OXFORD CLASSICAL MONOGRAPHS

Guilt by Descent

Moral Inheritance and Decision Making in Greek Tragedy

N. J. Sewell-Rutter

OXFORD CLASSICAL MONOGRAPHS

Published under the supervision of a Committee
of the Faculty of Classics in the University of Oxford

The aim of the Oxford Classical Monograph series (which replaces the Oxford Classical and Philosophical Monographs) is to publish books based on the best theses on Greek and Latin literature, ancient history, and ancient philosophy examined by the Faculty Board of Classics.

Guilt by Descent

Moral Inheritance and Decision Making in Greek Tragedy

N. J. SEWELL-RUTTER

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

First published 2007

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Data available

Typeset by SPI Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India
Printed in Great Britain
on acid-free paper by
Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, Norfolk

ISBN 978–0–19–922733–4

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Preface

This monograph is based on the D.Phil. thesis that I wrote at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and submitted in 2004. My first thanks are due to three scholars, two of whom saw me through my graduate studies, and one through the process of revising and expanding the work for publication. Richard Rutherford supervised me from 2000 to 2002, and Gregory Hutchinson from 2002 to completion in late 2004. Robert Parker then advised me throughout the taxing eighteen months during which my thesis metamorphosed into a book, and he read several drafts with constant good humour. All three have been unfailingly encouraging, helpful, and critical in the best sense of the word, and they have given freely of their acumen and learning.

It is also a pleasure to thank the many teachers, colleagues, and fellow students with whom I have discussed my ideas over the years and from whom I have received valuable suggestions of various kinds, notably: Peter Barber, Ewen Bowie, the late Michael Comber, Richard Hewitt, and Christopher Pelling. My thesis was acutely and constructively examined by Armand D'Angour and Alex Garvie.

I also thank three institutions in particular for fostering and facilitating my progress in the study of Classics: my school, Cheltenham College, where I first resolved to be a Classicist; University College, Oxford, where I read Mods and Greats; and Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where over four years of graduate study this enquiry germinated and began to approach its present form. During my studies at Corpus, I received welcome support from the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), which I also thank warmly.

I owe to three people great but agreeable debts for their friendly support and for gladdening me through a long project: Louise Calder, Christopher Holt, and Rupert Stone. *ἄνευ γὰρ φίλων οὐδεὶς ἕλοιτ' ἂν ζῆν*.

My last and culminating thanks are reserved for my family.

NJS-R

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Abbreviations, editions cited, and note on translations

I. Abbreviations

CV	J. Chadwick and M. Ventris, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1973)
DK	H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 12th edn. (Dublin and Zurich, 1966)
DTA	R. Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum, iii Appendix (Berlin, 1897)
FGrHist	F. Jacoby and others, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–)
GLP	D. L. Page, *Greek Literary Papyri*, i (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1942)
KRS	G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1983)
LIMC	H. R. Ackermann, J.-R. Gisler, and L. Kahil (eds.), *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, 8 vols. (Zurich and Munich, 1981–99)
LSJ	H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, rev. H. Stuart Jones, 9th edn. (Oxford, 1940)
ML	R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century* BC, rev. edn. (Oxford, 1988)
PMG	D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford, 1962)
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (Amsterdam, 1923–)
TGF	A. Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 2nd edn. (Leipzig, 1889)

TrGF	S. Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, iii (Aeschylus) and iv (Sophocles); R. Kannicht, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, v.1 and v.2 (Euripides) (Göttingen, 1977–2004)

The names of ancient authors and the titles of their works are generally abbreviated according to the scheme in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1996), xxix–liv: exceptions are self-explanatory.

Standard abbreviations are used for the titles of journals cited in the list of references at the end of the book.

II. Editions cited

Ancient texts are generally quoted according to the text and numeration of the latest Oxford Classical Text, with the following exceptions:

Attic *defixiones*	*DTA*
Etymologicon Gudianum [*Et. Gud.*]	A. de Stefani, *Etymologicon Gudianum quod vocatur etc.* (Leipzig, 1919–20)
Etymologicon Magnum [*EM*]	T. Gaisford, *Etymologicon Magnum* (Oxford, 1848)
Hesychius [Hesych.]	K. Latte, *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon* (Copenhagen, 1953–66)
Suda	A. Adler, *Suidae Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1928–38)
Fragments of tragedy	*TrGF*
Frr. of early epic	M. Davies, *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen, 1988)
Frr. of Solon	M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1998)
Frr. of Sophron	*GLP*
Frr. of Stesichorus	M. Davies, *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, i (Oxford, 1991)

Frr. of the Cyclic *Thebais*	M. Davies, *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen, 1988). Reference is also made on occasion to M. L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2003)
Scholia to Hom. *Il.*	H. Erbse, *Scholia in Homeri Iliadem (Scholia Vetera)* (Berlin, 1969–88)
Scholia to Euripides	E. Schwartz, *Scholia in Euripidem* (Berlin, 1887–91)

The following commentaries are cited by author's name only:

Barrett	W. S. Barrett, *Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford, 1964)
Garvie	A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephori* (Oxford, 1986)
Griffith	M. Griffith, *Sophocles: Antigone* (Cambridge, 1999)
Hutchinson	G. O. Hutchinson, *Aeschylus: Seven against Thebes* (Oxford, 1985)
Jebb	R. C. Jebb, edn. with commentary and tr. of all extant plays of Soph., 7 vols. (Cambridge, 1883–96)
Mastronarde	D. J. Mastronarde, *Euripides: Phoenissae* (Cambridge, 1994)
West	M. L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford, 1966)

Old Testament texts are quoted in the King James ('Authorized') Version, and references to them are given according to the scheme in B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford, 1993).

III. Note on translations

I have provided translations of all quotations from Greek and Latin texts: they are my own except where, on rare occasions, I have indicated otherwise.

Introduction

The primary focus of this book is Greek tragedy. The curious coexistence and parallelism of human and divine modes of causation may seem to be one of the defining characteristics of this genre. Anyone who is moderately well-read in tragedy will be familiar with the profusion of causes that the Attic tragedians often bring to bear on the deaths or falls from grace of certain doomed figures, Oedipus, for example, or Agamemnon. The Agamemnon of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is murdered not for one reason only, but for a great number of reasons that connect and interconnect with one another: the poet creates a causal edifice both magnificent and bewildering in its seemingly endless involutions. If anything, the more deeply one is versed in Attic tragedy, the more one stands in danger of taking for granted the complexity and the sheer strangeness of tragic causation. The thought-worlds of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, though intimately connected with our own, are in some respects far removed from it. In this enquiry, I shall seek to give an account of some salient features of these thought-worlds. We shall concentrate on the relation between the divine and the mortal realms, fixing our eyes on supernatural and human causation within some of those great and doomed families so beloved of the Attic tragedians.

The houses of Atreus and Labdacus account for thirteen of the thirty-three extant Greek tragedies. And in some other tragedies, deviant familial relations also figure largely—for example, in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where Hippolytus, rebuffing the advances of his enamoured step-mother, incurs the curse of his father Theseus and dies in fulfilment of it. The blighted family seems to be at least an important preoccupation of the tragedians. It is the intention of this enquiry, in investigating primarily these tragedies of family and generational interaction, to shed new light on one of the central concerns of tragedy, and thus to contribute to the understanding of the peculiar quiddity of this inescapably absorbing genre.

The Attic tragedians did not work in an intellectual and cultural vacuum, as we remind ourselves in Chapter 1. This chapter considers

briefly, by way of preparation for our approach to tragedy, some aspects of Herodotus. It examines some instances in this contemporary author of supernatural causation, moral inheritance within the family, and decision making. Herodotus, it will be argued, exhibits fruitful points of comparison and contrast with the tragedians.

Having orientated ourselves, we shall turn to tragedy, the main concern of our enquiry. My primary intention is to trace the connections within and the workings of a certain constellation of causal determinants that operate in the corrupted and inward-looking *oikoi* of tragedy, paying particular attention to the Atreids and the Labdacids. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 successively consider inherited guilt, curses, and Erinyes in tragedy, seeking to tease apart these closely connected concepts and to seek out similarities and differences in their functioning. Chapter 2 pursues a line of enquiry suggested by the consideration of Herodotus in Chapter 1. It asks whether those unfortunate descendants in tragedy who are punished for the sins of their fathers are presented as innocent in and of themselves. The chapter also considers the functioning of inherited guilt, its place and its workings within the architecture and the emotional and conceptual dynamics of the plays in which it appears. Chapter 3, continuing this line of thought, investigates the highly charged and emotive utterance that is the tragic curse and considers its status as a causal factor in those plays in which it is important. It examines, among other things, the inheritability of curses, and asks, in pursuit of a current scholarly debate, how important it is in tragedy. Chapter 4 moves from curses to those endlessly polymorphous entities, the Erinyes, sometimes the enforcers or even the embodiments of curses and the rectifiers of familial transgression. Here again, both the dramatic functioning and the causal import of Erinyes are the particular concerns of our enquiry. And so too is the one instance in tragedy where the Erinyes play a large part on stage as characters, the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus.

Throughout this enquiry, we must remember that Attic tragedy is not a medium driven solely by philosophical speculation or the urge to seek out truth: a Greek tragedy is a drama, and plays every bit as much upon the emotions as on the intellect. Indeed, we shall find an indissolubly intimate relation between dramatic form and content, between ideas and emotions. Care must be taken neither to over-intellectualize our interpretation nor, at the opposite extreme, to

over-emphasize pathos at the expense of the conceptual: while tragedy is not a matter of purely speculative philosophy uttered from behind a mask, it is also not simply an exercise in emotion.

After the nexus of three thematic chapters, 2, 3 and 4, which focus primarily on Aeschylus and Euripides, Chapter 5 considers some manifestations of inherited guilt, curses, and Erinyes in Sophocles, paying particular attention to his three Theban plays and his one Pelopid play, the *Electra*. Sophocles is treated separately because, as this chapter argues, he is a special case in the relevant respects. Aeschylus and Euripides, for all their differences, seem in interesting ways to stand rather closer to one another than either does to Sophocles.

The final chapter of this monograph, Chapter 6, attacks a question that is raised by the arguments of the earlier chapters. The argument of this chapter might be said to situate itself at the intersection of tragic theology with ethics and psychology: in other words, it investigates the agency and decision-making processes of the mortals in tragedy on whom the weight of supernatural causation rests. In this chapter we consider successively fate, mortal freedom, and the processes of decision, with particular emphasis on a scene that will occupy us much throughout this enquiry, the so-called 'decision' scene of Eteocles in Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas*. This last phase of the investigation does not pretend to be exhaustive in itself, but rather seeks to examine certain relevant aspects of these phenomena as they present themselves to the student of familial corruption and supernatural causation. I ask here precisely how divine necessity meshes with mortal agency in certain relevant cases, and whether the former imperils the latter.

These questions of causation, of familial interaction and decision-making, of mortal agency and over-determined action, are no less pressing now than they were when they received classic treatments in the mid-to-late twentieth century at the hands of Dodds, Lloyd-Jones, Lesky, and others.[1] This study aims to demonstrate that the raising of questions in these fields, let alone the settling of them, is by no means at an end.

[1] See e.g. Dodds (1951), Lloyd-Jones (1962), Lesky (1966*a*), Lloyd-Jones (1971), Dover (1973). It is instructive to note the near absence of these concerns from some important recent volumes on tragedy, e.g. Silk (1996), Easterling (1997).

This page intentionally left blank

1

Preliminary Studies: The Supernatural and Causation in Herodotus

This book will be chiefly concerned with Greek tragedy. It is primarily an enquiry into the workings of some prominent features of the genre, in particular inherited guilt, curses, Erinyes, and decision making. Not all tragedies involve a curse, and curses are not crucial in all the plays in which they do appear. The same is true of guilt and Erinyes, which are sometimes crucial, sometimes peripheral, and sometimes quite absent. And while many tragedies, not least those of Aeschylus, revolve around a crucial decision, many surviving plays of Sophocles and Euripides do not. Therefore, I do not pretend to give an account of Tragedy or the tragic, or even of some essential component of the tragic, but rather to examine some problematic features that are quite crucial in some surviving plays, and prominent in a large number of others. In my examination of how guilt, curses, Erinyes, and decisions function, I shall be particularly occupied with two things. First, it will be argued that the interpretation of these inter-relating factors requires both a keen eye for the creation of dramatic effect and a lively awareness of how dramatic form, structure, and content interpenetrate. Second, remembering all the while the salient fact that the texts in hand are plays, we shall find ourselves considering supernatural causation and human action. From one perspective, this enquiry may be viewed as unpicking a nexus of inter-relating causal determinants that drive certain great and doomed figures to death or ruin.

The student of tragedy must never forget that the genre does not exist in a vacuum, and that tragic theology is not entirely isolated and self-sustaining, but has multiple points of contact with the religions

of other genres and texts. Accordingly, in this chapter we shall begin our approach to the workings of supernatural causation in tragedy by first considering some passages of that important contemporary text, the *Histories* of Herodotus. Three Athenian poets of the fifth century BC did not create the complex phenomenon of supernatural causation *ex nihilo* and certainly do not enjoy a monopoly over it.

Herodotus, the native of Dorian Halicarnassus, may have spent time in Athens and was a contemporary and perhaps a friend of Sophocles.[1] His interest in supernatural modes of causation, including inherited guilt and fate, is clear, though their precise status and function in his historical work are hotly disputed. Does the text exhibit a living and liveable belief in the gods, or a deployment of them for purely narrative purposes, or a serious attempt to explain historical processes by referring them to the causal efficacy of the divine?[2] In any case, the workings of inherited guilt and fate in Herodotus are illuminating for the student of tragedy. As we shall see, a crucial difference is that Herodotus' text is a narrative articulated by a narrative voice, while tragedy is fully mimetic.[3] This difference is of great importance for the workings both of inherited guilt and of fate, which serve distinct functions in the two genres.[4] My intention is not to raise questions of intertextuality or influence, but rather to illuminate tragedy by comparison with a contemporary prose text composed under different circumstances and with a different purpose.

[1] Thus, famously, *TrGF* iv. T163—Sophocles' poem to Herodotus. See S. West (1999), 111–12.

[2] Cf. the important contribution of Harrison (2000), esp. his doxography of Herodotean religion, 1–30. Harrison himself suggests that the text is pervaded by a living religion such as one might practically believe and live by. This allows him to account for some of the difficulties of the work as indispensable features of a religion that is to cope with the world as actually experienced, a world in which prayers are not answered and oracles and prophecies can be believed only by miracles of sympathetic exegesis. *Contra*, cf. e.g. Gould (1989), 73 ff. on Hdt. as first and foremost a story-teller, who deploys the concept of fate 'not so much an explanation as a means of avoiding the necessity of explanation and the consequent break in the pace and flow of the story' (73).

[3] This is to employ the distinction of Plato, *Republic* 392d–394c, between ποιήσις ('poetry') that proceeds διὰ μιμήσεως ὅλη ('entirely through imitation') and ποιήσις that proceeds δι' ἀπαγγελίας αὐτοῦ τοῦ ποιητοῦ ('through the poet's own narration'), i.e. between drama, in which every word is spoken by a character, and forms that have a narrative voice, such as epic. See e.g. Annas (1981), 94–101.

[4] On fate in Herodotus and tragedy, and on the narrative importance of *moira*, see further below, Ch. 6.

In short, we shall see that it is severely limiting to view Attic tragedy in total isolation. By examining this author, we shall orientate ourselves for our main endeavour of the interpretation of the tragic texts. The *Histories*, we shall see, exhibit a thought-world in some ways very similar to the tragedians'.

The author of *On the Sublime* calls Herodotus *Ὁμηρικώτατος* (13.3: 'most Homeric').[5] The historian's great narrative of how East and West came into conflict may certainly be seen to exhibit Homeric features. To take one example, the text's organization, relying as it does on the principles of parataxis and ring-composition, may well appear indebted to Homeric modes of composition.[6] And the roles of fate and divine causation in the work may also be seen to bear similarities to Homeric epic. But these features, among others, have also led scholars to discern a tragic quality in Herodotus, who, it is said, was a friend of Sophocles.[7] It is well known that two passages of tragedy, at least, exhibit close verbal similarities with passages of Herodotus.[8] I propose to consider here not precisely questions of influence and intertextuality between the *Histories* and tragedy, which have quite legitimately been raised, but rather some of those features in Herodotus, particularly in the early part of his account, that bring him into close parallelism with Attic tragedy. Later chapters will examine, among other things, inherited guilt and fate in tragedy: the latter is undeniably prominent in the *Histories*, and the former too has its place, as we shall see.[9] We shall examine one or two instances of these phenomena in a prose *λόγος* ('account') of a date

[5] The context is the imitation of great writers of the past. Stesichorus, Archilochus, and Plato are also said to draw myriad tributaries from the Homeric spring. Russell (1964), *ad loc.*, quotes Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 3, where Hdt. is called *Ὁμήρου ζηλωτής* ('a zealous imitator of Homer') on account of his desire for *ποικιλία* ('variation/adornment'). For a modern view of Herodotus' debt to Homer in his narrative technique and structure, cf. Flower and Marincola (2002), 4–9.

[6] Cf. e.g. Immerwahr (1966), 7, likening Herodotean parataxis to 'pebbles in a mosaic'.

[7] See above, n. 1.

[8] There are close similarities between the words of Intaphrenes' wife at Hdt. 3. 119. 6 and those of Antigone at Soph. *Ant.* 909–12; and between Aesch. *Pers.* 728, *ναυτικὸς στρατὸς κακωθεὶς πεζὸν ὤλεσε στρατόν* ('the defeat of the navy was the undoing of the land army'), and Hdt. 8. 68. *γ, μὴ ὁ ναυτικὸς στρατὸς κακωθεὶς τὸν πεζὸν προσδηλήσηται* ('lest the defeat of the navy destroy in addition the infantry'). See above, n. 5.

[9] Inherited guilt: see Ch. 2. Fate: see Ch. 6.

contemporary with Attic tragedy—a text that seeks to narrate and explain real events of the past, some of them within living memory. Tragedy, with one surviving exception, does not pretend to handle stories of the recent past; but the causal mechanisms that it applies to ancient kings and heroes are strikingly similar to those applied by Herodotus to historic figures. We shall concentrate on the programmatic opening *logoi* of the text, and particularly on the first extended *logos*, the story of Croesus. In the nature of the *Histories*, the earlier books of the work tend to deploy mythic modes of causation more freely than the narrative of the Persian wars itself. But that is not to say that these causal mechanisms fade away as the story proceeds. If anything, the earliest *logoi* establish abiding causal principles that continue to obtain right through into the expedition of Xerxes.[10]

Croesus is the chief subject of almost ninety chapters of the first book of Herodotus' *Histories* (1. 6–94). After his defeat, the second half of the book is occupied with the reign and demise of Cyrus, the first of the four Great Kings whose careers the *Histories* trace. The stories of both men are programmatic for the later course of the work. In these two *logoi*, Herodotus introduces all the guiding principles of his *Weltanschauung*, including fate, retribution, the concept of the sins of the fathers, and the uncertainty and cyclical variation of human life.

After his extraordinary account of the tit-for-tat rapes that characterized early contacts between Greece and the East, the historian introduces *τὸν . . . οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας* (1. 5. 3: 'the first man whom I myself know began to commit unjust deeds against the Greeks')—the man who marks the beginning of the sequence that will culminate in Dareius and Xerxes.[11] Without the retributive principle there would be no Persian wars and therefore no *Histories*.[12] One of the broadest outlines of the

[10] Gould (1989), 120–25 rebuts the contention that Herodotus employs 'primitive' modes of causation in his earlier books but more 'historical' explanations in books 5–9.

[11] On the rapes at the opening of the *Histories*, see Fehling (1989), 50–59, treating the narrative as 'a single, complete invention' (52).

[12] Cf., crucially, the two passages where successive Great Kings give Greek actions as a reason for invading. At Hdt. 5. 105 Dareius desires to take vengeance (*τείσασθαι*) on the Athenians for their part in the Ionian revolt. At 7. 8. *β*. 1 Xerxes in his first speech in the *Histories* reveals his plan to yoke the Hellespont, again in order to take vengeance on the Athenians: *ἵνα Ἀθηναίους τιμωρήσωμαι ὅσα δὴ πεποιήκασι Πέρσας τε καὶ πατέρα τὸν ἐμόν* ('that I may punish the Athenians for all that they have done to both the Persians and my father').

work, one of the guiding principles of the clash of East and West, is sketched at this very early stage. The other three guiding principles that we have identified—fate, the sins of the fathers, and the uncertainty and mutability of human life—are all woven into the narrative of Croesus' reign. They are all put in place as components of his downfall, which is amply prepared and foreshadowed throughout the narrative. Croesus takes no account of Solon's warnings on the nature of *τὸ θεῖον* and *ὄλβος* (1. 32 f.: 'the divine' and 'prosperity'). And the immediate sequel to these warnings is the first disaster that he faces: he is overtaken by *ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη* (1. 34: 'a great retribution from a god') in the form of his son's death. At this point in his career, he does, it is true, recognize the hand of *θεῶν κού τις* ('some one of the gods') in the calamity that has befallen him (1. 45). This misfortune, and its attribution to an unspecified god, would seem to prove Solon's cautions right. Croesus does not, however, learn much of a lesson: this small degree of insight soon falls away from him, as he speeds headlong to ruin. His two years' mourning are evidently not spent in fruitful reflection. For, by chapter 50, he is trying to oblige the Pythian Apollo by making extravagant sacrifices at Delphi to prepare for his confrontation with Cyrus. The oracular responses that he receives from Apollo and Amphiaraus are perilously ambiguous, but to this ambiguity he is quite blind: if he attacks the Persians, he is told, *μεγάλην ἀρχήν μιν καταλύσειν* (1. 53. 3: 'he would destroy a great empire'). He receives other warnings in subsequent chapters, but these fall on equally deaf ears (55, 71). The uncertainty of human life as expressed by Solon is fully instantiated in the fate of his expedition: he crosses the boundary of the river Halys and is defeated, captured, and almost immolated.

The sequel to Croesus' defeat, his final oracular response from Delphi, drives home the last two of our four crucial principles, namely inherited guilt and fate. As well as the Solonian aspect of his downfall, there is an additional level of causation at work, one that is prefigured long before Croesus' defeat and brought back into play after it. When the Pythia has declared the usurper Gyges king, she warns him *ὡς Ἡρακλείδῃσι τίσις ἥξει ἐς τὸν πέμπτον ἀπόγονον Γύγεω* (1. 13. 2: 'that retribution would come from the Heracleidae, visiting the fifth descendant of Gyges'). The Lydians and their kings, we are told, take no account of this warning at the time, *πρὶν δὴ*

ἐπετελέσθη ('until it was actually fulfilled'). When Croesus ascends the throne at the start of chapter 26, an audience more alert than the Lydians and willing to do some simple arithmetic will realize that Croesus son of Alyattes is the fifth descendant in question. But at this point the narrative voice says nothing of his coming destruction: we hear instead of his attacking the Ionian Greeks and other peoples in quick succession. Indeed, throughout the narrative of Croesus' reign Herodotus is quite silent about the transgression of Gyges and its inevitable punishment in Croesus. The ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη ('great vengeance from a god') of chapter 34, the first hint of the pall of disaster that begins to hang over the king, is not explicitly linked to it. This incidental catastrophe exhibits precisely the kind of ironic fulfilment that so strongly characterizes divine causation in many tragedies, as for example in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Just as Oedipus' attempts to forestall his prophesied parricide in fact bring it about, so Croesus' precautions to protect Atys are precisely the means of his undoing: the young man's Phrygian bodyguard is the instrument of his death by the spear. But Croesus, as we have seen, learns no lasting lesson from this. Only in chapter 91, after his defeat, does he attain to the understanding that will make him into the first in a series of wise but unheeded advisers to the Great Kings. At this point we finally hear more of the oracle of 1. 13:

> τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἀδύνατά ἐστι ἀποφυγεῖν καὶ θεῷ. Κροῖσος δὲ πέμπτου γονέος ἁμαρτάδα ἐξέπλησε, ὃς ἐὼν δορυφόρος Ἡρακλειδέων δόλῳ γυναικηίῳ ἐπισπόμενος ἐφόνευσε τὸν δεσπότεα καὶ ἔσχε τὴν ἐκείνου τιμὴν οὐδέν οἱ προσήκουσαν κτλ.
>
> (1. 91. 1)
>
> It is impossible to avoid one's appointed fate, even for a god. Croesus paid in full for the crime of his fifth ancestor, who, as a bodyguard of the Heracleidae, was induced by a woman's guile to slay his lord, and assumed his high position, to which he had no right.

Croesus has misinterpreted a series of ambiguous oracles, all of which, had he but understood them, pointed to his own defeat. He now acknowledges that the fault is his.

The oracle introduces the roles of fate and of inherited guilt. We shall see in later chapters that in tragedy an ancestor's guilt or his curse frequently irrupts into the action at a moment of climax, little or

nothing having been made of it beforehand. Something analogous is clearly at work here in Herodotus. An alert audience will be aware that Croesus is the bearer of Gyges' guilt and that he will suffer as a result. But the narrator's silence until after the fact leaves this implicit: Herodotus concentrates on the human and humanly intelligible road to ruin that Croesus treads. Only at the end of that road does he mark out the parallel divine mode of causation which, no less than the human, has brought Croesus to its end. Herodotus' handling of the divine level of causation here is, as we shall see, closely parallel with many instances of the tragedians' use of it. The deferral and sudden introduction of supernatural levels of explanation will, in later chapters, come to be an important concern of our enquiry: we shall find that, in tragedy, inherited guilt, curses, and Erinyes can all be deployed in this fashion.

The other crucial component of Croesus' fall is fate, which is no less important in the Pythia's pronouncement than the guilt of Gyges. In this respect too, Croesus' unhappy end is programmatic for the *Histories* as a whole. The twin concepts of what is fated and what must happen run right through the work, and are frequently invoked to account for some misfortune or downfall. Here are three salient examples drawn from the many that the text provides. (i) At 2. 133, the pharaoh Mycerinus learns that he must die in six years, precisely because he has been a just man. His predecessors lived long lives of outrage and iniquity, all the while ignoring the gods and killing men; but he, who has lived piously, must die for not doing *τὸ χρεὸν ἦν ποιέειν* ('what it was necessary to do'). For, unlike his predecessors, he has not recognized that Egypt must suffer for 150 years. Somewhat paradoxically, then, Mycerinus' very justice and piety constitute a violation of necessity, a violation that will be duly punished. (ii) At 2. 161, we see an instance of the kind of use of necessity that becomes very familiar by the end of the *Histories*. Here the pharaoh Apries launches an ill-fated expedition against the Cyrenaeans, *ἐπεὶ . . . οἱ ἔδεε κακῶς γενέσθαι* ('when it was necessary that evil should befall him'). The expedition fails, and consequently he is deposed. (iii) A slightly different usage, and one that is supremely important for the course of the narrative as a whole, is found at 7. 17. Here, after Xerxes has had some troubling dreams, Artabanus, who has hitherto been dissuading the young and hot-headed king from attacking Greece, receives a dream advising him that he will be punished if he does not

cease ἀποτρέπων τὸ χρεὸν γενέσθαι ('averting what must happen'). Xerxes' expedition against Greece, then, that lynchpin of the *Histories*, is supernaturally guaranteed as inevitable. It is hard to imagine a deployment of the concept of necessity that could be more central to the text than this.

