). In *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes' external audience experience a privileged position to the internal audience of the play's characters. As above, they know throughout that the Relative is a man in drag, even when he successfully passes at the Thesmophoria. Pentheus' situation is not so clear cut. On the one hand, there is tenderness to this scene that evokes a narrative of passing; in addition to the attention to detail and care Pentheus takes in the costuming, both characters comment on the family resemblance of Pentheus to his mother and aunts (917, 925-6). Simultaneously, the irony is acute; Pentheus seems to have adopted the compulsion narrative, as he once again suggests violence as a solution (949-950). The two narratives come together in the final exchange between Pentheus and Dionysus:

Δι. ἕπου δέ· πομπὸς [δ'] εἶμ' ἐγὼ σωτήριος,
κεῖθεν δ' ἀπάξει σ' ἄλλος. Πε. ἡ τεκοῦσά γε.
Δι. ἐπίσημον ὄντα πᾶσιν. Πε. ἐπὶ τόδ' ἔρχομαι.
Δι. φερόμενος ἥξεις . . . Πε. ἁβρότητ' ἐμὴν λέγεις.
Δι. ἐν χερσὶ μητρός. Πε. καὶ τρυφᾶν μ' ἀναγκάσεις.
Δι. τρυφάς γε τοιάσδε. Πε. ἀξίων μὲν ἅπτομαι. (E. *Ba.* 965-970)

[82] Although much Dionysian myth involves his destruction of his opponents, Euripides establishes the playful laugh of Dionysus earlier in the tragedy (*Ba.* 434-440), evoking the merciful Dionysus of his *Homeric Hymn*. On this passage, see 3.4.2.
[83] Sommerstein (1994, 174) notes the similarities between the costume difficulties in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Bacchae* scenes.

Di.	But follow; I will go as your guide and security,		
	but another will carry you back from there.	Pe.	Yes, the one who birthed me.
Di.	Conspicuous to everyone.	Pe.	For which reason I go.
Di.	You will come carried…	Pe.	You speak of a treat for me.
Di.	In the hands of your mother.	Pe.	You force me to extravagance.
Di.	Yes, a sort of extravagance.	Pe.	I am grasping what I deserve.

The two speak at cross-purposes, as Dionysus' words hint at the dead Pentheus returning in the arms of his mother and murderer, Agave. At the same time, Pentheus interprets the familial reunion as a positive experience; Dionysus' reference to Pentheus returning in his mother's arms configures almost a rebirth for the king. The choice of the verb τρυφάω ('*live softly, luxuriously*', LSJ I) also has feminine connotations in its adjectival form ('*effeminate, luxurious*', LSJ I 2). Dionysus has used the compulsion narrative, which Pentheus acknowledges (μ' ἀναγκάσεις, 969), but the experience, cast as the beginning of a new life, has a fragile quality that hints back towards Pentheus' sense of the experience as gender reclassification.

Yet at the same time, the comedic narrative of drag and disguise is manipulated by the god to punish Pentheus. The two leave for the mountain, and the audience is left to imagine the mockery and violence that will be inflicted upon Pentheus. The king faces two audiences; the Theban citizen men and the inspired women on the hillside. Of the first, the audience hear no more; it is unclear whether Pentheus is mocked for failing to pass, or for the incongruity of what is perceived to be drag.[84] Dionysus' costume control extends beyond that of a human manipulator, as he is entirely able to control the social reception of his disguises too. Whilst Euripides could not prevent his Relative's exposure by Cleisthenes and the women, Dionysus parades Pentheus before the Thebans in a manner that deliberately elicits their mockery. For the play's second internal audience, the Theban women, Pentheus' disguise is interpreted differently. Here the plot departs dramatically from the drag-exposure narrative of *Thesmophoriazusae.* A messenger relates that Pentheus, upon arriving at the mountain, could not see the bacchants and asks to be raised into a tree (1058-1063). Instead of being their secret voyeur as planned, Pentheus is exposed to the gaze of the bacchants (1075). Almost immediately, Dionysus, no longer disguised as stranger, calls for Pentheus' punishment:

Ἄγ.	ἐκ δ' αἰθέρος φωνή τις, ὡς μὲν εἰκάσαι
	Διόνυσος, ἀνεβόησεν· Ὦ νεάνιδες,

[84] Both interpretations have a comedic precedent for incurring mockery in *Thesmophoriazusae* (Agathon and Cleisthenes in the former category, and Euripides' Relative in the latter).

ἄγω τὸν ὑμᾶς κἀμὲ τἀμά τ' ὄργια
γέλων τιθέμενον· ἀλλὰ τιμωρεῖσθέ νιν. (E. *Ba*. 1078-1081)

Me. A voice, Dionysus so far as one can guess,
shouted out from the sky: 'O young women,
I lead to you the man who has made you and me and my rites
a source of laughter; but punish him.

The inspired bacchants turn to violence, throwing stones, branches and *thyrsi* (1095-1100) before uprooting the entire tree with their hands (1103-1110) and tearing him limb from limb (1114-1143). During the attack, Agave refers to their target as τὸν ἀμβάτην / θῆρ' 'the mounted beast' (1007-8), the first indication that the women do not recognise Pentheus. Here, Dionysus manipulates their sight so that they no longer see Pentheus as human at all, but as an animal. Not only does Pentheus not pass as a woman before the Theban men, but he now does not even pass as human before the bacchants. Pentheus is dismembered by his relatives, who fail to recognise his shouts to identify himself (1118-1121), and his mother parades his head upon a *thyrsus*: ὡς ὀρεστέρου /…λέοντος 'as if [it were] a mountain lion's' (1141-2).[85] So concludes the dressing and undressing of Pentheus, whose body is the subject of the mockery of the Theban men and then the fatal attack of Dionysus' followers.

A play that offers a similar compulsion–death narrative of cross-dressing is *Lysistrata*, although the death is only metaphorical in the comedic setting. In a similar fashion to Pentheus' threats of violence, here the comedy's *proboulos* appears at the treasury, currently under the women's control, with reinforcements and threats to break in (425-430). Lysistrata emerges, refuting the need for 'levers' (430-2) and preferring to discuss the problems instead. The sequence that follows depicts the *proboulos* instructing his archers to seize Lysistrata, whilst the chorus of elderly women respond with verbal threats until the archers are put to flight (433-460). The *proboulos* remains resistant to Lysistrata's suggestions, largely based on his assumptions of how she should behave according to her gender role. He refuses to be quiet when she asks him to (530-1), and in response, the women begin to dress the *proboulos* in women's clothing to undertake women's work (532-538). In a sense, this serves their purposes; the *proboulos* now begins to engage, asking a series of questions about their aims (555, 565-6, 571-2, 574). But the costume is only partially successful, as the *proboulos* still fails to comprehend their argument, repeatedly interjecting critiques from a narrow male perspective (571-2, 594, 598). In response to this, the women dress him for death and act out his funeral; in quick succession, he is offered a coffin (600), honey-cake (601), wreath (602), ribbons (603) and tiara (604). In terms of costume

[85] Notably, this is an inversion of Dionysus himself turning into a lion and showing mercy towards the pirates who abducted him in *Hom. Hymn*. 7.44-59.

control, the *proboulos* is totally at the mercy of the women. At no point does he consent to the costuming, nor does he engage with the items that are forced upon him. Rather, they manipulate the *proboulos* into costume to serve their own purposes: 'this enacts visually the claims (within the fictional world) of female power and the need for the *proboulos* first to learn from women's experience and then to withdraw' (Ruffell 2013, 268).

By means of a dialogue with Aristophanic comedies from recent years, Euripides manipulates the different forms of cross-dressing as presented in *Thesmophoriazusae* to deliver a tragic plot reminiscent of the dressing scene of *Lysistrata*'s *proboulos*. The transgendered experiences and drag depicted in *Thesmophoriazusae* are interwoven and complicated in Pentheus' dressing scene, as Dionysus manipulates both Pentheus' costume and the responses of his internal audiences to it. He is not permitted to pass as a woman before the Theban men, or as the human Pentheus before the bacchant women. Simultaneously, his death at the hands of the women, whilst dressed as a woman, evokes the dressing scene of *Lysistrata*. The women's domination and control of the *proboulos*' costume creates a compulsion narrative that results in his metaphorical death, as they dress him for a (woman's) funeral. In *Bacchae*, Pentheus' dressing and *sparagmos* offers an extended, tragic version of this comedic scene, in which the king's perceived rebirth becomes his death.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlights similarities and cumulative associations of Old Comedic tropes that have been employed by Euripides. In the case of the doorkeeper, a common Aristophanic scene is incorporated into *Helen*, in which Menelaus is embarrassed but ultimately protected by an elderly, enslaved woman. The scene's potential humour is ambiguous and multifaceted. Whilst it is typical for comedic protagonists to spar with a lower status doorkeeper, this scene serves to emphasise Menelaus' precarity at Egypt, where his life is in danger. Though the scene evokes comedy, particularly the doorkeeper scene of Aristophanes' *Birds* and the female procurers of his later *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*, the simultaneous tragic circumstances give this humour an anxious quality. Similarly, the *Odyssey* similarities serve to both situate the hero in a narrative of survival, and to emphasise the stark difference between Odysseus' success and Menelaus' failure.

The rejuvenation scene, first evidenced in Euripides' *Heraclidae*, becomes a regular feature of Aristophanic comedy. The humour of this early scene relies on another stock comedic feature, the disagreement between an older, higher status character, and a lower status but outspoken younger man. In Old Comedy, the instances in which rejuvenation is ambiguous or fails appears to be most influential on later tragedy, such as Philocleon in *Wasps*. For markedly different purposes, Euripides' later *Heracles* similarly hints towards a rejuvenation to then subvert this potential audience expectation, instead presenting acts of divinely-inspired violence in its place. For perhaps more humorous purposes,

Euripides depicts an ambiguous rejuvenation again in *Bacchae*. Here, Tiresias and Cadmus mirror the maenad's behaviour and adopt elements of their costuming. Although the gendered coding is not as obvious here as in the later Pentheus dressing scene, there is a gender fluidity associated with the worship of Dionysus that encourages a comparison to the examples of older women's rejuvenation in Aristophanes. In multiple instances, older women, or men dressed in women's clothes, are connected to death instead of rejuvenation. This theme, due to its intended humiliation of its subjects, I refer to as *mortification*. Whilst the rejuvenations of Cadmus and Tiresias remain unresolved in the tragedy, the play instead centres on the *mortification* of Pentheus, dressed as a maenad, in its place.

The dressing scene, depicted in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, is compared to the only extant instance of a tragic disguise adopted onstage – that of Pentheus in Euripides' late *Bacchae*. The gendered differences outlined in the section on rejuvenation come to the fore in this tragedy, where Pentheus' adoption of maenadic costume is configured ambiguously – neither as simply the compulsion narrative of drag as presented by the Relative in *Thesmophoriazusae*, or as a more transgendered experience as depicted by Agathon or Cleisthenes in the same comedy. Indeed, his death at the hands of the Theban women is reminiscent of the mortification of the proboulos in *Lysistrata* – only this time the death is far from metaphorical. In each of these cases, it seems likely that Euripides' use of not only the comedic tropes, but the specific resonances they have in their Aristophanic appearances, is not just coincidental. In some cases, the result may be humorous, such as *Helen*'s doorkeeper scene. In other instances, Euripides pushes comedic tropes to their tragic limitations, such as rendering literal the metaphorical death, or *mortification*, theme of Aristophanes in *Bacchae*.

Chapter 6 – Oresteian Parody and Palimpsests

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the parodic and palimpsestic interactions of Euripides with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, through the examination of two recurring tragic tropes: hostage and recognition scenes. In the first instance, the hostage scene of Euripides' *Telephus* is tracked through its comedic parodies in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, before reappearing in Euripides' late play *Orestes*. In conjunction with the adaptation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* offered by this tragedy, Euripides' inclusion of the new Aristophanic associations of the hostage scene are considered in terms of their triple parodic effect: the play engages in ways that are paratragic, paracomedic and self-parodic all at once. As there is not such extensive extant evidence of comedic parody of Aeschylus' recognition scene, the repetition of the trope is assessed as an instance of direct paratragedy in Euripides' *Electra*. Here, Euripides' close rewriting of the Aeschylean text is addressed alongside the scholarly critique and assumptions surrounding its parodic interaction with its source material. In short, this chapter aims to provide a defence of Euripides' use of parody by elucidating the implications of this comic mode of textual engagement.

6.2 Hostage scenes

6.2.1 *Telephus*

The hostage scene is a tragic scene that has been repeatedly parodied by Aristophanes, before appearing only once again in the extant tragic corpus, in a late Euripidean play. Ostensibly, the tragedy that provides the inspiration for these multiple parodies is Euripides' *Telephus* (Ar. *Ach*. 429-430), though this is perhaps not the first time the hostage trope may have been employed in a tragic narrative based on the Telephus myth.[1] Although Euripides' *Telephus* does not survive in its entirety today, it debuted in 438 as part of the tetralogy containing the extant *Alcestis*. Its surviving fragments, many of which survive through Aristophanic comedies and their scholia, render it possible to reconstruct a great deal of the tragedy's content and narrative.[2] This includes *Telephus*' hostage scene, which evidently concerns the mythic Mysian Telephus holding the baby Orestes as a hostage at Argos. The tragedy seemingly begins with Telephus' arrival at Agamemnon's palace, with the hero initially disguised as a beggar (frr. 697-8, Ar. *Ach*. 430-740, *Nu*. 921-4).

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[1] Csapo (1990) demonstrates from vase evidence that the story's hostage sequence predates Euripides, and Wright (2019, 57) raises the serious possibility that 'the most familiar version of the Telephus story, which we have come to see as quintessentially Euripidean...was essentially an Aeschylean invention'. Only one word of Sophocles' *Telephus* survives (fr. 580): see Olson (2002, liv-lxi) and Wright (2019, 199-201) on the tragic tradition and surviving evidence.

[2] See *TrGF* 5 F696-727c, Wright (2019, 199). Reconstructions have been attempted by Handley & Rea (1957), Webster (1967), Collard, Cropp & Lee (1995, 17-52) and Preiser (2000).

The fragments and *Acharnians* parody indicate that the disguised Telephus intrudes in a quarrel between Agamemnon and Menelaus, and the brothers are offended by both the words and apparent low status of the intruder (frr. 712-713; *Ach.* 577). It appears that Telephus' disguise is exposed and he seizes the infant Orestes as a means of protection (fr. 727; Ar. *Ach.* 325-351, *Th.* 574-687). It seems most likely that this hostage scene occurred onstage. Although Webster (1967, 43-8) and Handley & Rea (1957, 36-7) suggest it may have been related in a messenger speech, Olson (2002, lvi n35) is surely correct to consider its popularity and vividness in comedic parody and vase paintings as evidence that it was staged.[3] Nevertheless, it remains unclear how Telephus comes upon Orestes, though it is possible that the course of action was advised and somewhat enabled by Clytemnestra as (perhaps) in the prior Aeschylean version of the story.[4] In any case, Telephus does successfully seize the baby, before fleeing to an altar upon which he threatens to kill him (fr. 727). This dramatic ultimatum apparently allows Telephus to make his case to great effect; Orestes escapes unscathed and the hero succeeds in convincing the Greek leaders to help him treat his wound.[5]

The two extended comedic parodies of this scene occur in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*. The first and earliest of the comedies contains an extended parodic adaptation of *Telephus*; the tragedy is referred to and directly quoted throughout the comedy alongside the inclusion of two of its major tropes, Telephus' hostage-taking and adoption of the beggar disguise.[6] In *Acharnians*, Aristophanes' protagonist Dicaeopolis offers his opinion on the Peloponnesian war in a manner similar to Euripides' Telephus, advice which is widely interpreted as the view of its playwright: 'tragic hero, comic hero, and comic playwright are thus collapsed into a single complex figure' (Olson 2002, lxi). The second comedic parody is more compact, as *Telephus* is only one of four Euripidean tragedies parodied in *Thesmophoriazusae*. In its recurrence, the innovations upon its previous comedic treatment are more marked and extensive; the hostage and disguise tropes are further complicated by the comedy's central conflict, the clash between Euripides and the city's women.

[3] In the case of the vases, it is not possible to determine for certain that they represent Euripides' play as opposed to the versions of *Telephus* by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Agathon, Iophon, or Cleon; see Taplin (2007, 205-210).
[4] Olson (2002, lvi-lvii) cites the address to an unidentified woman (fr. 699) as possible, though unprovable, evidence for Clytemnestra's role in Euripides' *Telephus*. Heath (1987, 276) suggests that this Clytemnestra may have colluded with the disguised Telephus, believing him to be a beggar, and thus not undermining the stage characters' surprise at his exposure and violent hostage-taking.
[5] This part of the plot does not survive extant, but is a summary of 'the simplest explanation of what can be reconstructed' (Olson 2002, lvi).
[6] The first allusion to *Telephus* comes only eight lines into the prologue of *Acharnians* (8, fr. 720). Whilst Euripides' Telephus seems to have entered already in disguise, Aristophanes depicts the adoption of the beggar costume in an onstage dressing scene; on this dressing scene, see 5.4.1.

6.2.2 *Acharnians*

In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis' exhaustion with the Peloponnesian war leads him to negotiate a personal peace with Sparta (130-3). This is met with outrage by the chorus of men of Acharnae, who share great hostility to the Spartans and consider Dicaeopolis a traitor (286-292). As they threaten violence at his home and refuse to listen to him, Dicaeopolis reveals that he holds their loved ones as hostages and threatens to kill them (327). He then emerges with a λάρκος 'coal basket' (333), and, as coal is an important industry in Acharnae, the chorus agree to put down their stones and hear what Dicaeopolis has to say (338-341). Here, the humour lies fundamentally in the substitution of *Telephus*' baby Orestes with a basket of coal, exchanging a high-stakes hostage situation with a low-stakes one, to which its witnesses still respond with exaggerated shock and horror. The coal-basket revelation is set up well by the chorus-leader's speculation that Dicaeopolis may have a παιδίον 'little child' (329) belonging to one of the group. Following the revelation, the coal-basket is personified throughout, lovingly described by the chorus with a hypocoristic diminutive, which is rare for inanimate objects: τὸ λαρκίδιον 'the little basket' (340).[7] Dicaeopolis too animates the basket, claiming that it has excreted its coal dust upon him in fear, like a cuttlefish expelling ink when threatened (350-1). In its entirety, the hostage scene plays for fewer than forty lines before the chorus agree to listen to Dicaeopolis' defence (359-365).

Following this minor victory, Dicaeopolis decides that he wants to dress up ἀθλιώτατον 'as piteously as possible' (384) before he speaks, as he claims to have had trouble with Cleon at the previous year's festival.[8] As such, he calls at the house of Euripides to borrow the costume of Telephus, who in turn is disguised as a beggar.[9] Only then does he address the chorus of Acharnian men at length (496-556), some of whom, just like the Euripidean Agamemnon and Menelaus, are offended by his words and low status (557-9). After a scene in which Dicaeopolis convinces the general Lamachus to undress, the chorus admit they have been won over by his argument (626-7). With this success, the *Telephus* costume and parody is dropped by Dicaeopolis, though the associations creep back into the comedy with the rather slapstick description of Lamachus becoming wounded (1174-1189). Here, the role of Telephus (or indeed another wounded Euripidean hero) seems to be transferred to Lamachus, whilst Dicaeopolis escapes the negative associations of the tragic character's role, exploiting only its positive attributes.[10] Essentially, Aristophanes picks and chooses the aspects of *Telephus* that enable his comedic protagonist's success, whilst either ignoring the plot's undesirable elements or transferring them onto the supporting characters. This is most evident in the ordering of events, as Foley (1988, 42-3) notes: 'by putting the hostage scene before the speech, he deliberately destroys the logic of Euripides' plot

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[7] Olson (2002, 166 on 340) observes the unusual diminutive, see also Petersen (1910, 178, 240).

[8] The conflation of protagonist and playwright continues in Dicaeopolis' speech (Ar. *Ach*. 497-556), on which see Sommerstein (1984, 179-84).

[9] On *Thesmophoriazusae*'s dressing scene, see 5.4.1. Dicaeopolis' arrival at Euripides' door is also discussed at 5.2.1.

[10] See Foley (1988, 38-9) on the associations between Lamachus and Telephus in the wounding scene.

(while enhancing the impact of his own) and gets away with it; for the hostage device only makes 'dramatic sense' in a tragic context after all verbal means have failed'. On a microcosmic level, Aristophanes' treatment of the hostage scene in *Acharnians* is reflective of his use of paratragedy in the play as a whole; the authority of the sister genre is evoked to lend a *gravitas* to the comedian's apparent political message, and simultaneously the tragic plot is manipulated and distorted to prioritise the comedy's own narrative and humour.[11]

6.2.3 *Thesmophoriazusae*

Although *Thesmophoriazusae*'s adoption of disguise occurs before its hostage scene, as in the Telephus narrative, the disguise itself shares little in common with the Euripidean tragedy. *Thesmophoriazusae* centres upon the characters of Euripides and his Relative, the latter of whom agrees to dress as a woman to infiltrate the *Thesmophoria* festival (212-279). His aim is to spy on the women, as it has been reported to Euripides that they are plotting his destruction, having taken issue with his tragic portrayal of their gender (75-85). The Relative successfully passes among the women at the festival, until Cleisthenes announces that there is an imposter present and the Relative is gradually exposed (636-654). To escape their wrath, he seizes a bundle from the arms of one of the women and stands atop the *orchestra* altar, holding a knife to its throat (687-695).[12] To increase the stakes and pathos of the situation, Mica, the baby's mother, claims that he has snatched her only child (697-8), which the Relative later reveals is a girl (717).[13] Instead of providing the Relative a chance to de-escalate the hostility, as in *Telephus* and *Acharnians*, his hostage-taking is met by a similarly violent threat from the women, who threaten to set fire to the altar (726-729). As the Relative prepares to sacrifice the baby, he removes its clothing to discover ἀσκὸς ἐγένεθ' ἡ κόρη / οἴνου πλέως, 'the girl has become a skin / full of wine' (733-4). Not only has he been fooled by τὸ Κρητικὸν 'the Cretan robe' (730) the bag is disguised with, but it is even sporting shoes: Περσικὰς 'Persian bootees' (734).[14] Following the visual gag of this revelation, the humour continues, as in *Acharnians*, with the women continuing to value the wine-skin as much as they would a human life. They still exclusively refer to it as Mica's child (744, 754, 761), and with plenty of word-play Mica and the Relative discuss the wine's qualities as if it were a growing baby (740-747).[15] As the women still threaten to burn the Relative unless he returns the wine-skin (749), he decides

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[11] Aristophanes defines comedy in opposition to its sister genre, referring to comedy as τρυγῳδία 'trugedy' at Ar. *Ach*. 199-200 ('with parody on τραγῳδία', LSJ I).