These are three of many examples of inevitability and necessity in Herodotus' text. The concepts operate throughout on all levels of significance, from the small vignette drawn in passing to the architectonics of the work as a whole; and they touch characters of all degrees of significance, from ancient pyramid-building pharaohs to the Great Kings of recent terrible memory. The ineluctable μοῖρα ('fate') that drives Croesus to pay his ancestor's debt in book 1 is but the first of many instances of ineluctability and necessity permeating the work. We shall consider later, in Chapter 6, some salient differences between the workings of fate in a narrative such as that of Herodotus and its workings in the fully mimetic genre of tragedy. It will emerge that the concept so central in the former is strikingly peripheral in the latter. For present purposes, it is sufficient to bear in mind Herodotus' picture of the intertwining of fate and inherited guilt, of necessity and downfall. His prose narrative of recent events deploys supernatural causation no less freely and no less centrally than tragedy. But whereas in tragedy, named divinities are prominent in the workings of supernatural causation, in Herodotus' historical narrative the less personalized concepts of fate and the unnamed god are more frequently deployed, and named gods tend to recede into the background. It is as if the purposes of a historical narrative in prose are better suited by these less precise, perhaps even less polytheistic, concepts, whereas the fictions of tragedy deploy the Olympians freely, and fate, as we shall see, rather less commonly. But the fact remains, as we shall find, that Herodotus' use of supernatural causation is in some respects very closely parallel with that of the tragedians.

Having discerned in the programmatic story of Croesus these four causal pillars of Herodotus' history—retribution, the mutability of human affairs, inherited guilt, and fate—I return to consider in more detail the workings of responsibility in this case. Here too we shall find close parallels with tragedy.

Croesus, we have seen, recognizes his own fault when he has heard the oracle of 1. 91. It is not the god but his own obtuseness that is to

blame: *συνέγνω ἑωυτοῦ εἶναι τὴν ἁμαρτάδα καὶ οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ* (91. 6: 'he recognized that the fault was his own and not the god's'). In context, it is clearly his over-confident readiness to interpret oracular responses in his favour that constitutes his failing. But the play of responsibility here, as in the case of many of the doomed mortals of Attic tragedy, is very subtle, more so than might at first appear. The same word, in the same grammatical case, is used both of the wrongdoing of Gyges and of Croesus' recognition of his own fault: both are called *ἁμαρτάς* (91. 1 ∼ 91. 6). This in itself brings the two men into a close and suggestive connection. The question is then invited whether Gyges and Croesus show any relevant similarity in conduct or moral character to bolster this parallelism. Gyges, we are told repeatedly in chapters 11 and 12, acted under compulsion: *ὥρα ἀναγκαίην ἀληθέως προκειμένην...ἐπεί με ἀναγκάζεις...οὐκ ἐθέλοντα...οὐδέ οἱ ἦν ἀπαλλαγὴ οὐδεμία* ('He saw that compulsion truly lay before him ... Since you compel me against my will ... Nor was there any escape for him'). But the fact remains, as the queen reminds him, that he, in seeing her naked, has committed *οὐ νομιζόμενα* (11. 3: 'what is not customary'), albeit a transgression that was itself inescapable (9. 3). And not all necessities are created equal. At 11. 2 the queen offers Gyges a free choice between two roads, either regicide and marriage or death: she invites him to turn which way he will. Gyges implores her not to compel him (11.4: *ἀναγκαίῃ*) to make this choice, but the queen stands firm. When Gyges gives her his decision, the goalposts have shifted subtly: *ἐπεί με ἀναγκάζεις δεσπότεα τὸν ἐμὸν κτείνειν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα κτλ.* (11. 4: 'since you compel me to kill my master against my will'). The necessity of making the choice has become in Gyges' mind, by a very natural progression, the necessity to take the course that will at least save his life.[13] The Pythian Apollo, as we have seen, indubitably regards the usurpation as a wrong deserving future *τίσις* (13. 2: 'retribution'): the transgression is explicitly moralized by weighty divine authority. In other words, what percolates down the generations from Gyges to Croesus is the desert to be punished for this wrong. We shall consider at length in Chapter 2 the implications of the doctrine of inherited

[13] More is said of differing kinds of necessity and different perceptions of what is necessary below, in Ch. 6.

guilt for the family and for the character of those humans unfortunate enough to be afflicted by it. Suffice it to say here that this is a clear and explicit case of that doctrine. In tragedy, as we shall see, where there is no authorial voice and where the Pythia is rarely so explicit, the operation of inherited guilt is seldom so unambiguous and often much more complicated.

This Herodotean instance of the inherited desert to be punished may be viewed in one of two ways. I here adumbrate two alternative lines of thought, the significance of which will become clearer as this thesis advances. (i) An argument may be made as follows. Croesus, in his wilfully optimistic interpretation of oracles, in his expansionism and in his perilous belief in both the favour of the gods and his own continuing success, shows a kind of folly analogous to that of Gyges. For Gyges, as we have seen, could, after all, have opted for death and loyalty over regicide and usurpation. In the last analysis he chose power. Similarly, Croesus is visibly intoxicated by his own power and is afflicted with the insatiable desire to increase it. Thus it might be argued that together with the divinely guaranteed desert to be punished there also percolates through the generations a similarity of character that itself predisposes the inheritor to self-destructive folly. In other words, Croesus the fifth descendant of the transgressor Gyges himself transgresses in a related way, so that Gyges' debt sits comfortably on his shoulders and his own downfall is just.[14] (ii) On the other hand, the role of μοῖρα ('fate') as an impersonal and implacable force may be emphasized, and, concomitantly with this, the moral aspect of the case may be minimized or annihilated.[15] On this account, it might be maintained that the mechanism of inherited guilt applies to the unfortunate Croesus in the absence of any personal wrong on his part. Croesus expiates the guilt of Gyges not by means of punishment for some fresh guilt of his own, but rather in an amoral percolation of punishment through the generations.[16] The innocent descendant atones for the crime of the ancestor.

[14] The applicability of arguments of this kind to figures in tragedy is assessed below, Ch. 2.

[15] Cf. e.g. Waters (1985), 113.

[16] Ch. 2 considers some protests against the doctrine of inherited guilt, some of which regard it as amoral or absurd precisely in that it necessitates the punishment of the innocent.

These two antithetical views are both well grounded in the text of the Croesus-*logos*. As we come to investigate tragedy in later chapters, their applicability to texts in that genre will be examined and assessed. But for present purposes, they serve to focus the wide-ranging general question of how far the Herodotean universe is a harsh and amoral place. The two views will clearly put different stresses on the prominence in the Croesus-*logos* of the uncertainty of the divine, its envy, and the cycle of human affairs. These Solonian doctrines may ultimately be squared either with blind fate or with a more moralized governance of the universe.

Regardless of which of these two camps we fall into, Croesus' downfall is multiply determined: it is motivated on both human and divine levels, and the divine component of its motivation is not single but multiple. Inherited guilt does indubitably play a part, but is not the be-all and the end-all. As we have seen, only after the fact is the transgression of Gyges reintroduced as an explanation. On the level of mortal character as well, Croesus' motivations are manifold: his pride, his greed, his blind self-belief and his ill-considered expansionism serve to provide ample grounding for his attack on Cyrus. But that is not to say that the divine strand is to be discounted or relegated to second place. We have seen that the structure of the Croesus-narrative, with its sudden and explosive reintroduction of divine causation directly after the account of his fall, gives the Pythia's explanation the feel of a capstone, a culmination. Moreover, ring-composition is clearly at work here: the story that began with Gyges ends with a reminiscence of Gyges (1. 8 ∼ 1. 91).[17] In other words, the demise of the Lydian empire is bracketed by Candaules' murder. We are not allowed to forget that, had it not been committed, the Persians would not have made contact with Asia Minor—and, to follow the causal chain through to its conclusion, had they not begun to interact with the Ionians, they would never have come to fight the Greeks.

After the Gyges-*logos* comes the story of Cyrus, which occupies the remainder of book 1 and reprises some of the same issues. Cyrus

[17] 'A favourite technique of Herodotus' (Flower and Marincola (2002), *ad* 9. 4. 2). Ring-composition is visible on the very largest scale in the *Histories* too: the grand narrative of Persian ascendancy and defeat both starts and ends with Cyrus, who is reintroduced in the last chapter of the text (9. 122) as the wise and moderate Cyrus of the Croesus-*logos*, not the blind figure he later becomes.

spares Croesus for three reasons: (i) Cyrus too is human; (ii) some future *τίσις* might come; (iii) human affairs are mutable.[18] The great king here displays an awareness of mortal limitations that will be sapped by his continued reign. Eventually he too will become convinced of his own invulnerability. He, like Croesus, will ignore warnings, and he too will eventually come to grief, far more horribly than Croesus. Cyrus' demise will be at the hands of the Massagetae, whom he ill-advisedly attacks. Two reasons are given for his expedition: (i) *ἡ γένεσις, τὸ δοκέειν πλέον τι εἶναι ἀνθρώπου* ('his birth, his belief that he was something more than a mortal man');(ii) *ἡ εὐτυχίη ἡ κατὰ τοὺς πολέμους γενομένη* (204: 'the good fortune that he had had in his wars'). By this stage he is so inflated by his own regality that Croesus' admonition that *κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρωπηίων ἐστὶ πρηγμάτων* (207: 'there is a cycle in human affairs') falls on deaf ears. Cyrus seems to himself to be specially beloved of the gods: *ἐμεῦ θεοὶ κήδονται καί μοι πάντα προδεικνύουσι τὰ ἐπιφερόμενα* (209: 'The gods care for me and show me in advance everything that is going to happen'). His twenty-nine-year reign ends in death and maltreatment, the head of his cadaver pushed into a bag full of human blood. This repulsive end is painfully appropriate: at last, in death, his thirst is slaked. He has learned no lessons from the fate of Croesus. In Cyrus, then, we see the first of many re-enactments of the same inexorable pattern of glory, over-reaching, and abasement. We have now seen that in the first substantial story of the *Histories*, that of Croesus, all the principal components of this pattern are put in place. Throughout the text, in their barest essentials they vary hardly at all.

The first book of Herodotus, then, is programmatic for the whole work. Many of the recurrent themes are present: human life is intrinsically mutable; when a man is on the road to ruin, he will tend to ignore or misconstrue advice; the crossing of boundaries, in particular rivers or other bodies of water, tends to mark impending doom.[19] Moreover, *tisis* is an inescapable principle; the crimes of

[18] Lefèvre (2001), 68, compares Cyrus' recognition here of Croesus' shared humanity with Odysseus' refusal to triumph over Ajax in the prologue of Soph. *Ajax*. Both men see in the abasement of their enemies an instance of human vulnerability that is at least potentially applicable to themselves.

[19] On the importance of boundary-crossing in Herodotus, cf. Immerwahr (1966), with the comments of Pelling (1997*b*).

ancestors will inevitably find their atonement in due course; and fate cannot be cheated. These causal features recur both on the scale of over-arching structures and in little throughout the work: Dareius and Xerxes are not the only rulers to follow in the footsteps of Croesus and Cyrus.

Our consideration of this non-tragic narrative text has shown that some concepts and some kinds of interest which are sometimes discussed as if they were the preserve of tragedy are not, in fact, by any means the sole preserve of that genre. Herodotus shows a very lively interest in the fate of Croesus and the guilt that he has inherited from his fifth progenitor Gyges. These kinds of issues, and others that are related, will occupy us much as we now turn to tragedy. Herodotus has often been more or less explicitly patronized by scholars: insidiously enough, he has at times been regarded as a story-teller of childlike enthusiasm and nothing more.[20] It is not the place of an enquiry such as this to pass judgement on the relative aesthetic successes of tragedy and history; but in the respects germane to our enquiry, Herodotus, we have now seen, in no way falls short of tragedy in point of conceptual and structural sophistication.

The interplay of the conceptual and the structural, of ideas and of literary form, is inevitably to be a pervasive concern for us as we turn to the study of tragedy itself. Throughout the following chapters I shall make a plea for a lively awareness of the interplay of form and content in these dramatic texts with which we are occupied. I first turn to inherited guilt, bearing in mind what we have learned about Herodotus. I consider in particular two contrasting presentations of

[20] E.g. Lesky (1966*a*), 306: 'Beside the mature drama of Sophocles we find the historical work of Herodotus, with its many archaic features.' On some of Hdt.'s structural devices, which have sometimes seemed archaic, cf. Immerwahr (1966), 7 ff., on the work's paratactic structure; 81–9, on the Croesus-*logos* as containing several 'semi-independent' *logoi*—Arion, Athens and Peisistratus, Sparta—of gradually increasing power. For a qualified rebuttal of the notion of a primitive Herodotus, cf. Gould (1989), 120 ff., arguing that the distinction between earlier and later *logoi* has been over-drawn. Gould reminds us that, for one thing, Herodotus could draw on eye-witnesses for his Xerxes stories, as he could not for Croesus, three or four generations earlier, which may help to explain the preponderance of named persons in the story of Xerxes. Second, perhaps less convincingly, Croesus, as a 'good' man, demands a divine level of causation for his fall in the way that Xerxes, a ruthless and overbearing man, does not, since such men's destruction is more easily intelligible in human terms.

the fatal clash of the two Labdacid brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, as it is presented both in Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas* and in Euripides' subtly nuanced response to the *Septem*, the *Phoenissae*. The downfalls of these two men, no less than that of Croesus in Herodotus, present a markedly familial aspect: we shall quickly find that their unhappy ends are inextricably bound up with the follies and delicts of their ancestors.

2

Inherited Guilt

It did not escape Aristotle that Athenian tragedy is very much concerned with sorrows within the *οἶκος*:

νῦν δὲ περὶ ὀλίγας οἰκίας αἱ κάλλισται τραγῳδίαι συντίθενται . . . ὅταν δ' ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις ἐγγένηται τὰ πάθη, οἷον ἢ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφὸν ἢ υἱὸς πατέρα ἢ μήτηρ υἱὸν ἢ υἱὸς μητέρα ἀποκτείνῃ ἢ μέλλῃ ἤ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον δρᾷ, ταῦτα ζητητέον.

(*Poetics* 1453[a]18–19, [b]19–22)

But now, the finest tragedies are composed about a very few households. . . . When the sufferings occur within intimate relationships—for example, when a brother kills, or is about to kill, his brother, or the like; or a son his father; or a mother her son; or a son his mother—this is the effect to be sought.

Modern scholars of tragedy have tended to agree in finding intimacy and *φιλία* ('intimate relationship'/ 'love') to be of great importance, not least when they are perverted into a familial closeness in death and destruction. It is very characteristic of Attic tragedy to trace the movement of guilt and transgression through the generations of a family.[1] Often sons seem to go the way of ruin in the very footsteps of their fathers. The tragic house has been called a 'psycho-physical' unit, which allows the inheritance of far more than material goods: tragic children may receive folly and doom for their portion no less than cattle and lands.[2] Classical Greek does not, of course, have a

[1] On the characteristic concept of pollution, designated by the sinister and emotive words *μίασμα*, *μύσος* etc., see Parker (1983), *passim*; Rudhardt (1992), 46–50, noting, at 47, that 'Les Grecs ne se sont pas interrogés sur la nature du *μίασμα* ni sur le mécanisme de son efficacité.'

[2] Jones (1962), 92; and see 82–111 for an extended consideration of the importance of the house in the *Oresteia*. On the house in the *Choephori*, 'Schauplatz und Zeuge all der vergangenen Greuel', see Sier (1988), 192, with refs.; see further below.

word or phrase directly corresponding to the useful English term 'inherited guilt'. The phenomenon, on the other hand, is indisputably present and easily detected, as this discussion will show. It will presently become clear that it is much easier to identify the phenomenon as a real thing than it is to fix what precisely it is that is passed down the generations of these doomed households. To take a very clear example, that of the Labdacids, Eteocles and Polyneices are the grandchildren of Laius, who died at his son's hand; and they too die at each other's hand. Their father suffers misfortunes that differ from poet to poet and tragedy to tragedy, but all agree that he does not end happily. But in our extant instantiations of Labdacid myths in the tragedians, do his sons inherit from their forebears more than the fact of their internecine death? Do they inherit characteristics or propensities to this kind of disastrous behaviour? Do they inherit some kind of *desert* to perish foully? And, a final question, how important is this phenomenon or set of phenomena for the interpreter of the tragedies in which it appears? In Chapter 1, I began to ask these questions with reference to the fall of Croesus in Herodotus 1. I now ask them of texts in a very different genre, a genre in which there is no authorial voice, and in which the fractured and the inspissated are at least as important as the coherent and the pellucid.

In order to investigate the role and functioning of inherited guilt in tragedy, some preliminary remarks are necessary, both general and specific, on divine justice in antiquity. The ancients are much concerned with *Δίκη*, which as early as Hesiod is personified and deified: *ἡ δέ τε παρθένος ἐστὶ Δίκη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,* | *κυδρή τ' αἰδοίη τε θεοῖς οἳ "Ολυμπον ἔχουσιν* (*WD* 256 f.: 'And there is the maiden Justice, child of Zeus, honourable and reverend among the gods who dwell on Olympus').[3] Elsewhere in the same author she is the daughter of Themis, and among her sisters are *Εὐνομίη* ('Good Order') and the Fates (*Theog.* 901 ff.).[4] This multi-faceted concept may at its broadest be central to the very order of the universe.[5] Thus Anaximander says that existing things *διδόναι . . . δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς*

[3] Solmsen (1949), *passim*, argues at length for the importance of the Hesiodic conception of justice to later writers. Cf. Dover (1974), 255, for later refs. to the same notion.

[4] On which see West (1978), *ad loc.*

[5] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 161–2, summarises the Greek notion of a *dike*-ordered and regulated cosmos.

ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν (fr. B1 DK: 'for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time', tr. KRS) in constant reciprocity; or again, Heraclitus insists εἰδέναι . . . χρὴ . . . δίκην ἔριν (fr. B80 DK: 'it is necessary to know . . . that right is strife', tr. KRS). At its most specific and concrete, the word may denote a penalty or a lawsuit.[6] Between these extremes resides the ethical aspect of δίκη. This too has a number of facets. From Homer on, Zeus protects suppliant and guest.[7] Δίκη as reciprocity has seemed to many a central motive principle and well-spring of action both human and divine in Herodotus.[8] Δίκη in the moral sphere may be presented as peculiarly the possession of Hellenic peoples, as opposed to the lawless outrages of the *barbaroi*.[9] Familial operation is a special case of this ethical aspect of δίκη.

The modern Western world is not quite at home with the concept of inherited guilt, which it perhaps finds alien or even primitive. Should not the individual, we ask, and he alone, bear the burden of his own actions? For many the notion is a dimly remembered archaism from the Old Testament.[10] In a classic account, E. R. Dodds reminds us that

[6] Anaximander: cf. KRS 117 ff. Heraclitus: Δίκη here has been called 'the "indicated way" . . . or the normal rule of behaviour', KRS 193 ff. According to LSJ s.v., the adverbial usage δίκην + genitive = Lat. *instar* + genitive grows out of this sense of 'way' or 'custom'. On this idiom see Sommerstein (1989), *ad* Aesch. *Eum.* 26. 'Penalty' or 'lawsuit': cf. e.g. Aesch. *Eum.* 433: κρῖνε δ' εὐθεῖαν δίκην ('give a straight judgement in a trial', tr. Collard), with Sommerstein (1989), *ad loc.*; and see Fraenkel (1950), *ad* Aesch. *Ag.* 813.

[7] Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1971), 5.

[8] Cf. Gould (1989), 63–85; and see above, Ch. 1.

[9] On the morality of barbarians in tragedy, see Hall (1989), 181–90. At 211 ff. she assesses the phenomenon of the 'noble barbarian'. The attribution of 'barbarous' outrages to Greek heroes in tragedy, esp. in Euripides' *Troades*, is the 'rule-proving exception' (222).

[10] Thus, famously, Exodus 20. 5 = Deuteronomy 5. 9: 'For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.' To select a few other examples, cf. Exodus 34. 7, 1 Kings 2. 33, Job 21. 17–19. West (1997), 124 ff. adduces parallels from the Hebrew Bible and other Eastern texts for Greek notions of divine justice. Pease (1955–8), *ad* Cicero *Nat. D.* 3.90, gives in a learned note on inherited guilt ample references not only to classical but also to Hebrew Bible material. Note that the Hebrew Bible does contain passages questioning and modifying the doctrine of inherited guilt: it is not always allowed to pass without protest, and on occasion inherited guilt is felt to conflict with individual responsibility. Thus e.g.: 'In those days they shall say no more, the fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every

there are good reasons why such a doctrine might seem welcome or even necessary in order to sustain belief in the efficacy of divine punishment.[11] Indisputably the world is not so ordered that retribution strikes offenders with the satisfying inevitability that men demand of their gods: sometimes the wicked flourish

> like a green bay-tree. . . . In order to sustain the belief that [the mills of God] moved at all, it was necessary to get rid of the natural time-limit set by death. If you looked beyond that limit, you could say one (or both) of two things: you could say that the successful sinner would be punished in his descendants, or you could say that he would pay his debt personally in another life.[12]

With the notion of *post mortem* punishment, which does not figure prominently in tragedy, we shall not be concerned. The other of Dodds's options, however, the punishment of the sinner in his descendants, enjoys a career traceable from early times. Solon, confident of the τίσις of Zeus, states that, if it is not immediate, it is sure:

> ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν αὐτίκ' ἔτεισεν, ὁ δ' ὕστερον· οἳ δὲ φύγωσιν
> αὐτοί, μηδὲ θεῶν μοῖρ' ἐπιοῦσα κίχῃ,
> ἤλυθε πάντως αὖτις· ἀναίτιοι ἔργα τίνουσιν
> ἢ παῖδες τούτων ἢ γένος ἐξοπίσω.
>
> (fr. 13.29–32 West)[13]

But some are punished forthwith, and some later: and as for those who escape in their own persons, and the fate of the gods does not overtake them, it comes later at any rate: the guiltless pay for their deeds, either their children or their future offspring.

man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge' (Jer. 31. 29–30); Deut. 24. 16, a principle appealed to at 2 Kings 14. 5–6 and 2 Chron. 25. 4; Ezek. 18. 2–20: 'What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?'

[11] Dodds (1951), 31 ff. Another useful account of inherited guilt is given by Parker (1983), 198 ff.

[12] Dodds (1951), 33, with useful collections of passages ibid., nn. 23, 25. Harrison (2000), 112–13, calls belief in delayed punishment a 'let-out clause for belief in [divine] retribution', quoting Parker (1983), 201–2: the doctrine of inherited guilt 'protects the belief in divine justice from crude empirical refutation.'

[13] Refs. to other authors are given by Parker (1983), 199; n. 50. The Solon of this fr. contrasts with the Solon who gives advice to Croesus in Herodotus 1: the historian's Solon is more a prophet of uncertainty and mutability than of guaranteed divine justice. Cf. Harrison (2000), 31–63.

This notion has been considered post-Homeric, a product of the Archaic period in which god is primarily to be feared and the life of man is hedged round with all manner of potential disaster: 'We get a further measure of the gap [between the Homeric and the Archaic] if we compare Homer's version of the Oedipus-saga with that familiar to us from Sophocles. In the latter, Oedipus becomes a polluted outcast . . . [b]ut in the story Homer knew, he continues to reign in Thebes after his guilt is discovered.'[14] There is, however, a discernible continuity between Homer and later authors: the Homeric Agamemnon, when Menelaus has just been pierced by the arrow of Pandarus, is confident of the eventual retribution of Zeus upon the truce-breaking Trojans *σὺν σφῇσιν κεφαλῇσι γυναιξί τε καὶ τεκέεσσιν* (Hom. *Il.* 4. 158 ff.: 'with their own lives and their women and children').[15] Agamemnon will of course ultimately be proved right, but not within the compass of the *Iliad*, which ends not with the fall and divine punishment of Troy, but with the burial of Hector. Hesiod, in a passage of which Solon's pronouncement appears reminiscent, asserts a future eclipsing or destruction (*ἀμαυροτέρη γενεή*) of the descendants of perjurers (Hes. *WD* 282–5). At the least, the notion of an offender bringing his family down with him when he falls is as early as the earliest Greek literature.

I shall have little to say of the advantages conferred by *δίκη* on the righteous; and I shall find myself saying nothing of the hypothetical converse of inherited guilt, inherited credit.[16] It is true that Hesiod's

[14] Dodds (1951), 36.

[15] Called by Kirk (1985), *ad* 160–62: 'the first general statement in Greek literature of the powerful dogma that Zeus always exacts vengeance in the end, and that it may spread into the transgressor's family'. Other passages are given by Parker (1983), 201 n. 65. Parker correctly concedes that the destruction of *an offender together with his family* is distinct from the destruction of *his descendants only*, while he himself goes unpunished (201).

[16] The notion that benefits should be conferred on the progeny of state benefactors—as on the descendants of the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton—was available to the Athenians, at least in a civic context: cf. Parker (1983), 206. Id., 203ff., discusses sanctions actually applied to the children of some classes of offender, and observes that the extirpation of families might sometimes be undertaken for reasons more 'prudential and punitive' than 'cathartic' (204). Cf. also Lysias 14, where not the least component of the character assassination of the younger Alcibiades is denigration of his father—a form of inherited discredit. A case of problematized moral inheritance is provided by Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*: will the young man be true to his father's open and honest heroism, or will he go against his inheritance by practising the *dolos* ('guile') counselled by Odysseus?

deified justice has many blessings in her gift: where men are just to foreigners and natives alike and do not transgress, τοῖσι τέθηλε πόλις, λαοὶ δ' ἀνθεῦσιν ἐν αὐτῇ ('their state flourishes and the people blossom in it'), peace nurtures the young in the land, famine and ruin are absent, the earth is fruitful, women bear children resembling their fathers, θάλλουσιν δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διαμπερές (*WD* 225 ff.: 'and they prosper continually in good things'). But tragedy as a genre tends to deal with the deviant and the crooked, and by its nature does not often depict the reward of virtue.[17] The forgiveness of the gods is also a notion that is available in tragedy, at least as something for which characters may entertain a more or less vain hope. Thus, for example, Euripides makes the old servant beg Aphrodite's forgiveness for the youthful folly of Hippolytus (Eur. *Hipp.* 114–20); or the half-comic Teiresias pray for Pentheus καίπερ ὄντος ἀγρίου (Eur. *Bacch.* 360–63: 'though he is wild'). Our concern, however, is with those cases in which the gods' forgiveness is not forthcoming, cases where justice of a kind in all its dreadful implacability is shown bringing characters low.[18] The Justice of the tragedians is generally an engine of destruction, and the Δίκα that shines forth in smoky dwellings in one passage of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (772 ff.) is often scarcely visible through the pall of transgression, Erinys, and curse.

We may reach a first approximation to an understanding of inherited guilt in tragedy by considering this very play, the *Agamemnon*. This text is perhaps the supreme example of a complicated nexus of guilt, curses, furies, and other vengeful spirits. In the very copious literature on it, questions of guilt and responsibility have figured prominently.[19] Scholars have asked to what extent Agamemnon deserves to die. They have thus been led to ask whether his sacrifice of his daughter at Aulis is a free choice and whether, compelled or not, it is a culpable act, an act that is legitimately avenged by Clytaemestra's murder on his return home. And if this murder is legitimate, at least in some sense, does that in turn legitimize the further deaths that occur in the *Choephori*? The questions that we ask

[17] If Oedipus' problematic apotheosis in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* is indeed the reward of virtue, it is by no means the norm in extant tragedy.

[18] On divine forgiveness, see further Dover (1974), 261 citing also passages from Aristophanes.

[19] Cf. e.g. Daube (1938), 166 ff.; Lloyd-Jones (1962); Dover (1973).

of the *Agamemnon* ramify throughout the great edifice of the connected trilogy, and are not laid to rest even by the triumphant torchlit procession that concludes the *Eumenides*. For the present, let us restrict ourselves to the first play: in its complex and multi-layered causality, the poet marshals around the bare facts of two deaths, those of Iphigenia and Agamemnon, the following supernatural elements:

(i) the butchered children of Thyestes that Cassandra discerns about the house (1095 ff. etc.);
(ii) the chorus of Furies also seen by the prophetess (1186 ff.);
(iii) the τριπάχυντον δαίμονα γέννης τῆσδε (1476 f.: 'the thrice-glutted spirit of this family') and its παλαιὸς δριμὺς ἀλάστωρ (1501: 'ancient keen avenger');
(iv) the curse laid on the house by Thyestes, οὕτως ὀλέσθαι πᾶν τὸ Πλεισθένους γένος (1600 ff.: 'that so should perish all the race of Pleisthenes').[20]

The structure of the play interweaves the great cosmic principles of reciprocity, the suffering of the agent and the demand of blood for blood with the curse on the house and with the Erinyes, those spirits of vengeance that are often associated with curses but are not identical with them.[21] No single one of these interlocking elements gives the key or hint or the crowning reason for the terrible deeds enacted. It is a mistake to try to discern one paramount causal factor in the death of Agamemnon to which the others are subordinate.[22] For

[20] Hutchinson (1985), *ad* Aesch. *Septem* 769–71, rightly emphasizing the compatibility of multiple causes, compares the over-determined fate of Croesus in Hdt. 1 (discussed above, Ch. 1, and see below, n. 47). Cf. also Gould (1989), 70–71 (specifically *à propos* Hdt.), on the 'luxuriant multiplicity' of causation acknowledged by the Greeks. In our consideration of the *Septem* below, we shall discern multiple causes for the catastrophe but also an effect of greater simplicity than is presented by the *Agamemnon*. We shall have more to say of δαίμων in a later chapter. On this strange phenomenon, see Burkert (1985), 179–81, esp. 181, for δαίμων in tragedy.

[21] Tragic Erinyes are considered in detail below, Ch. 4. The Erinyes of Aesch. *Eum.* 416 f. do identify themselves with curses: 'We are the children of eternal night, and in our home beneath the earth we are called Ἀραί.' More often in literature they are not embodied curses but enforcers of curses: 'Such curses are, in the epic, administered by the Erinyes, who are guardians of the structure of family authority (younger sons normally have no Erinyes)', Parker (1983), 196; and see his nn. 32–4 for relevant passages.

[22] Thus, rightly, Fraenkel (1950), *ad* Aesch. *Ag.* 1330: 'It would be absurd to attempt an exact calculation as to the degree of efficacy in each of the different elements that work together towards Agamemnon's fatal end.'

example, to insist very heavily on the curse of Thyestes, which is only revealed in the final scene of the *Agamemnon*, is to do violence to the structure and dramatic economy of the work. The play introduces this inherited curse when it does for a good reason. It is rather more fruitful to see these elements as complementing and reinforcing one another as the play progresses. Each has its place in the causal nexus alongside the others, and is deployed at that moment when it is most effective dramatically. In this fully mimetic text, every word is said or sung by a character or by the chorus, and consequently each supernatural element of causation is introduced to serve some underlying agenda: even the chorus is deeply engaged with the stage-action, and often performs the function of contemplating and contextualizing it.[23] To review each causal determinant in turn: we hear of the ominous sacrifice of Iphigenia in the parodos, after the watchman has caught sight of the beacon and before we have seen anything of Clytaemestra. Troy has fallen and we can expect Agamemnon home before long, and now the chorus tells of the sacrifice that facilitated the expedition and will presently lead to its perpetrator's death: the clouds begin to gather very early in the play, before any stage-action to speak of has got under way. Once this background has been established, the early choral odes introduce and contemplate the general principle that crime must follow crime in a pattern of inexorable reciprocity. Not until the Cassandra-scene do we feel the presence of Thyestes' children and the chorus of Erinyes, shortly before the speaker is done to death together with the child-killing son of Atreus the child-killer. Here there is a subtle play of similarity and difference: both Agamemnon and his father have killed children, but whereas Atreus has killed those of his brother Thyestes, Agamemnon has slain his own daughter. While in a sense Agamemnon renews or refreshes his father's crime, if anything his own crime is weightier still. This is an ascending rather than a descending sequence, and the crescendo will continue throughout the trilogy. The vengeful spirit of the house is introduced on the lips of Clytaemestra when she is attempting, with increasing anxiety and some

[23] On this aspect of the tragic chorus see Gould (1996), for whom 'the chorus brings to the fictional world of Greek tragedy an experience alternative to that of the hero, and one that is of its essence both "collective" and "other" ' (219).

desperation, to justify her crime to the horrified chorus. Finally, it is Aegisthus who relates the curse of his father Thyestes at the very end of the play: his intent, like Clytaemestra's, is self-justificatory—has he not justly avenged his father?[24] The multiple determination of Agamemnon's fall, then, is not superficial but quite essential to an understanding of the text. The *Agamemnon*'s peculiar gravity and weight derive not least from this conjunction of elements, any one of which would seem weighty on its own: in their juxtaposition there may be discerned a conceptual and thematic mass that perhaps parallels the *verbal* ὄγκος ('mass', 'bulk') that Sophocles is said to have attributed to Aeschylus (*Vita* 5 = Aesch. T 1. 14 Radt; Plut. *De Prof. in Virt.* 7.79B = Aesch. T 116. 1 Radt).[25]

This very brief overview suffices to show that the play foregrounds connections between generations of the house through suggestive juxtapositions. At the very least, we are invited to contemplate Agamemnon's death in connection both with the death of Iphigenia and with the deaths of Thyestes' children at the hands of Agamemnon's father. The former provides an important motive for Clytaemestra's act of murder, the latter a motive for Aegisthus' participation. Moreover, the cosmic principle of reciprocity propounded by the chorus invites us to see Agamemnon's death as a direct consequence of his prior act of sacrifice: blood demands blood. And that sacrifice in turn is connected to Atreus' act of butchery in the previous generation. This causal nexus brings to the fore the links between crime and crime, links that will extend through the trilogy. We can hardly assess the *Agamemnon* without assessing these features. And however moral, immoral, or amoral we find this terrible and bloody sequence—and opinions have varied—we cannot deny that a sequence does obtain and that heredity does come into question.

The consideration of some of these causal factors in the *Agamemnon* does not strictly have a place in a treatment of inherited guilt proper. Curses and Erinyes have close connections with ancestral transgression

[24] Δίκη, he says, has brought him back to Argos, and Agamemnon lies τῆς Δίκης ἐν ἕρκεσιν (1607, 1611: 'in the snares of Justice'). On Δίκη in the *Oresteia*, see further Sier (1988), 173.

[25] On the centrality of δίκη to Aeschylus see e.g. Lesky (1966*a*), 241. As a starting-point for the many relevant questions raised by the *Oresteia*, see Winnington-Ingram (1985), 287 f., with his useful bibliography. Some observations on the *Choephori* are given below, p. 72.

and are often found in association with it, but they are not simply facets of it, as Chapters 3 and 4 of this study will demonstrate. A taint of inherited guilt, whatever precisely it may be, is clearly neither a supernaturally charged utterance nor an animate entity with certain functions and prerogatives. It is of course true that in the nature of things a curse is likely to be uttered by one who has been or feels himself to have been wronged; and indeed curses have been thought to work coextensively with the rights of the individual: 'Even the strong can perhaps not curse effectively unless wronged, while the weak acquire the power to do so in so far as their recognised rights are infringed.'[26] Moreover, curses do have a familial aspect: they are felt to be most efficacious when uttered by 'kings, parents, priests, magistrates, and the like—who represent whatever in society most demands reverence'.[27] And curses *may*, but do not *necessarily*, attach themselves to successive generations of a house in a fashion analogous to, and sometimes complementary with, an inherited taint of guilt.[28] But, as has been forcefully underlined in a recent paper, not every curse, even if laid on a family member, does blight successive generations.[29] Erinyes, too, originally guardians of the order of the cosmos but also specifically enforcers of curses and avengers of certain kinds of transgression, particularly the familial, will be discussed separately.[30]

The *Agamemnon* is but one example, if perhaps the most rewarding, of a Tantalid tragedy concerning the sorrows of successive generations. The two extant *Electras*, the *Orestes*, and the Iphigenia plays all present versions of the myth that deserve attention. It is unfortunate that some of them have been viewed, more or less explicitly, as pale imitations of the transcendent brilliance of our one surviving connected trilogy. Thus Euripides' *Orestes* has seemed

[26] Parker (1983), 197 in a discussion that appropriately takes pains to distinguish the familial curse from inherited guilt. Burkert (1985), 73–5 treats the Greek curse as a kind of prayer. See further below, Ch. 3.

[27] Parker (1983), 192. Thus we discuss in Ch. 3 e.g. Eur. *Hipp.* 887–90: Theseus lays a curse on Hippolytus, whom he explicitly calls ἐμὸν παῖδ' ('my son'). At Eur. *Phoen.* 67 ff., we shall see, Jocasta describes her sons' anxieties lest their father's curse on them be fulfilled. For copious lists, see Parker (1983), 191–206.

[28] Thyestes' curse on the whole family, which has just been discussed, is a good example.

[29] West (1999), lamenting the imprecision of terminology in much scholarship on these subjects and rebutting Lloyd-Jones's insistence on the importance of inherited curses.

[30] See Lloyd-Jones (1971), 83–4; Parker (1983), 196.

to some a mere vehicle for low entertainment, peopled with thoroughly unattractive villains.[31] And in the *Electra* of Sophocles we may find ourselves pining, perhaps irrationally, for more Furies than the text appears to offer.[32] The five extant Labdacid plays do not live in the shadow of the *Oresteia* to anything like the same extent—not least, perhaps, because Aeschylus' *Laius* and *Oedipus*, the yokefellows of his *Septem contra Thebas*, survive only in a few very meagre fragments. It is the *Septem* to which we shall now turn in our investigation of inherited guilt. Questions of generational interaction and inherited guilt in this play have, it is true, received attention, but rather less so than in the *Oresteia*. We are fortunate, moreover, to possess another, and much later, tragedy on exactly the same part of the Labdacid myth, Euripides' *Phoenissae*. This late production of Euripides is no less mature than the *Septem*, and comparison and contrast of the two very different dramas is highly instructive. We shall see that much can be learned about both poets and about tragic inherited guilt from these two plays. The second, as we shall see, may be viewed as a finely and subtly nuanced response to the first.

The afflictions of the house of Oedipus are adumbrated in the earliest Greek poetry to which we have access: Homer knows of the incest and parricide of Oedipus and of *μητρὸς Ἐρινύες* (Hom. *Od.* 11. 271 ff.: 'a mother's Erinyes'), while the author of the cyclic *Thebais* appears to relate not one but two curses of Oedipus upon his sons (Athenaeus 14. 465E = *Thebais* fr. 2 Davies; *Σ* Soph. *OC* 1375 = *Thebais* fr. 3 Davies).[33] The Lille papyrus of Stesichorus seems to have included prophecies of doom for Eteocles and Polyneices uttered by Teiresias (Stes. fr. 222(b)

[31] Aristotle cites as an instance of *πονηρία . . . μὴ ἀναγκαία* ('unnecessary vice') 'Menelaus in the Orestes' (*Poetics* 1454a28–9). The last sentence of the Aristophanic hypothesis to the *Orestes* as transmitted comments censoriously that in the play *πλὴν . . . Πυλάδου πάντες φαῦλοι ἦσαν* ('except Pylades, all were vicious').

[32] Hence the controversy over the persistence of *δίκη*-problems and Furies at the end of that play. Cf. Stinton (1986), 75: 'Many have found allusions to pursuit by Furies in Sophocles' *Electra*; not because of the authority of the standard version, but because they felt that without any suggestion of Furies to cast a shadow on Orestes's success the play became at best flat and morally uninteresting, and at worst mere melodrama.' Surely it is in part the influence of Aeschylus that prompts critics to entertain such feelings. See further below, Ch. 4.

[33] On the cyclic *Thebais*, see also West (2003), 6–9, and 44–7, printing Ribbeck's emendation of fr. 2.9, *πατρῴϊ' ἐνηέϊ <ἐν> φιλότητι* ('their patrimony in friendship', tr. West), which seems to give good sense.

Davies). But the first certain instance of the working of the sorrows of the race into a unity is Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas*. The fragments of the two preceding plays are too sparse to allow any great certainty about their contents; but, in view of their titles, categorical denial of a tri-generational pattern would be rash.[34] I shall offer one or two speculations on this in the course of this discussion.

The *Septem* has sometimes been seen as falling into two halves, pivoting around the vicinity of line 653. This point, the end of the great central shield scene, has been called a divide in the 'atmosphere' of the play.[35] It has even seemed to some a divide in the character of Eteocles. This kind of approach does embody an important truth. For this point is indeed a real and very strong punctuation mark in the play's progress. But there is not, I shall argue, a marked or troubling discontinuity. The Eteocles of the first half is the same man as in the second, but seen in a different light. The earlier part of the drama is largely civic in character, and the latter rather more familial: as far as the end of the shield scene, the danger to the πόλις is to the fore. The Eteocles of the prologue, and even of the earlier portions of the *Redepaare*, is very much the helmsman of the ship of state (62 οἰακοστρόφος). In the first episode, his concern to quell the women's panic arises from its deleterious effect on the morale of the city (237f. etc.), whose interests are his first priority. It is true that in his early prayer for the salvation of the *polis* he invokes:

> ὦ Ζεῦ τε καὶ Γῆ καὶ πολισσοῦχοι θεοί,
> Ἀρά τ' Ἐρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής.
>
> (69 f.)

O Zeus and Earth and gods that protect the city, and Curse, the mighty Erinys of my father.

He thus sets his father's curse alongside the most powerful divine protectors of Thebes.[36] The only other mention of his familial affiliations

[34] Thus Lloyd-Jones (1971), 120–21, would have the *Laius* treat the rape of Chrysippus, a contention rebutted by West (1999). Hutchinson (1985) has comments on the frr. and the trilogy.

[35] Hutchinson (1985), xxxii ff.

[36] A recent paper argues that Eteocles the accursed leader is characterized throughout the play, from the prologue onwards, by a pervasive *dusphemia*: Stehle (2005); and that Eteocles in this passage, by invoking the Erinys of Oedipus, can only 'draw her attention': Stehle (2005) at 113. See further below, Ch. 3.

in the first portion of the play comes at line 203, when the chorus addresses him as *ὦ φίλον Οἰδίπου τέκος* ('O dear child of Oedipus'). But otherwise the familial aspect is strikingly absent from the first half of the play, from the utterances of the chorus no less than those of the characters. There is not one mention here of inherited guilt, of an ancestor's transgression threatening to bring about the destruction of Eteocles.

But suddenly, when it is announced that Polyneices is to stand at the seventh gate, all is family:

> *ὦ θεομανές τε καὶ θεῶν μέγα στύγος,*
> *ὦ πανδάκρυτον ἁμὸν Οἰδίπου γένος·*
> *ὤμοι, πατρὸς δὴ νῦν ἀραὶ τελεσφόροι.*
>
> (653–5)[37]

O maddened by the gods and great object of the gods' loathing, O our family, the house of Oedipus, all lamentable; alas! Now, indeed, are my father's curses finding accomplishment.

In the remainder of the play, the familial principle is repeatedly appealed to by both Eteocles and the chorus to explain the catastrophe. I contend that we do not see here a sharp discontinuity in the character of Eteocles, but rather that his character now displays a different aspect or dimension: he is no longer viewed as leader alone, but also as inheritor of a blighted past.[38] Throughout his earlier management of the national emergency, he has displayed confidence and resolution: as he unhesitatingly matches champion for champion, shield for shield, he is master enough of himself to display a quick and dry wit. At the moment of *anagnorisis* he is not divested of these qualities, but turns them towards an additional end: to his concern for the general salvation is added his quintessentially Labdacid desire for the destruction of his brother. The latter end is quite complementary with the former. Eteocles' death, then, is not

[37] Fraenkel (1957), 55–6 rightly says of this remarkable outburst: 'Der Anfang der Entgegnung des Eteokles (653 ff.) gehört zum Erschütterndsten, das ein tragischer Dichter geschrieben hat.' Croiset (1965), 119 describes Eteocles as 'saisi d'un transport de fureur'.

[38] A somewhat similar shift of aspect may be seen in the Orestes of the *Choephori*. The Orestes who is now the stalwart avenger, now polluted and on the verge of madness, remains the same character throughout and does no violence to the unity of the play.

quite the *Opfertod* that some have thought it to be. It does not over-value city at the expense of family, but rather conjoins the two interests into a neat unity. If Eteocles were sprung from almost any other blood, this would indeed be a noble self-sacrifice for the sake of Thebes, not unlike that of Menoeceus in Euripides' *Phoenissae*. But, given his background, which is shot through with the tendency to familial implosion, this is no selfless act.[39] This has been a first account of Eteocles' place in this crucial and absorbing scene, to which we shall return more than once as this book advances.

Eteocles' cause against Polyneices, he maintains, is just, and it is also just that the two should meet.[40] Thus it is, at least in part, his own moral sense, his own idea of what is right, that ensures his demise, as he makes the decision that brings him into conformity with his supernaturally determined doom. When the chorus, by this time Eteocles' partisans (677) and not labouring under a similar taint, endeavour to persuade him out of this determination, he is quite immovable. This conflict will be polluting, they say (681–2)—this is madness and ἄτα (686 ff.). But his response 'expresses Eteocles's passionate assent to the will of heaven':[41]

> ἐπεὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα κάρτ' ἐπισπέρχει θεός,
> ἴτω κατ' οὖρον, κῦμα Κωκυτοῦ λαχόν,
> Φοίβῳ στυγηθὲν πᾶν τὸ Λαΐου γένος.
>
> (689–91)

Since a god vehemently urges the matter on, let it go with a following wind, a wave having a share of Cocytus, all the race of Laius loathed by Phoebus.

Here, at line 691, is the first reference in the play to the transgression of Laius. The chorus will dilate on this theme in their next ode, where they sing of a παλαιγενῆ . . . παραβασίαν ὠκύποινον ('a swiftly avenged transgression, born long ago') abiding to the third generation, that is from that of Laius to that of the two brothers, 'when Laius, doing violence to Apollo, who said thrice in his Pythian oracular seat at the

[39] *Contra* e.g. Nussbaum (1986), 38–40, propounding the view that Eteocles' willingness to engage in fratricide constitutes an over-valuing of state at the expense of familial interests.

[40] The speech 653–76 contains five δικ– words: note esp. 673 ἐνδικώτερος ('having a greater right').

[41] Hutchinson (1985), *ad* 690.

navel and centre of the earth that should he die without issue he would save the city, overcome by his own thoughtlessness, sired death for himself, father-slaying Oedipus, he who sowing his mother's sacred field . . .' (742–53). The audience's precise response to 691 will, of course, depend on what they have seen in the earlier plays of the trilogy. But it is very unlikely that a *Laius* that contained the verb *χυτρίζειν* meaning 'to expose a child in a pot' (*Σ* Ar. *Vesp.* 289e = Aesch. fr. 122 Radt) will have proceeded without any mention of an oracle to Laius either urging him not to bear children or warning him of the consequences of so doing.[42] I therefore take it that here, coming shortly after Eteocles' diagnostic mention of his father's curse, his mention of his grandfather's sin is also supposed to be immediately relevant to his present ills.[43] Now that the perspective is broadened to encompass the wholesale destruction of the *γένος*, he thinks of the old transgression perpetrated before ever the curse was uttered. This transgression has already effected the destruction of both its agent and his son, and it is still felt to obtain. This contrasts with the Solonian notion discussed above—the notion that it is when the perpetrator goes unpunished that slow and sure divine justice strikes his offspring. In Aeschylus' version, Laius' disobedience to Apollo is felt to have an unfailing and universal destructive effect, which is not quelled by his own murder. In this respect, Eteocles' view of the workings of his own family seems to approach more closely to Yahweh's doctrine of the third and fourth generation in the Pentateuch than to any belief that expiation in the person of Laius himself extinguishes the guilt or pays off the debt. It has been said that in general Aeschylean inherited guilt does not attach itself to the

[42] Since oracles, like curses, have a tendency to metamorphose in tragedy, it does not follow from the wording of 742 ff. that the oracle, if and when it was mentioned earlier in the trilogy, had the same form. Hutchinson (1985), xxiii agrees that 'its command was no doubt reported', and remarks on the dangers involved in attempting to reconstruct it precisely (xxviii–xxix). He notes that 'In 748f. Apollo tells Laius that by dying without issue he will save the city, in 801f. it seems that the oracle is fulfilled by the death of the brothers.' For similar reasons we must beware of overconfidence in fixing the exact form of the curse of Oedipus. We cannot be certain beyond doubt that any single definitive form of words was given in the *Oedipus*: within the *Septem* itself, the three versions at 697, 727 ff. and 788 ff. are decidedly divergent.

[43] 'The present moment embraces the whole range of the trilogy.' So Hutchinson (1985), *ad* 691.

wholly innocent: 'In Aeschylus it seems that the son who inherits the family-curse'—the author means 'the inherited taint of familial guilt'—'is never an innocent sufferer. He inherits not just guilt but a propensity to incur fresh guilt himself, and he is thus always in some degree responsible for his suffering.'[44] Or again, in Labdacid—and Tantalid—plays generally, one scholar has discerned a 'conception of the family crime that leads automatically to fresh crime', which lends to inherited guilt in tragedy a 'greater moral subtlety' than it perhaps possesses in some extra-tragic discourses.[45] This seems to be the pattern here, where continuing guilt is percolating down the generations to the willingly fratricidal Eteocles. As we shall see, at no point does he deny the impiety or pollution attendant on killing his brother: in full knowledge, he takes upon himself a guilt no lighter in fifth-century Athenian eyes than that of his father.[46] Crime begets crime. In this sense, the guilt of Oedipus is a part of Eteocles' inheritance—and it is no less the inheritance of Polyneices outside the gates.[47]

It should be remembered, of course, that the *Septem* is a fully mimetic text, and that Eteocles' own appraisal of the mechanism of

[44] Garvie (1986), xxviii.

[45] Parker (1983), 200. Pease (1955–8), *ad* Cicero *Nat. D.* 3.90, lists some extra-tragic protests against the doctrine that the innocent suffer for their forefathers' transgressions. A pointed expression of discontent is attributed to Bion: *ὁ γὰρ Βίων τὸν θεὸν κολάζοντα τοὺς παῖδας τῶν πονηρῶν γελοιότερον εἶναί φησιν ἰατροῦ διὰ νόσον πάππου καὶ πατρὸς ἔκγονον ἢ παῖδα φαρμακεύοντος*. (Plut. *De sera* 19. 561c = Bion fr. 27 Kindstrand: 'For Bion says that the god is more ridiculous in punishing the children of the wicked than a doctor treating with medicines a grandson or son on account of the sickness of a grandfather or father'). See also Dodds (1951), 33 with n. 25; and for differences between civic and tragic discourse in this area cf. Parker (1997).

[46] On the particular heinousness in Greek eyes of murder within the family, see Rudhardt (1992), 49: the emotive word *μύσος*, often used of this kind of pollution, designates 'souillure trop abjecte pour qu'on en parle'.

[47] The inherited guilt of Croesus in Hdt. 1 (discussed above, n. 20 and Ch. 1), is a useful point of comparison. Croesus, we have argued, is in a relevant respect a Gyges-like figure, just as here Eteocles and Polyneices are, in a limited sense, suggested to be Oedipus- and Laius-like. This observation provides a basis for the refutation of e.g. the position of Waters (1985), 113, *à propos* the Croesus-*logos*: 'All that can be salvaged is the regrettably amoral view that the sins of the fathers may be visited on the children, in the fifth generation. Fate, fortune and necessity have little to do with morality.' If Croesus, like the sons of Oedipus, is so constituted as to incur fresh crime on his own behalf and as a result of his own motivation-set, his death as fifth descendant of Gyges is not 'regrettably amoral' at all. Part of the unhappy inheritances of Croesus, Eteocles, and Polyneices is the tendency to re-enact their forebears' delicts.

inherited guilt is that of a doomed man in a morbidly heightened emotional state. It remains to be seen whether his emotive assessment is borne out by the views of other characters and the chorus.

Answering Eteocles' speech 689–91, the chorus replies that, in wanting to fight his brother to the death, he entertains an over-savage desire (*ὠμοδακής . . . ἄγαν ἵμερος* 692). Eteocles openly agrees: 'Yes, for . . .' (*γὰρ* 695). He identifies his father's curse as the *reason* for his desire but is manifestly not of a mind to fight it, in what has been called a 'peculiarly bizarre and exceptional' acceptance of the external impetus.[48] His eyes, he says, are dry.[49] The other choric protests are in vain, and his last words before he departs to his death express in brief the appropriation of his fate that he has exhibited throughout this short scene: *θεῶν διδόντων οὐκ ἂν ἐκφύγοις κακά* (719: 'when the gods bestow evils, you cannot escape them'). This is a man oddly fatalistic with respect to his own resolve—a point that we shall examine in detail in Chapter 6. The poet allows Eteocles a number of opportunities to exhibit his unyielding resolution. He discounts (i) the fear of pollution; (ii) propitiatory sacrifice; (iii) time for the *δαίμων* to simmer down (surely the implication of the choric suggestion at 705 ff., and hardly practicable with the enemy clamouring at the gates); and (iv) the substitution of another champion at the seventh gate: this would be to buy victory at the price of inglorious personal safety. It is thus, we contend, that the fated quality of his fall is reconciled with the need for a personal impetus rooted in his own deviant motivation. We shall see that Euripides' Eteocles and Polyneices resort to combat after the prolonged wrangling of an extended *agon*: with the Aeschylean Eteocles, accepting his destiny in all its awfulness is the work of a moment.[50] In this conjunction of divine

[48] Pelling (1990*a*), 248.

[49] *Contra*, see Hutchinson (1985), *ad loc.*: 'The eyes are those of the Curse.' I do not see why the words 'the curse sits hard by my tearless eyes' should not be regarded as an admissible Aeschylean expression of the sentiment that Eteocles contemplates the slaughter of his brother tearlessly *because* he is afflicted by his father's curse. That the curse should be tearless does not seem to give particularly good sense: why should Eteocles point out that the curse of Oedipus does not weep? The lachrymosity or otherwise of the mortal hero about to face death is surely much more to the point.