[12] For the Relative's placement on the orchestra altar, see Sommerstein (1994, 198 on 689-758), Rehm (1988, 263-307).

[13] Austin & Olson (2004, 249 on 717) note that the baby's gender may have been obvious to the audience sooner on account of its costuming.

[14] Sommerstein (1994, 201 on 734) notes that Περσικὰς are worn by women at Ar. *Lys*. 229, *Eccl*. 319. Austin & Olson (2004, 252 on 733-4) also flag that Pollux vii 92 claims the shoes were white and associated with sex workers. Stone (1981, 227-9) suggests that they were most likely soft ankle shoes commonly worn by women and infants.

[15] There is added irony that they turn on the Relative after the exposure of his disguise, but they are more than willing to suspend their disbelief for the sake of the wine-skin.

to sacrifice his hostage. This is the staging depicted on the Würzberg Telephus vase, as identified by Csapo (1986) and Taplin (1987): Aristophanes' Relative is on the altar, poised to cut the bootee-wearing wine-skin, whilst Mica holds a wine-bowl to collect the αἷμα τοῦ τέκνου 'blood of the child' (755).[16] Just as the coal-basket's excretions served to animate the hostage object in *Acharnians* (350-351), the 'human' sacrifice is visually parodied in the opening of the wine-skin, which presumably would resemble the outpouring of blood.[17] Following the wine-skin's emptying, Mica then leaves, ostensibly to report the Relative's crime, and narratively allowing Aristophanes' character to turn to a plot from *Palamedes* in a second attempt to escape (762-775).

The similarities to both Euripides' *Telephus* and Aristophanes' own *Acharnians* indicate a strong dual influence upon this hostage scene. At first, *Thesmophoriazusae* shares more in common with the *Telephus* narrative, as the protagonist adopts a disguise, infiltrates an assembly, and makes a case on behalf of his interlocutors' enemy, before holding a baby hostage upon an altar when the disguise is exposed.[18] Moreover, although the *Telephus* parody is not announced as such, it is the first in a series of parodic scenes that contextualise the scene as paratragedy. The hostage scene occupies a similar number of lines to that of the *Palamedes* and *Helen* scenes that are announced as tragic sources in the comedy (770, 850).[19] However, as in *Acharnians*, the plot of *Telephus* arguably permeates *Thesmophoriazusae* in a much more insidious manner than the other parodies of the play.[20] If the Relative's speech and/or the exposing of the disguise are considered as an association with *Telephus*, even though it is not announced, it is the most extensive parody of the four that appear in the comedy.[21] At the same time, the comedic parody shares obvious similarities with *Acharnians*. In both plays, the protagonist adopts a disguise onstage in a dressing scene, and in both hostage scenes the 'child' is ultimately substituted by an inanimate object.[22] Indeed, the fourteen-year gap between Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae* provides possible evidence for comedic parodies becoming 'self-

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[16] See Taplin (1993, fig. 11.4, 36-41) for the extensive similarities between the vase painting and *Thesmophoriazusae*'s hostage scene. He labels the scene as a case of 'para-iconography' (1993, 38), a comic scene that references and travesties a familiar serious scene.
[17] See also Ar. *Lys*. 195-208 for conflation of blood and wine in a sacrifice scene. Stehle (2002, 390) suggests that the Relative likely drinks the wine himself, showing himself as a wine-enthusiast much like the wine-skin's 'mother'.
[18] Austin & Olson (2004, lviii).
[19] *Telephus* (688-764; 77 lines), *Palamedes* (770-848; 79 lines), *Helen* (850-928; 79 lines). The shortest parody is of *Andromeda* (1098-1134; 37 lines).
[20] For Revermann, the unflagged *Telephus* parody widens the possible range of audience interpretations and responses: ''Getting it' becomes more of a challenge, hence a greater means of differentiation' (2006, 116).
[21] Austin & Olson (2004, lviii) note the difficulty of determining the parody's beginning: 'Exactly when the parody of *Telephos* begins–or, better put, exactly when the audience in the Theatre can be expected to recognize that a parody of that play in particular is under way–is unclear'.
[22] On the dressing scene as a comedic trope, see 5.4.

sustaining' (Ruffell 2020, 353 n70), with Aristophanes' earlier parodic *Acharnians* now seemingly acting as inspiration for *Thesmophoriazusae* as much as the Euripidean *Telephus*.[23]

However, in both *Telephus* and *Acharnians*, the hostage scenes are successful and conclude without violence. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, the situation takes a sinister twist when the women threaten to burn the Relative at the altar rather than negotiate with him, a deeply sacrilegious act notably threatened by some of Euripides' earlier antagonists, but never carried out.[24] Indeed, Mica's threat to turn the Relative into a θυμάλωπα 'piece of charcoal' (729) hints towards at a subversion of the power dynamic in *Acharnians*; there Dicaeopolis threatened the Acharnians' coal, and here the Relative's hostage-taking may instead turn him into burning material.[25] Ultimately, in *Thesmophoriazusae*, the hostage scene fails; the plan is aborted as the hostage is sacrificed, and the plot of another tragedy is adopted in its place. In turn, this also fails, and the pattern continues until the Aristophanic Euripides adopts a more comedic approach to aiding his Relative's escape: dressing as an elderly female procurer and distracting his Relative's jailer with a dancing girl (*Th.* 1160-1202).[26] In *Acharnians*, Aristophanes depicts his protagonist exploiting the successful qualities of Telephus' tale whilst avoiding its undesirable elements; Dicaeopolis is ultimately successful in persuading the chorus of Acharnians, whilst the character's wounding is supplanted onto Lamachus. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes imagines and stages the failure of multiple Euripidean escape plots, with escape only being offered by Euripides in the role of a comedic older woman. In this comedy, Euripides' plots seem not to be permitted any positive or successful qualities.

6.2.4 *Orestes*

Three years after *Thesmophoriazusae* and thirty years after his own *Telephus*, the hostage trope appears in Euripides' *Orestes*, for only the second time in his extant corpus. It is contained within a text that is particularly *palimpsestic*, a term which Zeitlin (2003, 314) uses to describe the multiple layers of literary allusions that coexist in the tragedy. In literal terms, a palimpsest describes a writing-material that has been erased and written upon again (OED 2a), and the term is theoretically applied to describe the relationship between literary adaptations and the texts they rework.[27] On a basic level, as Greek tragedy

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[23] It is difficult to determine whether the Euripidean *Telephus* itself or Aristophanes' parody had a greater influence upon the sustained popularity of the tragedy, see Wright (2019, 200).

[24] E. *Her.* 240-6, *Andr.* 257-8.

[25] Dicaeopolis also uses the noun θυμάλωψ in a description of the Acharnians' anger (*Ach.* 321), which Olson (2002, 162 on 321-2) describes as 'A complex–and strikingly mixed–bundle of images, perhaps paratragic'. Surely the mention of the θυμάλωψ 'piece of charcoal' is a reference to his next action, seizing the λάρκος 'coal basket' (*Ach.* 331)?

[26] Stehle (2002, 370) considers Euripides' act here 'no comic plot', as he does not win the erotic attentions of a young woman as a rejuvenated comic hero. I would argue that the plot is certainly comedic, but rather mirrors the role of Aristophanic older women, who frequently act as sexual facilitators. Despite this discrepancy, I reiterate her observation 'there is no comic triumph because masculinity can only be recovered by renouncing triumph over women' (*ibid.*, 401).

[27] For its theoretical usage, see Hutcheon (2013, 6, 8, 33).

stages well-known myth, all playwrights' engagements with their inherited material are acts of adaptation. However, not all adaptations are parodic; whilst both processes involve repetition to some extent, parody is essentially 'repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity' (Hutcheon 1985, 6). Whilst a parody may have a clear relationship with one specific text, its subject may also be a generic element or trope.[28] In this vein, Hutcheon (1985, 6) identifies Euripides' *Medea* as a parody of Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy in its placement of a non-Greek woman as its protagonist and its exposure of the flaws of the (traditionally heroic) Jason. *Medea*, however, could not be called palimpsestic, as it is not known to be a direct reworking of a specific earlier text. Indeed, 'in a palimpsest, one can detect traces of the original writing underneath the newer writing' (Johnson 2017, 91). For this reason, whilst parodies are not necessarily sustained throughout entire texts (as Aristophanes' multi-parodic *Thesmophoriazusae* exemplifies), palimpsests tend to provide an 'extended intertextual engagement' (Hutcheon 2013, 8) with the work they rewrite. This is not to say an audience requires a direct experience of an original play to experience it as an adaptation or palimpsest. Rather, beyond a canonical text, there exists a 'generally circulated cultural memory' (Ellis 1982, 3), and this is particularly the case regarding theatre, an inherently ephemeral art form.[29]

Cultural memory is certainly important for *Orestes*, which debuted exactly fifty years after Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.[30] Temporally, *Orestes* concerns itself with the events that take place between the murder of Clytemnestra and Orestes' trial at Athens, which are depicted in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides* respectively. Its situation between the narratives of these two canonical tragedies provides both the freedom for Euripides to experiment with the action of his play itself and with firm audience expectations of the immediate past and future of this action, inherited from a shared cultural memory of the Aeschylean *Oresteia*. This is distinct from, for example, Euripides' *Helen*, described as καινή 'new' by Aristophanes (Ar. *Th*. 850) on account of its narrative diversion from the Homeric story. Instead, *Orestes* engages deeply with its inherited *Oresteian* text, to the extent that 'the structure of *Orestes* can be read as a series of reversed *Oresteia* plots' (Torrance 2013, 46). Not only is *Orestes* palimpsestic, but its radical adaptation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is achieved with the repetition and critical distance of parody; it is tragic paratragedy.[31] At the same time, Euripides' reappropriation of the hostage trope from its comedic parodies is an act of tragic paracomedy, as the trope's new comedic

[28] Thus it is possible to identify parts of Aristophanes as 'paratragic' due to their linguistic or metrical aspects even when their source texts are not extant.
[29] See Miller (2017, 53-67) on ephemerality and theatre's contribution towards abstracting cultural memories from canonical texts, and Middleton (2021) on the limits of adaptation theory when applied to classical theatrical adaptation.
[30] Hall (2010, 285) notes that this timing is probably no coincidence as the play demonstrates a keen awareness of 'the literary legacy which underlies it'.
[31] I consider *Orestes* a radical adaptation because, as Wright (2008, 24) observes, none of the stage action has any surviving literary parallel and yet its narrative remains compatible with the Aeschylean *Oresteia*.

associations are placed in distinct and distanced contexts. Cumulatively, the parodying of both genres results in a text that is in effect *self*-parodying and intensely reflective.

Fortunately, all three of these factors come to the fore in *Orestes*' hostage scene, which occurs at the end of the tragedy. However, its first major departure from the dramatic trope occurs much sooner in the tragedy: the hostage-taking is planned in advance. Even before the hostage plan emerges, Pylades' suggestion to murder Helen is a unique plot twist (1105). Although many tragic characters express a desire for Helen's death, this is the only extant instance of a genuine plot to kill her.[32] Pylades suggests that, if they should fail to kill Helen, they burn down the palace (1149-1152), with the aim that they will succeed in one plan or the other: ἑνὸς γὰρ οὐ σφαλέντες 'for not failing one [of these]' (1151). The characters are dedicated to a plan so bold that most only dare to fantasise about it, and their back-up is to burn down the royal house from the inside. Both paths seem likely to result in at least one violent death, providing an ominous and desperate atmosphere into which the hostage trope is introduced. As a follow up to their plan to assassinate Helen, Electra suggests holding Hermione as a hostage to quell Menelaus' retaliation for his wife's murder (1183-1203). Orestes' response, that Electra has τὰς φρένας…ἄρσενας 'masculine senses' (1204), has been noted for its ironic links to the Aeschylean Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*. Perhaps it may even refer back to the Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' lost *Telephus*, who may have enabled the hostage-taking of the young Orestes. In either case, the irony and futility of the repeated acts of vengeance is central to this murder plot.

Ultimately, the plan to kill Helen fails, as she disappears into thin air before the assassins' eyes. In a chaotic messenger scene, an enslaved Trojan attendant relates the confusion of Helen's attempted murder and its fallout within the palace (1369-1502).[33] Despite the absence of her body, Orestes initially maintains that the attempt on Helen's life has been successful (1512), and threatens to kill Hermione too should Menelaus respond with hostility (1533-6). As Orestes enters the palace, the chorus observe with horror that torches are being lit (1541-4), an indication that Pylades' planned arson may be about to come into play. Ironically, when Menelaus arrives with military reinforcements, he reveals that he does not believe Helen has disappeared. Rather, he interprets the story as Orestes' trickery, discounting it with πολὺς γέλως 'how ridiculous' (1560).[34] Much like *Medea*'s Jason, Menelaus orders the palace doors opened (*Or*. 1561-2, *Med*. 1314-7) and, like Medea, Orestes emerges with Hermione instead on the *skene* roof (*Or*. 1560, *Med*. 1318).[35] The obvious difference is that, whilst Medea brought with her

[32] As noted by Zeitlin (2003, 331); similarly, the satyrs' fantasy rape of Helen is not presented as a sincere threat at E. *Cyc*. 179-187, on which see Hall (2006, 148).
[33] This messenger speech and scene is noted for its humour and discussed at 7.3.4.
[34] Willink (1986, 340): 'the expression jars, because Men. could scarcely be further from laughter'. On the contrary, the expression is fitting in the incongruous and ominous circumstances, used for similar effect at E. *Ba*. 250, E. *Tro*. 943; see 3.4.2, 3.5.3.
[35] A comparison made by Arnott (1973, 59-60).

the two dead bodies of her children, Orestes has nothing to show for his ‘killing’ of Helen. However, he does hold the live Hermione hostage, his sword at her throat.

The recurring characters from Euripides’ *Telephus* are striking. Not only has Orestes come ‘full circle’ (Zeitlin 2003, 339) but Menelaus is again forced to negotiate a hostage situation, only this time his nephew is the perpetrator instead of the victim, and his own daughter is under threat. This repetitive intertextuality has a pessimistic quality, which mirrors the play’s emphasis upon the cycles of vengeance in the House of Atreus. Electra’s prologue, for instance, traces the familial conflict all the way back to Tantalus and Pelops, predating the conflict between Atreus and Thyestes and the marriages of Agamemnon and Menelaus (4-27). For Torrance (2013, 56), the hostage scene also corresponds with the sacrifice of Agamemnon’s daughter Iphigenia ahead of the Trojan war.[36] The siblings are the fifth generation of a long-suffering house, and their trauma is certainly intergenerational; just as Electra mirrors the Clytemnestra of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (and perhaps also his *Telephus*), Euripides engages with his own earlier *Telephus* in making Orestes the hostage-taker. Additionally, Hermione’s role interacts with another Euripidean text, as in *Andromache* (257-258) she herself threatens to set fire to the altar that Andromache is taking refuge at with her son.[37] Euripides’ paratragic references are not just in dialogue with Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, but his own earlier versions of these characters; the paratragedy is self-parody too.

In terms of the comedic influence, key narrative aspects are shared with *Acharnians*; the hostage scene occurs without a preceding disguise (or exposure) and the setting is the home of the protagonist, who is under physical threat and in turn becomes the hostage-taker. The stronger allusions are certainly with *Thesmophoriazusae*’s parody of *Telephus*, namely the sex of the child hostage, the protest of her parent, and, above all, the threat of fire. In each of these cases, *Orestes* offers a dark twist on its comedic precedent. The child is, of course, not a disguised wine-skin but a real young girl, whose outraged father nevertheless plays chicken with Orestes and even dares him to act: κτειν'· ὡς κτανών γε τῶνδέ μοι δώσεις δίκην ‘kill then: for after you have killed you will pay me the penalty for your actions’ (*Or*. 1597).[38] Moreover, the threat of fire comes not as a retaliation from the threatened party, but from the nihilistic hostage-takers themselves. In terms of its structure and staging, Zeitlin (2003, 341) notes the similarity of this scene to the firing of the *phrontisterion* at the end of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. There, Strepsiades and the enslaved Xanthias threaten to set fire to Socrates’ school, and

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[36] Torrance (2013, 56): ‘Where Agamemnon had agreed to sacrifice his daughter, Menelaus now comes to his daughter's rescue, prefiguring the ‘death-averted’ resolution of the drama’. Orestes himself makes the comparison between the two girls at E. *Or*. 658-9. Euripides’ interest in a ‘death-averted’ telling of the Iphigenia sacrifice is evident from his *IT*, and possibly the ending of his *IA*.
[37] Burnett (1971, 210) also considers *Orestes*’ Hermione as a mirror of the Aeschylean Cassandra.
[38] Willink (1986, 345) notes the causal and admonitory force of ὡς κτανών, concluding that this is ‘not intended as a specific invitation to kill Herm.’

successfully do so (*Nu*. 1491-1510). If it was not yet clear from the bold attempted murder of Helen, Euripides lends further weight to his characters' threats by structurally evoking the earlier comedic tradition.

The echo of *Thesmophoriazusae* is additionally sinister as Aristophanes' Relative character adopts the hostage scene from *Telephus* as the first in a series of tragic parodies that successively *fail*. Throughout *Orestes*, multiple different tragic plots are attempted to similar effect; as Burnett (1971, 184) says, 'the play contains a suppliant action, a rescue, and a mixed rescue and vengeance action, every one of which fails'. Just like Aristophanes' paratragedy, Euripides parodies various tragic plots, some Aeschylean and some his own, and depicts the failure of them all. Ironically, these plots culminate in the last resort hostage-scene, the first of *Thesmophoriazusae*'s flops. Inevitably, this also appears to fail, as Orestes calls for Electra and Pylades to set fire to the house and Menelaus rouses his men to attack it (*Or*. 1617-1622). Ultimately, the failed hostage scene is resolved by the only dramatic means left, a divine intervention. Apollo appears *ex machina* to instruct the characters on the necessary next steps to resolve the conflict, providing a third layer of staging to this already complicated visual *tableau*.[39]

Critics have commented upon the problematic nature of this dramatic resolution.[40] Much critique centres on Apollo's total inversion of the hostage situation, announcing that Orestes and Hermione are to be wed:

Απ. ἐφ' ἧς δ' ἔχεις, Ὀρέστα, φάσγανον δέρηι
γῆμαι πέπρωται σ' Ἑρμιόνην· (E. *Or*. 1653-4)

Ap. And her, Orestes, at whose throat you hold a sword,
you are fated to marry, Hermione.

The pronouncement that Orestes and Hermione will marry, though not out of line with Oresteian myth, is starkly incongruous in the context of the particularly threatening stage action that Apollo describes.[41]

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[39] Zeitlin (2003, 339) posits that these multiple layers of staging 'serve as the perfect spatial analogue to the palimpsestic text'. The debate on whether Helen appears in this scene centres on the deletion of *Or*. 1631, which may be an interpolation based on later staging; see West (1990b, 290).
[40] Mastronarde (2010, 192-5); Dunn (1996, 172) notes that Apollo reveals that the entire plot has been 'a joke and a contrivance'.
[41] The marriage of Orestes and Hermione is also mentioned at E. *Andr*. 966-1008, though she is there first married to Neoptolemus as in *Od*. 4.5-9.

When gods appear *ex machina* at a tragedy's end, they regularly give instructions on the narrative's future action.[42] Only rarely do these pronouncements concern marriage (e.g. S. *Tr.* 1225-7, E. *Andr.* 1243-7), and in these cases both spouses are not present onstage together. Rather, the effect in *Orestes* is much more reminiscent of the Aristophanic comedy, where plays regularly result in marriages for their protagonists. Imposed upon Euripides' tragic context, this trope is jarring and creates a doubled effect; there coexists the 'conflicting embodiment of tragic failure and comic success' (Dunn 1996, 173). Although the plot technically ends in success for its young protagonists, the majority of the tragedy is concerned with the futility of their actions, finally resulting in a 'celebration of their total failure that the god must interrupt' (Burnett 1971, 220).

Just as *Thesmophoriazusae* results in the plot's resolution arriving, finally, from the world of comedic tropes, Euripides' *Orestes* seems to borrow from comedy too. The two options presented as resolutions both have comedic precedents: the burning of the palace and the marriages of the young characters. As the latter of these plots comes into play, the jarring combination of the high-stakes hostage situation with its sudden enforced de-escalation brings an anticlimactic end to the unpredictable tragedy. Vellacott's reading of this scene as a 'mockery' (1975, 79) of divine benevolence is extreme, and unnecessarily conflates the parodic engagement with ridicule. Rather, the ending of Euripides' *Orestes* reveals that the combination of dedicated paratragedy and paracomedy can only result in a play that parodies itself. In *Orestes*, Euripides parodies traditional tragic action by emphasising the failure of devices that typically support a tragic plot. The means with which he achieves this paratragedy is through engaging with Aristophanic comedy; by cycling through the failures of multiple tragic plot types, as Aristophanes does in *Thesmophoriazusae*, Euripides returns to the hostage trope of his own *Telephus* – the avowed tragic precedent for Aristophanes' multiple parodies. This scene, however, has been altered by its parodic legacy; in a sense, just as its child hostage has grown to become the adult hostage-taker, the trope too is now in its second generation. In this new and developed context, it ceases to function as a viable vehicle to resolve the multiple conflicts and confusions of the chaotic plot. To save the characters from total destruction, and reroute the myth back onto its Aeschylean path, Euripides employs the formal tragic element of the *deus ex machina*, whose pronouncements dissipate the violent threat of the hostage scene by transposing a comedic marriage plot onto it, however incongruous and distancing this may be for his theatrical audience.