[50] Cf., *à propos* the problem of freedom and double motivation, the interesting suggestion of Mogyoródi (1996) that appropriation, which implies freedom, is crucial: see also below, Ch. 6. In the parodos of the *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon is presented as reviewing the two options that stand open to him (Aesch. *Ag.* 206 ff.),

and human, external and internal impetus, Eteocles shows himself 'der erste 'tragische' Mensch der Weltdichtung'.[51] No character in extant tragedy presents a more acute case of the mortal agent standing at the interface between supernatural causation and human action, where causal determinants of various kinds and differently construed necessities combine to bring about a fateful act.[52]

In the stasimon 720–91, the chorus contextualizes the clash of the brothers at greater length, appealing to the twin principles of curse and guilt invoked by Eteocles in the previous episode.[53] They relate first the curse of Oedipus and then the 'ancient transgression' of Laius, which led to his death by his son's hand (751 f.). The last two strophic pairs narrate the fall of Oedipus as an instance of the destruction attendant on *ὄλβος ἄγαν παχυνθείς* (771: 'over-fattened prosperity'): the prosperous and successful destroyer of the Sphinx later perished himself, and his Erinys is now set to visit on his sons a further disaster (790–1, where *τρέω* picks up the opening *πέφρικα* of 720). The family unit, riddled with interconnected woes, is a locus not of prosperity and positive *φιλία* but of the dangerous and destructive throughout its generations: *ὦ |πόνοι δόμων νέοι παλαι–| οῖσι συμμιγεῖς κακοῖς* (739–41: 'O new sufferings of the house intermingled with old misfortunes'). The fatherhood of Laius is perverted, and so also is that of Oedipus. Sure enough, the messenger in the next episode announces that whilst the city is saved, Apollo has brought home to the scions of Oedipus *παλαιὰς Λαΐου δυσβουλίας* (801–2: 'the ancient unwisdoms of Laius'). They have indeed divided their substance with Scythian iron (818–19), fulfilling their father's curse in a fate all too communal (*δαίμων κοινὸς . . . ἀμφοῖν ἄγαν*

before putting on the *ἀνάγκας . . . λέπαδνον* ('yoke-strap of necessity'), which may be viewed as a similar appropriation. Of course, for Eteocles in the *Septem* there is no directly comparable explicit review of options. Whether or not in the last analysis we believe that the so-called 'decision-scene' in the *Septem* does represent a decision, I stress that the review of alternatives undertaken by Agamemnon in the *Agamemnon* has no counterpart here. For the implications of the view that Agamemnon in the *Agamemnon* passage 'has no choice', see Lloyd-Jones (1962), 191 ff.

[51] Regenbogen, quoted by Williams (1993), 137, in the course of a discussion of the 'apparent unintelligibility' of the operation of necessity in this passage, which does not, Williams argues, simply represent a decision.

[52] See further below, Ch. 6.

[53] Cf. Romilly (1971), 56: 'leur chant remonte alors aux origins du mal, c'est-à-dire à Laios'.

814).[54] The following ode is again full of these same two concerns, the curse (832 f.) and Laius' disobedience, which for a third time is described as folly (750 ∼ 802 ∼ 842). The witlessness of the grandfather is carried through into the 'madness' both of Oedipus (781) and of the brothers (686, 875 etc.).[55] These verbal connections are highly suggestive of the workings of moral inheritance within the family. Successive generations of Labdacids not only repeat (albeit with variations) the misfortunes of their forebears: they display, the chorus suggests, repeated patterns of folly and witlessness on account of which they incur these disasters.[56]

We have discerned above, in our consideration of the *Agamemnon*, a play of similarity and difference in the repeated crimes of the Tantalids. A similar tension is evident in this passage: it is not only negative characteristics that have been inherited. For all that Laius and Oedipus partake of a similarly perverted fatherhood, and for all that Oedipus and his sons may be called 'mad', Oedipus is a paradigm of cleverness no less than of folly, just as Eteocles is presented in this play as a compound of quick wit and insanely destructive and polluting desire. There resurfaces in the person of Eteocles, then, not only ancestral folly but also ancestral intelligence. This dual inheritance of the Labdacids enriches and complicates the pathos of the play, adding a further poignancy to the continuing disasters of the family of Laius: these men who are going to their doom in the footsteps of their ancestors are not mere fools.

In the succeeding laments, all is familial. The emphasis falls so heavily on the deed of fratricide that the salvation of the city seems to

[54] In citing this speech of the Messenger (811 ff.), I follow the numeration of Page's OCT.

[55] Cf. Bacon (1964), 27 f.: 'The defiance of Eteocles and Polyneices is also compared by verbal echoes to the defiance of Laius.' Bacon adduces the further correspondence 842 ∼ 846: ἄπιστοι (of Laius) ∼ ἄπιστον (of Eteocles and Polyneices).

[56] See also the treatment of moral inheritance in Dover (1974), 83–95. Add to his φύσις-passages (i) (in favour of the importance of φύσις) Soph. frr. 567, 808 Radt; and (ii) (against its importance) fr. 667: πολλῶν δ' ἐν πολυπληθίᾳ πέλεται | οὔτ' ἀπ' εὐγενέων ἐσθλὸς οὔτ' ἀχρείων | γόνος ἀεὶ κακός· βροτῶν δὲ πιστὸν οὐδέν ('Among the multiplicity of the many the descendant of noble men is not always good and that of useless people is not always bad; nothing about mortals can be trusted,' tr. Lloyd-Jones; but note that γόνος ἀεί is an emendation of Lloyd-Jones for τὸ λίαν)—a sentiment directly contrary to the atmosphere of the end of the *Septem*.

count for comparatively little beside it.[57] The opposition between Eteocles and Polyneices that reaches its height at the end of the *Redepaare* now collapses utterly, and nothing more is said of the relative justice or piety of the two opposed causes. They are so closely joined in their terrible fate that they are barely distinguishable, barely individuated. This unification reaches a head in the noble passage 961–1004, where the intimate interconnection of the two scions of Oedipus approaches the point of identity.

This consideration of the *Septem contra Thebas* has shown the great, and even paramount, importance of moral inheritance in the second half of the tragedy. Suddenly Eteocles' Labdacid affiliations burst into the action, and remain there throughout the concluding scenes of play and trilogy. In our ignorance of the *Laius* and the *Oedipus*, which is almost total, we cannot comment on the implications for the trilogy of the *Septem*'s bi-partite structure: we must rest content with treating the play in isolation. It has emerged that the poet takes great pains to show the effect on Eteocles of his own heritage: the good leader is also the son of Oedipus. The explosive end of the shield scene marks the point at which this second aspect of Eteocles' nature is exposed, but not to the exclusion of his civic identity and the character that the poet has established in earlier scenes. If anything, Eteocles is one of the most sharply and economically delineated characters in Aeschylus, a character, we have argued, who remains quite consistent throughout. Indeed, the concept of atmosphere is usefully deployed here: what changes in the region of line 653—and we are certainly sensible of some change—is our perspective and our focus, not the substance of Eteocles. A theme is added to the mix as Eteocles goes to his death. But the predominant theme of the first half, the welfare of the state, is not subtracted. It is this addition of familial concerns that accounts for the dark pall that hangs over the closing scenes of the play and trilogy.

But, granted that moral inheritance is important, what exactly is inherited? It appears that Eteocles inherits not only Thebes, but the folly or madness, or at any rate the blighted disposition of choice, that drives him to an act of self-destruction and fratricide. Suggestive

[57] I say nothing of the πόλις-aspects of the *Antigone*-like scene 1005–*fin.*, which, following the modern consensus, I consider spurious.

verbal connections and connections of thought, we have argued, show that Eteocles is an Oedipus- and Laius-like figure in this relevant respect. The *Septem* presents his death and that of his brother as lamentable and horrifying, certainly; but the deaths are neither baseless nor random. Aeschylus, always concerned to explore the implications of mortal decision making and human action under the canopy of the divine, is at great pains to suggest that the misery of the *Septem* is not causeless, but rather the logical working-out of the past in the person of Eteocles, the grandson of Laius.[58] Not only does misery beget misery: from the perspective of agency and responsibility, crime, as we have said, begets crime.

The *Phoenissae* of Euripides is a very different play.[59] The author of the Aristophanic hypothesis identifies the *Septem* as its source: ἡ μυθοποιία κεῖται παρ' Αἰσχύλῳ ἐν Ἑπτὰ ἐπὶ Θήβας πλὴν τῆς Ἰοκάστης ('The invention of the story lies with Aeschylus in the *Seven against Thebes*, except Jocasta', Hypothesis (g) Diggle (OCT) 3–4). A further scrap of prefatory material expresses displeasure with the play's structure: it is παραπληρωματικόν ('overfull'), says the author. He censures the *teichoscopia* of Antigone, the Polyneices-scene and the exile of Oedipus, apparently on the grounds that they are inorganic (μέρος οὐκ ἔστι δράματος . . . οὐδενὸς ἕνεκα . . . προσέρραπται διὰ κενῆς: 'It is not part of the drama . . . for no good reason . . . it has been stitched on in a futile fashion', Hypothesis (c) Diggle (OCT) 2–5).[60] The choruses, moreover, have attracted criticism both in antiquity and more recently.[61] A recent rehabilitator has taken an important step in observing that the play is not a failed attempt at a

[58] Aeschylus' obsessive concern with human decision making is examined below, Ch. 6.

[59] Cf. Goossens (1962), 620–22: 'Rien de plus different que les deux tragédies que nous avons sur le mythe des Sept.' Goossens's view of Euripides' one-upmanship with respect to Aeschylus is rather naïve and simplistic: we shall see that the *Phoenissae* does not crudely attempt to trump the *Septem*, but engages with it in a highly subtle and sophisticated way.

[60] So Craik (1988), 162: 'The critic seems to be troubled by interpretation rather than authenticity.'

[61] πρὸς οὐδὲν ταῦτα . . . τὰ περὶ Οἰδίπουν καὶ τὴν Σφίγγα διηγεῖται τὰ πολλάκις εἰρημένα (*Σ* third stasimon: 'These things are to no purpose. . . . The material about Oedipus and the Sphinx relates things that have been said many times'). Modern times: Mastronarde (1994), *ad locc.*, quotes Hermann's disapproval of the first stasimon: 'Hanc neminem defensurum nedum laudaturum arbitror'; and of the second: 'Tumidissimum inani verborum strepitu carmen.'

second *Septem*, but rather is written on very different principles, emphasizing diversification and multi-directionality rather than simplicity.[62] Three relevant differences are immediately visible between Aeschylus' and Euripides' treatments:

(i) The only Labdacid present on stage in Aeschylus is Eteocles. In the *Phoenissae*, Oedipus, Jocasta, Antigone, and Polyneices are introduced as characters, not to mention other related figures.

(ii) The *Septem* has a simple and tightly controlled bi-partite structure, emphasizing first πόλις and later blighted family. However, in the middle of the *Phoenissae*, attention veers sharply away from the doomed royal house towards the voluntary self-sacrifice of Menoeceus in the interests of the city as a whole, only to return to the Labdacids later. Thus the play has something of a triptychal effect.

(iii) Aeschylus makes Eteocles himself the first to state that a curse and a transgression bear on his personal calamity. Only afterwards does the chorus of the *Septem* begin to contextualize it. In the *Phoenissae*, on the other hand, it is largely in Jocasta's prologue and the first four choral odes that the familial background to the action is related. Moreover, the myth–historical elements in the Euripidean choruses are far more luxuriant and profuse than those in the Aeschylean.[63] It has even been thought that the tainted history of house and city in the *Phoenissae* is distanced from the stage-action and relegated to only tangential relevance in choral odes that are simply interludes.

All three differences may be said to fall on the side of greater complexity: the earlier play seems much simpler by comparison.

[62] Mastronarde (1994), 3 ff., identifying the mode of composition as 'open' rather than 'closed': 'The open structure is not to be viewed as a failed effort at closed structure, but rather as a divergent choice that consciously plays against the world-view of closure and simple order.' This magnifies the difficulty of detecting extended interpolations on structural grounds: Euripidean canons of relevance in this play are inclusive enough to make it difficult to say with any certainty that a given passage is spurious because inorganic. On interpolation in the *Phoenissae*, see further Fraenkel (1963), esp. 120.

[63] Euripides undoubtedly welcomes the element of the bizarre inherent in the tales of Spartoi and Sphinx, not least for its exotic and ornamental effect. But we shall show that these elements are more than *mere* ornament.

I shall suggest that each of these differences has a bearing on the interpretation of inherited guilt in the tragedy. Euripides' response to Aeschylus, we shall see, involves a very different approach both to mortal agency and to familial disaster.

Jocasta's prologue gives familial background in typically Euripidean fashion, but gives it from the perspective of deep personal engagement. Her narrative is riddled with first-person verbs and pronouns (10, 12, 13 etc.). Laius is *οὐμὸς πόσις* (35: 'my husband'). Oedipus is *τὸν ἐμὸν ὠδίνων πόνον* (30: 'the labour of my own birth-pangs'), *παῖς οὐμός* (33: 'my son') and *ἐμὸς παῖς Οἰδίπους* (50: 'my son Oedipus'). He is *τάλας* in killing his father and marrying his mother (53), while he has cast on their children *ἀρὰς . . . ἀνοσιωτάτας* (67: 'most unholy curses'). The whole account ends with an impassioned prayer to save 'us' (85). She does touch on the first arrival at Thebes of its founder Cadmus, great-great-grandfather of Oedipus, and calls it an unhappy day (4–5). Most of her attention, however, is paid to the story from Laius onwards, including his *ἁμπλάκημα* ('transgression') in disobeying an unequivocally imperative Delphic oracle:

> *μὴ σπεῖρε τέκνων ἄλοκα δαιμόνων βίᾳ·*
> *εἰ γὰρ τεκνώσεις παῖδ', ἀποκτενεῖ σ' ὁ φύς,*
> *καὶ πᾶς σὸς οἶκος βήσεται δι' αἵματος.*
>
> (18–20)

Do not sow a furrow of children against the will of the gods: for if you beget a son, your offspring will kill you, and all your house will wade through blood.

Apollo leaves no doubt that transgression will lead to general misfortune for the family. As so often in Greek tragedy, we are left wondering, not whether these bloody misfortunes will ensue, but rather how they will be worked out. Oedipus' curse on his sons is also explicitly given, in a line strongly reminiscent of the curse in the *Septem* (*Septem* 727 ff. etc.): *θηκτῷ σιδήρῳ δῶμα διαλαχεῖν τόδε* (68: 'to divide this house with whetted iron'). It was in fear of this outcome that Eteocles and Polyneices were led to seek their unsuccessful compromise, their attempt to frustrate the curse by alternating the kingship of Thebes year by year.[64] Jocasta herself is trying for

[64] The brothers' compromise agreement may be a Euripidean innovation: cf. Mastronarde (1994), 26–7. There is no explicit mention of such an agreement in

a resolution (81 ff.). In assigning to her the role of mediator, a role quite absent from the *Septem*, Euripides perhaps takes his hint from the appearance of the mother of Eteocles and Polyneices in the Lille Stesichorus (fr. 222(b) Davies). Her influence pervades the present play, and her inclusion as a stage actor complicates the dramatic effect considerably. Jocasta is not a distant, dead, and vaguely apprehended source of misfortune, but an engaged, suffering and sometimes vocal character. Her attempts to mediate in the first episode reach a pitch of pitiful anguish at the end of the *agon* (618 ff.), where she has no option but to warn them helplessly of their 'father's Erinys'. In the fourth episode, she heightens the sense of urgency. Apprehensive for the brothers' lives, she hastens off to make a last and desperate attempt at reconciliation: *ὡς, ἢν μὲν φθάσω | παῖδας πρὸ λόγχης, οὐμὸς ἐν φάει βίος* (1280–1: 'since, if I reach my children before their duel, my life is saved'). Finally, in the fifth episode, the second messenger relates her suicide as a sequel to her sons' mutual slaughter—*καὶ τὰ πρὸς τούτοις κακά* (1427: 'and the further misfortunes')—extending the catastrophe back into the previous generation. *πᾶς . . . οἶκος* ('the whole house') does indeed wade through blood, as Apollo warned. Jocasta's bond with Eteocles is affirmed by the wordless touch of his *ὑγρὰν χέρα* (1439: 'his enfeebled hand') and that with Polyneices by his dying speech. Her final act, *περιβαλοῦσ' **ἀμφοῖν** χέρας* (1459: 'casting her arms about them both'), heightens and complicates the emotional effect of their unification in death, adding an element absent from and quite foreign to the lamentation at the end of the *Septem*. The steady and dignified closural movement of the Aeschylean play leaves no room for anything like this surprising, pathetic, and indeed rather overwrought Euripidean touch.[65]

the *Septem* (unlike Stes. fr. 222(b) Davies 220–24, where the mother of the two brothers suggests that they draw lots, one holding the house and Thebes, the other taking their father's money). In the earlier play, our sympathies lie very much with Eteocles, while in the *Phoenissae* he is clearly in the wrong on this point, though whether Polyneices is right to bring an invading army to claim his due is a different question. The brothers' compromise, leading to their quarrel, is of course an instance of that ironic fulfilment so characteristic of tragedy: without the agreement, which was intended to obviate the curse (cf. also 473–80), Eteocles could not renege; and, if Eteocles could not renege, the brothers would never meet in single combat. Thus the curse is fulfilled by the very means intended to negate it.

[65] My position on *Septem* 1005–*fin.* is given above, n. 57.

It is one thing for Aeschylus' mourners to couple Eteocles and Polyneices verbally, and another for Jocasta to perform a physical unification through her own moribund body, palpably yoking both the two men and two generations of the house.

The appearance of Oedipus at the end of the play is another surprise for the spectator familiar with the *Septem*. Here too we see Euripides diversifying his theme and complicating Aeschylus' relatively simple picture. The mentions of Oedipus at the end of Aeschylus' trilogy identify him chiefly as an initiator of curses, an incestuous abomination and a source of misfortune. But the Euripidean Oedipus is to some extent a victim in his own right. In the exodos, he is driven from his home by Creon in a scene that recalls Creon's firm treatment of him at the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[66] The new ruler will not have him stay at Thebes any longer: Teiresias has prophesied that the *polis* will never prosper if Oedipus stays (1590 f.), and Creon is in fear for the land διὰ . . . τοὺς ἀλάστορας | τοὺς σούς (1593–4: 'on account of your avenging spirits').[67] As in Sophocles, here we can hardly avoid feeling a measure of pity for this polluter, this danger to the safety of the country. Antigone shows obvious compassion for her father, and he repeatedly professes his own wretchedness (1595 f., 1599, 1608 etc.). Of course, he is not purely a victim. Antigone, anticipating Creon, also speaks of

[66] The authenticity of all or part of this scene has been called into question by scholars. At the very extreme of suspicion, some, like Diggle, delete all of 1582–*fin.* Mastronarde (1994), 591–4, discusses the various arguments. As he notes, at 593, '[D]oubted passages make a real difference to how the scene develops and ends'; but I do not know of any persuasive arguments for wholesale deletion of the scene. To speak at the most general level, it seems to me that the absence from the *Phoenissae* of any and all interaction between Oedipus and Creon and Oedipus and Antigone would constitute a substantial diminution of both the richness and the completeness of the familial picture that the poet is at pains to draw. For one of the defining differences between this play and the *Septem* is precisely its greater inclusiveness and its concern to portray the impact of the stage-action on as many members of the House of Oedipus as possible. It might be thought more likely than not that the poet who gives such a prominent role to Jocasta will also give at least some role in the exodos to her husband and son, who is at least as crucial to the *praxis* as his wife and mother. But such an argument is, of course, far from decisive.

[67] As well as the echoes of Soph. *OT*, the exodos as transmitted also echoes Sophocles' *Antigone* (and the probably interpolated end of the *Septem*), in that Antigone temporarily resists Creon's edict that Polyneices be left unburied. If this passage or the substance of it is indeed by Euripides, it is a further move towards comprehensiveness in the treatment of his theme.

σὸς ἀλάστωρ (1556: 'your avenging spirit') as the cause of his sons' deaths. And he himself acknowledges, albeit with regret, that he has destroyed his own children, ἀρὰς παραλαβὼν Λαΐου καὶ παισὶ δούς ('having received Laius' curses and passed them on to my children'), though this was not compassed ἄνευ θεῶν (1611 ff.: 'without the gods').[68] By his own admission, then, Oedipus is both the dangerous and powerful presence that Creon takes him to be and the very present and concrete link in the chain of familial misfortune from Laius to Eteocles and Polyneices. In making his Oedipus both horrifying and pitiable, Euripides extracts from his *praxis* every possible ounce of pathos, bringing before the audience of this Labdacid play as many Labdacids as possible. The introduction of Oedipus, then, no less than the introduction of Jocasta, indicates the gulf that separates Euripides' conception of his subject from Aeschylus'. Aeschylus brings the whole weight of the past to bear on Eteocles, making the sorrows of the house converge in a single member on stage: Euripides traces their ramifications through multiple interacting characters as they work out in concert the doom that they all share.

The notion of inherited guilt that is alluded to by Oedipus here in the exodos does not figure largely in the earlier spoken portions of the play. There is nothing comparable with the Aeschylean 'decision'-scene of Eteocles, no similar appropriation of compelling supernatural factors on the part of a single individual. In the first episode, Jocasta mentions to Polyneices the circumstances of his inauspicious birth, but is fatalistic about it: one must bear what the gods ordain (379–82). Shortly afterwards, in the first *rhesis* of the *agon*, Polyneices mentions Oedipus' curse on his sons and its role in prompting him to go into exile (473–80), but does not speak of an inherited taint as such. A more explicit mention of supernatural problems in the family is found at 624:

[68] Mastronarde (1994), *ad* 1611, enumerates three possible interpretations of the line: (i) it glances back to a curse of Pelops and thus the Chrysippus-myth; (ii) it is evidence for a curse pronounced by Laius on his son; (iii) 'curses' is to be taken generally of familial misfortune. In the absence of any good internal evidence for (i) or (ii), I accept the third interpretation. For questions relating to the Peisander scholion and the Chrysippus myth, see Ch. 3.

Io. πατρὸς οὐ φεύξεσθ' Ἐρινῦς; *Po.* ἐρρέτω πρόπας δόμος.

Joc.: Will you not avoid your father's Erinyes? Pol.: Let the whole house perish.

But the hint that Erinyes or related strands of causation might have a bearing on either of the brothers' motivations is not developed. Teiresias ascribes to the sons a foolish error in their treatment of their father (ἥμαρτον ἀμαθῶς), which precipitated the curse and will lead to their deaths (872 ff.). This recalls the semantic field of Laius' ἁμπλάκημα in disobeying the oracle and begetting a son, an 'error' committed when he gave in to pleasure in his cups (21–3): there is folly in both generations.[69] In the exodos, moreover, Oedipus says that he is not so ἀσύνετος ('stupid') as to be ignorant of the role of the gods in his misfortune: he is eager to mention that he is not the fool that he might be taken for. There is in this play, it seems, a suggestion of familial continuity in folly similar to that found in the *Septem*—a hint of similar vocabulary applied to different generations, all of whom are similarly doomed. Here again we are invited to think in terms of moral inheritance across the generations of the house, each generation's folly leading to the destruction of the perpetrator.[70] It is in the working-out of this folly that Euripides' interpretation differs from that of Aeschylus. But before this process is traced through to the sons of Oedipus, it is necessary to look to the choruses. Far from allowing the audience welcome intervals of peaceful wool-gathering, these masterful odes encompass in their broad chronological sweep 'a survey of the history of Thebes'; and they 'explain t[he] connection between the city's present ills and the conditions of its formation.'[71]

The chorus in this play are further removed from the action than the Theban women of the *Septem*, in that they are Phoenician maidens, not Thebans, and are passing through the city *en route* elsewhere. But there is a tie of blood: they too are children of Io, and therefore κοινὰ . . . φίλων ἄχη (243: 'the woes of friends are shared'), as they sing in the parodos. They have heard enough of the history of the city, albeit in their foreign tongue (819), to contextualize and

[69] 'In his cups': reading βακχείαν 21.

[70] Here too, as in the *Septem*, there is a suggestion of a dual inheritance: the Oedipus of the *Phoenissae*, like the Oedipus of the *Septem*, is simultaneously foolish and wise.

[71] Arthur (1977), 163.

comment on the action. At the same time, they remain distant enough from the perils of Thebes not to fall headlong into panic at the prospect of the enemy at the gates. In other words, they combine alterity with community. 'It is the chorus, "marginal", transient, and alien though it is, rather than any of the play's protagonists, who bring to this imagined world and its terrible events the ballast of memory.'[72] Their odes form a sequence that begins with the prehistory of Thebes, takes in Cadmus, the Sphinx and Oedipus, and culminates in an anticipation of the duel between Eteocles and Polyneices. Cadmus' arrival, we learn in the first stasimon, fulfilled an oracle of Apollo (638 ff.), one of the many Delphic pronouncements that run through the play.[73] This, the first object of the chorus' reflections, is the moment the significance of which Teiresias will later identify: it is the source of the wrath of Ares that must be propitiated by the sacrifice of Menoeceus (931 ff.). Already the chorus has provided important background to the action. Next they relate the internecine killings of the Spartoi (670 ff.). This provides a first slaughterous taint in the bloodline, more generally applicable to the *polis* than the specifically Labdacid woes of the prologue and first episode. This incident, which falls between the first and second episodes, is directly relevant to the public aspect of the stage-action in both the second and the third episodes. These episodes, unlike both those preceding and those following, concern themselves more with the state and its salvation than with narrow familial issues. The second stasimon, after a decidedly martial episode, begins with Ares and concludes both strophe and antistrophe with the familial Eris that afflicts the present kings. The antistrophe progresses through Oedipus to the danger once posed to the city by the Sphinx, who assailed the walls much as the Argives do now. From there the chorus' attention reverts to the present δυσδαίμων . . . ἔρις ἄλλα . . . παίδων Οἰδιπόδα κατὰ δώματα καὶ πόλιν (811–13: '*another* ill-starred strife of the sons of Oedipus in their house and in the city'). However much editors would excise from Oedipus' part in the exodos, he is a significant and ineradicable

[72] Gould (1996), 225.

[73] Apollo's oracle to Laius is retailed by Jocasta in the prologue; the oracle to Adrastus at 409 ff.; and the oracle to Oedipus in the third stasimon (1043 ff.).

presence in this ode. The epode freewheels through the generations, from the Spartoi, *Θήβαις κάλλιστον ὄνειδος* (821: 'fairest of reproaches to Thebes'), via Amphion's raising of the walls, back to Io again: the early history of the bloodline exerts an inescapable gravitational pull. Whereas the structure of the stage-action at this point in the play relegates familial problems to second place, in this chorus private and public interpenetrate. Thebes, no less than the Labdacids, has its own ancestral taint, and the two are not easily separated. After all, the house of which Oedipus' sons are the latest generation is a royal house. As is often the case in tragedy, the troubles of the *oikos* that stands at the head of the *polis* are inseparable from wider civic disaster. Thus, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus is not only the conscientious ruler, the public-spirited king making great efforts to scout out the pollution afflicting his land and people: he is also, when viewed under his familial aspect, its incestuous source. Aeschylus, I have argued, does not insist on this interconnection in the same way. In what remains of his trilogy, the earlier poet is more interested in the three generations of Labdacids and their successive disasters than in the *polis* over which these infatuated monarchs preside: to some extent the structure of the *Septem* even separates the two. In the *Oresteia*, too, the strongly Athenian civic aspect of the *Eumenides* is far more prominent than any engagement with the well-being of the Argive *πόλις* in the first two plays.[74]

The third stasimon opens with a Euripidean misdirection. Menoeceus has departed nobly to the death that he has elected to face, and the chorus begins: *ἔβας ἔβας* (1019: 'You came, you came'). But the progress of the sentence reveals that its subject is not the youth but the Sphinx. For a moment the second-person verb engenders the sense that Menoeceus must be meant: the audience will initially expect to hear his eulogy. As the sentence unfolds, however, it

[74] The clue to this difference may lie in part in the suggestion that the Thebes of tragedy is often the locus *par excellence* of the deviant and transgressive, whereas Athens is the site of resolution and salvation: cf. Zeitlin (1986). So e.g. Oedipus in Soph. *OC* ends his troubled wanderings at Colonus. But the distinction between a suffering *people* of Thebes in Sophocles and Euripides and a frightened but unblighted Aeschylean populace remains valid. (Of course, this is not to deny the presence of a tyranny and liberation motif in Aeschylus' *Choephori*—cf. *Cho.* 302ff., 973 etc.; but I do insist that in that play there is a less marked emphasis on public matters.)

becomes clear that what is apparently an immediate reaction to the present action—'You went, you went!'—is in fact a reminiscence of a past disaster—'You came, you came, [o Sphinx].'[75] It is only at the end of the ode that the boy's self-sacrifice will be praised. First we must hear of another danger overcome, Oedipus' victory over the Sphinx, *καλλίνικος ὢν αἰνιγμάτων* (1048–9: 'triumphantly defeating the riddles'), and of the incest and pollution of the city that this victory brings in its wake. Oedipus' curse on his sons is indeed alluded to here, but in passing (1053–4). Only now comes the expected praise of Menoeceus: the maidens commiserate with his father Creon and hope that they may bear such noble children themselves. Thus admirable and deviant children are starkly juxtaposed: the cursed Eteocles and Polyneices are implicitly contrasted with the selfless Menoeceus. Again the familial and the civic cannot be separated. We cannot think of Menoeceus and Creon without thinking of Oedipus, another saviour of the city, it is true, but ultimately an ambivalent benefactor, whose own parenthood no maiden in her right mind would wish to emulate.

With this choric mention of the curse of Oedipus, the historical progression of the choruses concludes. The historical odes have now come to the point of enmeshing the Theban past with the present course of the stage-action: in a little while, at the end of the subsequent episode, Jocasta will depart in the attempt to forestall the very curse that has just been mentioned. Accordingly, the one remaining extended song of the chorus, the fourth stasimon, makes 'only the barest explicit reference to the past'.[76] All the foreign maidens' detachment is replaced with intense emotional engagement: they tremble and feel the stab of pity (1285–7). It is fitting that these cataloguers of familial woe should conclude their song with the word *'Ερινύων* (1307), which, in a different grammatical case, was also Jocasta's last word in the *agon*-scene (624).

On the strength of these choruses alone, the *Phoenissae* both demands and repays close study as an examination of the intricate interplay of similarity and difference within successive generations,

[75] *Pace* Mastronarde (1994), *ad loc.*, who sees no ambiguity. The misdirection requires only that *βαίνω* be able to bear the sense of 'go' no less than 'come', which of course it can (LSJ s.v.).

[76] Mastronarde (1994), *ad loc.*

all of them subject to repeated transgression and repeated misfortune. In this respect we may discern a greater intricacy in the present play than in the *Septem*. As I have argued, Aeschylus pursues in that play simplicity rather than multi-directionality, and he does not allow such an intimate and complex interpenetration of family and state. Thus he does not, for example, give a prominent role to the Spartoi, nor does he dwell on the notion that the whole πόλις of Thebes is thoroughly tainted from its very inception.[77] Heredity is the choric armature of the *Phoenissae*, the framework that articulates and informs the text. The final birth in the choral odes is the signal for Eteocles and Polyneices to begin their duel to the death. There is no vestige here of Aeschylus' almost total suppression of family in the first half of the *Septem* and that play's subsequent and explosive familial *anagnorisis*. The closing tragedy of Aeschylus' connected trilogy is a very different creation from Euripides' single, long, and 'open' tragedy, which condenses into a single play enough generational matter from the myth to fill a trilogy in its own right.[78]

It remains to consider the appearances of Eteocles and Polyneices in the play. Here, if anywhere, Euripides' constant engagement with the *Septem* is manifest. The second episode shows an Eteocles far removed from the able and imperturbable general and leader of Aeschylus. Here he is dependent for strategic advice on Creon, who

[77] Of course, these elements are not totally absent from Aeschylus' play: the first word of the *Septem* is *Κάδμου; σπαρτῶν . . . ἀνδρῶν* ('the Spartoi') are mentioned at 412; and the Sphinx appears on Parthenopaeus' shield (539 ff.) and briefly in the contextualizing ode at 720 ff. But none of these appearances approaches the sustained thematic importance of these elements in the *Phoenissae*. It is symptomatic that Aeschylus appears to have relegated the Sphinx to the place of his satyr-play. The play of Aeschylus that offers the closest parallel for the kind of multiplicity that I discern in the *Phoenissae* is not the *Septem* but the *Agamemnon*.

[78] It has been argued that the *Phoenissae* was the third member of a connected trilogy *Oenomaus–Chrysippus–Phoenissae*. The corrupt and fragmentary Aristophanic hypothesis with its *καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα ὁ Οἰνόμαος καὶ Χρύσιππος καὶ <> σῴζεται* ('and indeed Oenomaus and Chrysippus . . . <> preserved') is not decisive either way, but if anything the nominatives count against a connected trilogy. Here those who propound one must surely pine for datives. Mastronarde (1994), 31 ff., makes the further point that the *Phoenissae* makes no unambiguous internal reference to the Chrysippus-story. Oedipus' mention in the exodos of his *passing on* a curse from his father to his children is not, I have argued, at all conclusive. It can be stated with some confidence that, even if the *Phoenissae* was third in a loosely connected trilogy, then that trilogy was constructed on very different principles from the Theban tetralogy of Aeschylus.

is responsible for setting a champion at each of the seven gates and for the criteria to be used in appointing them (734 ff.). To Creon also falls the task of consulting Teiresias, for Eteocles has offended him: here too his less than perfect competence as a leader compels him to delegate one of his essential responsibilities. This is the same Eteocles who has reneged on his agreement with his brother (74 ff.). In the *agon*-scene, moreover, it is he who is in a furious rage, with δεινὸν ὄμμα καὶ θυμοῦ πνοάς (454: 'dreadful aspect and breaths of rage'). His antagonist Polyneices is not the bogeyman of the *Septem*, but if anything a sympathetic figure. Indeed, the first portion of the first episode (261–445) allows him to present himself unopposed as a reasonable and a wronged man, οὐ δικαίως ἀπελαθείς (369: 'unjustly driven out'). He has suffered all the humiliations of exile (388 ff.). And when he does return to his native city, he must come tearfully (366 ff.), sword in hand for fear of guileful attacks. Euripides thus markedly alters the balance of our sympathies between the two brothers—an important aspect of his very different presentation of what it is to labour under an inherited taint.

It is hard to imagine how the *Septem* could have included anything like Euripides' *agon* between the brothers without a drastic modification of its dramatic economy. The Aeschylean Polyneices does, of course, claim δίκη for himself, but he remains a clamouring presence outside the walls. The closest he comes to arousing our sympathies is when he and his brother are pitifully joined in death: until his individuation breaks down, he remains a horrifying threat to the much more sympathetic Eteocles. Conversely, there is no room in the *Phoenissae* for Aeschylus' so-called 'decision' of Eteocles.[79] In that scene, our focus is on one of the brothers as the individual agent who aligns internal with external necessity. This is a characteristically Aeschylean presentation of the workings of divine causation on the doomed descendant of the blighted Oedipus. Euripides is not greatly concerned with the particular kind of moral inheritance depicted there—not for him the cursed and guilt-inheriting Eteocles who holds within himself the impulse to appropriate his curse and willingly enact it. It is true that at *Phoenissae* 624 (quoted above) Polyneices in some sense appropriates the curse of his father at the end of

[79] On which see further below, Ch. 3 and (esp.) Ch. 6.

the *agon*-scene. But this is the culmination of his lively and deeply acrimonious trochaic wrangling with his brother. Euripides does not share Aeschylus' profound anxiety about the agency of the individual mortal: his version of moral inheritance is rather more interpersonally conceived. He explores the tendency of the house as a whole to destroy itself through strife between its members, which is a very different matter from exploration of the agency of one such member. In this respect the *agon* of Eteocles and Polyneices is of a piece with the roles of Oedipus and Jocasta. To employ a metaphor from geometry, it might be said that the doom of the Labdacids in the *Septem* is a single point in the form of Eteocles, whereas their doom in the *Phoenissae* is a polygonal figure, depicting multi-directional interactions between the several members of the family who are introduced as characters. Euripides' concern is to show the brothers, who are sharply individuated one from the other, coming through an abusive exchange to the *mutually* satisfactory resolve to kill *one another*:

Πο. ἀντιτάξομαι κτενῶν σε. *Ετ. κἀμὲ τοῦδ' ἔρως ἔχει.* (622)

Pol.: I shall muster against you to slay you. Et.: I too yearn for this.

In the earlier part of their *agon*, the brothers are diametrically opposed not only in their claims, but also in their styles of self-defence: Polyneices presents himself as wronged but still unwilling to go as far as armed conflict, while Eteocles professes the injustice of his own position with a kind of savage nobility. Polyneices wants, he says, only his own due share (484 ff.), while Eteocles explicitly deifies Tyranny (504–6), and will do anything to keep hold of that great goddess, in whose name *ἀδικία* ('injustice') is as fine as it can be (524–5). After Jocasta's utterly futile attempt at mediation, and as the dialogue accelerates towards its conclusion, Polyneices calls successively on the various members of his family. He invokes not only his mother (612), but also his father (611) and his sisters (616–17), none of whom Eteocles will let him see. His thoughts as he stands on the point of departure are with his family and the *polis*. After these frustrated appeals, it is he, Polyneices, the unwilling enemy, who first suggests single combat with Eteocles. He has been wrought to such a pitch in the presence of his brother that he is no longer reluctant: now he will have blood. The two sons of Oedipus are

brought into a close union of murderous ἔρως. They are different men, Polyneices for the most part more appealing than Eteocles; but their behaviour when they meet proves that they share in equal measures Oedipus' tendency to destroy other members of the clan. Thus they are very much the sons of that unhappy father who has slain his own father and cursed his own children.

These two plays, I have argued, are both deeply engaged with problems of inherited guilt, but they manage their respective engagements in different ways. But have we lost sight of δίκη? There is no trace in these tragedies of the kind of divine justice that was visited by the god of the Hebrews on Sodom and Gomorrah, or on the disobedient wife of Lot. What has emerged within the limits of this consideration is a conjunction of inherited guilt with moral inheritance: in both authors, the doomed family's recurrent misfortunes through the generations are mediated not simply through some mysterious supernatural means, but at least in part through the recurrence of traits and modes of behaviour, which help to create the recurrent patterns of doom through intelligible continuities of human character and action. The workings of inherited guilt in Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas* and Euripides' *Phoenissae* are decidedly more human than the Solonian δίκη that strikes the innocent progeny of sinners, and against which Bion was later to protest.[80] The scions of Oedipus in both plays, I have argued, are not innocent victims of a cruel and scarcely explicable destiny. At the least, they throw themselves headlong into fratricide. At most, they gladly perpetuate and re-enact their family's gruesome internecine history, showing themselves true and fitting Labdacids.

We have found that the study of inherited guilt, if it is to do justice to the richness and complexity of these texts, must take account of the intimate and indissoluble connection between the dramatic and emotional aspect of tragedy and its conceptual burden. The tragedians do not examine inherited guilt aridly or in a vacuum: they weave it into the structure of their plays, introducing it at crucial moments and making it a central part of the emotional dynamics of the texts. As our enquiry proceeds, we shall find that this is no less true of curses in tragedy, to which we now turn.

[80] On protests against the doctrine of inherited guilt, see above, n. 45.

3

Curses

The previous chapter's investigation of inherited guilt has touched on curses in tragedy. Curses and taints of guilt are often, but not always, found in conjunction, and sometimes an intimate conjunction. Thus the Agamemnon of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* labours both under a taint of inherited guilt in virtue of Atreus' murder of the children of Thyestes and under Thyestes' curse on the whole family, a direct consequence of the same act of murder. Similarly, the Eteocles of the *Septem contra Thebas*, in desiring his brother's death, not only re-enacts the guilt of Laius and Oedipus, but also fulfils his father's curse. In Euripides' *Phoenissae*, the same is true of both Eteocles and Polyneices, though the working-out of the process is differently presented. Starting from this point, this chapter begins by distinguishing the concept of a curse from that of inherited guilt. It will then endeavour to identify the essence of the tragic curse by means of a thought-experiment involving the substitution of *defixiones* (the so-called 'curse-tablets' or 'binding spells') in some tragic passages where in fact we find curses. We shall then proceed to the main objects of this enquiry. I have argued that tragic inherited guilt involves considerable moral complexity on account of the parallelism between inherited doom and inherited character-traits and dispositions of choice. Is the same true, it may be asked, of inherited curses? But before this question can be asked, it must be established what precisely we mean by an *inherited* curse as opposed to any other curse. And it must also be asked whether this special kind of curse is actually as common as first appearances might suggest, or whether it is a category that has been over-used by exegetes of Attic tragedy. This last question, as we shall see, involves an important point of critical

methodology: our consideration of tragic curses will raise a crucial issue concerning the hierarchy of interpretative priorities that we bring to our engagement with these texts. The investigation of curses thus strikes at the heart of the interpretation of tragedy.

A curse has been defined as 'a prayer that harm may befall someone', and indeed to treat curses as a species of prayer is fruitful.[1] A more nuanced definition of curses has been articulated by a New Testament scholar, who defines a curse as

> a directly expressed or indicated utterance which in virtue of a supernatural nexus of operation brings harm by its very expression to the one against whom it is directed. ... The curse can overlap with prayer if its fulfilment is thought to be so dependent on a deity that it must be committed to this deity, and it may even become a prayer if it is requested from the deity.[2]

These two definitions have in common the notion that a curse must be expressed or performed, so that a mere unspoken sentiment of ill-will is excluded from the realm of the curse. The second definition has the additional advantage of recognizing that the supernatural element of cursing may be implicit: not everything that we or the Greeks would call a curse explicitly invokes a divine or supernatural power. Thus Thyestes' curse as reported by Aegisthus at the end of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1600–02) involves a performative act of kicking over the table, but no direct invocation of any gods.[3] On the other hand, the mention of the supernatural in the definition implies an awareness that it is not profitable to treat as a curse proper such exclamations as *βάλλ' εἰς κόρακας* (e.g. Ar. *Nub.* 133: 'away with you, damn you!'). Utterances of this kind, in Greek as in English, do express a desire for the destruction of their object; but they do not

[1] M. West (1999), 31. For curses as prayers, cf. Burkert (1985), 73–5; Hesych. A 6921–2 s.v. *ἀρά*; and *Et. Gud.* s.v. *ἀρά*, suggesting an etymology *ἀπὸ τοῦ αἴρεσθαι τὰς χεῖρας ἐν τῷ εὔχεσθαι* ('from raising the hands in prayer'). It is a well-known lexical feature of Greek that certain words may mean both 'curse' and 'prayer'. *ἀρά*, *ἀράομαι*, and *ἀράτος*, *εὐχή* and *κατεύχομαι* can all refer to both cursing and praying, though some words compounded from the two roots are more specialized, e.g. *κατάρα* never = 'prayer', always 'curse'; *κατευχή* never = 'curse'. For an attempt to clarify the semantic fields of *εὔχομαι* and *ἀράομαι*, see Pulleyn (1997), 59–76, with doxography.

[2] Büschel (1964), 449.

[3] This curse is considered in detail below, p. 71 ff.

make any genuine appeal to the supernatural, nor are they buttressed by any real expectation that they will find fulfilment.[4]

If the quiddity of curses is to be identified in the context of Greek tragedy, they must be distinguished on the one hand from prayers in general and on the other from *defixiones*. It would be satisfyingly neat to draw the following distinction between cursing and binding. Curses, it might be claimed, characteristically constitute an appeal to the divine order that is governed and guaranteed by Olympian powers: they have been thought to work coextensively with an individual's rights, and to operate effectively only where injustice has been done.[5] *Defixiones*, on the other hand, appeal to a different order of things, in that they have a more chthonic aspect. But this simple formulation will of course not stand, for more than one reason. First, there are, it is true, many instances of efficacious curses that do serve to smite a wrongdoer. But equally, some curses work to the detriment of the innocent, or at least of those who are innocent in the respect relevant to the operation of the curse. Thus, in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Poseidon complies with Theseus' appeal that he fulfil one of the three curses that he has granted, though Hippolytus has in fact not laid violent hands on Phaedra, and Theseus' information is, unbeknown to him, nothing but the malevolent fiction of a disappointed woman.[6] Second, the simple distinction of order appealed to is by no means watertight: the Erinyes, powers conceived as enforcing curses, and sometimes even approaching the point of identity with them, have a very marked chthonic aspect.[7] But, even if they are not so easily distinguished, curses and *defixiones* do present discernibly

[4] Note, *à propos* of curses and prayers, the distinction drawn at Plut. *Alc.* 22.4, where the priestess Theano refuses to curse Alcibiades for profaning the Mysteries. She does so on the grounds that she is *εὐχῶν, οὐ καταρῶν, ἱέρεια* ('a priestess of prayers, not curses').

[5] Parker (1983), 197.

[6] The *Hippolytus* is treated in more detail below, p. 67. Nothing here is intended to deny that the three *arai* of Theseus in that play are exceptional.

[7] For the chthonic aspect cf. Burkert (1985), 200 n. 13, Hom. *Il.* 19. 259–60, Aesch. *Eum.* 395: *ὑπὸ χθόνα τάξιν ἔχουσα* ('having my appointed place below the earth'). For Erinyes and curses, cf. Aesch. *Septem* 70: *Ἀρά τ'Ἐρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής* ('and Curse, the mighty Erinys of my father'), id. *Eum.* 417: *Ἀραὶ δ' ἐν οἴκοις γῆς ὑπαὶ κεκλήμεθα* ('in our home beneath the earth we are called Curses'). For a fuller treatment of the nature, prerogatives and workings of Erinyes in tragedy, see below, Ch. 4.

different aspects: we sense some definite contrast in their nature and operation. It is worth pursuing this feeling in order to shed light on curses in tragedy, and on the virtual absence of *defixiones*.[8]

Defixiones certainly share with curses the intent to harm a victim or victims, and it is true that some of them constitute pleas for justice or vengeance.[9] But regardless of individual circumstances, the leverage that a *defixio* is supposed to exert and the mechanisms whereby it operates are distinct from those of a curse. Whereas the former is spoken aloud, or sometimes—in life but not in tragic texts—publicly inscribed, the *defixio* is a 'silent and lasting inscription . . . While the official cult always continues with the spoken word, the invocation of the written word is used to serve magical ends.'[10] Indeed, some tablets explicitly describe themselves as 'letters'.[11] Moreover, *voces mysticae, characteres*, and figurines, those peculiar and sometimes chilling features of the *defixio*, seem to suggest that the power of the gods above and their governance of human morality are insufficient to achieve the desired end, even where a wrong is thought to have been done.[12] Instead, the initiators have recourse to the gods below.[13]

[8] On the curse–*defixio* distinction, see further the helpful discussion of Graf (1997), 118–74. Ogden (2002), 210 gives a one-page summary of the properties of *defixiones*. Id., 210–26, gives a selection of *defixiones* in translation, with useful illustrations and limited commentary.

[9] E.g. *DTA* 98. 6–7: *ἀδικούμενος γὰρ ὑπὸ Εὐρυπτολέμου καὶ | Ξενοφῶντος καταδῶ αὐτούς* ('for being wronged by Euryptolemus and Xenophon I bind them down'); *DTA* 100. 11–12: *τούτους κολάζ(ϵ)τ(ϵ)* ('punish these people'); *DTA* 102. a.4, where *Δίκη* is invoked. See also, for examples in translation, Gager (1992), ch. 5; and see the study of Versnel (1991). Parker (1983), 198 with n. 46, cites some other *defixiones* specifying that the author has been wronged. He notes that some aggrieved people will in practice have resorted to both curse and *defixio*.

[10] Burkert (1985), 75. On the public nature of the curse and the private nature of the *defixio*, see further Graf (1997), 128 ff., with references.

[11] Cf. *DTA* 102. a.1–3: *'Επιστο{σ}λὴν | πέμπων | [δ]αίμο(σιν) κτλ.* ('sending a letter to the spirits').

[12] It should be said, of course, that the earliest tablets tend to be the simplest, while it is in the later examples that more elaboration is found and these devices are employed with increasing frequency: cf. Ogden (1999), 6–10 with refs. See also below, n. 25. But *voces mysticae* in magic are attested—albeit obliquely—as early as Eur. *IT* 1336ff., where Iphigenia's incantations include *βάρβαρα μέλη*, 'foreign songs': cf. Graf (1997), 218–19 with n. 29.

[13] In the Attic *defixiones* collected in *DTA*, Hermes is of all divine powers much the most frequently invoked, e.g. 84. b.2: *καταδῶ Τρύφωνα πρὸς τὸν 'Ερμῆν* ('by Hermes I bind down Tryphon'). He is sometimes addressed under the aspect of *κάτοχος*, e.g. 88; and often as *χθόνιος*, e.g. 83. *Γῆ*, Hecate, Persephone, the Erinyes, and the

In other instances, the notion of a demonstrable wrong, a balance needing to be redressed, seems to be very much subordinate to the natural, if discreditable, human desire to harm a rival by underhand means. *Defixiones* by no means always claim the moral high ground.[14] Many of the simplest give no indication of the reason for their writing.[15] It appears, then, that divine justice, in the sense in which it appears repeatedly in tragedy, is not the power, or rather order, to which the caster of the spell addressed himself. In this world, another sphere of influence is entered, one that has often been called magical. *Defixiones*, then, presuppose a *modus operandi* different from those presupposed by prayers and by curses.[16] No argument deployed here will depend upon the establishment of a satisfactory distinction between magic and religion, categories that do not appear to have been clearly distinguished at the time when our tragedies were composed.[17] Suffice it to say that marked differentia are identifiable between these two particular phenomena.

The mechanisms involved, though apparently pervasive in daily life from at least the fifth century BC to the end of classical antiquity, are not prominent in the world of tragedy. The specific magical elements found in *defixiones* are extant, to my knowledge, in only one place in the genre if at all.[18] This one passage is the so-called

Πραξιδίκαι also appear, and Hermes is more than once coupled with Persephone: in *DTA* 105–7 they appear together under their chthonic aspect. Note that Erinyes are very much less prominent than Hermes. In the prologue of Aeschylus' *Choephori*, Orestes invokes Hermes Chthonios first of all.

[14] Rivalry: e.g. *DTA* 45 (theatre?); 75, 87 (trade); 96 (apparently law-courts). See also Gager (1992), esp. chs. 1–4.

[15] Many bear only the name or names of intended victims (*DTA* 1–39), and some only a name or names with a *verbum devovendi* (*DTA* 40–46).

[16] The notion of binding is not, of course, unique to what we understand by *defixiones* proper. Cf. e.g. P. Paris 574. 1246–7 (a C3 AD spell for casting out a *δαίμων* from a possessed man): *σε δεσμεύω δεσμοῖς ἀδαμαντίνοις | ἀλύτοις κτλ.* ('I bind you with adamantine bonds that cannot be loosed').

[17] On the magic–religion distinction, see e.g. Luck (1985), 4 ff.; papers in Faraone and Obbink (1991), *passim*, e.g. 20, 92, 188 ff.; Graf (1997), 2 ff. and *passim*: 'The debate about the distinction between magic and religion has been long and bitter, and without a clear solution' (2).

[18] In choral lyric, Pindar *Ol.* 1 contains a prayer that may show the influence of *defixio*, when Pelops, all boldness and confidence, makes his successful prayer to Poseidon, asking the god: *πέδασον ἔγχος Οἰνομάου χάλκεον* (76: 'restrain the brazen spear of Oenomaus'). Cf. Gerber (1982), *ad loc.*

'binding song' in the first stasimon of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. The scholia on the ode imply that it falls within this sphere of operation; and more recently it has been argued that the ode reflects not only *defixio* in general, but specifically the numerous binding spells intended to incapacitate an adversary in the law-courts.[19] In support of this suggestion, its proponent convincingly adduces arguments both from context and from verbal features of the song itself.[20] I shall not rehearse detailed correspondences here.[21]

This is of course a binding-*song*, involving both music and dance. The essence of the *defixio* as it is known to us from archaeology is that it is inscribed and the tablet then deposited in some deep place. Doubtless there were performative elements attendant on the creation and interment of the tablets, but they are lost. Moreover, this passage contains none of the eclectically gathered magic words and divine names that are so common in the later instances of curse-tablets, though admittedly not in fifth-century examples. Tragedy as a genre is quite capable of introducing exotic and foreign, or apparently foreign, elements when the occasion demands.[22] Perhaps one reason for the complete absence of such elements from this stasimon is that when the Erinyes are themselves performing the binding rather than being invoked to perform it or aiding in its performance, they are thought to have no need of such magical concomitants. It is one thing for a mortal to beg an Erinys to bind, and quite another for

[19] Scholia: e.g. *Σ* Aesch. *Eum.* 303: *οὐκ ἀποκρίνῃ· ἢ ἀντὶ τοῦ οὐδὲ ἀντιφωνήσεις μοι, ἀλλὰ σοῦ βουλομένου λαλεῖν τὸ φθέγμα δεθήσεται* ('*Do you not reply?*: alternatively, *you will you not even respond to me, but though you wish to speak your voice will be bound*') Modern argument: Faraone (1985), and cf. n. 14 above.

[20] Context: Faraone (1985), 152 n. 12, rightly noting the use of judicial vocabulary earlier in the play; verbal features: *passim*.

[21] E.g. *ὕμνος . . . δέσμιος ter* (306; 331–2 = 344–5), and cf. Sommerstein (1989), *ad loc.*; the chorus here repeatedly emphasizes its own chthonic character (338–40, 368–72, 385–6, 395–6); it intends to silence Orestes and to madden and distract him (cf. e.g. *DTA* 50 and 67. a.8–10, both attempting to neutralize the opponent's speech).

[22] Foreign elements: Aesch. *Pers.* includes abundant Asiatic-sounding names and exclamations: cf. Hall (1996). Medea knows exotic *pharmaka* and disappears from Euripides' play in a chariot drawn by dragons. See also below, n. 37. Gager (1992), 265–9, has a 'Glossary of Uncommon Words', which suggests foreign, sometimes Near Eastern, origins for some *voces mysticae*. Cf. *DTA* Index 9, 'Ephesia Grammata'. These elements of *defixiones* increase in number diachronically. The earliest tablets are generally the simplest: cf. Ogden (1999), 6–10, with refs.

an Erinys to do so on her own account. Tablet or no, this is clearly a magical binding very like those that we know from buried *defixiones*.

It should be repeated that this is an exceptional passage in the surviving tragic corpus.[23] Indeed, the very absence of such material from other places where *defixio* might conceivably be introduced deserves attention: tragedy depicts plenty of enmities and rivalries of appropriate kinds. In Aeschylus' *Septem*, we find no binding of Polyneices by Eteocles. When Ajax is sent mad in Sophocles, it is not by his enemies but by an Olympian goddess, and his plight inspires in his enemy Odysseus not *Schadenfreude* but pity. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, when Phaedra's advances are unsuccessful, her vengeance relies not on a *defixio* but on a letter to her husband, though incapacitating the mind and tongue of her stepson would doubtless have been welcome: she has no faith in his oath of silence.[24] There is enough magical material in extant tragedy to show that it is not rigorously excluded from the genre.[25] If we make the thought-experiment of inserting *defixiones* into those places in tragedy where we in fact find curses, it emerges very quickly that tragedy sorts better with cursing than with binding. The parallelism of divine and human causation, with which the tragedians are deeply preoccupied, might appear less easy to manipulate when *defixiones* are employed than when a victim is cursed without their aid. Perhaps the *defixio* also

[23] In other respects too the *Eumenides* is an exception among surviving tragedies. It includes a change of scene from Delphi to Athens (not usual, but cf. Soph. *Ajax*—a much more dramatic scene change), and the majority of its characters are not mortal but divine (the only other extant play that centres on deities is the *Prometheus Vinctus*).