[42] Mastronarde (2005, 329) observes that gods who 'save' and 'inform' the human characters usually appear *ex machina*, and give 'dispositions for the future'.

6.3 Recognition scenes

6.3.1 Introduction

So far, this chapter has tracked the development of the hostage trope from Euripides' *Telephus* to his late *Orestes*, via its comedic parodies in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*. This discussion analysed Euripides' use of palimpsest and parody, and both of these strategies can be observed further in his *Electra*. To build upon the hostage scene example, I address a recurring scene in tragedy that has been most widely identified as a potential instance of Euripidean paratragedy. The recognition scene between Orestes and Electra, featured in extant works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, is a critical window into the web of mythological and dramatic intertextuality that exists among the fifth-century tragedians. This perceived instance of parody has garnered the most critical acceptance of all Euripidean parody, most likely because it does not ostensibly interact with the 'lower' genre of comedy.[43] Still, for ethical and aesthetic reasons, scholars have suggested that the parodic lines are interpolated and should be deleted.[44] They have been defended, largely successfully, by Lloyd-Jones (1961), Bond (1974, 2), Cropp (2013, 178-81), and Gallagher (2003), amongst others.[45] Whilst most now accept the authenticity of the scene, some reject its identification as parody, or entirely conflate this with concepts of mockery, ridicule or 'comic relief'.[46] The preceding chapter has revealed Euripides' successful integration of comedic tropes into his tragic works, neither ridiculing the received tropes nor using them in exclusively light-hearted contexts. Perhaps the best example of this is the dressing scene of *Bacchae*, in which an ostensibly comedic trope is employed at the tragedy's turning point. Despite its rejection at first by Pentheus, the dressing is depicted with a solemn and even touching sense of sincerity, accompanied with a sense of dread of the violence to come (see 5.4.2). This section aims to re-establish parody as a comic mode of engagement distinct from both ridicule and comic relief, assessing the reception of Aeschylus' Oresteian recognition scene in Euripides' *Electra*. Sophocles' *Electra*, which cannot be dated prior to the Euripidean tragedy with certainty, is used as an example of an alternative approach to adapting the myth.

6.3.2 Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, Sophocles' *Electra*

All three renditions of this section of the Oresteian myth involve two major plot points: the return of Orestes and the double murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (Halporn 1983, 102). In each of these plays, Orestes must be identified by his sister upon his return before they can enact their vengeance. Therefore, the recognition acts as the critical turning point (or, *anagnorisis*; Zeitlin 2012, 361) in each

[43] On the aesthetic and ethical distinctions between the genres in Aristotle, see 4.1. Aristophanes references the Aeschylean recognition scene in *Clouds* (534-6) but does not directly stage a parody of the recognition between the siblings.
[44] The *Electra* lines were first condemned as interpolations by Mau (1877), and most recently by Bain (1977).
[45] Additionally, Wright (2008b, 121-2) observes a reference to *Electra*'s recognition scene at E. *Or*. 233-4.
[46] Lloyd-Jones (1961, 179) assumes that the parody is a form of ridicule. Despite outlining some theoretical observations on parody, Halporn (1983, 112-3, 115) nevertheless conflates it with ridicule and comic relief, as does Gallagher (2003, 404, 413).

play. In Aeschylus' version, Electra finds a lock of hair upon her father's grave (*Cho*. 168). In discussion with the chorus, they establish that the only person who would be likely to leave this familial sepulchral offering is Electra, as Clytemnestra has been proven to be an enemy (173). Electra notes the similarity of the lock to her own hair, and they entertain the possibility that it may have been sent by a messenger of Orestes (176-180). Next, Electra notices two sets of footprints at the gravesite, one of which bears striking resemblance to her own feet (205-210). Garvie (1986, 97 on 221) suggests that she follows these and quickly arrives at the hiding-place from which Orestes and Pylades emerge. Orestes, who has already recognised Electra (16-18), identifies himself (219), but Electra fears a δόλον 'trick' (220). As further evidence, Orestes invites Electra to hold the shorn lock up to his head (230) and assess a ὕφασμα 'weaving' he has with him – one that his sister made for him before his exile (231-2). Immediately, Electra accepts the tokens as proof of his identity and the siblings must work hard to contain their excitement at the reunion (232-67). Notably, the hair-offering as a token of Orestes' recognition is the only one to have a literary precedent, attested in Stesichorus' lyric *Oresteia* (fr. 217 *PMGF*).[47]

In Sophocles' *Electra*, this same token recurs, but in more confusing circumstances, as Orestes has been falsely reported dead (672). However, their sister Chrysothemis arrives from Agamemnon's grave, announcing that Orestes is present (876). She has seen libations and flower garlands at the tomb (893-6), and, most conspicuously, a νεώρη βόστρυχον τετμημένον 'a lock of freshly shorn hair' (901). It is this token that she identifies as belonging to Orestes, and she is similarly moved by its discovery (902-6).[48] Electra, however, still believes the news of Orestes' death.[49] Later, Orestes himself plays along with this false report, pretending to be the conveyor of her brother's ashes (1112). Moved by Electra's grief and loyalty, Orestes reveals himself by means of Agamemnon's σφραγῖδα, 'signet ring' (1223). Joyfully, Electra accepts the ring as a token of her brother's identity (1224-9). Evidently, Sophocles adapts the Aeschylean version of the myth, introducing the false report of Orestes' death to delay the recognition of the siblings, and to stage Clytemnestra's complex reaction to the news.[50] Moreover, Sophocles depicts the failure of the hair-offering to convince Electra, who is persuaded by the messenger's report of Orestes' death rather than Chrysothemis' interpretation of the hair-offering. This token becomes a narrative 'dead end' (Finglass 2007, 373). As such, a second token is required to prove Orestes' identity, and Sophocles selects the σφραγῖδα of Agamemnon.[51] For Halporn (1983, 108), this token is a symbol of ruling power, as opposed to the loving familial tie indicated by Aeschylus'

[47] On the Stesichorus fragments and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, see Brown (2018, 4-6).
[48] Her reasoning must be that here, as in Aeschylus, only family members are expected to offer locks of hair at a tomb; Gallagher (2003, 411).
[49] Finglass (2007, 371) notes the irony: 'The Paedagogus announced the death of Orestes; Chrysothemis proclaims his return from exile. His tale was false, and yet received Electra's unquestioning belief; Chrysothemis' account, though true, is immediately rejected by her sister'.
[50] The particular emphasis placed upon Clytemnestra's laughter in this tragedy is assessed at 2.2.3.
[51] Finglass (2007, 465 on 1223) lists other classical instances of recognition by means of a ring: Men. *Epitr*. 386-418, Plaut. *Curc*. 653-7, Ter. *Hec*. 574, 811-2.

final token, the garment made by Electra.[52] In both scenes, the recognition prompts the siblings' great emotional relief. In the Aeschylus, Electra's 'wavering and irrational hope' (Garvie 1986, 88) is an intense, if short-lived, emotional rollercoaster.[53] In the Sophoclean version, the siblings are chastised for their τῆς ἀπλήστου τῆσδε σὺν χαρᾷ βοῆς 'greedy shouting with joy' (1336), as they imagine a positive future in which they may act ἐλευθέρως 'freely' (1300).[54]

6.3.3 Euripides' *Electra*

Euripides sets his *Electra* against an unusual backdrop. Instead of the tomb of Agamemnon or palace of Argos, *Electra* is set at the farm that has become his female protagonist's new home. She has been married to a farmer, whose grasp of the class politics at play in their match has prevented him consummating their union (43-9). As such, this Electra occupies a liminal space –between *parthenos* and spouse– in a peculiarly rural and low-status setting. For Knox (1979, 252-4) this domesticity is enough to cultivate a comic tone, though this 'has nothing to do with comedy' (*ibid*., 254). Rather, Euripides' setting of this heroic myth in a more everyday setting is incongruous and unusual. Although it is uncertain which debuted first, similarities to Sophocles' *Electra* are apparent. Like the Sophoclean version, Euripides' Electra does not see Orestes' tokens first hand, but they are related to her by an elderly man, a father-figure who addresses her as ὦ θύγατερ 'o daughter' (493). Despite fulfilling a similar role to Sophocles' Chrysothemis, who enters ecstatic with joy (S. *El*. 871-4), this Old Man arrives weeping (E. *El*. 501-10).

Euripides' Old Man does not begin with his interpretation of what he has seen (as S. *El*. 877-8), but rather gives a chronological account of his journey. Only when he has narrated his own libation and discovery of a stranger's offering of a sheep, blood and a lock of hair (513-5) does he suggest, with a tentative ἴσως 'perhaps' (518), that Orestes came in secret to make the offering. To test his hypothesis, he suggests Electra compare the hair to her own:

Πρ. σκέψαι δὲ χαίτην προστιθεῖσα σῇ κόμῃ,
εἰ χρῶμα ταὐτὸν κουρίμης ἔσται τριχός:
φιλεῖ γάρ, αἷμα ταὐτὸν οἷς ἂν ᾖ πατρός,
τὰ πόλλ᾽ ὅμοια σώματος πεφυκέναι. (E. *El*. 520-3)

OM. But look at the hair, holding it up to your own locks,

[52] Garvie (1986, 102 on 232) notes the sinister connotations of weaving in the *Oresteia*, and here the contrast between Electra's lovingly made garment and Clytemnestra's murder: A. *Ag*. 1405, *Cho*. 140-1.
[53] Brown (2018, 210 on 164-305): 'at every moment we want her agony to end and the recognition to be complete'.
[54] For the siblings' forecast of their future laughter in this play, see 2.2.3.

see if the colour is the same as the shorn off lock.
For two relatives, who share the same paternal blood,
the majority of the body is formed similarly.

Electra dismisses the claim immediately; firstly, and ironically, on the grounds that her courageous brother would not arrive Αἰγίσθου φόβῳ 'in fear of Aegisthus' (525). She then rejects the token itself:

Ἠλ. ἔπειτα χαίτης πῶς συνοίσεται πλόκος,
ὁ μὲν παλαίστραις ἀνδρὸς εὐγενοῦς τραφείς,
ὁ δὲ κτενισμοῖς θῆλυς; (E. *El.* 528-9)

El. Then how would the lock of hair correspond,
one grown in the wrestling-grounds of a nobleman,
and the other feminine from combing?

Moreover, she adds, many people share similar hair, even when they are not related (530-1). This first rejection establishes the two very distinct rhetorics at play in this attempted recognition, the poorly constructed argument of the Old Man and the exaggerated criticism of Electra. In the first instance, Gallagher (2003, 411) observes that the Old Man 'presents a caricature of the reasoning over the tokens in *Choephoroi*'. Regarding the lock of hair, Bain (1977, 110) notes that he suggests the comparison as if it is present for Electra to see it, which it most likely was not. His question is therefore entirely hypothetical (Halporn 1983, 115), and moreover fails to outline the most important feature of the Aeschylean token, that it is a distinctly familial sepulchral offering (Gallagher 2003, 402). In response, Electra similarly misses the most important factors of the evidence. Whilst the Old Man suggests comparing the hair's χρῶμα (521), her dismissal is based on its texture (Gallagher 2003, 406). The response also assumes that Orestes, in his exile, is attending wrestling-schools that require him to keep his hair cut short.[55] Most conspicuously from a visual perspective, she implies that her own hair is κτενισμοῖς θῆλυς, when its shorn and unwashed state has already been emphasised multiple times in the tragedy (108, 184, 241, 335).[56] This is certainly loaded with irony, if not perhaps outright humour.

The introduction of the second and third tokens confirms Euripides' parody of the Aeschylean recognition scene:

Πρ. σὺ δ᾽ εἰς ἴχνος βᾶσ᾽ ἀρβύλης σκέψαι βάσιν

[55] Denniston (1939, 116 on 528-9) cites E. *Ba.* 455 as evidence for wrestlers' cropped hair.
[56] Bain (1977, 104): 'if Electra was costumed at all realistically, as perhaps we would expect in a Euripidean play, the audience would have a visual reminder of the ineptness of her argument'.

εἰ σύμμετρος σῷ ποδὶ γενήσεται, τέκνον.
Ἠλ. πῶς δ᾽ ἂν γένοιτ᾽ ἂν ἐν κραταιλέῳ πέδῳ
γαίας ποδῶν ἔκμακτρον; εἰ δ᾽ ἔστιν τόδε,
δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν ποὺς ἂν οὐ γένοιτ᾽ ἴσος
ἀνδρός τε καὶ γυναικός, ἀλλ᾽ ἄρσην κρατεῖ.
Πρ. οὐκ ἔστιν, εἰ καὶ γῆν κασίγνητος μολών,
< >
κερκίδος ὅτῳ γνοίης ἂν ἐξύφασμα σῆς,
ἐν ᾧ ποτ᾽ αὐτὸν ἐξέκλεψα μὴ θανεῖν;
Ἠλ. οὐκ οἶσθ᾽, Ὀρέστης ἡνίκ᾽ ἐκπίπτει χθονός,
νέαν μ᾽ ἔτ᾽ οὖσαν; εἰ δὲ κἄκρεκον πέπλους,
πῶς ἂν τότ᾽ ὢν παῖς ταὐτὰ νῦν ἔχοι φάρη,
εἰ μὴ ξυναύξοινθ᾽ οἱ πέπλοι τῷ σώματι; (E. *El*. 532-44)

OM. Stepping into the footprint of his boot, see if the step
is proportional with your foot, child.
El. But how could there be an impression of feet on
the earth's rocky ground? And if that is so,
the feet of two siblings would not be equal,
one belonging to a man and one a woman, but the masculine is bigger.
OM. Is there not, if your brother came to the land,
< >
a piece of weaving from your shuttle by which you might recognise him,
the one in which I myself stole him away from death?
El. Do you not know that when Orestes fled the land,
I was still young? But if I were weaving clothes then,
how could he, who was a boy then, be wearing the same weaving,
unless the robes grew alongside his body?

Again, the Old Man introduces confused versions of Aeschylean tokens; he suggests ἴχνος…ἀρβύλης (532), a boot print instead of a footprint,[57] and seemingly misremembers the age of this Electra – too young to have woven a garment for Orestes to use as a token. Electra, in turn, questions the veracity of the Old Man's report of these tokens; in a style that Gallagher (2003, 406-8) observes as particularly sophistic, she implies that the Old Man could not have seen any footprints on the terrain (534-5). Furthermore, she denies that the footprints could serve as a token in any case – they would not be ἴσος

[57] Gallagher (2003, 412) on the futility of the boot print as a proposed token.

(536). This misreads the Old Man's suggestion that her foot might be σύμμετρος 'commensurable' (533; LSJ II A) with Orestes', indicating similarity of proportion rather than exact sizing. Finally, her disregard of the weaving is at first made on the more certain terms of a miscalculated timescale, but she extends her dismissal to a *reductio ad absurdum* (Gallagher 2003, 408). Her literal interpretation of the Old Man's suggestion has been identified as particularly comic: for example, Cropp (2013, 181) notes that it is 'unusually humorous for tragedy, but not incongruous in the context of this debate'. Denniston (1939, 118 on 544) even compares the line to Menelaus' joke about Helen's weight in Euripides' *Trojan Women* (1049-50).[58]

In any case, with all three Aeschylean tokens rejected, another must be found as Euripides' Orestes does not seem likely to identify himself any time soon. Fortunately, the Old Man happens to have rescued Orestes from the palace as a child (556-7), and begins to inspect this familiar stranger, circling around him when he re-enters the stage (559-562). The Old Man instructs Electra to pray to the gods for a revelation, and she briefly suspects he has lost the plot, before he announces that the stranger is Orestes (563-571). Electra wants a χαρακτῆρ 'mark' (572) as proof, and the Old Man reveals what he has seen:

Πρ. οὐλὴν παρ᾽ ὀφρύν, ἥν ποτ᾽ ἐν πατρὸς δόμοις
νεβρὸν διώκων σοῦ μέθ᾽ ἡμάχθη πεσών. (E. *El.* 573-4)

OM. A scar along the brow, where once in his father's house
he was cut, falling while he was chasing a fawn with you.

The hero's identification from a scar has an obvious classical precedent in Homer's *Odyssey,* the resonances of which I will return to shortly. In terms of its immediate narrative effect, this sign does convince Electra, who embraces her brother in a surprisingly cold reunion (578-584).[59] There is evidently an irony in the scar triggering the successful recognition: Goff (1991, 260) observes that 'It seems to me almost comic that the definitive proof of identity is finally found to be one that has been available for Elektra's inspection throughout the entire scene'. Goff (1991, 261) also flags that Electra precisely requests a χαρακτῆρ despite being in full view of the scar, a mark that she was specifically present at the creation of. The Old Man is vindicated, but Electra is exposed and likely embarrassed, perhaps a contributing factor to the rather awkward reunion.

[58] This *Trojan Women* joke is analysed at 4.2.3.
[59] See Walton (1991, 24-5) for a rejection of an enthusiastic performance of these lines.

Many critics have noted Euripides' playful interaction with the inherited tragic tropes. Goldhill, for example, describes this recognition 'as a literary, theatrical game, a game complete with rules and conventions' (1986, 249).[60] To identify whether this 'game' is parodic in nature, it is appropriate to return to Hutcheon's previously outlined definition of this style of engagement: 'repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity' (1985, 6). On a basic level, Euripides' use of Aeschylean tropes qualifies as parody in these terms; the tokens are repeated, creatively critiqued, and ultimately rejected as catalysts for the recognition of the siblings. A further observation about parody from Hutcheon helps to address the perceived problem that Euripides is critiquing or ridiculing Aeschylus with this parody, namely that it is 'not always at the expense of the parodied text' (*ibid.*). Gallagher (2003, 413-4) outlines a theory of parody based on observations of Rose (1993), working on similar grounds: 'while parody is accompanied by a comic effect, it need not necessarily ridicule the work of its target or "parodee"' (*ibid.*, 47). For Gallagher (2003, 414), this means seeking another source of Euripides' ridicule, for which he offers the Old Man or the sophists. To me, this misses the mark; insisting on conflating parody with ridicule limits interpretation to a narrow perspective which does not allow for the possible avenues of other sorts of humour, such as that of incongruity theory. Moreover, this approach to parody relies on the assumption that it is always intended to be received as humorous. As has been established in chapter four on tragic jokes, comic modes do not always serve the purpose of eliciting comic amusement. This approach relies on so many questionable assumptions about laughter and humour that, for my purposes, identifying a target is neither a necessary nor a sufficient means to analyse or defend Euripides' use of parody.

Rather, to tackle the claims of both interpolation and impropriety, it is important first to establish another key feature of Euripides' intertextual engagement in *Electra*, which is not just a parody, but a palimpsest too. Johnson's observation that 'in a palimpsest, one can detect traces of the original writing underneath the newer writing' (2017, 91) is evidenced in Euripides' extensive textual engagement with *Choephoroi*. Gallagher notes the echoes of Aeschylus, particularly in the language describing the lock of hair (E. *El*. 520, A. *Cho*. 229) and the footprints (E. *El*. 532, A. *Cho*. 230).[61] These specific textual allusions have led Bain, arguing that the lines are interpolated, to claim that their author 'wrote not with a recent Aeschylean revival in mind, but with a text of *Choephoroe* before him' (1977, 111). Although Euripides engages closely with Aeschylus elsewhere, as in *Orestes*, it is the parody's palimpsestic textual quality that is identified as suspicious. Moreover, Bain's major critique of the lines is their reliance on an audience's knowledge of *Choephoroi*:

[60] On the use of theatrical games within *clownesque* performances in tragedy, see chapter 7.

[61] To these, Cropp (2013, 179 on 518-44) adds further textual echoes: *El*. 521, *Cho*. 190; *El*. 530, *Cho*. 174; *El*. 532, *Cho*. 228; *El*. 533, *Cho*. 209.

> '[A]llowing for the liveliness of oral tradition in fifth-century Athens, I take leave to doubt whether anything like a half of Euripides' audience had actually seen the first performance of the recognition scene of the *Choephoroe* or heard it discussed by someone who had' (1977, 110)

For Bain (1977, 110-111), the authenticity of the lines therefore relies upon the Aeschylean revivals that may, or may not, have taken place around the same time as Euripides' *Electra*.[62] However, by the 410s the late Aeschylus was certainly already an established canonical author of tragedy. To experience a text as a palimpsest, Euripides' audience need not recognise every specific textual reference but the broader strokes of the plot, for which the tokens act as clear signifiers. The 'generally circulated cultural memory' (Ellis 1982, 3) of this major theatrical work is surely understated by Bain.[63] Euripides' textual allusions do not require an audience of high literacy or great age to be received as palimpsestic as well as parodic. Indeed, Revermann considers surviving comedic paratragedy as a useful indicator of audience competence: 'it performs the double act of being appealing to all –a *sine qua non* for success at the competitive dramatic festivals– while inviting layered responses and creating strata of connoisseurship' (2006, 103). An audience member need not recognise every aspect of the tragic parody for it to be received as such, a feature surely shared with this example of tragic paratragedy.

Reading this parody as a simultaneous palimpsest, which engages closely with Aeschylus' text, encourages a closer reading of the Old Man character. Like Sophocles, Euripides places his Electra at one remove from the identifying tokens themselves, but this tentative elderly figure takes the place of the confident Chrysothemis. Like many elderly characters of tragedy, his physical impairment is evident from the text.[64] Whether or not this might elicit amusement from its theatrical audience is debated; Bain (1977, 106) and Cropp (2013, 177) note the potential for humour, whilst Halporn (1983, 115) emphasises his physical struggle as an attempt to evoke pathos.[65] In any case, for Cropp (2013, 177), 'his infirmity helps to make Electra's rejection of his suggestions plausible'; this character's age indicates that he may not be a reliable eyewitness. It is notable that this is the character in whose mouth Euripides places the Aeschylean allusions and references, and upon whose memory the parody depends. In short, it seems that the Old Man has wandered in from the Aeschylean text and arrived in the dramatically different setting of Euripides' play. He and his recognition narrative are entirely incongruous in Euripides' tragedy, as Gallagher (1986, 412) observes: 'It is appropriate that the Old

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[62] Bain (1977, 111-13) outlines the ancient evidence for the Aeschylean revivals following the tragedian's death: *Vit. Aesch.* 12, *Schol. ad Ar. Ach.* 10, Quint. X.1.66, Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* vi.11, Ar. *Ach.* 9f., *Ran.* 868f.; Biles (2006-7) provides a detailed and sceptical account of the extant evidence.
[63] Certainly, Aeschylus' *Eumenides* became shrouded in urban legend, at least for later readers, as *Vit. Aesch.* 9 recounts the tale of children fainting and pregnant women miscarrying at the entrance of the chorus of Furies.
[64] E.g. Cropp (2013, 177) lists E. *Her.* 107-26, *Ion* 735-40, *Or.* 470-5.
[65] These are not necessarily incompatible readings. On humour and pathos, see 4.1.