[24] The play does not, of course, rigorously exclude all mention of magic: the Nurse's claim to possess a love-charm and Phaedra's acquiescence in its use are crucial to the plot (Eur. *Hipp.* 509 ff.).

[25] Other incidents that might be regarded as reminiscent of magic include: the raising of the ghost of Dareius in Aesch. *Persae*, our earliest extant tragedy, which is accomplished by means of prayers to the gods below (628, 641 etc.); the poisoned robe in Soph. *Trach.*; Medea in Soph. ῥιζοτόμοι (*Root-cutters*) fr. 534 Radt, cutting roots in an obviously ritual context involving nudity, a brazen sickle, and ritual cries—though we do not have enough of the play to know why she was represented as doing this; also, in Eur. *Med.*, Medea's skill with φάρμακα (Eur. *Med.* 385: 'drugs/potions') and her special association with Hecate (395–7). A still more magical Medea is found in Ap. Rhod. 3. 528–33: we are told that she can, among other things, turn back rivers and 'fetter' (ἐπέδησε) the courses of moon and stars. Cf. Hunter (1989), *ad loc.* Magic does of course figure prominently in later texts, where a taste for the bizarre and esoteric is often evident, e.g. Theocritus 2, Horace *Epod.* 17, Vergil *Ecl.* 8, *Aen.* 4.483 ff., 509 ff.

offers less scope for moral complexity. The victim of a binding, if it is effective, is overcome by supernatural powers who are in some degree compelled to act and whose operation is supposed to be only partly consensual. A curse proper, on the other hand, appeals to divine powers but does not compel them. It is an invocation dependent on their pleasure: they may be entreated and cajoled, but they cannot in the same way be constrained. The speaker of a curse may, it is true, enjoy a greater or lesser degree of leverage over the deity or deities invoked. Thus, for example, when Theseus invokes his father Poseidon in the *Hippolytus* (887–90), he has been promised three *arai*, and the success of this curse is therefore required as proof of his father's good faith. But even here, where the curse has every chance of hitting the mark, there is no suggestion that Poseidon has no choice.[26] Indeed, Theseus is not confident of its fulfilment. He adds to his curse the sentence of exile, lest it fail: δυοῖν δὲ μοίραιν θατέρᾳ πεπλήξεται (894: 'he will be struck by one of two fates'). The moral complexity of this play is not harmed by Poseidon's having the option to kill or spare the innocent Hippolytus. And while some *defixiones* do undoubtedly work with a conception of justice and punishment, this is not the norm in the world of binding as it is in the world of the curse.[27] The notional difference of mechanism between curse and *defixio* is, I think, one reason why the latter is less common in, and perhaps less appropriate to, tragedy. This difference was long ago adumbrated by Wünsch: 'Nam cum saepe eveniret, ut sero numinis vindicta aut numquam adsequeretur maleficum, volgus a religione convertebat se ad superstitionem, quae docebat, preces non exaudiri a numinibus nisi rite invocatis secundum *praecepta, quae deos cogere possent arte magica*, ut devoventibus

[26] In Greek eyes there is no difficulty with the notion that a prayer or sacrifice may be formally correct and valid, but may still be refused by the powers invoked. Cf. e.g. Athena's rejection of the Trojan women's prayer and precious offering in Hom. *Il.* 6. Hecabe has gone to great trouble, but the goddess nods upward nonetheless (*Il.* 6. 286–311).

[27] Of course, none of this is to say that in tragedy curses are not generally fulfilled, in stark contrast to life outside the theatre. In that rather larger arena of the Athenian consciousness, 'No one could actually know whether or not the gods always accepted the particular form of prayer which we call a curse and would accordingly be willing to implement it' (Dover (1974), 251, in the context of curses being specially ratified when pronounced publicly on behalf of the community).

morem gererent' [my italics].[28] ('For since it often happened that divine punishment overtook a wrongdoer late or never, the populace turned from religion to superstition; which taught that prayers were not heard by the gods unless they had been invoked with due ceremony *according to the precepts, which had the power to compel the gods by magic art* to gratify those who cursed.')

Another factor in the absence of *defixiones* from tragedy is perhaps the genre's sense of its own dignity. Grand thoughts and grand personages, says Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, demand grand words:

> . . . ἀνάγκη
> μεγάλων γνωμῶν καὶ διανοιῶν ἴσα καὶ τὰ ῥήματα τίκτειν.
> κἄλλως εἰκὸς τοὺς ἡμιθέους τοῖς ῥήμασι μείζοσι χρῆσθαι.
>
> (1058–60)[29]

It is necessary to engender words of equal size to great thoughts and ideas. And in any case, it is reasonable that the demigods should employ words of greater magnitude.

The other side of the same coin is that in this comic poet's work, Euripides is repeatedly mocked for violating the dignity of the tragic. Aristotle shares the belief that tragedy must have a certain elevation: he famously defines it as μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης κτλ. (*Poetics* 1449[b]24: 'an imitation of an action that is serious and complete, and that possesses a certain magnitude').[30] Looking back on Attic tragedy over a span of centuries, Horace in the *Ars Poetica* takes the elevation of the genre for granted (89–98): the feast of Thyestes requires an elevated strain, and it is an exception to the rule for a Telephus or a Peleus to lament in a lowly register. A curse or prayer is quite appropriate to the genre; but a magic ritual is perhaps less easily accommodated.[31] Moreover, the *defixio* regularly

[28] *DTA* 'Praefatio', ii. We need not wholeheartedly accept the terms of Wünsch's opposition between *religio* and *superstitio* to take his point about different spheres of operation. See also Parker (1983), 198 noting that *defixiones*, unlike curses, require 'reinforcement through magical techniques'.

[29] Cf. Russell (1964), xxxii–xxxiii.

[30] On Nietzsche's very different account of the elevation of tragedy as a genre, and on its relation to Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Silk and Stern (1981), 225–38.

[31] The quintessentially exalted genre of Homeric epic contains very few even approximately *defixio*-like practices, as *Il.* 13. 434–41, where Poseidon 'fetters' (πέδησε) the limbs of Alcathous so that he may be slain by Idomeneus. The unfortunate

involves writing. And though writing does figure in tragedy, it is the exception rather than the rule, and in the surviving plays it is never free from complexity.[32] In a genre that tests verbal communication to breaking point, written letters are often deceptive, often ambiguous, and never unproblematic.[33] In the *Hippolytus*, Phaedra's tablet is very vocal, but the words that it is said to call aloud are false.[34] While we could conceive of inscribed curse-tablets in tragedy crying out to the gods below in a similar vein, this would constitute an infraction of the genre's norm of communication with divine powers, which is oral and not textual.

A further reason for the prominence of curses perhaps shows most clearly of all the value of trying to imagine the substitution of *defixiones*. Curses must be pronounced: they are fundamentally performative and lend themselves well to moments of high drama. The *defixio*, on the other hand, whatever rituals and incantations were associated with the inscribing and burial of the tablets, is in essence much more private. We frequently see in tragedy a Theseus or an Oedipus quite publicly calling down the vengeance of heaven on malefactors or supposed malefactors; but we do not see them engaging in the secret and disreputable practice of scratching names, symbols, or words of power on tablets of lead to compass their destruction. By its nature, a curse does not come into being unless it is laid on an enemy or wrongdoer by another's word, a word that may often be spoken before or directly to the wrongdoer himself or,

hero is made to stand fixed like a stele or a tree, and helplessly takes the spear in the middle of his chest. See also *Od.* 4. 380, where the desperate Menelaus asks Eidothea *ὅς τίς μ' ἀθανάτων πεδάᾳ καὶ ἔδησε κελεύθου* ('Which of the immortals fetters me and has held me back [*lit.* 'bound me'] from going my way?').

[32] Writing is crucial in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (both the *δέλτος* left behind by Heracles and the purely metaphorical 'tablet' on which Deianeira has recorded the Centaur's instructions for the proposed love-charm, 683: *χαλκῆς ὅπως δύσνιπτον ἐκ δέλτου γραφήν*: 'like writing that is hard to erase from a tablet of bronze'); and in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (Phaedra's letter), *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Agamemnon's two letters to Clytaemestra) and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Iphigenia's letter to Argos, where she supposes it will reach Orestes). On tragic writing and letters see further Segal (1986), esp. 92–109.

[33] Cf. Segal (1986), 93: even into the fourth century, writing can be presented as 'an object of suspicion'. This suspicion is, of course, first attested in the earliest Greek literature, in the one Homeric reference to writing, *Il.* 6. 166 ff.

[34] See below, n. 60.

at least, out in the open, before some audience.[35] In this respect too, the curse differs markedly from the less open, less public *defixio*.

To conclude this discussion of *defixiones* and curses: the thought-experiment of attempting the substitution of binding spells where curses occur in tragedy reveals four features crucial to the operation of the tragic curse, four features absent from *defixio*. (i) A curse proper is a request to divine powers on the part of one who claims the moral high ground: it generally does not pretend to constrain these higher powers, perhaps not least because it is satisfied of its own moral rectitude and the justice of its case. (ii) Curses, as a kind of prayer-like utterance, sort better with the exalted dignity of tragedy than does the more humble, quotidian, and secretive *defixio*. (iii) The tragic curse is by its nature spoken aloud, not written. Tragedy is very shy of presenting writing as an efficacious mode of veridical communication. (iv) Curses are quintessentially public and performative utterances, which may be pronounced before an audience and even before their intended victim: binding spells are generally more private. In general, the curse lends itself better to moments of high drama.

Curses differ in these respects not only from *defixiones* but also from a taint of inherited guilt. Guilt accrues as a result of actions under the canopy of the cosmic principle of retribution. It may percolate down the generations of a family in parallel with the φύσις ('inborn nature') which itself, I have argued, facilitates the resurfacing of self-destructive dispositions of choice. Unlike a curse, inherited guilt is not imposed by an injured party, but comes of its own accord. It has been suggested above with special reference to Aeschylus' *Septem* and Euripides' *Phoenissae* that a keen sensitivity to familial context is vital to the interpretation of the plays. The workings of inherited guilt in those tragedies have been traced in some detail.[36] The question to be addressed now is whether curses ever have an analogous familial aspect, and, if so,

[35] Some curse-words in Greek, like the modern English word 'curse', are occasionally applied to a grave misfortune or to some kind of jinx or hoodoo without bearing the strict sense of a species of utterance spoken with the intent of doing harm. Cf. West (1999), 41 with n. 25, denying that either Soph. *OT* 417 f. or Eur. *Phoen.* 1610 f. is a 'literal curse.' (See further below, pp. 64–6.) See also *EM* 134. 15 s.v. ἀρά: ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἄρεος, βλαπτικοῦ ὄντος, ἀρὰ ἡ βλάβη κτλ. ('*curse*: either from *Ares*, who is harmful; *curse* = *harm*...') and Hesychius A 6922 s.v. ἀρά. But it is with ἀρά 'curse' *stricto sensu* that we are currently occupied.

[36] See above, Ch. 2.

precisely how they function. Certain classes of people appear to be particularly efficacious in their cursing: 'kings, parents, priests, magistrates, and the like—who represent whatever in society most demands reverence'.[37] In tragedy, it is the curse on the family, whether the father's curse or that laid on a line by an outsider, that is of most pressing interest for our present purposes.

A curse may be directed at an entire *οἶκος* or *γένος* root and branch.[38] An example in tragedy that we have already mentioned is the curse of Thyestes on his whole family, reported at the end of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Such curses are also deployed in public contexts. A well-known Tean inscription (ML 30) is dated to around 470 BC and is thus roughly contemporary with Aeschylus' *Persae*, our earliest extant tragedy. Anyone who harms the Teans with *φάρμακα* or attempts to interfere with the corn supply is to perish together with his *γένος*.[39] But not every curse in tragedy can be taken without argument to blight the descendants of its victim. Curses on families and inherited curses have been a focus of recent debate, a debate of considerable significance for the interpretation of tragedy. We have drawn an elementary distinction between curses and guilt: we must proceed to consider whether curses also focus the issue of the parallelism between on the one hand divinely determined causes of suffering and on the other the tendency of later generations in a house to exhibit self-destructive traits of character and dispositions of choice.[40] The unfolding of curses across generations in a great and

[37] Parker (1983), 192, and see 191–206 for his extended treatment of curses. Thus e.g. at Eur. *Hipp.* 887–90, as we have seen, Theseus curses Hippolytus explicitly as *ἐμὸν παῖδ'*; and at Eur. *Phoen.* 67 ff. Jocasta describes her sons' anxieties lest their father's curse be fulfilled. For the universally agreed efficacy of certain fathers' curses in myth, see Plat. *Leg.* 931b–c: *Οἰδίπους, φαμέν, ἀτιμασθεὶς ἐπηύξατο τοῖς αὑτοῦ τέκνοις ἃ δὴ καὶ πᾶς ὑμνεῖ τέλεα καὶ ἐπήκοα γενέσθαι παρὰ θεῶν, Ἀμύντορά τε Φοίνικι τῷ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπαρᾶσθαι παιδὶ θυμωθέντα καὶ Ἱππολύτῳ Θησέα καὶ ἑτέρους ἄλλοις μυρίους* ('Oedipus, we say, when he had been dishonoured, laid on his own children curses that everyone always says were fulfilled and heard by the gods; and Amyntor in his wrath cursed his own son Phoenix, and Theseus Hippolytus, and countless others cursed their children likewise'). For an example of a public curse, see below. One of the most trenchant ironies of Soph. *OT* is that the curse pronounced on the polluter by Oedipus in his capacity as ruler is to rebound on his own head as parricide.

[38] Cf. M. West (1999), 35–6, with n. 12, on oaths *κατ' ἐξώλειαν* ('on pain of utter destruction').

[39] Parker (1983), 193–6 cites and discusses other examples of public curses.

[40] Dispositions of choice and states of mind are considered at length below, Ch. 6.

unfortunate tragic family is in urgent need of close attention. It may be that thus another strand can be distinguished—if not perhaps unravelled—in the tangled skein of that strangely fascinating and endlessly involuted entity, the tragic house.

It has recently been argued that the concept of the inherited curse is an over-used interpretative tool, and even that preoccupation with the phenomenon is itself one of the 'inherited curses of scholarship'. Particular attention has been paid to the Labdacid plays, where family and heredity are generally agreed to be of some importance.[41] The point of contention is not that in some portions of the story curses are cast, and indeed that they sometimes deserve attention; but rather that a curse from old time lies on the race and is crucial to the unfolding of the story in tragedy. Thus it has been argued, for example, that in Aeschylus' Labdacid trilogy, the generations are tied together by 'ill-judged, deluded behaviour, not an ancestral curse'.[42] Eteocles in Aeschylus' *Septem* clearly says, as we have noted in Chapter 2, that his own disaster is in part the outcome of the curse laid on him by his father, and the chorus shares his view. But granted that his father has cursed him, is his misfortune also to be considered in the light of some earlier curse, and is Oedipus' curse somehow a re-enactment of it? If this question is to be pursued, a scholion on Euripides must be examined, the so-called 'Pisander' scholion.

The contents of this scholion (*Σ* MAB Eur. *Phoen.* 1760) are as follows:

ἱστορεῖ Πείσανδρος ὅτι κατὰ χόλον τῆς Ἥρας ἐπέμφθη ἡ Σφὶγξ τοῖς Θηβαίοις ἀπὸ τῶν ἐσχάτων μερῶν τῆς Αἰθιοπίας, ὅτι τὸν Λάιον ἀσεβήσαντα εἰς τὸν παράνομον ἔρωτα τοῦ Χρυσίππου, ὃν ἥρπασεν ἀπὸ τῆς Πίσης, οὐκ ἐτιμωρήσαντο. ἦν δὲ ἡ Σφὶγξ, ὥσπερ γράφεται, τὴν οὐρὰν ἔχουσα δρακαίνης· ἀναρπάζουσα δὲ μικροὺς καὶ μεγάλους κατήσθιεν, ἐν οἷς καὶ Αἵμονα τὸν Κρέοντος παῖδα καὶ Ἵππιον τοῦ Εὐρυνόμου τοῦ τοῖς Κενταύροις μαχεσαμένου. ἦσαν δὲ Εὐρύνομος καὶ Ἰωνεὺς υἱοὶ Μάγνητος τοῦ Αἰολίδου καὶ Φυλοδίκης. ὁ μὲν οὖν Ἵππιος καὶ ξένος ὢν ὑπὸ τῆς Σφιγγὸς ἀνῃρέθη, ὁ δὲ Ἰωνεὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ Οἰνομάου, ὃν τρόπον καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι μνηστῆρες. πρῶτος δὲ ὁ Λάιος τὸν ἀθέμιτον ἔρωτα τοῦτον ἔσχεν. ὁ δὲ Χρύσιππος ὑπὸ αἰσχύνης ἑαυτὸν διεχρήσατο τῷ ξίφει. τότε μὲν οὖν ὁ Τειρεσίας ὡς μάντις εἰδὼς ὅτι θεοστυγὴς ἦν ὁ Λάιος, ἀπέτρεπεν αὐτὸν τῆς ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα ὁδοῦ,

[41] M. West (1999), 44. [42] M. West (1999), 40.

τῇ δὲ Ἥρᾳ μᾶλλον τῇ γαμοστόλῳ θεᾷ θύειν ἱερά. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸν ἐξεφαύλιζεν. ἀπελθὼν τοίνυν ἐφονεύθη ἐν τῇ σχιστῇ ὁδῷ αὐτὸς καὶ ὁ ἡνίοχος αὐτοῦ, ἐπειδὴ ἔτυψε τῇ μάστιγι τὸν Οἰδίποδα. κτείνας δὲ αὐτοὺς ἔθαψε παραυτίκα σὺν τοῖς ἱματίοις ἀποσπάσας τὸν ζωστῆρα καὶ τὸ ξίφος τοῦ Λαου καὶ φορῶν· τὸ δὲ ἅρμα ὑποστρέψας ἔδωκε τῷ Πολύβῳ, εἶτα ἔγημε τὴν μητέρα λύσας τὸ αἴνιγμα. μετὰ ταῦτα δὲ θυσίας τινὰς ἐπιτελέσας ἐν τῷ Κιθαιρῶνι κατήρχετο ἔχων καὶ τὴν Ἰοκάστην ἐν τοῖς ὀχήμασι. καὶ γινομένων αὐτῶν περὶ τὸν τόπον ἐκεῖνον τῆς σχιστῆς ὁδοῦ ὑπομνησθεὶς ἐδείκνυε τῇ Ἰοκάστῃ τὸν τόπον καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα διηγήσατο καὶ τὸν ζωστῆρα ἔδειξεν. ἡ δὲ δεινῶς φέρουσα ὅμως ἐσιώπα· ἠγνόει γὰρ υἱὸν ὄντα. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἦλθέ τις γέρων ἱπποβουκόλος ἀπὸ Σικυῶνος, ὃς εἶπεν αὐτῷ τὸ πᾶν ὅπως τε αὐτὸν εὗρε καὶ ἀνείλετο καὶ τῇ Μερόπῃ δέδωκε, καὶ ἅμα τὰ σπάργανα αὐτῷ ἐδείκνυε καὶ τὰ κέντρα ἀπήτει τε αὐτὸν τὰ ζωάγρια· καὶ οὕτως ἐγνώσθη τὸ ὅλον. φασὶ δὲ ὅτι μετὰ τὸν θάνατον τῆς Ἰοκάστης καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ τύφλωσιν ἔγημεν Εὐρυγάνην παρθένον, ἐξ ἧς αὐτῷ γεγόνασιν οἱ τέσσαρες παῖδες. ταῦτά φησι Πείσανδρος.

Peisander relates that the Sphinx was sent upon the Thebans from the furthest regions of Ethiopia on account of the wrath of Hera, because the Thebans did not punish Laius for the impiety he committed in his unlawful lust for Chrysippus, whom he snatched from Pisa. The Sphinx, as is written, had the tail of a serpent; and, snatching up small and great alike, she devoured them, including Haemon the son of Creon and Hippios the son of the Eurynomos who fought the Centaurs. Eurynomos and Eioneus were the sons of Magnes the son of Aeolides and Phylodice. Now Hippios, though a foreigner, was slain by the Sphinx, and Eioneus by Oenomaus, in the same way as the other suitors. Laius was the first to conceive this unlawful passion. And Chrysippus, in shame, made away with himself with his sword. Then Teiresias, knowing as a prophet that Laius was hated of the gods, attempted to dissuade him from his journey to Apollo: he sought to persuade him instead to offer sacrifices to Hera as goddess of marriage. But Laius set Teiresias at naught. Now he departed and was murdered at the crossroads together with his driver too, when he struck Oedipus with his whip. When Oedipus had killed them, he buried them straight away together with their cloaks; but he removed Laius' belt and sword and wore them. He took the chariot back and gave it to Polybus. Then he married his mother after solving the riddle. After this, when Oedipus had offered certain sacrifices on Cithaeron, he set off for home with Jocasta in his chariot as well. When they reached the point of the crossroads, he was reminded and showed Jocasta the place; he told her what had happened and showed her the belt. Jocasta was horrified but said nothing: she did not know that he was her son. And afterwards an old horse-keeper came from Sicyon and told him the

whole story of how he found him, took him and gave him to Merope. He also showed him his swaddling-clothes and the pins and demanded the price for saving his life. Thus everything came to light. Now they say that, after Jocasta's death and his blinding, he married the maiden Eurygane, by whom his four children were born. So says Peisander.

It has been argued that the Sophoclean Oedipus-plays presuppose some version of the Chrysippus-story, because the fate of Oedipus is only comprehensible if Laius has perpetrated some transgression and if some curse laid on him has been inherited by his progeny.[43] Sophocles, we are told, 'took it for granted that his audience would realize that a curse inherited from Laius rested upon Oedipus'.[44] If nothing is found in Sophocles to confirm this view decisively, it must be remembered that the modern reader is perhaps 'slow to realise what slight indications may serve to show that something in a play is relevant to its understanding'.[45] This argument raises two questions, questions that must be separated: first, whether the story of Chrysippus is essential to an understanding of the story of Oedipus; and second, whether Laius' transgression constitutes or at least involves a curse on the family. If a curse is a species of prayer or an utterance relying on some supernatural means of doing harm, then some evidence must be presented for his pronouncing a curse on his offspring before it may even be asked whether this curse was later inherited. The only other discernible means whereby Laius' offspring might labour under an inherited curse is if a curse were pronounced upon Laius and his offspring by some other party: as far as we know, the best candidate for laying such a curse is Pelops after the rape of Chrysippus. As a consequence, if no evidence of such cursing is forthcoming, then the inherited 'curse' on the offspring of Laius must be regarded as at best an inherited taint of guilt, and not at all a curse proper. This is not to minimize the importance of curses in tragedy, but to insist that misfortune, inherited or not, is one thing, a curse another—and that a curse that is inherited is yet a third thing. The issue is not the wholesale denial of the importance of curses, but a circumscription and more precise articulation of their workings and significance. As has recently been pointed out, 'Critics have often

[43] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 120–24.
[44] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 121.
[45] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 124.

spoken of an inherited curse when what they mean is inherited guilt, or some kind of genetic corruption, or persistent but unexplained adversity.'[46]

M. L. West has recently observed that, whereas epic does not tend to 'move across generations', several fifth-century genres adopt a 'more synoptic approach to mythology'.[47] Acknowledging that the tragedians tend to show interest in the continuity of misfortune across the generations of this unfortunate *oikos*, West denies, rebutting Lloyd-Jones, that an inherited curse is ever in tragedy the connecting factor. He finds in Aeschylus' *Septem* no sign that 'the earlier fortunes of Oedipus and Laius . . . had anything to do with a curse'.[48] His treatment of the three Sophoclean Theban plays concludes that 'There is no question of a family curse going back to Laius.'[49] This leaves Euripides and the 'Pisander' scholion, whose contents have been printed above. This note has been variously assessed as (i) a summary of the epic *Oedipodeia*; (ii) a late mythographic composite; and (iii)—the prevalent view—the work of a Hellenistic prose author.[50] 'That text certainly cannot be used as evidence for the presence of the Chrysippus-story in the epic Oedipodeia.'[51] In the

[46] M. West (1999), 34.

[47] M. West (1999), 37.

[48] M. West (1999), 39–40, where it is rightly observed that at Aesch. *Sept.* 742 ff. the chorus identifies as the beginning of familial misfortune not a curse but Laius' foolish disregard of the thrice-repeated oracle of Apollo. The importance of inherited guilt in the play is considered above, Ch. 2, and its focus on decision making below, Ch. 6.

[49] M. West (1999), 42. Finding no curses in Sophocles' *Antigone*, West says nothing of *φρενῶν Ἐρινύς* (603), which he himself quotes: see below. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Teiresias' reference to a *δεινόπους ἀρά* coming from Oedipus' parents (*OT* 417 f.: 'dread-footed curse') is 'vatic language and does not refer to a literal curse' (41), and cf. n. 35 above. The characters of *OC*, like those of *Ant.*, contemplate familial misfortune with 'baffled despair' (42).

[50] M. West (1999), 42 with n. 27, giving refs. and doxography. Lloyd-Jones (2002), 1–10, in his much more detailed consideration of the scholion, summarizes earlier debate on the origins of its contents at much greater length. Conflation or confusion of different sources has long been suspected. See also Fraenkel (1963), 6–7.

[51] M. West (1999), 42. Lloyd-Jones (2002), 10 concludes: 'It seems to me much likelier than not that Bethe was right and that in general the scholion sketches the plot of the [epic] *Oedipodeia*, though I do not rule out the possibility that it is to some extent affected by reminiscences of tragedy, as in the case of the surprisingly casual mention of the riddle.' He notes the tendency of the tragedians to omit Hera's part in the story, citing *Phoen.* 810 (Sphinx sent by Hades) and Eur. *Antigone* fr. 178 *TGF* = *Σ Phoen.* 1031 (Sphinx sent by Dionysus).

absence of good evidence for the plot of Euripides' *Chrysippus*, and *a fortiori* in the absence of good evidence for the *Chrysippus*' being part of a connected trilogy that also contained the *Phoenissae*, the arguments for the *Phoenissae* glancing back to an ancestral curse on the race, it is contended, are not strong.[52] Even if the *Chrysippus* did contain an inherited curse on the race of Laius, perhaps this is a concoction of the playwright '*suo Marte*'.[53] Only one source, another scholion on the *Phoenissae*, speaks of an inherited curse (*Σ* MAB Eur. *Phoen.* 60): *φασὶν ὅτι Πέλοψ Χρυσίππου ἁρπαγέντος κατηράσατο μέχρι παίδων εἶναι τὸ κακόν* ('They say that Pelops, after the rape of Chrysippus, cursed him so that the misfortune should extend to his children'). Thus West concludes that there is no good evidence of early date that an inherited curse lies on the Labdacids anywhere in tragedy.