Man, as the messenger of Orestes' return, uses the language of Orestes from *Choephori*. But he misuses it'. It seems that Bain need look no further than the Old Man himself for a first-hand witness of the *Choephoroi* recognition scene. In a botched attempt at repetition, the Old Man creates this parodic palimpsest – a rewriting of the Aeschylus that emphasises the distance and difference of the Euripidean text. This happens in conversation with the νεᾶνις 'young woman' (487) Electra, whom he mistakes for her older Aeschylean counterpart, weaving a garment for Orestes whilst this later Electra was too νέαν 'young' (542). Eventually, they will arrive at a consensus, but it is an intergenerational collaboration that harks back far beyond Aeschylus to Homeric epic. However, memory itself is a palimpsestic process: it is a non-linear dialogue between past and present in which each may inform interpretation of the other. Memory, on a personal and cultural basis, is constantly being rewritten. In this context, Euripides' palimpsestic parody is not ridicule or critique of Aeschylus, but cultural commentary, observing and staging the creation and recreation of myth that his own tragedy is a part of.

Here it is appropriate to return to the text and examine what Euripides offers as the successful recognition sign in place of the failed Aeschylean tokens. Orestes' scar as a means of recognition evidently places Euripides' text in dialogue with *Odyssey* 19.392-93, in which Odysseus' nurse, Eurycleia, recognises the hero from a scar he acquired in a hunt.[66] Tarkow notes the contrasting characteristics of these two literary protagonists; the scar, as it invites comparison between the two, 'serves to remind us of the essentially unheroic fellow Euripides is portraying in Orestes' (1981, 147). Goff (1991) takes this work further, addressing the contrasting details of how the two scars are acquired. Whilst Odysseus' scar results from a boar-hunt that marks his progression into manhood, Orestes, 'far from attempting any heroic exploit,. . .fails in the merely playful hunt that does engage him' (Goff 1991, 264). Odysseus' scar and his acquisition of it are, together, a guarantee that he will be victorious in reclaiming his home and wife from the suitors (*ibid*., 263), but Orestes' scar has no such resonances; rather, it is the result of 'the siblings' childish horseplay' (Zeitlin 2012, 370). This is particularly jarring given Orestes' own rather heroic narrative within Homer's *Odyssey*, in which his vengeance is depicted as a positive *exemplum* for the young Telemachus (*ibid*., 361).[67] Instead, within Euripides' narrative, it is evident that the evocation of the Odyssean scar serves to characterise Orestes as an unheroic successor to both Homer's Odysseus and his own epic self. Like his sister Electra, he is instead trapped in a liminal space between childhood and adulthood,[68] resulting in a peculiar impasse that throws the futures of the siblings into question.

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[66] Goff (1991, 260, original emphasis): 'It would be difficult to *exclude* the *Odyssey* from an account of the scar, if only because of the immense cultural authority wielded in fifth-century Athens by Homeric epic'.
[67] Orestes is referenced in relation to his vengeance multiple times throughout the epic: *Od*. 1.28-43, 1.298-300, 3.305-312, 4.512-547.
[68] Goff (1991, 261) emphasises that the Homeric Odysseus is not the only other heroic figure *Electra*'s Orestes is compared to and found wanting. In addition to the Homeric and Aeschylean versions of Orestes, Euripides also evokes Perseus in the context of a joke (*Or*. 1520). On further imagery of Perseus and the Gorgon in this text, see O'Brien (1964, 24).

6.4 Conclusion

On a metatextual level, the sense of nostalgia that Goff observes in the account of Orestes' scar indicates another aspect of Euripides' engagement with the literary material of his predecessors. Performance theorists, such as Schechner (1985, 36-7) and Blau (1987, 173), consider all theatrical representations to be acts of repetition. Carlson (2003, 131-2) emphasises that spaces also hold resonances of past activities, theatres being a prime example; they are, in this sense, haunted. Hauntology is a term coined by Derrida (2006, 10), a pun on 'ontology', which in its Derridean context refers to the spectres of communism that have outlived the death of one of its most influential initiators, Marx. The neologism describes the subversion of linear time by 'spectres' or 'ghosts', whose inherently anachronistic existence creates a dialogue between past and present. Derrida uses the ghost in *Hamlet* to demonstrate the temporality at play here, with the adapted Shakespearean quotation 'time is out of joint' (2006, 1). This anachronistic temporality is a feature that Goff observes of Euripides' *Electra*: 'These complicated relations of imitation constitute something like a literary-historical joke, since Orestes is anterior to Telemachos in the *Odyssey*, but the *Odyssey* as a text is anterior to the *Elektra*' (1991, 266 n24).

In Euripides' *Electra*, and indeed his *Orestes*, there seems to be a specific type of hauntology at play, one theorised in work on music. Fisher (2012, 16) observes the failure of electronic music to maintain its sense of 'futuristic' dissonance and resist its development into a fixed genre, with expected and formal features. As such, this once 'futuristic' music no longer holds the same sense of potential for its audience, and instead confronts 'a cultural impasse: the failure of the future' (*ibid.*). For Fisher, 'What haunts the digital cul-de-sacs of the twenty-first century is not so much the past as all the lost futures that the twentieth century taught us to anticipate' (*ibid.*). In the cultural and historical context of fifth-century Athens, Euripides reckons with a distinct sort of lost future. Primarily, in the two parodies in question, he confronts the future anticipated by Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, and by his *Oresteia* as a whole. For Zeitlin, the *Oresteia* defends and mythologises a patriarchal ideology that itself is based on an untruth, the 'myth of matriarchy' (1978, 151). Aeschylus' manipulation of the mythical past associates the feminine with the ancient, chthonic deities and stages their dethroning, replaced by the masculine principles offered by Apollo and Athena.[69] Ultimately, this trilogy is concerned with justice, and offers a model for accessing it (Zeitlin 1978, 161-2).[70] Following Zeitlin's reading, the ideological future promised by the Aeschylean text has always been lacking, founded on a deceptive version of the past. Sophocles and Euripides, the inheritors of this tradition, present later versions of the same characters that are haunted by the lost future promised by Aeschylus' text. As discussed in chapter two, Sophocles' Electra and Orestes ironically presuppose a joyful freedom that naively clashes with their

[69] For the role of laughter in the Furies' institution at Athens as Eumenides in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, see 3.4.1.
[70] On Aeschylus and the Athenian historical institution of the Areopagus, see Goldhill (2004, 7-11).

own ethical condemnation of Clytemnestra, and the Aeschylean sense of justice this is built upon. In Euripides' *Electra*, Orestes, Electra and the Old Man are all resistant to embracing their future; Orestes' silence, Electra's cynical questions, and the Old Man's tentative and anachronistic argument all delay the recognition that their collective future turns upon. In Euripides' later *Orestes*, the young protagonists attempt to re-enact the *Oresteia* plot in reverse, repeating versions of past actions which fail in their novel contexts. The result of this misguided repetition brings the plot close to apocalypse – the denial of any future for their myth at all.

Moreover, Goff's observation of the 'literary-historical joke' (1991, 266 n24) at play in the multilayered timelines of Euripides' *Electra* may be further unpacked with reference to dramaturgical hauntology, and its relationship to affect. D'Cruz observes:

> '[H]auntological dramaturgy involves the practice of developing techniques to disturb the spectator. These techniques, which may be conceptual, thematic and technical, seek to elicit some kind of corporeal and emotional response from spectators that can turn the intimate shelter of home into something unnerving and ominous.' (2022, 11)

The *Orestes* and *Electra* of Euripides are especially haunted texts, an observation that is surely influenced by the wealth of extant literary material that interacts with these tragedies. *Orestes* interacts not just with the Aeschylean text it adapts, but with earlier Euripides and its Aristophanic parodies too, staging the self-parodic repetition and failure of *Telephus*' hostage scene. The result is jarring, as the allusions to comedic parody are manipulated for such intensely nihilist and pessimistic ends. The Euripidean *Electra*, with its palimpsestic parody of Aeschylus and its many subtle allusions to heroic myth and epic, seems particularly concerned with the theatrical, mythical and literary spectres that haunt it. The effect of this is disturbing for its spectator; the failure of the Aeschylean tokens and Orestes' underwhelming version of the Odyssean scar both serve to characterise this protagonist as lacking, unable to live up to his literary precedents. The comic mode of parody, in conjunction with the literary palimpsest, is in both cases fundamental to Euripides' style of hauntological dramaturgy. In the same way that the Orestes and Electra of his *Electra* lack the emotionality of their Aeschylean and Sophoclean counterparts, Euripides' use of parody, a comic mode, encourages an audience affect that is critical, distancing and certainly disturbing.

Chapter 7 – Clowning around with Tragedy

7.1 Introduction

This chapter adopts theory from theatre clowning to address certain tragic characters whose idiosyncratic relationships to laughter and humour have been observed, but not yet fully explored in performance terms. The first section addresses Cassandra, and clown theory from Peacock (2009) is used to elucidate her textual connections to laughter in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and her light-hearted performance in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. The second section addresses tragic messenger figures who have been noted for their humour. This perceived sense of humour, often attributed to 'comic relief', tends to be reserved for minor or lower status characters in tragedy. In this section, Otto's (2001) work on fools and jesters is employed with reference to three tragic messenger scenes – from Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and *Antigone*, and Euripides' *Orestes*. The aim of these studies is to reveal the ways in which laughter and humour can enhance the performance of Greek tragedy, without undermining the more serious attributes of the characters or themes of the texts.

7.2 The *clownesque* Cassandra

7.2.1 Introduction

> 'Societies are haunted by their clowns, who bang on the ground upon which we rest and make it sound hollow' (Bouissac 2015, 179)

Greek drama, and particularly tragedy, is built upon the repetition and adaptation of well-known narratives and myths.[1] This process gave each dramatist the freedom to depict their own distinct versions of characters and stories, whilst also responding to audience expectations formed by other works and genres in classical culture. Whilst Cassandra is by no means the character depicted most regularly in extant drama, her two surviving extended portrayals in Aeschylus and Euripides both connect the character to laughter.[2] Earlier in this thesis, I discuss the intergeneric flexibility of tropes that appear in both classical Greek tragedy and comedy. Here, I address the typically comic 'clownesque' elements of Cassandra's character, which I identify in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*.[3] Although the terms of contemporary performance theory are anachronistic when applied to Greek tragedy, clowning is a performance style with particularly broad definitions and

[1] Ruffell (2014, 163-6) notes that Old Comedy's narratives, whilst less influenced by classical mythology, still featured stock characters and generic styles (e.g. mythological burlesque, tragic parody).

[2] Though she does not appear onstage, Cassandra also plays a key part in the narrative of Euripides' *Hecuba*. In terms of lost or fragmented tragedies, Wright (2019) records evidence from three other plays in which Cassandra was likely a part of the narrative (72-74, on Sophocles' *Locrian Ajax*) or appeared as a character (99-100, on Sophocles' *Laocoon*, 146-148, on Euripides' *Alexandros*).

[3] I borrow 'clownesque' from Peacock (2009, 31) to describe a performance that shares characteristics with clowning but is not itself a 'clown show'.

a wide temporal and geographical scope. As such, contemporary clown theory can work in dialogue with other, historicised understandings of the texts, contributing a vocabulary with which to describe some of the character's specific idiosyncrasies.[4]

Despite its relatively scant historical evidence, clowning has a long and rich tradition across the globe, appearing in many different manifestations and cultural contexts.[5] There are, however, some generalisations that may still be made about clowns and their social roles: they are typically placed as outsiders, and often have socially-sanctioned cultural functions as truth-tellers (Peacock 2009, 26, 107-117).[6] Historically, clowns have had a strong relationship to politics and religion – from the popularity of the court jester, to the holy or wise fool archetype that appears in both Christianity and classical Greek philosophy.[7] The clown's proximity to power comes at a price, as they 'symbolically straddle a dangerous line between the permitted and the forbidden, the moral and the immoral, the legal and the illegal, and the profane and the sacred' (Bouissac 2015, 180). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the historical 'wise fool' Socrates. His unique philosophical style provided excellent comic material for Aristophanes, who caricatured the philosopher in his comedy *Clouds*. Socrates' novel and unusual behaviour made him a well-known and enigmatic figure, qualities that subsequently resulted in his trial and execution at Athens on the charges of impiety and corrupting the youth. Like their close relative the fool, the role of the clown is inherently precarious.[8]

Applying these distinctions, the mythical Cassandra certainly proves to have a *clownesque* role. She has a striking but complicated relationship with divine and political power as both a gifted (or cursed) priestess of Apollo and a favoured enslaved concubine of Agamemnon.[9] Similarly, her status as outsider and truth-teller is confirmed by her unique prophetic abilities. Although there are multiple vagaries and alternatives surrounding her foresight's origin and its functioning, Cassandra was known

[4] Whilst *clownesque* performances certainly occurred in other classical Greek theatrical, ritual and more informal performance practices, these are not the focus of this study. For a historical account of Greek laughter within these contexts, see Halliwell (2008, 215-263) on Old Comedy, 155-214 on ritual laughter, 100-154 on symposia.
[5] Bouissac (2015, 1-11) cites the clown's ambiguous 'universalism', through their relatively global existence and simultaneous situation in immediate local contexts.
[6] The 'outsider' status is also a typical feature of contemporary stand-up comedy, as discussed by Gilbert (2004). Bala (2010, 60) observes that stand-up comedians are a close relative of clowns, a crucial difference being that the former tend to rely on speech over non-verbal forms of communication.
[7] See Peacock (2009, 107-126) on clowns and their relationship with religion and politics; in the classical period, Plato's Socrates may aptly be described as a wise 'fool', whose personal wisdom stemmed from an acknowledgement of his own ignorance (Pl. *Ap.* 21a-23b).
[8] Whilst these two terms are often used interchangeably, I use 'clown' for individuals that appear to use *clownesque* behaviour to intentionally mock, critique or provoke laughter, whilst 'fool' has a more ambiguous relationship to intentionality and self-awareness.
[9] These parts of Cassandra's story are not mentioned in Homer's surviving epics. The lost *Cypria* tells of her prophetic abilities, whilst the *Little Iliad* dealt with her enslavement following the city's fall.

in myth for being able to see the future,[10] a characteristic that is prominent in both of her tragic portrayals. However, in most of her appearances she is unable to successfully communicate her warnings about the future she foresees, which is another characteristic she shares with the clown: failure (Peacock 2009, 24). Cassandra's inability to communicate with others positions her as an outsider wherever she is, and Aeschylus and Euripides both embrace the dramatic potential of her miscommunications by portraying Cassandra attempting to persuade other characters of her point of view.[11]

To assess how Cassandra's *clownesque* role manifests in performance, clown theory may offer some helpful terms, with an important caveat regarding ancient tragedy. Peacock notes that *play* (or *jeu*) and *complicité* are defining features of the clown performance style, both of which hinge on the clown's engagement with their audience:

> 'the clown is distinguished from the actor by his or her ability to play with the audience and to create a sense of *complicité* with them by using play to connect with them' (Peacock 2009, 14)

Complicité is the connection between clown and audience, a silent and instinctive communication (Peacock 2009, 33). *Play* depends on this reciprocal relationship, occurring in a 'potential space' between the real and imagined (Winnicott 1991, 55-70). This *play* space has its own rules and values, and even distorts clock time with its own temporal adaptations. For example, much of theatre operates within *symbolic time*, where staged actions may represent longer or shorter spans of typical clock time.[12] This shared play-space and temporality, sustained by an audience's *complicité*, is evoked in the reflection of renowned clown coach, Lecoq: 'it is not possible to be a clown *for* an audience; you play *with* your audience' (2009, 157, original emphasis).

These principles of clown performance are not dissimilar from Fischer-Lichte's conception of all live performance as relying on a 'feedback loop' between audience and performers, enabled by a physical 'co-presence' in the theatrical space (2008, 38, 67). Fischer-Lichte observes the liminal state that this creates in performance, in which spectators remain 'on the threshold for the duration of the performance. Their position is never fixed; they do not control the performance but their influence can be felt nonetheless' (2008, 67). As a performance style, *play* tends to push this liminal aspect of all

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[10] Mason (1959, 87) references one possible origin story attributed the abilities of Cassandra and her brother Helenus to a snake's lick.

[11] Cassandra's miscommunication was likely also depicted by Sophocles in his *Laocoon*, in which Laocoon and Cassandra advocated for the destruction of the Trojan horse, see Wright (2019, 99-100).

[12] Schechner (1988, 8); Peacock (2009, 11) observes that clowning regularly follows 'event time', in which the clown may complete their task in a timespan that seems appropriate to them but incongruously long or short to their audience.

performance to its extremes. Clowns often physically interact with and even cross into their audiences, or suddenly change the 'rules' of the 'game' they are creating through their *play* (Schechner 1988, 8-25, Wright 2006, 34-8). Like any performance *play* may have its own conventions, but nowhere are these rules made to be broken more frequently than in the world of the clown.

This connection between clowns and their audience, through *complicité* and *play*, is distinct from the performance of fifth-century Greek tragedy. Unlike Old Comedy, extant tragic texts do not clearly indicate that performers would interact with their audience directly, a distinction which some scholars consider definitive of the two genres (Wiles 2000, 125, Taplin 2003, 17). Metatheatre and parody, though these undoubtedly exist in tragedy (Torrance 2013), are generally not announced as such within the plays, which rely on a certain suspension of disbelief to sustain themselves.[13] Therefore, tragic *clownesque* performers are unlikely to have been able to interact with their audience directly through *complicité* to facilitate *play*. However, tragedy somewhat makes up for this by supplying its *clownesque* characters with an audience internal to the tragic world – the chorus. This chorus may then act as a conduit between the performer and their theatrical audience, facilitating *play* and *complicité* without breaking the 'fourth wall' between the clown and their theatrical audience. Thus, this formal feature allows for the *clownesque* to appear within the genre, albeit at one remove from the ancient audiences. The chorus experiences the character as a clown or clowning, whilst the audience witnesses it only at a distance – as the *clownesque*.

7.2.2 *Agamemnon*

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is set at Argos following the fall of Troy, and this backdrop emphasises Cassandra's isolation as a cultural and geographical outsider. Yet simultaneously, her sexual relationship with Agamemnon dangerously transgresses the boundaries of his Greek *oikos*.[14] Agamemnon's introduction of Cassandra to the home he shares with Clytemnestra, a clear act of disrespect towards the queen, is verbally and visually presented by Aeschylus in cues that conflate Cassandra's sexual slavery with marriage. Not only does she enter in a carriage, seemingly evoking a bridal procession, but she may even be veiled like a bride too.[15] Whilst she is onstage with Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, they both speak of her enslavement in terms of animal husbandry (δουλίωι...ζυγῶι

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[13] Cartledge (1990, 38) notes that comedy also relied on its own distinct suspension of disbelief and specific rules of engagement.

[14] Although concubinage was not unusual in heroic myth, tragedy frequently depicts its harmful potential within the legitimate family (e.g. Euripides' *Andromache*, Sophocles' *Trachiniae*). Epic also hints at the underlying spousal tensions infidelity may cause, e.g. *Od.* 1.433 tells of Odysseus' father abstaining from sex with the family's nurse to avoid his wife's χόλον 'wrath'.

[15] Taplin (1977, 304-306) argues for the arrival of Agamemnon and Cassandra in the same chariot, which Foley (2001, 93) notes may have evoked a bridal procession. She also considers 1178-9 as evidence for a veil, though this comparison may just be metaphorical.

'the yoke of slavery', 953; χαλινὸν...φέρειν 'to bear the bridle', 1066), a metaphor commonly used for brides that implies Agamemnon is her groom.[16]

Following her entrance, Cassandra is silent for three hundred lines before speaking, and does not respond when Clytemnestra addresses her. As it is common for clowns to abstain entirely from speaking (Peacock 2009, 28), this is the first potential *clownesque* performance technique utilised by Aeschylus in his depiction of Cassandra. Whilst it is possible that the lost staging may have indicated Cassandra attempting communication non-verbally, it is her silence that insults Clytemnestra, who promptly leaves the stage:

Κλ. οὐ μὴν πλέω ῥίψασ' ἀτιμασθήσομαι. (A. *Ag.* 1068)

Cly. I will not waste any more words and be dishonoured.

Despite Cassandra's lack of freedom, the queen seems to interpret her proximity to the *oikos* and her mysterious silence as threatening, or perhaps even as critique. But when Cassandra does choose to speak, she immediately undermines her captors' assumptions and the 'rules of engagement' thus far. Most fundamentally, she suddenly communicates in fluent Greek, exposing Clytemnestra's incorrect assumption about her limited language proficiency (1050-1061). Moreover, whilst the Greek characters cast Cassandra as Agamemnon's consort, she immediately calls upon her first enslaver and rejected groom:

Κα. ὀτοτοτοτοτοῖ πόποι δᾶ·
ὦπολλον ὦπολλον. (A. *Ag.* 1072-3)

Ca. Ah ah!,
Apollo, Apollo!

Although alternative stories existed in the ancient world, in *Agamemnon* Aeschylus has Cassandra explicitly narrate the origin story of her prophetic abilities to the chorus: Apollo agreed to bestow prophetic powers on her in exchange for sexual favours (1202-1213). In this version of events, when Cassandra did not follow through on her side of the bargain, Apollo turned his blessing into a curse,

[16] For Agamemnon as groom, see Seaford (1987, 111), Mitchell-Boyask (2006, 274). Naturally, the marital imagery serves to heighten the offence to Clytemnestra, who later chastises her husband as λυμαντήριος 'abusive' (1438), an adjective which Sommerstein (2008, 175) notes is usually reserved for rapists or seducers.

maintaining Cassandra's newfound powers but removing her persuasive ability.[17] She would still be able to predict the future flawlessly, but she would never be believed. Moreover, Aeschylus' Cassandra describes her prophetic role in imagery that draws particular attention to the potential costuming similarities between prophetess and bride:

Κα. καὶ μὴν ὁ χηρσμὸς οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων
ἔσται δεδορκὼς νεογάμου νύμφης δίκην (A. *Ag.* 1178-9)

Ca. Now truly, the oracle will no longer look out from behind
a veil in the manner of a newly married bride

As Cassandra is aware of the divine workings behind her circumstances, she therefore considers that Apollo, and not Agamemnon, has led her to her fate (1087). Cassandra has changed the rules of engagement, and the god is now cast as groom.

There is evidently a broader, divine dimension to this narrative, and it is one that only Cassandra and Aeschylus' theatrical audience can fathom entirely. Aeschylus' chorus, elders from Argos, are moved by Cassandra's words (1162-6), and are convinced by her tale of Apollo's assault (1214). In this sense, she succeeds in building *complicité* with her internal audience, who go along with the new divine aspects she brings to the narrative. However, when Cassandra speaks in prophecy, the chorus are unable to comprehend and adapt to this dramatic temporal shift. Apollo's prophecies come upon her in waves, which begin in the past but then span the present and future, imminent and distant. The visions she experiences are violent and vivid, and she repeatedly cries in lament as she recounts what she sees to the chorus (1076-7, 1100, 1114, 1125, 1136, 1146). After Cassandra has explained the origin of her abilities to the elders, it is possible to see how Aeschylus has transformed the gift of divine prophetic sight to inflict its most ironic suffering. As a curse born from his sexual rejection, Apollo's psychological assaults on Cassandra are like a rape, further emphasised by her confused depiction as his priestess and bride.[18]

The first prophecy she communicates clearly is the murder of Agamemnon (1246), and this immediately compromises the *complicité* she has begun building with the chorus. Now, they bid her to remain silent and critique her words (1247-1255). Next, in a potential Aeschylean invention, she sees

[17] Redfield (2003, 138) notes that this sexual-rejection aetiology is quite possibly an innovation of Aeschylus and is not explicitly mentioned in the Euripidean plays that reference or depict her.
[18] Mitchell-Boyask (2006, 273) considers Cassandra's description of Apollo as a physically aggressive παλαιστὴς 'wrestler' (1206) as evidence for reading her forced visions as suggestive of sexual assault.

and tells of her own death – pushing the limits of human knowledge and experience to the limit.[19] In *Prometheus Bound*, when Prometheus explains that he stopped mortals foreseeing their deaths, the chorus ask:

Χο. τὸ ποῖον εὑρὼν τῆσδε φάρμακον νόσου; (Ps-A. *PB* 249)

Cho. What cure did you find for this illness?

Apollo has pushed his mantic gift to the point where it has become a harmful νόσος 'illness' for Cassandra, for which there is no φάρμακον 'cure' besides death. To punish Cassandra for her rejection, the god has transformed his divine gift so as to repeatedly assault her psychologically, pushing her to the isolating limits of human experience. If Apollo's prophecy can be understood as a game, with rules and expectations, Aeschylus' Apollo takes play with Cassandra to its limit, which here is existential – the foreknowledge of her own death. Moreover, the chorus and Aeschylus' audience witness Cassandra foreseeing her end for the first time, with the implication that, until her arrival at Argos, she has not known that the journey will trigger her own and Agamemnon's deaths. As a result, Cassandra has little time to come to terms with the pronouncement before she must die, and she cannot effectively share her experience with the chorus, whose *complicité* has now been compromised. She faces an impossible conundrum, which she tackles with a *clownesque* attitude, and that of a *tragic clown* in particular, where 'there is no buffer, no optimism. Life hits you hard and knocks you over' (Wright 2006, 238). In this way, 'The bafflement of the *simple clown* becomes the trauma of the *tragic clown*. In this kind of clown performance the audience's attention is held by the clown's determination and perseverance' (Peacock 2009, 36).

Persevere is indeed exactly what Cassandra does. This sudden revelation of her death acts as a final straw for the prophetess and changes her perspective: she knows she will no longer have to live in fear of the god's cruelty, because soon she will no longer live. She responds in anger:

Κα. τί δῆτ' ἐμαυτῆς καταγέλωτ' ἔχω τάδε
καὶ σκῆπτρα καὶ μαντεῖα περὶ δέρηι στέφη;
σὲ μὲν πρὸ μοίρας τῆς ἐμῆς διαφθερῶ.
ἴτ' ἐς φθόρον· πεσόντα γ' ὧδ' ἀμείψομαι·
ἄλλην τιν' ἄτης ἀντ' ἐμοῦ πλουτίζετε.
ἰδοὺ δ', Ἀπόλλων αὐτὸς ἐκδύων ἐμὲ

[19] Mason (1959, 86) on Aeschylus' innovation; Schein (1982, 12): 'she transcends a boundary of experience which was, for the Greeks, one of the defining limits of the human condition'.

χρηστηρίαν ἐσθῆτ', ἐποπτεύσας δέ με
κἀν τοῖσδε κόσμοις καταγελωμένην †μέτα†
φίλων ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν οὐ διχορρόπως †μάτην†· (A. *Ag.* 1264-1272)

Ca. Then why do I wear these mockeries of myself,
a staff and prophetic garlands around my neck?
I shall destroy you before [accomplishing] my own fate.
Get off! Now you are cast down I will repay you so:
make some other woman wealthy with ruin in my place.
But look, Apollo himself strips me
of his prophetic clothes, he watched whilst
in these garments I was greatly and
unanimously mocked by friends who were really enemies . . . in vain.

Surely it is Cassandra's unique ability to see her otherwise unexpected death looming that brings out this concern with mockery, and the imminent certainty of death allows her this moment of defiance. Her garments, the physical manifestations of her tie to the god who continues to punish her, are now καταγέλωτα 'mockeries'. They are reflections of the prophetic ability that only brings her harm, and the 'wedding' that will prove to be neither to Agamemnon nor Apollo, but, finally, to Hades.[20] The rules of engagement shift again, and she removes the garments as an act of *hubris* towards the god they are associated with. Her renunciation of the clothing becomes a symbolic repetition of her initial sexual rejection of Apollo, who she portrays as voyeuristically reveling in the act's eroticism and even partaking – undressing her αὐτὸς 'himself'.[21] Again, her undressing is reminiscent of the *tragic clown*, whose focus is not making their audience laugh but 'extending play as far as it will go' (Peacock 2009, 36). In response to Apollo pushing the prophetic game to its limits, Cassandra symbolically challenges the god through the only means of control left to her, that of her physical costume. As outlined in chapter 5.4, in Old Comedy, onstage costume manipulation can be considered a means for characters to assert their status and compete with each other (Compton-Engle 2003, 507).[22] Here, Aeschylus has Cassandra turn this dramatic technique on herself, paradoxically abusing her own clothing to reclaim her status and critique her former manipulator.

[20] As Cassandra anticipates entering Agamemnon's palace, she refers to the doors as Ἅιδου πύλας 'gates of Hades' (1291). Ultimately, the 'marital' home she will enter is the Underworld. Rehm (2019, 43-58) notes that the theme of 'marriage to death' is raised in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* through the betrayed marriages of Helen and Clytemnestra and the killings of Cassandra and Iphigenia which are each framed as a 'twisted wedding ceremony'.
[21] Raeburn & Thomas (2011, 203): 'a powerful act of sacrilege'; Pillinger (2019, 68) notes the eroticised edge of Cassandra's undressing.
[22] The theme of costume control also appears in tragedy, famously between Pentheus and Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*.

Of course, in a sense, her abuse of the clothing marks an attempt to mock the god in return, as she physically throws it to the ground and almost personifies it in her verbal abuses. But Pillinger (2019, 69) observes that Aeschylus' portrayal of the clothes in the reflexive phrasing ἐμαυτῆς καταγέλωτα 'mockeries of myself' indicates that Cassandra also engages in self-mockery by encouraging mocking laughter at the garments. Pillinger continues:

> 'The result of this confusion of mocking and mocked creates a circular process in which Cassandra embroils Apollo as both subject and object. More significantly, she positions herself as a disempowered, mocked body, but her words assert the power of the comedian, directing the humour bitterly wherever she chooses, and eliciting it from whomever she picks' (2019, 69)

In Aeschylus, Cassandra's unique temporality creates a compelling paradox: she is plagued by a cruel knowledge of past and future, but this same knowledge also gives her the freedom to finally reject the god who repeatedly abuses her. Cassandra's relationship to laughter deftly reflects this same conundrum: she may mock Apollo, but in doing so she implicitly mocks herself. Thus Cassandra's removal of the garments is simultaneously an act of self-respect and self-deprecation, a technique that Pillinger is right to associate with 'the comedian' – particularly contemporary stand-up comics with marginalised perspectives.[23] Through Apollo's persistent psychological assaults, culminating in the revelation of her imminent death, the god has made Cassandra a 'natural fool' (Peacock 2009, 108), deemed ridiculous by her peers despite her sincerity and insight. But here, as Cassandra realises the extent of her own mockery, she truly moves into the *clownesque*, as unlike the natural fool, the clown *intentionally* behaves to mock, critique or provoke laughter. In her rejection of her prophetic costume, Cassandra refuses the role of fool that has been forced onto her. Instead, as she grapples with her own failure and mockery, Aeschylus' Cassandra makes *herself* a clown and in doing so redirects mockery back at the god. Wright (2006, 238) observes: 'in tragic clown, there's the potential of a huge transcendent arc – from the hapless idiot, deserving little but our ridicule, to the focussed, dignified and determined protagonist, whom we've all grown to admire and respect'. Cassandra, mocked by Apollo and acquaintances alike, channels the defiance and determination of the *tragic clown*, and in doing so demands the admiration and respect of all her audiences – divine, choral and theatrical.

[23] Gilbert (2004, 138-142) describes the vast amount of criticism directed towards self-deprecating comedy, particularly the varied feminist perspectives on its use by female comics. Some of these critics note that self-deprecating humour has been the only viable option for women in certain sociocultural situations, see e.g. Levine (1976), Martin and Segrave (1986), Auslander (1993), Horowitz (1997). Given Cassandra's gender and status, it is unsurprising that she opts for self-deprecation, generally a less aggressive form of humour.

7.2.3 *Trojan Women*

In contrast to *Agamemnon*, Cassandra's appearance in Euripides' *Trojan Women* is as a geographical and cultural insider among the female Trojan prisoners of war. Here, she even converses with a member of her own family, her mother, the Trojan queen Hecuba. This Cassandra, however, is similarly depicted as an outsider by Euripides – due to her knowledge, as in Aeschylus, but also her drastic tonal incongruity with the other Trojan women. In *Agamemnon*, implicit verbal and visual cues link Cassandra with marriage imagery, and in *Trojan Women*, Euripides' Cassandra openly plays with the wedding imagery that Euripides has taken up from his predecessor, pushing the theme to its narrative and staging limits. Upon seeing a flame in the women's camp, the Greek herald Talthybius fears the Trojan captives' grief has driven them to suicide (298-305). Instead, Cassandra bursts onto the stage wielding a wedding torch and singing a hymn to Hymen, god of marriage (308-315). Despite her mother's grief, she encourages Hecuba to join her in celebration–χόρευε, μᾶτερ 'dance, mother' (332)–and similarly she requests μακαρίαις ἀοιδαῖς / ἰαχαῖς 'blessed songs / and cries' (336-7) from the chorus of Trojan women accompanying them.[24] Whilst this Cassandra still considers herself to be ultimately led by Apollo (329), this time she envisages Agamemnon as her groom – and she celebrates her fate.

The juxtaposition is jarring, and Euripides takes Aeschylus' imagery to its narrative extremes in Cassandra's act of exuberant *play*. Goff describes Cassandra's performance as a 'parody of marriage' (Goff 2009, 51), and the character resembles a *bouffon* as described by Lecoq: 'While we make fun of the clown, the *bouffon* makes fun of us. At the heart of the *bouffon* is a mockery pushed to the point of parody' (Lecoq 2009, 118). Much of the *bouffon*'s ability to push their mockery so far depends on their physical appearance, and Lecoq writes of the need for 'corporeal transformation' in their costumes (Lecoq 2009, 125). Although Cassandra references her costume as prophetic clothing later in this scene (451-4), she begins by encouraging her audience to interpret it as bridal wear, evoking the image of a bride as a 'mask' from which she can channel her critique through her parody of marriage. Specifically, Cassandra channels a 'grotesque' *bouffon* to her internal audience, a type of *bouffon* that deals with social relationships and functions rather than psychology or feelings (Lecoq 2009, 129). Notably, Cassandra's grief is entirely absent as she embraces her parodic role as young bride. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra's fate was isolated from that of her peers, but here her situation reflects the reality of all the young Trojan women, and certainly the three daughters of Hecuba who all discuss (re)marriage in the play. Indeed, in Cassandra's parody Goff (2009, 51) sees a reflection of the historical institution of

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[24] For line 332, Diggle prints χόρευε, μᾶτερ, χόρευμ' ἄναγε, πόδα σὸν 'dance mother, lead the dance, [turn] your step'. Alternatively, Murray (1913) follows the early manuscript Vaticanus graecus 909, which has χόρευε, μᾶτερ, ἀναγέλασον 'dance, mother, laugh loud'. Whilst neither reading is necessary for my argument here, the latter captures well Cassandra's appeal for Hecuba's emotional *complicité*. The ambiguous compound ἀναγέλασον '*laugh loud*' (LSJ I) is particularly suited to Cassandra's joyous yet vengeful celebration of her 'wedding', as it would aptly describe her laughter's intensity – which she chooses to emphasise over its target.

marriage for real fifth-century Athenian women. The social critique of Euripides' *bouffonesque* character is not limited to the realm of her tragedy.

But whilst Cassandra's excitement is situationally incongruous and certainly parodic, there is a simultaneous sincerity behind it. She pauses her celebration to inform the other characters that Troy is indeed happier than the Greek cities, because although the Trojan women currently suffer, the ending of Troy was more noble than the lives and futures of the Greek warriors (374-402). She has seen the suffering of the Greeks, both present, past and future, separated from their families and soon to face tragedy upon their *nostoi* 'homecomings'. Specifically, she considers herself a crucial part of the Trojan vengeance, as an orchestrator of Agamemnon's death:

Κα. ὧν οὕνεκ' οὐ χρή, μῆτερ, οἰκτίρειν σε γῆν,
οὐ τἀμὰ λέκτρα· τοὺς γὰρ ἐχθίστους ἐμοὶ
καὶ σοὶ γάμοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς διαφθερῶ. (E. *Tr.* 403-5)

Ca. Therefore, mother, you must not pity your country,
nor my marriage bed: for by means of this marriage I will destroy
those whom you and I hate most.

Whilst in Aeschylus the revelation of Cassandra's impending death is interpreted as an insult from Apollo, here Euripides imagines the solace it might bring the prophetess to see how her personal tragedy fits into a wider narrative of patriotic vengeance.[25] Instead of considering herself a victim of the god or her fate, this Cassandra is overwhelmingly appreciative of Apollo for giving her the guarantee of her captors' future punishment, describing him as φιλτάτος 'most dear' (451) and depicting herself as his willing λάτριν 'handmaid' (450). Whilst in this telling Euripides still has Cassandra cast off her prophetic clothing, she cheerfully bids it χαίρετ' 'farewell' (452) in a potential parody of her Aeschylean act of defiance, as she embraces her new role as Agamemnon's bride and Troy's avenger. Indeed, her unique perspective means that Cassandra 'delights in the irony of celebrating slavery and rape as marriage, but is protected from the horror of the equation by her knowledge not only of the future but of the real significance of the present' (Goff 2009, 52). By sharing her knowledge, Cassandra has shifted from the mode of the grotesque, which deals with social relationships, to that of the mystery *bouffon*:

[25] Barlow (1986, 26-27) considers the political context of this play significant. *Trojan Women* was produced in 415, during the Peloponnesian war, and specifically in the year following the Athenians' particularly brutal siege of Melos. There the Athenians killed the men and enslaved the women and children, which Barlow sees reflected in the Trojan women's experiences at the hands of the Greeks. The implicit political comment certainly seems to problematise the treatment of the siege's survivors, especially with the sense of impending doom for the Greeks that Cassandra revels in.

‘The *bouffons* from this family are soothsayers. They know the future. They know the end of the world and can foretell it...They are prophets’ (Lecoq 2009, 127).

As Euripides does not depict Cassandra receiving her prophecies, it is unclear how long she has been aware of this future. However, the revelation is evidently much earlier in her narrative than in Aeschylus, and as such she attempts to communicate it to her friends and relatives. This is where a tragic interpretive chasm appears, as Euripides’ Cassandra similarly lacks the ability of persuasion. Hecuba judges her behaviour inappropriate for the situation—οὐ γὰρ ὀρθὰ ‘not right’ (348)—and considers her μαινὰς θοάζουσ' ‘frantically raving’ (349). Although she disapproves, Hecuba’s interpretation is fitting given that the *bouffon* operates within ‘the realm of organised madness’ (Lecoq 2009, 134). Similarly, the chorus note the incongruity of Cassandra’s tone and question her pronouncements:

Χο. ὡς ἡδέως κακοῖσιν οἰκείοις γελᾶις
μέλπεις θ' ἃ μέλπουσ' οὐ σαφῆ δείξεις ἴσως. (E. *Tr.* 406-7)

Cho. How gladly you laugh at your family’s misfortunes
and you sing, and yet perhaps you will show that your songs are inaccurate.

Although her knowledge of the future comforts her, and Euripides’ audience knows she is telling the truth, she is unable to convince her loved ones or assuage their grief in any way. She is once again isolated by her unique knowledge and temporality and is alone in her emotional journey. There is no *complicité* between the performer and her internal audience of Trojan women, and they refuse to participate in her wedding game.

However, Cassandra’s internal audience is not just Hecuba and the chorus, but also includes a Greek representative, the herald Talthybius. Whilst the women take issue with Cassandra’s joy and question the veracity of her prophecies, her behaviour is naturally more sinister to her enemies. So, to Talthybius, her overzealous celebration of the wedding as a means to Agamemnon’s death naturally has threatening undertones. Like a *bouffon*, she has used ‘comedy as a weapon’ (Mason 2002, 52) to taunt him. Talthybius responds:

Τα. εἰ μή σ' Ἀπόλλων ἐξεβάκχευσεν φρένας,
οὔ τἂν ἀμισθὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς στρατηλάτας
τοιαῖσδε φήμαις ἐξέπεμπες ἂν χθονός. (E. *Tr.* 408-410)

Ta. If Apollo had not inspired your mind with frenzy,

> you would not go without penalty for sending my generals
> from the land with such utterances.

Cassandra's actions can be dismissed as madness, a strength of *bouffons* in particular, who are 'one step further removed from everyday reality than clowns and they can, therefore, go one step further in their comments on the world around them' (Peacock 2009, 32). By engaging with the *bouffonesque*, Euripides turns Cassandra's prophetic ability into a sort of superpower, or at the very least an invisibility cloak. Wiles distinguishes between the Greek dramatic genres thus: 'While tragedy dealt with the experience of being trapped, comedy allowed all forms of transformation and escape' (2000, 33). Similarly, by introducing elements of the comic *bouffonesque* to his tragedy, Euripides allows his Cassandra to escape, in part, despite the confinement to her narrative. Cassandra's inability to persuade means that she can openly carry out her role in the Trojan vengeance, and rejoice as she does so, precisely because no one will believe her. Few are given the opportunity to mock their enemies from a position of vulnerability, but this freedom is granted to the *clownesque* Cassandra.