[52] Oedipus says at the end of Euripides' *Phoenissae*: *παῖδάς τ' ἀδελφοὺς ἔτεκον, οὓς ἀπώλεσα, | ἀρὰς παραλαβὼν Λαΐου καὶ παισὶ δούς* (1610–11: 'And I begot sons who were my brothers, whom I destroyed, receiving the curses of Laius and passing them on to my children'). These words, which seem to imply a curse at least connected with Laius, are dismissed by West in the same breath as his dismissal of Soph. *OT* 417–18: cf. M. West (1999), 41 with n. 25; and nn. 35, 49 above. His cursory dismissal of *Phoen.* 1611 seems to involve a fallacy. Crucial to the paper is his argument against equivocation on 'curse', which has two senses: curse[1] = 'misfortune'; and curse[2] = 'a kind of prayer for harm or other utterance relying on supernatural powers to do harm'. It is question-begging to dismiss a candidate for a curse[2] uttered by or inherited from Laius, *where the point at issue is whether the* Phoenissae *contains a reference to a curse*[2]. This point should be independent both of the 'Pisander' question and of the contents or even the existence of the *Chrysippus*. *Phoen.* contains ample evidence that Oedipus has cursed his sons (e.g. 66 ff.). It is hard to see why 1610 f. should not in principle imply either that Oedipus cursed his sons as Laius cursed him (*παραλαβών . . . δούς*); or that he inherited a curse from Laius—i.e. a curse[2] pronounced upon Laius and his offspring, which was then passed down through the generations. Mastronarde, *ad loc.*, identifies three possibilities. (i) *Λαΐου* is a subjective genitive: Laius has pronounced a curse on Oedipus which Oedipus has passed on to his sons. (ii) *Λαΐου* is an objective genitive: Laius has been cursed himself, doubtless by Pelops, 'which would provide the only allusion to the Chrysippus story within *Phoen.*'. (iii) *ἀράς* is used in a 'loose and assimilating manner' of Laius' misfortune: it refers not to a curse[2], but to a curse[1]. In other words, Oedipus, who has been plunged into misfortune by his father, is in turn plunging his sons into misfortune. Mastronarde, essentially following Thomas, accepts (iii). Whatever we conclude, these two lines are the only passage in the text that raises the question of an ancestral curse in an acute form: it is not as though exegesis of the play is hamstrung without some ancestral curse to tie it together. This point of critical methodology is further discussed below.

[53] Dositheus, *FGrHist* 290 F 6, may give the hypothesis to Eur. *Chrysippus*.

West does not deny that in some tragedies that other notable and notably unfortunate family, the house of Pelops, labours under an inherited curse.[54] But he notes the wide variations between attested versions of the curse. (i) As Myrtilus was cast from Pelops' chariot into the sea, he cursed Pelops and his scions.[55] (ii) Pelops cursed both Atreus and Thyestes, his sons by his second wife, for their jealous murder of Chrysippus, his son by his first wife.[56] (iii) Chrysippus was abducted by Zeus.[57] On the basis of this multiplicity of incompatible versions, West concludes: 'The inherited curse was not a fixed element in this mythical complex but an accessory motif that could be fitted in at various points, according to the changing horizons of individual authors.'[58]

From the thickets of this controversy, three preliminary lessons can be extracted. (i) The attempt to elucidate extant tragedies from other sources, many of them later and resting on uncertain foundations, is perilous in the extreme and must be undertaken cautiously. We must be very careful to examine our assumptions about the background of extant plays. (ii) To derive from such later sources a crucial architectonic principle that is conceived as underlying an extant play is no less dangerous. Strict limitations must be imposed on any claim that if an extant tragedy is to be fully, or even satisfactorily, understood, it requires knowledge for which the extant text itself provides little or no firm support. If we find it tempting to read inherited curses into tragedies, we would do well to ask ourselves why we feel we need them. Are they supposed to provide a more satisfying sense of unity? Or a better explanation for the suffering portrayed? Or a more

[54] West (1999), 37–9.

[55] Pherec. *FGrHist* 3 F 37, Eur. *Or.* 988–1012—a highly compressed and elliptical account of how the *ἀρὰ πολύστονος* ('lamentable curse') came upon the Pelopids. Cf., some ten years earlier, West (1987), *ad* Eur. *Or.* 982–1012: 'no one who did not know the stories already would understand them from this account'. Also, *ad* 996: whereas in Aesch. the curse is 'a real abiding force', in Eur. 'it is merely a convenient justification for filling up songs with mythical reflections'. Our consideration of another Euripidean play, the *Phoenissae* (above, Ch. 2), shows that, in one play of this author at least, a curse in the family is far more than a mere excuse for the introduction of mythic material. For Myrtilus' demise but no curse, see Soph. *El.* 504–14. At Eur. *IT* 192–3, *ῥιφαὶ Πέλοπος* ('Pelops' casting') is Murray's supplement—he cites in support *Or.* 988, *El.* 727—on which nothing secure can be based.

[56] Hellanicus *FGrHist* 4 F 157, Thuc. 1. 9. 2. And for Pelops' curse on Atreus and Thyestes, cf. Calasso (1994), 181–2. Calasso calls the history of the Pelopids 'a succession of atrocities, each worse than the one before' (183).

[57] Praxilla *PMG* 751.

[58] M. West (1999), 39.

comforting picture of justice? Perhaps the attempt to exalt a hereditary curse as a paramount explanatory feature of a play reveals as much about what we desire to find in the action of a tragedy as it does about the tragedy itself. It may be that we are sometimes guilty of what might be called trilogic thinking: it is very easy to fall into the trap of demanding generational interactions and repeated patterns of misfortune in an unfortunate house even where the text does not foreground such diachronic schemes. It is of course true to say that Attic tragedy is much concerned with sorrows within the *oikos*, and that many extant tragedies revolve around certain great and doomed houses. But that does not mean that we must shoehorn ancestral curses into our texts even if they protest, simply in order to gratify our mistaken belief that such curses will satisfy our craving for a certain kind of familial unity. The tragedians are quite capable of writing a Labdacid play that does not rest on Pelops' curse on Laius, or a Pelopid play that does not rely on Myrtilus' curse on Pelops. (iii) Whatever the usage of the English language, a curse in the strict sense must be kept apart from the kind of persistent blight or recurrent misfortune that may, in Greek no less than in English, be loosely termed a curse. This is not always easy to do. The state of suffering from some blight or misfortune, even where no curse proper has been spoken, is sometimes indistinguishable from the effect of a true curse. Thus the vocabulary of cursing comes easily and naturally to be applied to such a state. For present purposes, this feature of language must be constantly borne in mind. On our account of cursing, not everyone who is said to be cursed is in fact truly cursed.[59]

Where an inherited curse does obtain, does it ever enjoy crucial and primary importance for a play or trilogy? It will be profitable to examine first some of the curses that are actually pronounced on stage within extant plays. Theseus' curse on his son in Euripides' *Hippolytus* has already been discussed, a curse wrested from him by his wife's malicious letter. In the sequence of significant acts of

[59] The Greek noun ἀρά ('curse') is not in itself used of a generalized blight or misfortune: this is contrary to English usage, which does allow us to speak freely of the *curse* of deafness, stepchildren *vel sim.* However, the same is *not* true of the adjective ἀραῖος ('cursed', 'accursed'), which, as in English, *may* be used of such a blight or misfortune. But see further below, n. 62; and Ch. 5 Sect. i n. 33.

communication that informs the play, this is climactic.[60] In form, his curse, which is called *ἀρά*, is very prayer-like. It involves an invocation of Poseidon, who is Theseus' father and has promised him three *ἀραί*. Let him destroy Hippolytus this very day, *εἴπερ ἡμῖν ὤπασας σαφεῖς ἀράς* (887–90: 'if indeed you have bestowed upon us true curses'): characteristic elements of prayer are clearly present.[61] The chorus urges Theseus to retract, but he is implacable and redoubles his resolve, adding to the curse the burden of exile. The curse alone apparently cannot be relied upon: if Hippolytus does not meet his death at the hands of Poseidon, *τὰς ἐμὰς ἀρὰς σέβων* ('respecting my curses'), then let him suffer the wretched life of the exile (894–8). The curse is not at all prominent in the 300 lines that intervene between its pronouncement and the Messenger-speech bearing tidings of its fulfilment: in this intervening passage, interest is focused instead on the human dynamics of the *agon* between father and son. When the news comes that Theseus' own father has not let him down, his reaction is initially triumphant (1169–72, where he is eager to hear how the supposed malefactor perished). Only when Artemis explains his mistake is he prostrated.

The operation of this curse is swift and direct. Theseus' decree of exile facilitates its fulfilment, in that it brings the departing Hippolytus to the seashore where the bull appears. Hippolytus' chastity, his fidelity to the oath that he has sworn—despite 612—and even in some degree his own delight in horses, are put to ironic service in compassing his destruction. Thus Aphrodite's *ὀργαί* (1417: 'rage') are satisfied, more or less as she outlined in the prologue (43–6). The *Hippolytus*, as many have remarked, is a profoundly ironic play: both the circumstances of this curse's pronouncement and the means of its fulfilment are in different ways ironic. It is by the combination of his father's curse with his own character, his own unbending piety, that Hippolytus is undone.

In the first episode of another profoundly ironic play, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the main character pronounces a curse on the killer of Laius, whoever he may be:

[60] On the centrality of speech and silence in the play, see Knox (1952); and cf. *βοᾷ βοᾷ δέλτος ἄλαστα* (877): the letter is said to cry aloud.

[61] Cf. the typology of Greek prayers in Pulleyn (1997), esp. 15–18.

κατεύχομαι δὲ τὸν δεδρακότ', εἴτε τις
εἷς ὢν λέληθεν εἴτε πλειόνων μέτα,
κακὸν κακῶς νιν ἄμορον ἐκτρῖψαι βίον.

(246–8)

And I curse the culprit—whether one man has escaped notice on his own or whether he acted together with others—that he should wretchedly live out an unhappy life in wretchedness.

He adds a similar imprecation for himself, if his own house harbours the murderer.[62] When it is eventually revealed that Oedipus is himself the killer, both polluting and polluted, he emerges from the house self-blinded and demanding to be taken away (ἐκτόπιος 1340), describing himself as τὸν καταρατότατον (1345: 'the most accursed one'): not only has his injunction that the killer be driven out come home to him (241∼1381 f., 1451 ff.; and compare 1436 with 386), but also his curse. Multiple linguistic correspondences draw the parallels between Oedipus' state at the end and his former elevation and good intentions.[63] As has often been remarked, his unceasing endeavours to save the city precipitate his own downfall, and his confident, if unwitting, pronouncement of a curse is a facet of this process.

These two cases are similar in three relevant respects. (i) Each curse is pronounced by a figure of authority: Oedipus and Theseus are both kings, and Theseus is also Hippolytus' father.[64] (ii) Each curse is pronounced in full solemnity at a crucial point in the plot and finds its fulfilment at the end of the play. These are no casual utterances, but moments of high drama. (iii) Each is pronounced in ignorance: Theseus does not know that Hippolytus is innocent of rape, and Oedipus does not know that he himself is guilty of the killing. The late realization of their ignorance has profound effects on both characters and on their families.

[62] Regardless of whether κατεύχομαι without genitive or dative of person can ever be translated 'I curse' (cf. Jebb *ad* 246), the exangelos later in the play clearly regards this pronouncement as a curse: this is the clear implication of 1291: δόμοις ἀραῖος, ὡς ἠράσατο ('accursed in the house, even as he cursed'), as Jebb, *ad loc.*, cannot but acknowledge—see further below, Ch. 5 Sect. i n. 33. It is at any rate certainly an utterance that intends harm by supernatural means.

[63] Vernant (1990*a*) argues that the play's language is pervaded by systematic ambiguity between the exalted and the finally abased and polluted Oedipus.

[64] Oedipus' own fatherhood within the strange generational economy of Thebes is notoriously problematic: cf. Zeitlin (1986).

It cannot seriously be denied that all extant Labdacid plays present or allude to catastrophes of more than one generation of the family; but in some of these plays there is no ancestral curse, no *inherited* curse, to be found. The *Antigone* is a case in point. Antigone's wish μὴ πλείω κακὰ | πάθοιεν ἢ καὶ δρῶσιν ἐκδίκως ἐμέ (927–8: 'may they suffer no more misfortunes than they unjustly inflict upon me'), described as a curse by Griffith, is not an ancestral curse and is not even aimed at any Labdacid.[65] Despite its apparent fulfilment in the misfortunes suffered later by Creon and his family, it is not for present purposes interesting.[66] Easterling, in a detailed reading of the second stasimon of the play, discerns a depiction not of 'a family under an actual curse' in the narrow sense, but more generally of repeated and inherited misfortunes across the generations of the Labdacids.[67] Jebb does not hesitate to speak of this same ode in terms of a 'divine curse . . . upon [the] family', referring to the story of Pelops and Chrysippus.[68] This approach has been developed by Lloyd-Jones, who sees Antigone as 'a victim of the family curse'.[69] He adduces good arguments in favour of some notion of generational continuity in misfortune and even of inherited *guilt*. Moreover, he offers a salutary reminder that Aeschylus does not have a monopoly on the workings of *ate*, remarking on the parallels between the chorus' contextualization of Antigone in this stasimon and familiar passages of Aeschylus. But the passages adduced in favour of a cursed Antigone do not weigh heavy. To say, as she does more than once, that her woes are derivable from her father (1 ff., 857 ff.) is not in

[65] Griffith, *ad loc.*

[66] Even the very weakest and humblest can sometimes curse effectively. In the *Odyssey*, the broken-down slave woman at the mill curses the suitors for putting her to this shattering work. νῦν ὕστατα δειπνήσειαν, she asks Zeus, and her prayer is answered (*Od.* 20. 112–19: 'now may they dine for the last time'). Note that here Antigone is in no position of power when she utters this wish: these are almost her last words as she departs to a sentence of certain death. She is not one of those authority figures whose curses are supposed to be particularly efficacious, but her words are subsequently ratified nonetheless. That this wish or curse is indisputably fulfilled might be said to contribute to the character's peculiar potency, which the poet sets in relentless counterpoint with her social inferiority and consequent helplessness. Eurydice's dying curse (1304–5) is perhaps comparable.

[67] Easterling (1978), 142.

[68] Jebb, *ad* 582–625, and cf. id. *ad* 593.

[69] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 115, and for his treatment of the *Antigone* see 113–17.

itself to say that she is cursed. She does, of course, explicitly say that she goes to join her unhappy parents in death ἀραῖος ἄγαμος ἅδ' | ἐγὼ μέτοικος (867–8: 'I, accursed and unmarried as you see me, to dwell there . . .'). But, in its context, this is to say no more than that she is at the extreme of misfortune and that, as such, she aptly fulfils the destiny of the 'renowned Labdacids' (862). She is not, it would seem, seriously claiming that anyone has cursed her, but simply that her renewal of the woes of her ancestors is practically indistinguishable from the state of being cursed. The only other passage within the play that is at all promising is 582–614. Here ἀρχαῖα τὰ Λαβδακιδᾶν . . . πήματα (594–5: 'the ancient troubles of the Labdacids'), in the absence of an explicit curse reference, and since the Chrysippus affair cannot legitimately be brought into consideration, need mean nothing more than a sequence of catastrophes: it can mean no more than some progression of inherited disaster. φρενῶν Ἐρινύς (603: 'an Erinys of the mind') is a poor straw to clutch at, for the presence of an Erinys does not entail that a curse obtains.[70] So while a notion of inherited misfortune and perhaps guilt is easy to discern in Sophocles' *Antigone*, there is no good internal evidence for the presence of an inherited curse.

Another text in which an inherited curse has been thought very important is Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: it has been argued that the curse cast upon Atreus by Thyestes determines the action of the trilogy.[71] The curse is clearly aimed at the whole family, οὕτως ὀλέσθαι πᾶν τὸ Πλεισθένους γένος (1600 ff.: 'that so should perish the whole race of Pleisthenes'). Thyestes' kicking over the table reinforces the curse with a tangible expression of disgust and repudiation: a parallel can perhaps be drawn with the use of analogy in some *defixiones* and other magical practices. As the table that has supported the unholy freight of butchered children is overturned, so may the whole family be overturned. This does appear to be a heritable curse and, in common with the curses of Theseus and Oedipus that have been discussed above, it is uttered *in extremis* by a figure in authority. Thyestes is father to Aegisthus, who reports the curse, and uncle to Agamemnon, who has borne the brunt of it earlier in the play.

[70] See below, Ch. 4.

[71] Lloyd-Jones (1962); and cf. Lloyd-Jones (1971), 89 ff.

This curse demands a rather more cautious treatment than the curses we have considered thus far: it lies in the past, before the beginning of the trilogy; it is heritable; and it is mentioned at the end of the play by a character who is only introduced in the exodos.[72] Of course, in this play and the trilogy as a whole the importance of the deeds of former generations must not be minimized.[73] The previous chapter has discussed the importance of inherited guilt in the *Oresteia*. The Cassandra-scene of the *Agamemnon*, which contains prophecies that are indubitably fulfilled, highlights the importance of the feast of Thyestes; and in the exodos Aegisthus chooses for his own purposes to adduce his father's cursing consequent on the same feast. The *Choephori* is not intelligible except in the context of Clytaemestra's murder of her husband, which is avenged by their son with his sister's aid. The great *kommos* in which Agamemnon's children nerve themselves for the deed appeals repeatedly and magnificently to Agamemnon as he lies in his tomb at their feet: the appeals sometimes reach the point of invocation of the dead man reminiscent of the Persians' invoking the departed Dareius in the centrepiece of the *Persae*.[74] There is much talk of *Δίκη* and retribution (313 f., 398 etc.), deployed not in the spirit of detached philosophical or theological enquiry into the rights and wrongs of the matter, but rather in very necessary self-justification and in the attempt to bolster the anxious

[72] To clarify, the distinction that I am endeavouring to inculcate is between (i) an inheritable curse that lies in the past *and is explicitly alluded to as such within the drama(s)*; and (ii) some inheritable curse that may be mentioned by other sources—whatever their antiquity—as lying before the start of some given extant play, but which is not explicitly alluded to within an extant play.

[73] In metaphor and imagery throughout the trilogy, generation and parenthood are of paramount importance. The bereaved vultures and the pregnant hare in the parodos of the *Agamemnon* help set the tone. Clytaemestra's dream (*Cho.* 523–39) continues the theme in her inexorable advance to death at her son's hands, and many other generation metaphors are thrown out in passing, e.g. *πῶλον*, *Cho.* 794. On imagery in Aeschylus, cf. Lebeck (1971), Garvie (1986), xxxvi–xxxviii and notes *passim*, with the review by West (1987*b*). Simon (1988), 28–62 notes that 'Causality [in the *Oresteia*] is typically cast in the language of something begetting something' (45).

[74] Electra's *κλῦθί νυν, ὦ πάτερ* (332: 'hear now, O father') is strongly reminiscent of e.g. Chryses' prayer to Apollo in *Iliad* 1: *κλῦθί μευ, ἀργυρότοξ'* (37: 'hear me, god of the silver bow'). Cf. *Pers.* 638, 665, on which see Groeneboom (1960), ii. 135 ff. On Orestes' nerving himself for the deed of matricide in this passage, see Croiset (1965), 219–21, and Sier (1988), 70 ff.: the invocation of Agamemnon 'hat dem Sohn die innere Festigkeit gegeben, die ihn zum Handeln befähigt' (70).

speakers' resolve. The lines 402–4, assigned by Hermann to the chorus, appear to implicate an Erinys in the family's succession of deaths:

> *βοᾷ γαρ λοιγὸς Ἐρινὺν*
> *παρὰ τῶν πρότερον φθιμένων ἄτην*
> *ἑτέραν ἐπάγουσαν ἐπ' ἄτῃ.*

For destruction calls upon an Erinys, bringing from those who died before another ruin on top of ruin.

Orestes' injunction in the succeeding stanza, *πολυκρατεῖς ἴδεσθε φθιμένων Ἀραί* (406: 'behold, you mighty Curses of the dead!'), is of a piece with this, as the capitalization of *Ἀραί* in Page's text suggests.[75] A curse *stricto sensu*, which is an utterance, cannot look upon an event or on the plight of mortals, but a mortal may certainly entertain the hope that an embodied Erinys can. We know of no curse cast by the deceased Agamemnon or Cassandra, no literal 'Curses of the dead': it is the personified agents and enforcers of cursing, who may, as we have seen, be *called* 'curses', that this line invokes. The *kommos*, then, does not explicitly refer present woes to a curse proper: the perceived presence of an Erinys does not entail that a curse has been cast.[76] But, even though there is no explicit curse reference here, these lines do certainly appear to recall or suggestively evoke the curse of Thyestes on the *γένος*. And they must at least suggest a curse-*like* strand to the coming murder. But this is neither the sole nor the dominant mechanism to which the speakers appeal in their justification of the outrage. Their purposes are suited better by the language of blood for blood, which is much more frequently on their lips. The chorus will conclude the following stasimon with another and rather more pointed reference to an Erinys (648–51), just as Orestes calls for admittance to the house. Now that he is apparently confirmed in his resolve as an avenger, he can be regarded as definitely subject to this supernatural mechanism of causation, and an allusion to the general field of an ancestral curse, if not indubitably to a curse as such, is not inappropriate. In this trilogy,

[75] I print Page's text of 406. The text of the MS, and that printed by West, both give essentially the same sense.

[76] See below, Ch. 4.

curses, like the phenomenon of inherited guilt that we have already considered, have a habit of emerging at crucial points, of irrupting into the action at moments of high drama and of decision making. Timing is crucial.[77] None of these causal elements is casually deployed: a curse or a Fury is not a throwaway scrap of poetic colour, but a grave and weighty element of the dramatic edifice, placed significantly at a load-bearing point in the structure.

There is more talk of curses and Erinyes in the climactic stand-off between Orestes and his mother. In the excited stichomythia of 908 ff., Clytaemestra, whose intelligence and adaptability are beyond question, runs the gamut of possible strategies and, as her end draws nigh, unashamedly clutches at straws. She does not at any point in this scene pronounce a curse of her own on Orestes, but she does ask him: *οὐδὲν σεβίζῃ γενεθλίους ἀράς, τέκνον;* to which he replies: *τεκοῦσα γάρ μ' ἔρριψας ἐς τὸ δυστυχές* (912–13). 'Have you no reverence for a parent's curse, my child?' 'No, for you who bore me cast me into misfortune.' This warning or threat that he, as her child, will be accursed if he kills her is parried with the retort that she has not been a protective mother. In context it does not seem plausible to relate this to the inherited curse on the race: to warn Orestes that he will incur a curse is far more to the point than asking him whether he respects the inherited curse that obtains. For if anything the inherited curse, as the chorus has already implied more than once, does not militate against her death but actually conduces to it. On this reading, the thrust of Orestes' reply must be that she has not been a true mother to him and as such does not have the right or power to curse him.[78] The Nurse in the previous episode has offered a paradigm of motherhood far more touching than his biological mother, and no amount of desperate mammary display (896–8) will change that. Clytaemestra does not let go of her status as mother. In the famous exchange 924–5, she warns of the *μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας* ('grudge-bearing hounds of the mother'), which Orestes deftly parries by adducing those of his father. Of course, both the exodos of this

[77] I consider this phenomenon of 'irruption' at length in my consideration of Erinyes below, Ch. 4.

[78] Thus Garvie *ad* 913: 'Although Clytaemestra gave him birth, she did not treat him like a son, and therefore she is not properly his mother. . . . [T]he line makes a fitting response to 912 as usually interpreted.'

play, when Orestes begins to see Erinyes, and the whole course of the *Eumenides* prove her right: Orestes' dilemma is precisely that he has been warned of manifold 'attacks of the Erinyes' (275 ff.) if he does *not* do the deed.[79] The fact that Clytaemestra is right when she says this is quite compatible with her saying it in desperation: curses and Erinyes, like any concept that humans are able to deploy, are quite amenable to being inflected in whatever direction is demanded by a speaker's assessment of his or her own needs.[80] The overlapping spheres of curses and Erinyes, then, are important to the *Choephori* and the *Eumenides* no less than to the *Agamemnon*. But to see the trilogy as ultimately the working-out of the *inherited* curse of Thyestes seems insufficiently grounded in the text, in which all characters have their own ends to serve and will deploy language appropriately.

There is indubitably a curse at work here. But, like the inherited guilt that also helps to inform the trilogy, it is one strand of several. We have argued in the previous chapter that the unity of the *Oresteia* consists not least in the sheer mass and accumulation of interconnected causal elements. It has now emerged that the curse of Thyestes, like the deaths of Iphigenia and Agamemnon, has the status of one element in this conglomerate. It is a crucial member of the trilogy, but not its keystone. While this inherited curse is certainly no chimera or phantom, it is simply one of many intertwining strands of explanation for the action of the trilogy.[81] It is less prominent, for example, than the all-pervasive preoccupation with retributive δίκη. Tragic texts by their nature unfold diachronically. While it is sometimes inevitable and often legitimate to take a more synchronic view of them, the ordering of developments within a play does not deserve dismissal out of hand. The inherited curse is mentioned very late in the *Agamemnon*, by a character who has a vested interest in justifying

[79] Cf. Daube (1938), 166–78, on Agamemnon's dilemma at Aulis.

[80] This is well said at Thucydides 3. 82. 4–8.

[81] This complex of internecine strife notoriously omits any mention of Pelops and the curse of Myrtilus as an ἀρχὴ κακῶν ('beginning of evils'). To refer the calamities of the trilogy to anything beyond the generation of Atreus and Thyestes would be a desperate and, it would seem, quite unnecessary expedient. Orestes' deployment of the great name of the Pelopids (*Cho.* 503 f.) is a wish that the line might be preserved, not a lament that it is beset with ancient woes.

Agamemnon's murder and who is likely to rejoice in it out of filial piety and for other reasons. To treat the *Agamemnon* like some highly wrought and unusually sophisticated murder mystery, as though it should be expected to offer some final answer, some over-arching *explanation* for its catalogue of disasters, is misleading, not to say pernicious.[82] For this line of interpretation comes perilously close to over-intellectualizing the trilogy and consequently minimizing its very great impact as drama. Family is undeniably of paramount importance in the *Oresteia*; but we go rather too far if we enthrone an architectonic ancestral curse in the attempt to invest the trilogy with unity.

I have argued, not that inherited curses have no place in Greek tragedy, but rather that they are never more than one strand of causation. Still less do I seek to maintain that curses are unimportant in themselves. If we endeavour to encapsulate the sense of unity with which a work like the *Oresteia* leaves us, we would do well to avoid the belief that it must reside in a single causal factor. If anything, it is the sheer mass and accumulation of elements in the trilogy that imparts a sense of its oneness. The sorrows of the house of Atreus are multiple, and the downfall of Agamemnon and the near downfall of his son are multiply determined. The reader who considers the causal aspect of unity may well find himself or herself thinking that it is not the curse of Thyestes alone that draws the work together, but the fact that different woes come to a head in the careers of very few persons: there are many reasons for the many sufferings of this single *oikos*. Inherited guilt and Erinyes, two other facets of extreme familial disorder, are no less important to the feverish afflictions of the house.

I have also emphasized that in the tragedies we have considered curses are deployed at moments of high drama and with considerable theatrical impact and subtlety. If *defixiones* are very much less prominent than curses, that may be partly because the curse proper, as a performative utterance, has more potential for being uttered in a moment of heightened tension or emotion. A curse, moreover, can be cast in another character's teeth, whereas the *defixio* is undertaken

[82] Holford-Strevens (1999), 219 remarks that Aristotle treats Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* 'on the footing of a detective story', and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* 'as a thriller'.

in secret or at least privately. And because an inherited curse may travel down a bloodline in parallel with self-destructive situations and dispositions of choice, it perhaps lends itself better than a *defixio* to a medium in which, as Aristotle notes, sufferings within families are of paramount importance.[83]

[83] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453[a]18–19, [b]19–22, and see above, Ch. 2.