7.3 Messenger-fools: the comic relief?

> aut regem, aut fatuum nasci oportere
> 'It is necessary to be born either a king or a fool'
> Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* I.6-7; Eden (1984, 28)

7.3.1 Introduction

Lighthearted or joyful moments in tragedy are often regarded as providing variety within the plays, 'to provide *chiaroscuro* with prevailing grief' (Stanford 1983, 43). Some critics prefer not to seek the humour within these 'lighter shadings' (Gregory 1999-2000, 74), whilst others posit that they might provide a sort of 'comic relief' from the emotional intensity of the main action.[26] Critics have regularly identified low-status characters in tragedy as potential sources of this type of humour, such as the Nurse in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and the messengers addressed in this section.[27] In itself, this is not a disservice to these characters and their concerns: humour can be serious after all.[28] However, the assumption that these characters function only to elicit a form of 'comic relief' is dangerous, and does not capture the critical role they play in their dramatic works. In particular, Morreall (2009, 119) critiques assumptions regarding 'comic relief' when applied to tragic events. He argues that the term,

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[26] Comparison is regularly made to minor characters of Shakespeare, such as *Hamlet*'s gravediggers, the porter of *Macbeth* or *King Lear*'s fool; this conflation is critiqued by Seidensticker (1982, 73), Wallace (2013, 208).
[27] On the Nurse, whose humorous potential is not addressed in this section, see Seidensticker (1982, 72-5); Burnett (1998, 111); (tentatively) Taplin (1986, 172), Goldhill (2006, 89).
[28] See chapter four on jokes; Gaut (1998, 56-7).

in its typical usage, implies that comedy is somehow removed from the tragic circumstances, suggesting instead that comedy provides a different perspective on those circumstances, one that is often more sensitive and critical towards their nuances (2009, 119-22).[29] To refocus upon the useful implications of the term, release theories of humour provide some critical observations on laughter and amusement, positing that they serve to expel nervous energy from the mind and body.[30] The theory became popular in Freud's psychoanalytical work on humour, in which he says of jests that 'their function consists from the first in lifting internal inhibitions and in making sources of pleasure fertile which have been rendered inaccessible by those inhibitions' (transl. Strachey 1960, 130). In this sense, the humour of release has an anarchic quality, in that it serves to allow those who employ and enjoy it to circumvent social norms that otherwise govern communication.[31]

Arguably, the most important verbal communicators within tragedy are its messengers. The messenger speech is a formal element of the tragic genre that appears in most extant works, and as such the vast majority of tragedies contain characters whose primary role is to deliver these speeches,[32] which narrate tragedy's offstage action, including murders, suicides, and, worst perhaps of all, lengthy political processes.[33] De Jong (1991, 12) observes three aspects of first-person narration in tragedy, which is limited by the messenger's role as a character within the text:

> 'The presenter of a first-person narrative is a character, that is to say, (generally speaking) a human being, who 1) can only tell what he sees himself, depending on where he finds himself (the restriction of *place*); 2) has no more than ordinary access to the minds of other characters (the restriction of *access*); and 3) does not necessarily understand everything he sees (the restriction of *understanding*).'[34] (original emphasis)

These restrictions are distinct from, for example, those of the Homeric narrator, a third-person non-character whose perspective readily moves between divine and human realms.[35] However, their narrations are not only limited by their narrative restrictions, but also their relationships to the other

[29] Morreall cites, for example, research which indicates that humour can effectively be employed to prevent indoctrination (2009, 120).
[30] Release or 'relief' theory is often attributed to Herbert Spencer's *The Physiology of Laughter* (1860), though Morreall (2009, 133-8) observes a similar approach to laughter in the ancient Buddhist tradition.
[31] It may also encompass ethical norms, depending on the style of humour; see chapter four on jokes and ethical criticism.
[32] Twenty-six of the thirty-two surviving plays contain messenger speeches, as defined by De Jong (1991, 179-80).
[33] Bremer (1976) outlines the formal and performance limitations that require messenger speeches to relate many offstage events.
[34] De Jong (1991) specifically focuses on the messenger speeches of Euripides, but these restrictions apply just as aptly to all of the messengers addressed in this section.
[35] De Jong (1991, 3); Barrett (2002, 4) stresses that epic narrators are also *extradiegetic*, existing outside of the world the characters inhabit.

tragic characters. Messengers, whether enslaved or free men, occupy a lower social status than the protagonists they bring their news to.[36] To a certain extent, they must be mindful of keeping these characters happy; as they occupy a lower social status, it is often implied that they might be punished for their transgressions.[37] On the upside, as tragedy tends to be concerned with the action of high-status characters, the messengers are also afforded enough distance from the tragic plot to survive its unfolding.

The connection between messengers and humour is not without ancient precedent. In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, the messenger god elicits a great deal of laughter from both Apollo and Zeus due to his trickster tendencies (4.29, 281, 389, 420). The hymn's narration presents Hermes' acts of deception as inspired by a calculated trickery, ὁρμαίνων δόλον αἰπὺν ἐνὶ φρεσίν 'pondering sheer deception in his mind' (4.66). Similarly, the messenger figures of tragedy, comparatively restricted narrators, give insight into their own personal motives and agendas, which are often coloured by these characters' relationship to and understanding of the events they narrate. Although not always motivated by trickery, as Hermes is, there is a similar emphasis on the clever use of humour as a tool for achieving their own desires and avoiding negative outcomes. Moreover, these potentially humorous and genre-transgressing characters may even serve to comment on tragedy as a dramatic form: 'from humorous engagements with the convention to more elaborate forms of metatheater, the *angelia* finds itself the subject of a substantial amount of self-directed commentary staged by the plays' (Barrett 2002, 22). In the previous section, clown theory helped to elucidate the particular relationships between Cassandra and laughter within Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*. In this section I will argue that, whilst the *clownesque* plays a role in the performance of messenger scenes, understanding of their potential humour can be improved by relating them to a subset of clown performance, that of fools or jesters.[38]

For Otto, the fool is a near universal phenomenon: 'The evidence points to his having existed across the globe and across history, in most of the major civilizations of the world and many of the minor ones' (2001, xvii). Otto's monograph, *Fools Are Everywhere*, addresses manifestations of the figure spanning the globe and history, from ancient China to mediaeval Europe. Assessing the evidence of these various fool figures, Otto proposes some shared qualities of the fool across time and cultures. First and foremost, the fool is granted licence to speak freely to a person in power, communication that is generally tempered by their use of humour (2001, 12, 101). This humour may be riddling, physical,

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[36] The messenger characters are almost always men, the potential exceptions being *Trachiniae*'s Nurse (*Tr*. 871-946) and *Alcestis*' Serving Woman (*Alc*. 136-212).
[37] Punishment is threatened in each example addressed here: S. *Tr*. 410-11, *Ant*. 228-30, E. *Or*. 1516-28. In other cases, the news is not always poorly received by the tragic protagonists, e.g. E. *Med*. 1116-35.
[38] On the fool as a type of clown, see Peacock (2009, 107-17).

absurd, and could even, on occasion, take the form of a simple bluntness of expression (2001, 115). Like the clown's, the status of the fool is liminal (2001, 100); they are isolated observers, and usually from 'relatively humble backgrounds' (2001, 48). As such, they function 'as foil or antithesis' (2001, 49) to the ruler they serve, sharing qualities such as their isolation, but occupying a vastly different social status and role. Here, I address the traditional scholarly observation of humour in two messenger scenes of Sophocles (*Trachiniae*, *Antigone*) and one of Euripides (*Orestes*). Each of these examples has been labelled as comic or humorous, some since antiquity and others latterly. The restrictions outlined by De Jong prove helpful in accounting for the varied tone in tragic messenger scenes, as the messengers' relationship to the information they recount is crucial in determining their scenes' tonal qualities.

7.3.2 *Trachiniae*

For Seidensticker (1982, 79-80), the two messenger figures of *Trachiniae* are 'zu den Vorläufern der komischen Nebenfiguren in der abendländischen Tragödie zu zählen', and these characters seem an apt place to begin an account of the potentially humorous tragic messenger. The first part of *Trachiniae*'s messenger scene (180-229) immediately sets up the idiosyncrasies that will lead to its potentially comic development; a garlanded Old Man arrives to inform Heracles' wife, Deianeira, of the hero's victory.[39] This Old Man preempts the news from Λίχας ὁ κῆρυξ 'Lichas the herald' (189), who is currently waylaid by the general populace and their questions. Deianeira and the chorus of Trachinian women rejoice until the entrance of Lichas himself (200-226), who is accompanied by a group of captive women from Oechalia, the city Heracles has recently sacked (244-5). Lichas' messenger speech outlines a version of events leading up to Heracles' victory: his enslavement in Lydia (248-253), his vengeful sack of Oechalia (254-260), the quarrel with Eurytus and murder of Iphitus (260-9), Zeus' punishment – the enslavement in Lydia (274-280) and the outcome of Oechalia's sacking (281-5). Easterling (1982, 110) observes that 'the effect of this arrangement is to place the main emphasis on the reasons for Heracles' hatred of Eurytus; later it turns out this is the most misleading part of his account'.

Following the speech, Deianeira expresses her joy, but admits that it is partly curtailed by the fates of the captive women before her. She addresses the captive girl Iole directly and asks Lichas questions about her identity (293-313). Lichas responds evasively, immediately on the defensive: τί δ' οἶδ' ἐγώ, τί δ' ἄν με καὶ κρίνοις; 'why would I know, and why would you ask me?' (314-5). Maintaining his ignorance, Lichas also reveals that Iole, out of grief, has not spoken since her capture, and Deianeira bids Lichas take the women into the house (316-334). Upon their exit, the Old Man returns, claiming to have further knowledge that Lichas did not share with Deianeira. She agrees to hear him out, and so

[39] Henceforth I use the name 'Old Man' (*Tr.* 184) to identify this character, instead of the more widely used ἄγγελος or 'messenger'. This is following Yoon (2022, 376), who observes that the term 'messenger' can be applied to a wide range of characters in this tragedy, which is greatly concerned with forms of narrative.

begins the play's second messenger speech (351-374) – a direct rebuttal of the first.[40] The Old Man reveals that Lichas has already revealed, publicly, that the reason for Heracles' sacking of Oechalia was not revenge, but out of Ἔρως 'desire' (354) for Iole. The girl is being introduced to his home as not only a slave, but a concubine, much like Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.[41] In shock and outrage, the chorus recommends that Deianeira questions Lichas, who happens to be returning to the stage (387-92). Above all, it is this scene that Seidensticker (1982, 76-80) identifies as being potentially comic (*Tr*. 393-435), as the clashing motives of the two messenger figures come into conflict. However, the context of the surrounding scenes is also important, as it feeds into the potential humour of this climactic interrogation. The pivotal figure is, undoubtedly, the Old Man, enthusiastic and determined to be πρῶτος 'first' (180) to break the news.[42] Presumably, he is a stranger, and Deianeira remains inquisitive of him, but he does not identify himself any further. The limitations of his place, access and understanding become apparent all at once when he misinterprets Deianeira's question; she asks why αὐτὸς 'he himself' (192) is not present in the joyous circumstances, with αὐτὸς presumably referring to her husband, Heracles. The Old Man, however, answers as if she meant Lichas (193-199), revealing his rather limited information and emotional grasp of the situation. For Yoon, this demonstrates to Sophocles' audience 'the narrowness of the Old Man's scope as messenger' (2022, 378); the implication seems to be that he is not really cut out for this job, and, instead, has undertaken the role opportunistically.

Tragic convention would usually have a messenger exit the stage once their news has been delivered, but this stranger remains onstage for the arrival of the formal messenger, Lichas, and throughout the entirety of the next scene.[43] This does not pose any obvious dramatic constraints until Deianeira moves to question Iole. The girl, perhaps in a reference to the initially silent Aeschylean Cassandra, does not answer Deianeira.[44] In Aeschylus, this is only temporary, and Cassandra becomes the dramatic focus of the scenes that follow. Here, however, the presence of the initial messenger poses a problem of capacity; three speaking actors are already onstage.[45] Iole is unable to respond to Deianeira because the strange messenger, already technically superfluous on account of Lichas' formal role as ὁ κῆρυξ 'the herald', is currently occupying the third speaking role. The purpose of this becomes apparent when the messenger intervenes and exposes Lichas' lies, but in a context where the audience have 'no

[40] Though at only twenty-four lines long, it is so short that it is often not identified as a messenger speech by scholars. Jebb (1908, 57) and Easterling (1982, 121) do not consider that this messenger delivers a speech as such, but Dickin (2009, 159) adopts a more open framework.
[41] On Cassandra's entry to the house and its social implications for Clytemnestra, see 7.2.2.
[42] His enthusiasm itself may even be comic. The eagerness of an elderly male attendant is enough to elicit the laughter of the internal audience of feast guests at E. *Ion*. 1172-3. See 2.4.2.
[43] On the exit convention, see Taplin (1977, 89).
[44] Foley (2001, 87) notes that concubines tend to have critical, but often silent or invisible presences in tragedy. At the furthest extreme, Cassandra is evoked as a concubine but never arrives onstage in Euripides' *Hecuba* (824-35).
[45] A logistical problem observed by Davies (1991, 100 on 199).

reason to disbelieve him' (Easterling 1982, 110), the messenger's presence is seemingly incongruous and dramatically clunky.[46] Lichas' interrogation begins, pleasantly enough, with some questions from Deianeira. But the tone quickly shifts to more hostile questioning as the Old Man takes over. He begins by addressing Lichas with οὗτος, βλέφ' ὧδε 'you there, look here' (402), of which 'the tone is rough and peremptory' (Easterling 1982, 125).[47] Lichas responds in kind, with σὺ δ' εἰς τί δή με τοῦτ' ἐρωτήσας ἔχεις; 'and you, for what reason have you asked me this?' (403), with an emphatically placed σὺ 'you' to emphasise his indignance (Davies 1991, 127 on 403). The Old Man, rather cryptically, reveals that he thinks Lichas has behaved μὴ δίκαιος 'unjustly' (411) towards Deianeia, whom both describe as his mistress (δεσπότιν, 407, δέσποιναν, 408). This emphasis upon Lichas' relationship to Deianeira establishes a key feature of his role as a fool-type character, his relationship to a powerful figure.[48] In essence, the Old Man reminds Lichas of his duty, which, for a fool, is to protect the person they serve even in times of disaster (Otto 2001, 58).

At this point, the herald attempts to avoid the exposure of his lies by lampooning the Old Man with increasing intensity. His words take on the characteristics of tricksters, who 'use their wit to extricate themselves from sticky situations' (Otto 2001, 37). First, he retorts with a dismissal: ἄπειμι: μῶρος δ' ἦ πάλαι κλύων σέθεν 'I am leaving: I was foolish all along to listen to you' (414). Then, a dig at the Old Man himself: λέγ', εἴ τι χρῄζεις: καὶ γὰρ οὐ σιγηλὸς εἶ 'speak, if you want something: for you are not disposed to silence' (416). Tricksters are distinct from fools because, although their communicative means are similar, they are free agents (Otto 2001, 41). There is an obvious irony here in that the Old Man, a stranger with no particular loyalty to Deianeira, seems to be temporarily undertaking the role of her fool. At the same time, the fool-type messenger Lichas is accused of betraying Deianeira, and his evasive responses characterise him as more of a trickster. Moreover, Lichas *has* tricked Deianeira. At the Old Man's accusation that Lichas is aware of Iole's identity, Lichas doubles down with multiple interrogatives, demanding that the Old Man be more specific (421-2). He accuses the Old Man of speaking from δόκησιν 'suspicion' (426), but when he is accused of spreading the word himself, he first demands to know the identity of this ξένος 'stranger' (430) and then bids Deianeira dismiss him:

Λί. ἄνθρωπος, ὦ δέσποιν', ἀποστήτω: τὸ γὰρ
νοσοῦντι ληρεῖν ἀνδρὸς οὐχὶ σώφρονος. (S. *Tr*. 434-5)

Li. Send this man away, mistress: for

[46] Davies (1984, 482-3) argues that the content of Lichas' speech is invention, though the audience might not be expected to therefore interpret it as a lie.
[47] For tragic parallels, see S. *OT* 1121, A. *Suppl*. 911.
[48] See Otto (2001, 47-95) on the especially close relationship between fools and their powerful employers.

it is not for a sensible man to babble with a mad one.

At the climax of their disagreement, Lichas uses a verb unattested elsewhere in the extant tragic corpus; ληρέω (‘*speak* or *act foolishly*’, LSJ I).[49] For Davies (1991, 129 on 435), this tragic *hapax* fits among the scene’s other colloquial terms, such as the Old Man’s rather direct οὗτος (402) and the pair’s indignant repetitions of each other’s words (427, 429). Moreover, Kidd (2014, 165-170) observes the common theme of Aristophanic protagonists accusing their interlocutors of speaking nonsense, often following the interlocutor’s delivery of a punch-line: ‘the other character actually scolds the jester for his jesting’ (2014, 170).[50] Thus, ironically, Lichas responds to the Old Man’s blunt exposure of the truth (431-3) as if it were a nonsensical and comedic joke. At this, Deianeira interrupts their ‘brawling’ (Davies 1991, 129), with an impassioned and reasoned speech – a notable shift in tone. Ultimately, Lichas will somewhat redeem himself as fool instead of trickster by claiming that his deception was solely out of compassion for Deianeira (481-3), but only after his status and loyalty have been undermined.

On the one hand, Lichas’ *ad hominem* attack on the Old Man is evidently prompted by embarrassment at the unfolding exposure of his lie. His critiques are loaded with superiority, particularly concerning the Old Man’s identity. On the one hand, an audience cannot be expected to align themselves with Lichas, because they are now aware that he is desperately evading the acknowledgement of his betrayal; he is evidently a sinking ship.[51] However, Lichas’ scornful words also expose an outstanding question within this unfolding situation: who actually *is* this Old Man? For Seidensticker, the stranger is no more than a local ‘Wichtigtuer’ (1982, 78) acting out of hope of a reward.[52] The narrow limitations of his narrative restrictions are evident in his reliance on his eyewitness account of Lichas’ public announcements; he cannot offer anything more than what the herald already knows (Yoon 2022, 378). In defining the fool, Otto notes that some may only adopt a fool-type role circumstantially, their status depending on an ‘occasion or ritual’ (2001, 45). Here, the Old Man is presented as an opportunistic fool, produced from the circumstances that require him, and destined not to outlast them. In short, Lichas makes a fair point. Writing on vicious humour, Gaut (1998, 60) observes that it is not so much the severity of jokes that elicits amusement, but that they are fitting, ‘that

[49] Conversely, the verb is used in later Aristophanes at Ar. *Eq*. 536, *Th*. 622, *Ra*. 1377, *Pl*. 508. In Old Comedy, Ruffell (2018, 336) observes that it is often connected to allegations of madness, an implication that seems present here in *Trachiniae*.

[50] Kidd (2014, 165-6) assesses a range of ‘nonsense’ terms employed for this purpose, among which forms of ληρέω are prominent: *Lys*. 743, *Nu*. 500, *Ran*. 1197, *Th*. 595, 622, *Vesp*. 767.

[51] Moreover, Yoon (2022, 380-1) notes that, unusually, Lichas’ lies have initially been presented to Sophocles’ audience as the *truth*. The audience do not just witness the misleading of Deianeira, but are themselves likely misled by Lichas too.

[52] Seidensticker (1982, 85) notes that the Old Man shares this quality with the Corinthian messenger of Sophocles’ later *OT*. For the similarities between the scenes and their shared potential for humour, see Seidensticker (1982, 85-8). See also Payne (2000, 403-412) on further similarities between the two scenes.

they hit their target, and the target *deserves* to be hit'. In this case, Lichas' lampooning of the Old Man is accurate, and draws attention to the reservations the audience may well have regarding this seemingly random, temporary fool character. The audience is caught between a rock and a hard place, and the scene's tendency to indignant, superior humour serves to emphasise this predicament. There is the fool/trickster Lichas, or the opportunistic fool, the Old Man; neither seems sufficient as a communicator of the news. On an affective level, the scene's potential humour serves to build sympathy for Deianeira, who has to rely upon these limited and/or biased perspectives.[53] Additionally, it has thematic resonances with the text as a whole; the colloquial spat between these two messenger-figures lays the groundwork for the main action of the plot, Deianeira's accidental poisoning of Heracles. This tragic mistake is caused by the vengeful deception of the centaur Nessus, who has been killed by Heracles for his sexual assault on his wife (552-587). Here is the real malicious trickster, whose catastrophic deception flies under the radar in all the communicative confusion.

7.3.3 *Antigone*

Whilst *Trachiniae*'s beginning features the clash of two contrasting messenger figures, *Antigone*'s first messenger speech is delivered by someone who is upfront about his desire to avoid the role entirely. Brown (1987, 148 on 223-231) observes that Sophocles might instead have opted to stage Antigone herself entering here, under arrest for her burial of Polynices. However, the playwright instead introduces a messenger scene which reveals that the mystery of her brother's burial has not yet been solved. *Antigone*'s first obvious break from the messenger scene tradition is evident from the guard's opening words, revealing that he did not rush to break the news to Creon, but took his time (223-6).[54] Immediately, Sophocles distinguishes this character from the generic norm, as 'the guard's first words almost seem like a playful reversal of the typical, breathless messenger' (Seidensticker 1982, 81 n21). These opening sentiments read much like a stage direction, indicating that the actor may have taken his time entering the stage and delivering the lines.[55] Following Mueller's (2011) work on the politics of Antigone's gestures in the tragedy, here too the guard's reluctant entrance may be read as implicit critique of Creon.[56] Conversely, or indeed simultaneously, it may be intended to entertain him, with a form of physical humour intended to defuse the tense situation – an anarchic form of 'comic relief' to disarm Creon.

[53] Although humour may provide an effect akin to an 'anaesthesia of the heart', this is crucially only temporary (Bergson 2013, 11). Thus humour can elicit sympathy, just perhaps not simultaneously with amusement.
[54] On his pretentious language here, see Long (1968, 84-6).
[55] Playing with audience expectations of time is a feature of the *clownesque*, and this *Antigone* entrance could certainly provide an opportunity for an actor to apply a clown's *event time*, completing the guard's task 'in time that is appropriate to them, but not necessarily the audience' (Peacock 2009, 11).
[56] Mueller (2011, 425): 'We miss out on important aspects of a play's meaning if we attend only to the verbal action…viewers are likewise prompted to respond to non-verbal cues in forming their judgements'.

The guard then relates his internal monologue, revealing fear of Creon's punishment as a reason for his avoidance, before he realised that he might be punished instead for his evasion (227-230). He rounds off the speech with a personal hope: that he will suffer no more πλὴν τὸ μόρσιμον 'except for what is fated' (235-6). In contrast to Deianeira's questioning of the Old Man, the guard offers all this upfront, before Creon has a chance to glean any real information about his message from him. All at the same time he gives too much information, and not nearly enough. In response, Creon asks about the source of his fear, and the guard is quick to establish the restrictions of his narration before sharing anything further:

Φύ. φράσαι θέλω σοι πρῶτα τἀμαυτοῦ: τὸ γὰρ
πρᾶγμ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἔδρασ᾽ οὔτ᾽ εἶδον ὅστις ἦν ὁ δρῶν,
οὐδ᾽ ἂν δικαίως ἐς κακὸν πέσοιμί τι.
Κρ. εὖ γε στοχάζει κἀποφάργνυσαι κύκλῳ
τὸ πρᾶγμα: δηλοῖς δ᾽ ὥς τι σημανῶν νέον.
Φύ. τὰ δεινὰ γάρ τοι προστίθησ᾽ ὄκνον πολύν.
Κρ. οὔκουν ἐρεῖς ποτ᾽, εἶτ᾽ ἀπαλλαχθεὶς ἄπει; (S. *Ant*. 238-244)

Gu. I want to tell you first what relates to me: for
I neither did the act nor did I see who did,
and I would not justly come to any harm.
Cr. At any rate you aim well [from afar], blocking yourself off all around
regarding the deed: but you are evidently going to reveal some news.
Gu. Because terrible things result in much hesitation.
Cr. So won't you speak, and then leave and go away?

The guard's limited place, access and understanding here are simultaneously the reasons for his fear (he cannot give more detailed information and thus may appear suspicious) and his excuse (he has nothing to hide). Creon observes the guard's 'circuitous approach' (Griffith 1999, 166), which the guard attributes again to the strangeness of this mysterious πρᾶγμα. Finally, Creon pointedly asks if he really does intend to share the news at all, a response that Seidensticker (1982, 82) describes as 'weniger verärgert als amüsiert'. It seems that the guard, first through his physicality and now through his entertaining verbal evasions, has succeeded somewhat in dampening Creon's temper. Following all this deliberate time-wasting, the guard agrees to give the message as if he were already doing so successfully: καὶ δὴ λέγω σοι 'and indeed I am speaking to you' (245). He informs Creon in direct terms that someone has buried Polynices and then disappeared (245-7), dispensing the worst part of the news in a form of 'shock therapy…No witty puns or jokes, just plain speech' (Otto 2001, 115).

When asked for more information, the messenger describes the confused guards accusing each other of the deed and finally settling upon sending this particular guard as a messenger to inform Creon of the little they did know (259-77).[57] His relationship to his task is depicted in terms that cast him as a temporary fool:

Φύ. καὶ ταῦτ᾽ ἐνίκα, κἀμὲ τὸν δυσδαίμονα
πάλος καθαιρεῖ τοῦτο τἀγαθὸν λαβεῖν. (S. *Ant*. 274-5)

Gu. And this decision prevailed, and to unlucky me
the lot selected to take up this good service.

The guard is aware of the dangers of his task (κἀμὲ τὸν δυσδαίμονα, 274) and, at the same time, its communal necessity (τοῦτο τἀγαθὸν, 275). Although he has been randomly selected by πάλος 'lot' (275), he seems to accept his role as opportunistic fool; perhaps 'the only one capable of breaking bad news to the king' (Otto 2001, 113). Despite the guard's use of humour, his licence remains precarious; Creon's response is wrathful, paranoid and threatening. He demands that the guard find the perpetrator or else be tortured and killed (304-12). In response, the guard asks for permission to speak, parroting the phrasing of Creon's earlier question (244):

Φύ. εἰπεῖν τι δώσεις ἢ στραφεὶς οὕτως ἴω;
Κρ. οὐκ οἶσθα καὶ νῦν ὡς ἀνιαρῶς λέγεις;
Φύ. ἐν τοῖσιν ὠσὶν ἢ 'πὶ τῇ ψυχῇ δάκνει;
Κρ. τί δὲ ῥυθμίζεις τὴν ἐμὴν λύπην ὅπου;
Φύ. ὁ δρῶν σ᾽ ἀνιᾷ τὰς φρένας, τὰ δ᾽ ὦτ᾽ ἐγώ.
Κρ. οἴμ᾽ ὡς λάλημα δῆλον ἐκπεφυκὸς εἶ. (S. *Ant*. 315-320)

Gu. Will you allow me to say something, or shall I turn and go?
Cr. Do you not know even now that you speak vexingly?
Gu. Does it sting you in your ears or in your spirit?
Cr. Why are you diagnosing where my pain is?
Gu. The doer distresses your mind, but I your ears.
Cr. My word, you are evidently born for babble.

[57] Tatum addresses this speech in detail, including its '(perhaps comically distorted) specimen of good government' (2015, 94). For Tatum (2015), the guards' ability to progress from anarchy to order within the messenger speech reflects successful democratic values of the collective, in contrast to Creon's tyrannical failure. This stands in contrast to Sourvinou-Inwood's (1989, 148) equation of Creon with the *polis*, critiqued by Foley (1995, esp. 134-5).

In a sharp change of tack, the guard feels compelled to speak more to Creon, despite being threatened with the punishment he so feared. His decision to debate with the king is indicative of his adoption of a fool's role here, that is, he exhibits his 'duty to entertain and his license to speak freely, even if this earns the ire of his master' (Otto 2001, 100). The manner in which he speaks is riddling, particularly the question ἐν τοῖσιν ὠσὶν ἢ 'πὶ τῇ ψυχῇ δάκνει; (317).[58] As a result, it takes him some time to arrive at his point – that Creon's anger properly lies with the perpetrator and not the messenger (319).

Creon's critique of the guard is similar to Lichas' opinion of the Old Man in *Trachiniae*. There, Lichas described the Old Man as οὐ σιγηλὸς (416), and described their dialogue with the colloquial verb ληρεῖν 'to babble' (435). Here, a cognate of that same verb appears in λάλημα 'babble', as Creon chastises the guard in the same terms that Lichas lampoons the Old Man. In both cases, these opportunistically foolish figures vex their critics whilst undermining their cases; the Old Man exposes Lichas' lie, and the guard undermines Creon's paranoid anger, receiving the last words in the scene. As Creon enters the palace reiterating his threat, the guard expresses his relief to the chorus and audience:

Φύ. οὐκ ἔσθ᾽ ὅπως ὄψει σὺ δεῦρ᾽ ἐλθόντα με:
καὶ νῦν γὰρ ἐκτὸς ἐλπίδος γνώμης τ᾽ ἐμῆς
σωθεὶς ὀφείλω τοῖς θεοῖς πολλὴν χάριν. (S. *Ant*. 329-331)

Gu. There is no way you will see me coming here again:
for even now I am saved beyond my hope and judgement
and I owe much thanks to the gods.

As the guard is thrilled to survive the conversation, Creon's threat is incongruously received with relief instead of fear. Whilst the guard began the scene fearful despite Creon's bemusement, the experience of the king's actual wrath appears to be not as bad as he expected. Nevertheless, he exits with a plan never to return, though he goes back on his word only fifty lines later, as he returns with the guilty Antigone (380). There, he enters and communicates more typically and straightforwardly: it appears his fool function is no longer required by the occasion.[59]

Although there is only one messenger character in this scene, there is still a clash as in *Trachiniae*, and Creon's chastisements of the guard share similarities with Lichas' digs at the Old Man.

[58] On the riddle as a form of communication, Otto (2001, 86): 'usually for simple amusement, it could also be used by the jester to straighten out an erring emperor'.
[59] Although Griffith (1999, 193 on 388-400) observes 'another half-comic moment' from the guard, there is much less evidence for potential humour in this scene.

There, each proves to be an insufficient fool figure for Deianeira, setting the scene for the tragic plot's narrative reliance on the deception of a trickster. In *Antigone*, critics have noted the guard's shared characteristics with Creon; each displays 'literal-mindedness, mistrust and self-concern' (Griffith 1999, 165). Even their verbal styles share certain qualities, as Tatum (2015, 93) compares the guard's verbose entrance with Creon's performance before the chorus of elders (162-210). In other ways, the guard acts as a 'foil or antithesis' (Otto 2001, 49) to Creon, exposing his worst qualities and setting them against humbler expectations. In terms of status, it is unclear whether the guard is enslaved or a free citizen soldier, but either way his connection to the plot is only tangential; he is 'drawn into the action by pure accident' (Brown 1987, 149). His simple pleasure in surviving another day jars with Creon's idealistic rant on the gods, justice and money (284-303), informed by the powerful position he holds. Ultimately, the guard's low expectations serve him well. Despite Creon's threats, he is one of the few characters of the tragedy who remains untouched by the events that unfold.[60] As in *Trachiniae*'s scene between the Old Man and Lichas, Sophocles presents another clash between two characters, only this time with a greater exaggeration of their different statuses. What results is essentially a levelling, as the guard's multiple flaws and humorous tendencies serve to undermine Creon in the scene. Just as he is outshone by the fool-type guard, soon his fear of being bested by a woman (483) will also come to pass.

7.3.4 *Orestes*

The Trojan messenger scene of Euripides' *Orestes* serves as the third and final example of the fool-type messenger figure in tragedy, as this scene presents an exaggerated culmination of many of the Sophoclean elements and its own developments besides these. Notably, this scene arrives much later in the play than the two Sophoclean examples, taking place after the pivotal action of the tragedy and conveying it to the chorus and theatrical audience.[61] As Orestes and Pylades have entered the palace intending to murder Helen (*Or.* 1240-5), the chorus say that they expect to see her body (which an audience might expect to emerge on the *ekkyklema*) or hear a messenger speech describing her death (1357-1360). They are given neither; instead, an enslaved Trojan man, an attendant of Helen, emerges to tell a rather confusing story. One scholiast maintains that he even descended from the *skene* roof, though another says he enters through the door.[62] Conventionally, he fills the role of messenger, but his tone and style differ markedly from the earlier messenger speech (866-956). In this earlier scene, an elderly messenger informs Electra and the chorus of the process and outcome of the vote on the execution of herself and her brother. This messenger's rather blunt delivery shares much in common with that of *Trachiniae*'s Old Man, particularly as both narrate activities they have coincidentally been

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[60] This guard is a 'survivor' (Griffith 1999, 165).
[61] Its late narrative placement is more comparable to the messenger scenes in S. *OT* 924-1185, which are also noted by Seidensticker (1982, 85-8) for their potentially comic elements.
[62] Σ ad *Or.* 1366, Schwartz I.217.2-9; West (1987, 290) suggests that textual contradictions regarding his entrance could have arisen from later performances, where the *skene* was potentially too high to descend from safely.

eyewitness to, opportunistically embracing messenger roles (*Tr*. 180-191, *Or*. 865-873). *Orestes*' first messenger gives chronological details on the assembly's speakers and their arguments, inserting his own reflections among the straightforward narration (884-945). His speech clearly narrates the events he has witnessed, stating his own situation regarding his place, access and understanding. *Orestes*' second messenger is markedly different in style, which is immediately evident when he begins the scene in song. Since, as West (1990b, 277 on 1369-1502) observes, monodies are usually reserved for high-status characters, his entrance seems to break staging and metrical convention simultaneously.[63] The potential shock value of this combined aural and visual novelty is captured by Burnett (1971, 191): 'His parody of the late Euripidean lyric monody is so exaggerated that his gestures, if they matched his music, must have been the most outrageous ever seen on the classic stage'.

In terms of his content and delivery, he continues in this subversive way. His *aria* is overwrought with emotion, and he laments his prior suffering as much as his present misfortune Ἴλιον Ἴλιον, ὤμοι μοι 'Ilium, Ilium, alas alas!' (1381). West is right to emphasise that he is one of the few tragic messengers who has been personally threatened by the events he relates, having been 'terrorized' (1990b, 277) and certainly traumatised by the attack of Orestes and Pylades.[64] This unusually high emotion is paired with the 'high sophistication of diction and metre' (Willink 1986, 305) of his song, making his communicative style highly original and unconventional. Amidst this high-style *aria* is a seemingly incongruous reference to a specific element of his costume; namely, his εὔμαρις (1370), a type of moccasin.[65] Beyond the everyday nature of this reference, there is little to suggest that this messenger is introduced as a comic figure.[66] West (1990b, 277) considers the incongruity of the high-style song performed by this low-status character as 'part of the humour of this delectable scene'.[67] The Trojan certainly describes himself and his culture in orientalising and exoticised terms, but Willink is surely correct that these are not 'simply exciting or comic novelties' (1986, 305). Approaching this messenger as a fool-type character helps to elucidate humour in this scene that is not solely dependent on the audience's superior enjoyment of racist or xenophobic stereotypes.[68] The messenger refers to his

[63] Willink (1986, 305 on 1366-1502) notes that he is the only anonymous enslaved character who sings in extant tragedy.
[64] Torrance describes the events of the tragedy as 'an *Oresteia* in reverse' (2013, 47), pairing this scene with Cassandra's prophetic pronouncements (2013, 55). Certainly, each scene invites the theatrical audience to consider the speaker's personal suffering running in tandem with the tragedy's main action. Here, the Trojan messenger's high emotion and vulnerability serves to illustrate the questionable ethics of both the attack on Helen and the Trojan war.
[65] Associated with Asia and the east, this type of slipper is also worn by Darius' ghost in A. *Per*. 660.
[66] Euripides' regular use of domestic language is widely noted, so this does not appear particularly incongruous with his style; e.g. on *Electra*, see Knox (1979, 252-4), who admittedly does argue for its comic effect.
[67] West (1990b, 277 on 1369-1502) considers that this character, in Old Comedy, would speak pidgin Greek, but this is both not what happens here and also a rather generalising assessment of Old Comedy's enslaved and non-Greek characters. Another critic who emphasises the humour of his entrance scene is Burnett (1971, 218, noting esp. 1507, 1513, 1517); Zeitlin (2003, 321) considers him a 'debased' version of Cassandra.
[68] This is not to say that this sort of humour does not co-exist with my reading, but rather that the prioritising of this humour may reflect more upon the norms and stereotypes of receiving cultures than on its ancient audience.

non-Greek status in (particularly Greek) pejorative and foreignising terms, forms of βάρβαρος. In Aeschylus' *Persians*, the term is casually used as a self-descriptor by the play's Persian characters, which implies that an audience may not necessarily always be encouraged to interpret the term as incongruously pejorative. However, in *Persians*, the term appears only ten times over 657 lines; in *Orestes*, the Trojan speaks the term half as many times in less than a tenth of the lines.[69] His frequent and emotional usage of the term draws attention to his isolation, as an enslaved survivor of the sack of Troy, now placed at Argos amongst Greek enslavers, attackers and witnesses. As well as playing into some cultural xenophobia and perhaps eliciting pathos, Euripides' character is sure to highlight his marginalised status at Argos, placing himself as an outsider. Ultimately, this messenger's emphasis upon his liminal and isolated role will protect him from Orestes' further violence, as he gradually adopts a fool-type role over the scene's course.

Like the guard in *Antigone*, this character does not seek out a messenger function, but it is thrust upon him. Whilst *Antigone*'s guard is sent by his colleagues to convey the news to Creon (*Ant*. 274-5), the Trojan is shaped into a messenger by the chorus, who ask questions about what he has witnessed (*Or*. 1380, 1393, 1425-6, 1452, 1472). Neither of these are traditional or expected messengers, such as Lichas. Like the guard and *Trachiniae*'s Old Man, the Trojan is only able to convey a limited amount of information. However, his restrictions are much less narrow than those of *Trachiniae*'s Old Man, who may only convey what he has heard second-hand from Lichas. Indeed, the Trojan's restrictions are less narrow than *Antigone*'s guards too, who seem to have misdirected their attention from their posts and thus have no insight into who the perpetrator might be.[70] By contrast, this messenger has no issue of place or even access; the Trojan has personally witnessed most of the action (1499), including the attackers' announcement of their motives (1461-4). However, he cannot understand or explain the supernatural event of Helen's disappearance. At first, the action seems complete (1490-2), but then he reveals that Helen is ἄφαντος 'vanished' (1495).[71] Beyond his restricted understanding of the metaphysical anomaly, this messenger appears ideally situated to report on the events he has witnessed. However, Euripides places him too close to the action to be able to report on it with the distance of a traditional messenger; the lack of conventionality in his impassioned *aria* seems influenced as much by his proximity to the traumatic events as by his restrictions.

The scene develops more obvious humorous potential when Orestes takes to the stage and begins to converse with the lingering Trojan; the narrative overstaying is a feature that all three

[69] A. *Per*. 187, 255, 337, 391, 434, 434, 475, 635, 798, 844; E. *Or*. 1370, 1374, 1385, 1396, [1430].
[70] However, it is also implied that the first 'burial' of Polynices may have been a divine intervention like Helen's disappearance: *Ant*. 278-9. Even if this is the case, it is not what Creon chooses to believe: *Ant*. 280-314.
[71] West (1990b, 282) describes the phrase as 'cunningly contrived to convince us that Helen is dead'; Willink (1986, 327): 'an ingenious *suggestio falsi*'.

messenger scenes have had in common.[72] Introducing his entrance, the chorus' comment appears metatheatrical: καὶ μὴν ἀμείβει καινὸν ἐκ καινῶν τόδε 'here another novelty succeeds the novelties before it' (1503). Messenger scenes typically involve the relation of information from a low-status character to a tragic protagonist, but Orestes, as he is a direct perpetrator of the crime being reported, does not require a messenger to tell him about it. However, his entrance introduces a familiar dynamic: a high-stakes situation between a powerful protagonist and a vulnerable low-status character. In the same way as *Antigone*'s guard seems to adapt his speech and physicality to placate Creon, the audience witness the Trojan adopting a new style of speech to converse with Orestes:

Φρ. προσκυνῶ σ', ἄναξ, νόμοισι βαρβάροισι προσπίτνων.
Ὀρ. οὐκ ἐν Ἰλίῳ τάδ' ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐν Ἀργείᾳ χθονί.
Φρ. πανταχοῦ ζῆν ἡδὺ μᾶλλον ἢ θανεῖν τοῖς σώφροσιν.
Ὀρ. οὔτι που κραυγὴν ἔθηκας Μενέλεῳ βοηδρομεῖν;
Φρ. σοὶ μὲν οὖν ἔγωγ' ἀμύνειν: ἀξιώτερος γὰρ εἶ.
Ὀρ. ἐνδίκως ἡ Τυνδάρειος ἆρα παῖς διώλετο;
Φρ. ἐνδικώτατ', εἴ γε λαιμοὺς εἶχε τριπτύχους θενεῖν.
Ὀρ. δειλίᾳ γλώσσῃ χαρίζῃ, τἄνδον οὐχ οὕτω φρονῶν. (E. *Or.* 1507-1514)

Tr. I pay reverence to you, lord, prostrating myself in barbarian fashion.
Or. We are not in Ilium, but in the Argive land.
Tr. Everywhere it is sweeter to live than die for sensible people.
Or. Surely you have not raised a shout to get help for Menelaus?
Tr. Only one to protect you: for you are worthier.
Or. So do you think the child of Tyndareus perished justly?
Tr. Most justly, if she had triple throats to slit.
Or. You please with a cowardly tongue, not thinking the same inwardly.

As with the guard, the first part of the Trojan's discussion with Orestes is tentative, defensive and fearful. He physically lowers himself before Orestes, addressing him as ἄναξ (1507), and again emphasises his marginality and tangential role in the conflict. Like *Antigone*'s guard, he expresses his simple wish to live (1509). To Orestes' leading questions, he responds enthusiastically. Whilst the obvious threat within the situation may prevent the amusement of Euripides' audience, they are aware that the man is speaking insincerely; his opinion on the actions of Orestes and Pylades has been made

[72] Willink (1986, 331 on 1506-36) notes that in this case, where the Trojan has unusually sung his message, it would almost be more unusual not to hear him speak at all.

clear to the chorus (1437-1451, 1455-1472, 1492-3). Therefore, his superlative over-exaggerations may be interpreted as acts of sarcastic humour, even if they are not received as amusing.

Orestes is suspicious of the Trojan's deference and demands an oath from him: μὴ λέγειν ἐμὴν χάριν 'that you are not speaking to please me' (1516). The Trojan swears on his life, again emphasising that this is his primary concern (1517). The text implies that Orestes may bring his sword close to the Trojan at this point, because the latter asks him to remove it (1519). This triggers a mythological reference from Orestes that the Trojan answers with a joke (1520-1). Whilst the implications of the joke in particular are discussed at 4.2.4, it serves within the scene as a minor turning point, as the Trojan tries out a more oppositional approach to Orestes' taunting:

Ὀρ. δοῦλος ὢν φοβῇ τὸν Ἅιδην, ὅς σ' ἀπαλλάξει κακῶν;
Φρ. πᾶς ἀνήρ, κἂν δοῦλος ᾖ τις, ἥδεται τὸ φῶς ὁρῶν.
Ὀρ. εὖ λέγεις: σῴζει σε σύνεσις. ἀλλὰ βαῖν' ἔσω δόμων.
Φρ. οὐκ ἄρα κτενεῖς με;
Ὀρ. ἀφεῖσαι.
Φρ. καλὸν ἔπος λέγεις τόδε.
Ὀρ. ἀλλὰ μεταβουλευσόμεσθα.
Φρ. τοῦτο δ' οὐ καλῶς λέγεις.
Ὀρ. μῶρος, εἰ δοκεῖς με τλῆναι σὴν καθαιμάξαι δέρην: (E. *Or.* 1522-7)

Or. As a slave you fear Hades, who will deliver you from evils?
Tr. Every man, even if he is a slave, rejoices at seeing the light.
Or. You speak well: intelligence saves you. Go inside.
Tr. Are you not going to kill me?
Or. You are released.
Tr. You speak a fine word.
Or. But I will reconsider.
Tr. This however you do not speak finely.
Or. You are a fool, if you think that I will bloody your neck.

Orestes attributes his pardon of the Trojan to his σύνεσις ('*mother-wit* or *sagacity*', LSJ II), even though the man has only reiterated the same sentiment as before (1509). What noticeably changes in this encounter is the Trojan's communicative style towards Orestes, as he seems to adopt the bold verbal style of the fool. Following the joke, which seems a clear turning point in the adoption of this style, the Trojan parrots Orestes' compliment of his speech (εὖ λέγεις, 1524, καλὸν ἔπος λέγεις τόδε, 1525). Orestes seems perhaps to pick up on the jibe, as he suggests reconsidering, and the Trojan repeats almost

the same sentiment in reverse (τοῦτο δ' οὐ καλῶς λέγεις, 1526). All this light-hearted word-play functions to protect the Trojan on account of his clever σύνεσις, whilst also allowing him the excuse of appearing μῶρος.[73] This is exactly the balance that the fool must find in order to reckon with the powerful people they serve, their truth-telling remaining 'an irrepressible tendency even when the king has a bout of bad temper' (Otto 2001, 130).

Narratively, this unexpected scene serves to heighten the tension of the tragedy, with the change of focus allowing Euripides to continue to be 'deliberately ambiguous over whether Helen is dead' (Vellacott 1975, 76). In terms of characterisation, Zeitlin (2003, 327) considers the Trojan messenger as a double of Orestes and Electra, partially on account of the ambiguous gendering he receives in the text (e.g. 1528). This observation is mirrored by the Trojan's opportunistic assumption of the fool function – occupying the role of foil, antithesis and double all at once. West (1990b, 283) observes that 'the Phrygian emerges as a witty fool', but likens the scene to Old Comedy rather than its tragic counterparts. The examples above have revealed that his exaggeratedly unconventional role does indeed have Sophoclean precedents in its use of unconventional types of staging, tone and communicative style. It has often been commented that the Trojan's cowardice is what makes this scene humorous or comic, but this is not solely the case.[74] Rather, the Trojan seems to *perform* a cowardice that is peppered with sarcasm, before adopting the deliberately witty verbal style of a fool. In this way, he is the best *exemplum* of a messenger providing a tragedy's 'comic relief', in all its anarchic glory.

7.4 Conclusion

Cassandra, as she appears in the works of Aeschylus and Euripides, has a distinct and specific connection to laughter that is facilitated by her *clownesque* role. In both tragedies, she is positioned as an outsider with a close but precarious relationship to the gods and political leaders, and she also functions as a truth-teller. The element of failure emerges in both portrayals, as Cassandra is unable to communicate her unique point of view to her internal audiences. Cassandra is therefore only partially successful as a clown, as she does not sustain *complicité* with the other characters through *play*. However, her *clownesque* tendencies allow Cassandra's character greater freedom than a purely tragic portrayal might allow. In *Agamemnon*, her ironic exploitation of her own costume serves to reclaim autonomy over her status, choosing to be her own tragic clown rather than Apollo's fool. In *Trojan Women*, she functions as grotesque and mystery *bouffon* to her internal audience, and the extremity of this comedic role allows her to successfully mock her enemies without incurring punishment.

[73] Notably, Lichas uses the term μῶρος of himself, for conversing with the Old Man (*Tr*. 414). The intention here is to dismiss him.

[74] Seidensticker (1982, 112): 'einem feigen, lächerlichen Eunuchen'; West (1987, 277): 'ludicrous in his unmanly fear'; on the Gorgon joke, Zeitlin (2003, 318): 'the allusion is made comic by the exaggerated cowardice of the slave who quails before a heroic encounter with his adversary'.

Ultimately, both tragedians depict a character whose *clownesque* features allow her to manipulate otherwise suffocating situations, reclaiming her autonomy and redirecting laughter back towards those who mock her.

A close study of the messenger in relation to the fool figure as described by Otto (2001) proves helpful in elucidating the dynamics of potential humour in messenger scenes. Sophocles' *Trachiniae* presents a clash between a trickster/fool and an opportunistic fool, foregrounding the tragedy's concern with deceptive narratives. The potential humour lies in the superior argumentative styles of both fool figures, neither of whom proves sufficient as a messenger to their protagonist in need, Deianeira. In *Antigone*, the reluctant guard holds great potential for physical humour, and uses traditional verbal styles of the fool to convey his bad news: shock therapy and the riddle. His commitment to continuing discussion despite Creon's threats reveals a fool's dedication to speaking freely and on behalf of others, which here is demanded by his situation – chosen by lot as a representative of the guards as a collective. In revealing Creon's worst qualities and mirroring some of them, the guard is foil and antithesis to the king, and sets the scene for Creon to meet his true match, Antigone. Finally, the Trojan messenger of Euripides' *Orestes* departs most dramatically from convention in staging, metre and narrative style. This character emphasises his own marginality and isolation to successfully cast himself in the role of fool, combining the fool's capacity for quick-thinking wit (his σύνεσις) with a disarming performance of cowardice and misunderstanding (appearing μῶρος). This character, whose autonomy and depth has been greatly understated by many critics of tragedy, is a fine example of the opportunistic messenger fool providing an anarchic 'comic relief' by acting as a foil, antithesis and mirror of the play's three erring protagonists.

Conclusions

Where next?

Over the research and development of this thesis, Classics and its related institutions have become a site of public debate, with scholars raising the question of whether it can, and should, continue without a major renegotiation of its pedagogy, methodologies and implicit politics.[1] In the UK, this cultural shift is towards a public acknowledgment of the country's history of empire and colonisation. In this landscape, institutions are being asked to take accountability for their own involvement in systems of violence and oppression. One such institution is the British Museum, which in recent years has faced an increasing amount of public scrutiny from various social justice movements. For example, in February 2020, the punningly-titled activist group 'BP or Not BP' occupied the British Museum's Great Court. [2] Dressed in costume armour, and accompanied by a thirteen-foot Trojan horse, they were protesting the oil giant's sponsorship of the British Museum's Troy exhibition. Oil sponsorship is not the only reason the British Museum has received recent media attention, as groups simultaneously petition the institution to return its collection of marbles from the Parthenon to Athens. One of these multiple campaigns is light-heartedly named 'Lost My Marbles'.[3] This is not the place to comment on the discipline or conjecture its future, but the examples above serve to emphasise that laughter and humour are deeply political topics. Humour has long been a mode of protest adopted by marginalised people and communities.[4] It is not just a means of coping with oppression, but a manner of channelling anger and challenging injustice; Muñoz, for example, maintains that for many queer performers of colour 'comedy does not exist independently of rage' (1999, xi). At the same time, laughter is used to police cultural hegemony, to punch down, to humiliate, to harm, and to silence. Although the ambivalence of laughter and humour, and often their ambiguity, can make them difficult to negotiate, their study is critical for an appreciation of their political power and awareness of their often insidious role in the reinforcement of harmful ideologies.

The aim of this thesis has been to combine interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives with traditional methods of classical scholarship, within the analysis of laughter and humour in Greek tragedy. This has included the discussion of laughter, humour, and joke theories, alongside the study of parody and clowning as comic modes of textual engagement and performance respectively. The rather constellatory methodologies have been intended to indicate the potential scope of this topic, and areas for further research. A primary aim of this approach has been to address laughter and humour as separate, though intersecting, phenomena. Instances of tragic laughter display patterns that invite further study, beyond their theoretical typing as instances of 'superiority' or 'play'. This thesis focuses on

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[1] E.g. Poser (2021).
[2] Gayle (2020).
[3] The Tom Sawyer Effect (2020).
[4] On humour in political protest, see Hart (2007).

enmity, *philia*, and divinity as identifying factors of relationships, often addressing the impact of social status upon expressed attitudes towards laughter and humour. Whilst this thesis begins to recentre the marginalised laughter and humour of tragedy's women and enslaved characters, more substantially intersectional critique remains on the horizon.

In terms of humour, this thesis has advocated for a tightening of theoretical approaches in some places, and a loosening in others. The study of tragic jokes in chapter four applies the language of joke theory to tragic texts, helping to elucidate their distinct roles and 'tokening' in their contexts. This approach reveals the distinctions between the two jokes of Aeschylus and Sophocles, intended as jokes in their dramatic and metatheatrical context, and Euripides' jokes, both seemingly only functioning as jokes to the tragedies' audiences rather than their characters. As only four examples of tragic jokes are addressed here, this study has by no means exhausted the corpus. Conversely, comparing shared Aristophanic and Euripidean tropes, without the aim of identifying 'paracomedy' in Jendza's terms, allows for the acknowledgement of shared elements and associations that do not have to meet such rigid criteria. Indeed, adopting a more open framework of parody, such as that of Hutcheon (1985) outlined in chapter six, helps to disentangle the perception of superior mockery from that of more ambivalent comic modes of engagement.

In terms of performance, the work on Cassandra and the 'comic' messengers is intended to show that these characters can invite humour without undermining the surrounding stage action, or simply providing a sense of light-hearted relief. Although humour can be used to create a sense of emotional distance in an audience, clown theory navigates the nuances of laughter's possible affective qualities, revealing ethical and respectful ways of playing tragic characters for laughs. The future of this work is in part practical, building on the work of companies such as Spymonkey, who have adapted Greek tragedy for the stage using clowning practices, resulting in their take on Sophocles' *OT*, *Oedipussy* (2012). On the theoretical side, development requires the collaboration of researchers and practitioners – and those who are both. In this vein, one such exciting recent study is *Greek Tragedy and the Contemporary Actor* (2018) by Dunbar & Harrop. The practice of eliciting laughter and humour, ever elusive and amorphous phenomena, cannot be contained within one singular genre, theory, or performance style – and certainly not within one thesis.

Flop goes the weasel?: Hegelochus and *Orestes* 297

A comic should always end with their best material, and so it feels appropriate to conclude this thesis on tragic laughter and humour with an amusing anecdote about one of Euripides' tragic performances. In 408, *Orestes* debuted at the Dionysia, and was apparently the site of a theatrical blunder so comically compelling that its story has survived in multiple retellings. Euripides' *Orestes* follows its eponymous hero navigating a hostile political situation at Argos, shortly after his murder of his mother

Clytemnestra. The political hostility towards Orestes is mirrored by the Furies who internally plague his mind with temporary but intense bouts of terrifying hallucinations. According to a scholion on Euripides, the famous mistake came towards the end of one of Orestes' episodes, when he is supposed to announce:

Ὀρ. ἐκ κυμάτων γὰρ αὖθις αὖ γαλήν' ὁρῶ (E. *Or.* 279)

Or. After the storm again I see a calm sea

Only the actor, Hegelochus, apparently fluffed up the accentuation.[5] The word γαλήν', the elided form of γαληνὰ from γαληνός -ον 'calm', Hegelochus pronounced by a slip as γαλῆν, the accusative of γαλῆ meaning 'ferret' or 'weasel'. The subtle difference lies only in the accentuation, and so it was thus that Hegelochus is said to have announced:

Ὀρ. ἐκ κυμάτων γὰρ αὖθις αὖ γαλῆν ὁρῶ (E. *Or.* 279)

Or. After the storm again I see a weasel

Naturally, hilarity apparently ensued amongst the audience. And this enjoyment, unfortunately perhaps for Hegelochus, was not so temporary as Orestes' hallucinations, as is evidenced by its recent musical retelling on the social media app TikTok (Hegelochus, *Itskeyes on TikTok* 2021). This account is rare and compelling – not only because it reports an event that evidences laughter occurring among tragedy's audience, but also for the ways in which it interacts with the theories of laughter and humour.

Most clearly, incongruity is the cause of the audience response – the laughter of comic amusement. Their expectations are subverted by the unlikely image that Hegelochus' mispronunciation creates, juxtaposing the tragic metaphor of the stormy sea with a rather unimpressive and famously terrestrial animal. Whilst lions, bulls and snakes are referenced regularly in tragedy, the weasel is uncommon in ancient art, but was a typical part of Athenian life, as weasels were regularly kept for pest-control purposes.[6] Stylistically, the mistake creates such a successful joke type because the wordplay is so close to the sentiment's alternative sincere meaning, and only a slight shift of intonation

[5] Farmer (2021, 2) notes that the scholion on *Orestes* says that the actor running out of breath was the cause of the mistake; Σ ad *Or.* 279.02, Schwartz I.127.1-3: οὐ γὰρ φθάσαντα διελεῖν τὴν συναλοιφὴν ἐπιλείψαντος τοῦ πνεύματος τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις τὴν γαλὴν δοκεῖν λέγειν τὸ ζῷον, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τὰ γαληνά.

[6] On the weasel in Athens, see Kitchell (2014, 196, 193); on animal imagery in tragedy, see e.g. Konstantinou (2012), Dasteridou (2015).

changes the image so dramatically. But the joke's context, or its 'tokening', is as important as its type.[7] The dramatic context leading up to line 279, Orestes' hallucinatory episode, is likely to engender an anxious mood among its audience. This effect would surely only be enhanced among a fifth-century audience familiar with the conventions of tragic madness and its close association with misplaced physical violence.[8] However, Orestes' hallucinations themselves could easily be interpreted as play if they weren't simultaneously so troubling. In enthusiastic and perfectly incongruous fashion, the character demands a bow with which he can defend himself against the Furies, his invisible attackers (269-276). If the stage directions are to be interpreted from the text, as Taplin (2003, 17) recommends, Hegelochus is likely to have acted out Orestes' defensive archery, with either a prop or a mimed bow.[9] The attack certainly shares characteristics of Heracles' mad episode in Euripides' *Heracles*, in which the hero's laughter and actions are mistaken for play. As such, the bystanders are unsure which reaction is appropriate – γέλως φόβος 'laughter [or] fear' (950).[10] Might this be an indication of the intended response of *Orestes*' audience here, swaying between a sympathetic and a detached, amused response?

This is difficult to determine without certain knowledge of the fifth-century staging. If Orestes' bow is mimed, which seems most likely, the effect is closer to Heracles' imagined charioteering and play-wrestling, source of the simultaneous γέλως and φόβος response. But if Hegelochus is actually armed, as the scholiast suggests, the episode appears more akin to Heracles' reported murder of his family – a distinctly tragic affair. In the first instance, the opportunity for incongruous humour is certainly greater, but in the latter case the potential for another type of humour is heightened. As the violent threat subsides with no harm done, the end of Orestes' episode brings a new opportunity for the comic – in the form of relief. Seemingly no longer under the Furies' influence, Orestes begins to recover from his hallucinations at line 277, asking:

Ὀρ. ἔα:
τί χρῆμ᾽ ἀλύω, πνεῦμ᾽ ἀνεὶς ἐκ πλευμόνων;
ποῖ ποῖ ποθ᾽ ἡλάμεσθα δεμνίων ἄπο; (E. *Or.* 277-278)

Or. Ah!

[7] Nannicelli (2020, 189): 'A joke [type] is an abstract, inert kind of blueprint or recipe that is purely linguistic...A joke token is a specific telling of a joke type'. See 4.1.
[8] E.g. Euripides' *Heracles*, Sophocles' *Ajax*; as discussed in relation to laughter at 3.2.
[9] Burnett (1971, 202) describes the performance as 'a wild brief pantomime'. The scholiast suggests a real physical bow was used in its debut, though later reperformances mimed the weapon; Σ ad *Or*. 268.08, Schwartz I.126.1-4: Στησιχόρῳ [fr. 40] ἑπόμενος τόξα φησὶν αὐτὸν εἰληφέναι παρὰ Ἀπόλλωνος. ἔδει οὖν τὸν ὑποκριτὴν τόξα λαβόντα τοξεύειν. οἱ δὲ νῦν ὑποκρινόμενοι τὸν ἥρωα αἰτοῦσι μὲν τὰ τόξα, μὴ δεχόμενοι δὲ σχηματίζονται τοξεύειν.
[10] Notable differences in the *Heracles* include the appearance of Lyssa *ex machina* to attest to and cause Heracles' madness, and the episode's relation by a messenger in place of its occurrence onstage. See Hartigan (1987) for comparisons between the two portrayals of Euripidean 'madness' in *Heracles* and *Orestes*.

Why am I restless, gasping breath from my lungs?
Where oh where have I leapt from my bed?

These lines indicate that he is no longer at risk, or indeed *a* risk to Electra or the chorus of Argive women, and his recovery signals to the audience that they no longer need to fear for him. This shift provides relief from the anxious collective mood, and thus brings the renewed potential to reinterpret the incongruous events as humorous. As the danger has been removed, the reflective impulse now tends towards laughter – but Euripides' writing does not seem to allow the audience this moment of humorous relief. In the extant text, the scene immediately returns to the actor's congruous and sympathetic portrayal of Orestes' recognition of his hallucinations and the suffering that they are inflicting upon his sister (280ff). But this is where Hegelochus' mistake comes – precisely at a moment where the audience are seeking to express their nervous energy, and perhaps anticipating an inability to do so. Indeed the mispronunciation (joke-type) is so amusing precisely because it is not just the speech of a character recovering from hallucinations (theatrical joke-token), but a serendipitously timed human performance error at a high-stakes moment of the tragedy (metatheatrical joke-token). The Freudian 'nervous energy' is efficiently and riotously expelled by this opportunity to laugh at the averted danger, and the audience are not simultaneously required to put aside their empathy for the character's suffering.[11] Thus, though the joke type relies on incongruity, it is the relief theory that truly seems to make it land in its tokened context.

However, it seems to be the enticing pull of a superior sort of laughter that has sustained this story up to the twenty-first century. In antiquity, lampooning references to Hegelochus' mistake appeared soon after in Aristophanes *Frogs* (405), Sannyrion's *Danae* and Strattis' *Anthroporestes* in addition to another unknown play by the poet.[12] Whilst parody does not necessarily equate with mockery, this is certainly Revermann's interpretation of the comedic references, amounting to 'ridicule so scathing and persistent' (2006, 113). According to Heiden (1993, 150), the incident ended up defining the actor's public memory, now a 'paradigm of disgrace'. Indeed Hegelochus' Wikipedia entry asserts: 'This error was widely mocked, Hegelochus was ruined, and he never acted again',[13] a claim for which I found no ancient evidence. This sensational but unsubstantiated assertion is perhaps as satisfying as the idea that Euripides was torn apart by hounds, just before his depiction of Pentheus' *sparagmos* in *Bacchae* was posthumously staged in 405.[14] If Aristophanes' regular parodying of

[11] See 4.1 on comic amusement and emotional detachment.
[12] Ar. *Ran.* 301-305; Sanny. *Danae* fr. 8; Stratt. fr. 63, *Anthroporestes* fr. 1; see Farmer (2020) for analysis of these parodic comedic references.
[13] See 'Hegelochus (Actor)', 2022.
[14] Scullion (2003) critiques a number of the biographical traditions' assertions about the tragedian, including the report of Euripides' self-exile to Macedon soon after this *Orestes* production, and his death at the court of King Archelaus.

Euripides is anything to go by, the attention of comic poets may not always prove detrimental to a creative's career or legacy. Rather, Farmer interprets the comic poets' interest in Hegelochus' blunder as their appreciation for this 'moment of instantaneous tragic parody' (2020, 16). As discussed in chapter six, paratragedy was a well-established comedic device by this point in the fifth century. Structurally, evidence suggests that poets would typically parrot the metre and language of tragedy – or even lift full lines from the works they chose to parody.[15] They would then juxtapose this 'high' language with colloquial or scatological references and scenarios. Thus Hegelochus' accidental insertion of the 'weasel' into Orestes' narrative inserts an everyday feature typical of Old Comedy's parody into Euripides' tragedy, in an accidental tragic act of comedic paratragedy.

But is it possible that there is another invisible layer of superiority to this joke? The weasel, though uncommon in art, was featured in the archaic poem by Semonides which survives in fragments. Kitchell (2014, 194) notes that Semonides lists the γαλῆ 'weasel' as a category of woman in his *Types of Women*:

> τὴν δ' ἐκ γαλῆς, δύστηνον οἰζυρὸν γένος·
> κείνῃ γὰρ οὔ τι καλὸν οὐδ' ἐπίμερον
> πρόσεστιν οὐδὲ τερπνὸν οὐδ' ἐράσμιον.
> εὐνῆς δ' ἀληνής ἐστιν ἀφροδισίης,
> τὸν δ' ἄνδρα τὸν παρεόντα ναυσίῃ διδοῖ.
> κλέπτουσα δ' ἔρδει πολλὰ γείτονας κακά,
> ἄθυστα δ' ἱρὰ πολλάκις κατεσθίει. (Sem. fr. 7.50-56; Stob. 4.22.193)

> Another is from the weasel, a wretched and
> sorry creature, since there is nothing associated with
> her that is fair, desirable, pleasing or lovable. She is
> mad for the bed of love, but she turns the stomach
> of the man who is at her side. She does much harm
> to her neighbors by her thieving and she often eats
> up sacrifices left unburned. (transl. Gerber 1999, 309)

Particularly if this line is addressed towards Orestes' maltreated and unmarried sister, the blunder simultaneously becomes an insult.[16] If Electra is accidentally addressed as a 'weasel' – in either the

[15] E.g. Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* (debuted 411) parodies Euripides' *Telephus*, *Palamedes*, *Helen* and *Andromeda*, as well as featuring the tragic author as an onstage character.
[16] *Orestes*' Helen reminds the audience of Electra's unmarried status at *Or*. 72.

literal or poetic sense – this accidental mockery would certainly add a layer of superiority to the joke token.[17]

Even without this potential reading, the comedic poets' repeated refashioning of the event indicates, to Farmer, an assertion of eminence: 'they present the superiority of reperformance, the superiority of imitation. Tragedy, these poets argue, may be fragile, but comedy is indestructible' (2020, 17). This is a relatively common assertion regarding Old Comedy's parody, and its lampooning and audience laughter may well serve as lighthearted teasing, social corrective or even ridicule – a threat to tragedy to retreat from their turf or risk humiliation. However, none of their paratragic references can recapture the serendipitous humour of the original event. Farmer observes: 'There is no mistake a comic actor could make that would not simply enhance the humour of his performance' (2020, 12-13). But simultaneously, comedy is not able to derive humour from the incongruity of *humour itself*, accidental or otherwise, within its work. Incongruity, relief, play and superiority all play a part in comedic work, but never are they so deliciously unexpected as in this Euripidean example.

The four delightfully varied parodies indicate that these seasoned comics could appreciate that it is Hegelochus, really, who landed the best joke. The evidence does not seem to indicate a message of generic superiority or dominance, but with two competitive genres so influenced and inspired by each other, this event and its reception indicates a crossover space that could be shared, enjoyed and reconfigured by tragedians, comedians and their audiences alike. Despite the blunder, there was space for multiple reperformances of *Orestes* throughout the classical and post-classical periods,[18] just as there was scope for multiple instances of its parody. And finally, to bring this thesis right back to where it began: γέλως. Intriguingly, there is a possible etymological link to γέλως within this story. It is not where it might seem obvious: the name of our unintentional comic, Hegelochus. Rather, Hegelochus' name derives from ἡγέομαι 'lead, guide' and λόχος 'ambush' – two actions he certainly accomplished through his unexpected weasel-gag in *Orestes*' starring role. Instead, the γέλως association comes from the joke type itself, or rather, its original meaning. Indeed the trigger word, γαληνός -ον 'calm', contains a potential etymological link to γέλως.[19] Thus Hegelochus' humorous error came precisely at the moment of his mispronunciation of a potential laughter-word – πολὺν γέλων, indeed.

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[17] In Aristophanes, the γαλέη appears multiple times, though none of the references are obviously to do with women: Ar. *Vesp*. 363, *Pax* 794, *Th*. 559, *Ran*. 304, *Ecc*. 128.

[18] See e.g. Duncan (2015, 308-310) on the reperformance of *Orestes* at the Dionysia in 340.

[19] Borowski (2015, 78), as outlined in 3.5.2.

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