4

Erinyes

The workings of inherited guilt and curses in tragedy have by now become clear. In the course of discussing them, we have had occasion to mention Erinyes more than once. In this chapter we come on to consider in detail their nature and operation in tragedy. These three concepts—inherited guilt, curse, Erinys—are often found in close and involved conjunction, and part of our endeavour is gradually to tease them apart, to identify their essence and their differing functions and connotations as they are deployed by the tragedians. Crucial to this project is a lively awareness of the symbiotic relationship between form and content: to understand how a curse, a taint of guilt, or an Erinys works and what it signifies, we must have an eye to the flow and structure of our plays as well as to what happens and is said in them. Curses and guilt, we have seen, tend to come to the fore at crucial points, to articulate and inform plays on the levels both of detail and of large-scale structure. The same is true of Erinyes, who have a habit of obtruding themselves on our consciousness with a violent suddenness and then keeping hold of it. We shall first pursue their history and nature in life and in genres other than tragedy, in order to learn what we can about their range and prerogatives. Having staked out their territory, we examine their appearances in a number of plays where they are crucial, and find that in all these texts they share certain features that set them apart from curses and inherited guilt. We then consider their central place in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, which is often taken, more or less consciously, for a *locus classicus*. In the event, we shall see, the one extant play in which Erinyes almost literally hold centre stage is an exception to the rule in more ways than one. Thus, we shall find, Aeschylus' play helps us to define the province and limitations of tragic Erinyes.

Erinyes are called by Burkert 'the embodied curse', and in one passage of tragedy they confirm this identification themselves (Aesch. *Eum.* 417).[1] They are involved in the enforcement of curses as early as the *Iliad*. Twice in the Embassy-scene of book 9, Erinyes are brought into the sphere of cursing, first when Phoenix relates his own father's curse on him (*Il.* 9. 454–6, *στυγερὰς δ' ἐπεκέκλετ' Ἐρινῦς κτλ.*: 'and he called on the hateful Erinyes'), and again in the Meleager-paradigm (*Il.* 9. 571–2, *τῆς δ' ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς | ἔκλυεν ἐξ Ἐρέβεσφιν, ἀμείλιχον ἦτορ ἔχουσα*: 'but the Erinys who walks in mist heard her from Erebus, having an implacable heart'). But they have a wider range of attributes and functions than this description suggests. They may sometimes be invoked to fulfil a *defixio*, or they may silence a talking horse.[2] They may correct the path of the sun or punish oath-breakers.[3] They may avenge kin-murder even when no explicit curse has been uttered; and be invoked as explanations of *ate* where murder and equine locution are not at issue.[4] They may be euphemistically called Eumenides and identified with the Semnai Theai.[5] Their field of operation appears at first sight to overlap not only with curses, but

[1] Burkert (1985), 181. *Ἀρά* may become a *daimon* in itself, and may be identified with the Erinys that would otherwise be regarded as enforcing it: cf. Aesch. *Septem* 70 with Hutchinson, ad loc.; Soph. *El.* 111, where Electra invokes to aid in the avenging of Agamemnon *πότνι' Ἀρά, | σεμναί τε θεῶν παῖδες Ἐρινύες* ('lady Curse, and dread Erinyes, children of the gods'); and Strubbe (1991), 42 with n. 100.

[2] *Defixiones*: see above, Ch. 3; Versnel (1991), 64; and Gager (1992), 134–6, at 135 n. 61: 'They [sc. Erinyes] do not appear frequently in the papyri or tablets [sc. of defixiones]'. Horse: Hom. *Il.* 19. 417, with *Σ*, noting: *ἐπίσκοποι γάρ εἰσι τῶν παρὰ φύσιν* ('for they are the overseers of things contrary to nature').

[3] Path of sun: Heraclitus fr. 94 DK (= fr. 226 KRS): *ἥλιος οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μή, Ἐρινύες μιν Δίκης ἐπίκουροι ἐξευρήσουσιν* ('the sun will not exceed his measures: otherwise, the Erinyes, agents of Justice, will find him out'). Oaths: as early as Hom. *Il.* 19. 259–60: Agamemnon, swearing that he has not laid hands on Briseis, invokes, among other powers, *Ἐρινύες, αἵ θ' ὑπὸ γαῖαν | ἀνθρώπους τίνυνται, ὅτις κ' ἐπίορκον ὀμόσσῃ* ('Erinyes, who beneath the earth punish mortal men who swear false oaths'). See Burkert (1985), 200 with n. 13, and cf. the closely similar wording in Agamemnon's earlier oath before the single combat of Menelaus and Paris, *Il.* 3. 276 ff. at 278–9. Both of these are moments of high drama, crucial to the pace and flow of the poem as a whole.

[4] Apparently random infatuation: Hom. *Il.* 19. 86–9, and see below. At Soph. *Teucer* fr. 577 Radt, Telamon complains that he has been deceived by an Erinys: *ἐν σκότῳ λαθοῦσά με | ἔσαιν' Ἐρινὺς ἡδοναῖς ἐψευσμένον* (2–3: 'an Erinys, going unnoticed in darkness, beguiled me, deceived in my pleasures').

[5] Though no extant passage in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* explicitly confirms the name Eumenides, cf. the play's Hypothesis 3–4, *τὰς δὲ Ἐρινύας πραΰνασα* [sc. *Ἀθηνᾶ*]

also with *keres*.[6] They may appear in the flesh, or their operation may be immanent, which to the classical Greek is no less real a manifestation: Aphrodite's role in the human causation of Euripides' *Hippolytus* is just as significant and just as real as the physical archery of Artemis in Sophocles' *Niobe* (fr. 441aa, 441a Radt).[7] Or again, in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the Erinyes of the murdered Agamemnon, though invisible save in the person of Orestes, are not less real than those of Clytaemestra which first appear to Orestes alone and subsequently hound him over many weary miles.[8] The earliest literary references to the Erinyes, in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, attach unattractive epithets to them: the Erinys is δασπλῆτις, στυγερά, and ἠεροφοῖτις (respectively Hom. *Od.* 15. 234, *Il.* 9. 454, 9. 571 etc.).[9] Moreover,

προσηγόρευσεν Εὐμενίδας ('[Athena], mollifying the Erinyes, named them Eumenides'; reading πραΰνασα with West for the πραΰνας of MS M, which would make the subject of the sentence Orestes) ∼ Harpocration s.v. Εὐμενίδες; Page, app. crit. *ad* 1027; and West, app. crit. *ad* 1028: 'veri simile est autem Minervam Furiis hic nomen Εὐμενίδας indidisse . . .'

[6] The two may be identified, e.g. Eur. *El.* 1252: Orestes is to be hounded by κῆρες . . . αἱ κυνώπιδες θεαί ('the *keres*, the dog-faced goddesses'). On the nature and functions of the entities *keres* see further below.

[7] Euripides' *Cresphontes* seems to allude to a version in which Apollo does the shooting: Eur. *Cresph.* fr. 455:. . . τέκνα | Νίοβης θανόντα Λοξίου τοξεύμασιν ('the children of Niobe who died by the arrows of Loxias'). Cropp (1995), *ad loc.* suggests that Artemis' role 'is absent through allusory brevity, or because the sentence is quoted incomplete'. In Sophocles' play, fr. 441a.9–11 seems to suggest that it is the *daughters* of Niobe who are perishing on stage at the hands of Artemis and that the sons have died already: perhaps they were shot down by Apollo when they were on the hunting expedition mentioned in the fragmentary Hypothesis, the occasion of Niobe's renewed boasting ([ἀποπέμπουσα] δὲ ἐπὶ θήραν . . . [πάλ]ιν ἐμεγαλορημ[όν] ησεν κτλ.: 'sending them off hunting she boasted of them again'; and cf. fr. 448). In any case, both versions agree that the archery is a real physical phenomenon.

[8] The word 'hound' is to the point: Clytaemestra has warned her son of the μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας (*Cho.* 924: 'the mother's grudge-bearing hounds', and cf. Soph. *El.* 1388: ἄφυκτοι κύνες 'inescapable hounds'; Eur. *El.* 1342–3: κύνας τάσδε 'these hounds'), and see Vidal-Naquet (1990*a*), 158 ff., noting the role of animal imagery in this play's presentation of the Erinyes. On his account, their reconfiguration as tutelary deities of Athens is marked by their transformation from bestial huntresses into gods of agriculture and recipients of non-deviant sacrifice. It may be thought that to press too hard the animality of these divinities, even within the precisely defined bounds of the play's economy of imagery, is potentially pernicious. For their elaborate and highly articulate self-justification in the trial scene is, it would seem, hardly characteristic animal behaviour.

[9] On ἠεροφοῖτις see below. δασπλῆτις is another fossilized Homeric word of uncertain meaning. In its contexts it is unlikely to mean anything pleasant: the

Sophocles, in an isolated fragment, has *Τειρεσὼ δ' ἄνωθεν †εστινη† αἱματορρόφος* (fr. 743: 'Teiso above, gulping blood'). In Hesiod they are *κρατεραί* (*Theog.* 185: 'mighty'). None of these poets describes them physically: for this the Pythia's description in the prologue of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* is the *locus classicus* (*Eum.* 46–56).[10] In the exodos of Euripides' *Electra*, the Dioscuri call them *χειροδράκοντες χρῶτα κελαιναί* (1345: 'serpent-handed, black-skinned').[11] The visual arts are less uniformly damning. Erinyes are depicted with or without wings, with or without black skin or clothing, and with or without entwining serpents. While the monstrous potentialities of these attributes are exploited to the full in some representations, others depict personable young maidens whose appearance is some way removed from hideousness.[12] It may be thought that Aeschylus, who doubtless had an eye to the dramatic effect of his embodied Erinyes in the theatre, exercised considerable influence over artists.[13]

Pausanias attests cults of the following related entities:

(i) A cult of Demeter Erinys in Arcadia (8. 25. 3 ff.), where she was covered by Poseidon and bore the horse Arion, perhaps gaining her epithet from her wrath at this arbitrary treatment.[14] *τοῦ μηνίματος μὲν ἕνεκα Ἐρινύς, ὅτι τὸ θυμῷ χρῆσθαι καλοῦσιν ἐρινύειν Ἀρκάδες* (8. 25. 6: '*Erinys* on account of her wrath, because the Arcadians call to be

epithet is also applied at an early date to Charybdis (Simon. fr. 522 Page), where the monster is a metaphor for all-consuming death. Rather later it is used of Hecate in a magical context (Theoc. 2. 14); and of snakes, or rather of Cadmus and Harmonia in snake form (Nicander *Ther.* 609); and later still of the horrific prospect of lovers separated: Paulus Silentiarius *Anth. Pal.* 5. 241. 3–4, *δασπλῆτα διάστασιν*, '[*daspleta*] separation'. The etymological suggestions of the *Suda* and Hesychius s.v. betray desperation.

[10] In attempting to describe them, the Pythia finds it relevant to mention that she has seen paintings of Harpies (50 f.). Sommerstein, *ad loc.*, notes that her description includes some words not normally found in tragedy—*βδελύκτροποι* (52: 'repulsive'), *ῥέγκουσι* (53: 'they snore/snort'). To give a good idea of the full horror of the Furies, she must stoop below the normal level of generic elevation.

[11] See also Eur. *Or.* 255–7, *IT* 285–7, for two more associations with serpents.

[12] The range of permutations is displayed and described in *LIMC* iii s.v. *Erinys*.

[13] A *Vita* of Aeschylus claims that when the *Eumenides* was produced, the entrance of the chorus so shocked the audience *ὡς τὰ μὲν νήπια ἐκψύξαι, τὰ δὲ ἔμβρυα ἐξαμβλωθῆναι* ('that children expired; foetuses miscarried'). On this fictional account, their shocking effect on the Pythia within the confines of the play was matched by their powerful influence over the spectators of the drama.

[14] Cf. Burkert (1985), 138.

annoyed *erinyein*'). It has been suggested, on the strength of a number of archaeological finds from Mycenae, that this cult is a survival from Mycenaean religion, preserved into historical times in the relatively secluded backwaters of Arcadia.[15]

(ii) In Sicyon, a *ναὸς θεῶν ἃς Ἀθηναῖοι Σεμνάς, Σικυώνιοι δὲ Εὐμενίδας ὀνομάζουσιν*, where the deities received libations of honey and water and an annual burnt offering of a pregnant sheep (2. 11. 4: 'a temple of the goddesses whom the Athenians call *Semnai*, but the Sicyonians *Eumenides*').

(iii) A sanctuary by the Areopagus in Athens of the goddesses *ἃς καλοῦσιν Ἀθηναῖοι Σεμνάς, Ἡσίοδος δὲ Ἐρινὺς ἐν Θεογονίᾳ* (1. 28. 6: 'whom the Athenians call *Semnai*, but Hesiod, in the *Theogony*, *Erinyes*'). He remarks that Aeschylus was the first to give them hair entwined with snakes, and that their images here had *οὐδὲν φοβερόν* ('nothing frightening').[16]

But whereas it might seem logical *a priori* that these deities should receive apotropaic worship after the fashion of heroes throughout Hellas, in practice they seem to have been largely ignored by cult.[17] Perhaps their negative function was felt to predominate to such an extent that they were better ignored than disturbed. No doubt their fabled implacability made sacrifice seem hopeless in Greek eyes: their character as untiring avengers would not admit of any substantial *quid pro quo*. And where they were in fact worshipped, they were called by euphemistic names. The cult of the Semnai Theai at Athens was real, but the Erinyes who in Aeschylus come to be identified with

[15] Marinatos (1973). Certain 'idols' have been unearthed on the southern slope of the Mycenaean acropolis, 'purposely made and painted to represent extremely fierce and ugly looking female beings', together with 'large coiled snakes modelled in clay': examples are illustrated in Marinatos' figs. 1 and 2. The *e-ri-nu* of the Mycenaean tablets might, on this account, be more akin to the historical Demeter Erinys than to 'the Furies of Orestes, which automatically come to one's mind'.

[16] The identifications both of the Erinyes of the *Oresteia* with the Athenian Semnai Theai and of the Erinyes of Soph. *OC* with the Eumenides have been doubted: cf. Brown (1984), with the rebuttal by Lloyd-Jones (1990). In the course of his attempt to separate these figures, Brown mentions several other possible instances of their cult.

[17] Harrison (1903), 238 f., points out that the one instance of 'worship for the Erinyes *as such*' is in Sparta (Hdt. 4. 149: a *ἷρον* of 'the Erinyes of Laius and Oedipus'); and that Clytaemestra's tragic account of her offerings to them (Aesch. *Eum.* 106 ff.) is a transference to these beings of 'the regular ritual of the dead and of underworld divinities': it does not reflect any attested, let alone widespread, Erinys-cult.

them 'were hypothetical, imaginary spirits, created in part from bits and pieces of the literary/mythological tradition and in good part from Aeschylus' imagination. In practised religion, at least in the archaic and classical periods, the Erinyes did not exist in Athens.'[18] On this account, the Erinyes of tragedy might be termed a survival of the distant past: 'Their *floruit* had been in the past, a past which Aeschylus conjures up in his treatment of avenging spirits in the *Oresteia*.'[19] If, even as the tragedians wrote, the emphasis in the Athenian mind fell, or was fast coming to fall, rather on the human duty of vengeance than on its divine ministers the Furies, then the prominence of tragic Erinyes becomes still more arresting. The human duty to requite is certainly paramount even in that most Erinys-ridden of works, the *Oresteia*—but it is paramount in close conjunction with divine causation. In Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas*, moreover, the prominence of Erinyes in the climactic 'decision'-scene is undeniable: here again, they appear in tandem with Eteocles' very human reasons for fighting his brother. Previous chapters contain lengthy arguments for the importance of doubly motivated action in tragedy where inherited guilt and curses obtain.[20] In continuation of this line of thought, it will be suggested below that the workings of Erinyes in the tragedians, alongside the force of the mortal vendetta, present a case in some respects parallel. But cursing and the inherited taint of guilt certainly continued to be recognized among Athenians in the fifth century. If Erinyes did not, and if they therefore savoured of the archaic even at the time of production, they become an interesting case. It would, of course, be unwise to speculate too far on the basis of scanty or non-existent evidence: let us simply bear in mind the apparent disparity between

[18] Mikalson (1991), 14. See also Mikalson (1983), 50 ff., quoting Antiphon 4. 1. 2–4. Cf. Parker (1983), 14 f., on the unreality of Erinyes and *alastores* in Attic comedy by contrast with their central importance in tragedy. Parker notes, ibid. n. 66, the 'homely' comic employment of language which in the tragedians is lofty and momentous, including Ar. *Lys.* 811, *Ἐρινύων ἀπορρώξ* ('a bit broken off the Erinyes'), where the grim avenging spirits of tragedy are not at issue. Add to his passages Ar. *Plut.* 423 f.: *ἴσως Ἐρινύς ἐστιν ἐκ τραγῳδίας κτλ.* ('perhaps it's an Erinys from tragedy').

[19] Mikalson (1983), 51–2. Nothing more will be said of the diachronic development of Erinyes in cult. Speculations on their earliest forms and nature are excluded from this account as both fruitless in themselves and largely irrelevant to the interpretation of tragedy.

[20] See Chs. 2 and 3.

the prominence of tragic Erinyes and their vanishingly small role in contemporary cult.

Though the Erinyes share common ground with that class of avenging spirit known as ἀλάστωρ, they are distinct from it.[21] An *alastor* is discerned by Clytaemestra in the murder of Agamemnon (Aesch. *Ag.* 1501, and cf. 1476) and by Oedipus in the future fortunes of his sons (Soph. *OC* 787 ff.). And when, in the *Eumenides*, Orestes is pleading for sanctuary at Athens, he grimly describes himself as ἀλάστορα (Aesch. *Eum.* 236). This entity may, it is true, ensure the recurrence of bloodshed in blighted families. But, unlike Erinyes, which may be single or plural, the *alastor* is generally single in number, and in tragedy it does not attain to any substantial degree of personification, except insofar as a mortal may be identified with it. Nor is it conceived as residing in an afflicted mind or infatuating it. Sometimes, and from an early date, the word is used loosely of some kind of generalized evil spirit that causes misfortune outside the familial context. Thus the Messenger in Aeschylus' *Persae* prefaces his description of the rout at Salamis by identifying the false Greek deserter as φανεὶς ἀλάστωρ ἢ κακὸς δαίμων ποθέν (354: 'some *alastor* or evil spirit appearing from somewhere'): insofar as the bearer of deceitful information brings grave misfortune, he must be some kind of *alastor*.[22] In Homer the word appears only in the *Iliad*, and is never used of a spirit or supernatural entity: it is used only as a proper name for several slain warriors (e.g. *Il.* 5. 677). In the fourth century, Demosthenes employs ἀλάστωρ only as a term of general abuse for his traitorous adversaries (Dem. 18. 296, 19. 305). Erinyes, which are not only more vividly realized but also enjoy a wider range of prerogatives, play in tragedy a much more prominent and crucial role.

[21] *Contra* Dodds (1960), 55: 'This sinister capacity of guilt for producing fresh guilt is "projected" as an evil spirit, or company of evil spirits, for whom the terms δαίμων, ἀλάστωρ, ἐρινύς are used more or less interchangeably.' Of course, an *alastor* in its capacity as avenging spirit is perhaps not easily distinguishable from an Erinys in the same capacity, but for many of the capacities of Erinyes there is no parallel in the sphere of operation of the *alastor*. *Alastores* do not, for example, enforce curses or prevent the natural order more generally from running awry. Though Erinyes do tend to bring misfortune, their role as enforcers and guardians of the order of things has a positive and useful aspect that we do not find predicated of *alastores*, which do not police the universe in the same way.

[22] Hall (1996), *ad* Aesch. *Pers.* 158, notes the frequency of this notion in the *Persae*, and remarks on its affinity with the identification of an unspecified θεός τις ('some god').

We shall come in due course to examine the question of the proverbial implacability of the Erinyes, especially in connection with their apparent placation at the end of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. But it is worth noting at this point that there is a highly suggestive piece of inscriptional evidence from which we may conclude that an *alastor* or something very similar did have a real cultic existence outside literary texts—and, what is more, that this kind of entity could be propitiated. The text in question is the now well-known *SEG* xliii. 630, a *lex sacra* from Selinous.[23] In column B of this inscription, we find a prescription for the purifying of those who are beset by entities called ἐλάστεροι (*elasteroi*). There seem to be several kinds or grades of ἐλάστερος (*elasteros*) by which a man can be afflicted, including ξενικός ('pertaining to a guest') and πατρῶιος ('ancestral'/'pertaining to the father').[24] The text gives detailed instructions for purification.[25] In this context at least, it is definitely possible to be rid of *elasteroi*: ἱαρεῖον τέλεον ἐπὶ τôι βομôι τôι δαμοσίοι θύσας καθαρὸς ἔστο (col. B 10–11: 'Having sacrificed a full-grown victim on the public altar, let him be pure').[26]

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of this text. Suffice it to say, with Clinton's discussion, that 'This must be the same figure as the Alastor or Alastoros, hitherto familiar from literature, but here we see, in real life, purificatory measures taken to counteract these spirits.'[27] As such this text is a crucial piece of evidence for the student of the various avenging spirits of tragedy. Aeschylus—or, for that matter, Homer—did not invent the notion that a mortal who has transgressed may be pursued by spirit-avengers. Moreover, what is at least as important, it is now clear that the monopoly on the pacification of such spirits is not held by Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: there was such a thing in Greek cult, at least at Selinous, and quite probably in the fifth century.[28] When, in due course, we turn to the role of the Erinyes in the *Oresteia*, we must bear this in mind.

[23] See *inter alia* the detailed commentary of Lupu (2005), 359–87, with abundant references; and the helpful study by Clinton (1996).

[24] Thus Lupu (2005), esp. 385.

[25] 'Unusually detailed': thus Lupu (2005), 364.

[26] 'Let him be pure', correctly, Clinton (1996): strictly speaking, not 'he shall be pure', as Lupu (2005) renders.

[27] Clinton (1996), 160.

[28] See Lupu (2005), 365, on the possible dating of the text.

Before we return to Erinyes strictly considered, and their relation to various kinds of spirit and *daimon*, let us note column A of this same inscription (i.e. *SEG* xliii. 630 col. A). Here sacrifice is prescribed τοῖι Διὶ τοῖι Εὐμενεῖ ('to Zeus *Eumenes*') and to the Eumenides. Zeus *Eumenes* is not otherwise attested, and certainly does not elsewhere receive cult in company with the Eumenides.[29] In this context, Zeus Eumenes and the Eumenides seem to be 'kindly chthonian deities' having 'nothing to do with the destructive Erinyes'.[30] So here we have another surprise, another otherwise unknown cultic practice. This too must be born in mind by the student of tragedy, and especially the student of the *Oresteia*. But now let us return to our discussion of Erinyes proper and consider briefly their relationship with another important class of spirit.

Erinyes can also be distinguished from the κήρ or κῆρες, with which they are sometimes identified. The province of κῆρες is at the same time more generalized and more limited. These entities are intimately associated with the death and disease, more or less personified, that hangs over a man insofar as he is mortal.[31] There may have been a time in the Golden Age when men lived

> νόσφιν ἄτερ τε κακῶν καὶ ἄτερ χαλεποῖο πόνοιο
> νούσων τ' ἀργαλέων αἵτ' ἀνδράσι κῆρας ἔδωκαν.
>
> (Hes. *WD* 91f.)

Far removed from evils and hard toil, and from baneful diseases which bestow *keres* on mortals.

But now every man is susceptible to a *ker* or *keres*, whether or not he is a killer or accursed. In Homer the phrase κὴρ . . . θανάτοιο is

[29] Thus Lupu (2005), 370, *ad* col. A. 8–9.

[30] Lupu (2005), 370. *Contra*, see the important paper Henrichs (1991). Henrichs argues against the kind of sharp disjunction to which Lupu subscribes here, seeing instead in the Erinyes a uniting of contradictory aspects. In their very nature, Henrichs argues, the chthonians, including the Erinyes, encompass both curse and blessing, both good and evil, an ambivalence esp. sharply formulated in Attic drama. On this account, it would seem that the association of Erinyes and Semnai Theai/Eumenides would not have been as outlandish to the *Oresteia*'s contemporary audience as it has often seemed to modern classicists. Perhaps, it might be argued, the Erinyes are more *inherently* ambiguous than we tend to allow.

[31] For the various Greek notions of powers governing human fortune and mortality, see Ch. 6 below.

frequent (*Il.* 2. 302, *Od.* 11. 398 etc.: '*ker* of death'). Odysseus coordinates *θάνατον καὶ κῆρα* (*Od.* 12. 158), 'where the two words death and Ker are all but equivalents'.[32] This Homeric employment of the term comes close to the notion of an individual's fate. Where Achilles speaks of his choice of lives (*Il.* 9. 410 ff.), it has been remarked that 'there is strongly present the idea of the diversity of fates'.[33] In Sophocles, Odysseus describes the afflicted Philoctetes with his chronic wound as *νοσῶν . . . παλαιᾷ κηρί* (41 f.: 'sick with an ancient *ker*'); and in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Teiresias prophesies that, if Menoeceus is sacrificed, he will cast *μέλαιναν κῆρα* over the eyes of the Argives (Eur. *Phoen.* 950: 'black *ker*').[34] Erinyes, on the other hand, are never conceived as the generalized ills of the flesh to which all are susceptible alike. *Keres*, it may be said, define the limits of mortal vulnerability: Erinyes define the limits of what is lawful, in life and in the cosmos, and they punish transgressions of these ordinances. In general, they do not attach themselves to mortals unless called into action by whatever means: thus *οἴκων γὰρ εὐθυδίκων | καλλίπαις πότμος αἰεί* (Aesch. *Ag.* 761 f.: 'the fate of straight and just houses bears fair children always').[35] In other words, though they may occasionally be presented as creating more or less random misfortune, Erinyes are not fates of death or disease any more than they are generalised 'evil spirits'.[36]

[32] Harrison (1903), 174. Much of this paragraph is ultimately indebted to Harrison's account of *keres* in her ch. 5.

[33] Harrison (1903), 175.

[34] Harrison (1903), 167, implies that at the root of this usage is the idea of the *ker* causing blindness. Speculations as to the original nature of these beings aside, we may accept Mastronarde's gloss on the line, *ad loc.*: 'Primarily of the cloud of grief and misfortune [that will envelop the defeated Seven] . . . but also with a suggestion of the darkness that closes over the eyes of those who die in battle', comparing 1453.

[35] So Dodds (1960), 55–6: 'They [the Erinyes] are not everywhere at work . . . we are to think of them as generated by a specific deed of blood . . . or by the curses of its victim.' Cf., from the first century BC, Cicero, *Pro Sexto Roscio* 66, on furies and the 'macula' attendant on the shedding of a father's or mother's blood, which 'permanat ad animum, ut summus furor atque amentia consequatur'.

[36] The notion of the 'random' Erinys, i.e. the Erinys whose workings are not, or are not obviously, part of some definite and discernible pattern, is found in the earliest poetry: this idea seems to underlie Agamemnon's explanation of his infatuation at Hom. *Il.* 19. 86 ff., where the emphasis is on the notion of an impenetrable and *ταραχῶδες* ('troublesome') divine realm dispensing *ate* willy-nilly. (This notion is, of course, a godsend to a man of Agamemnon's haughty and unyielding temper.) But the notion of an Erinys whose workings are more intelligible and regulated is also

This concludes our consideration of the relationship between Erinyes and various other classes of troublesome or avenging spirit. We have noted one or two suggestive pieces of evidence about implacability and the potential for purification: further discussion of these nuances will be found later in this chapter.[37]

The name *Ἐρινύς*, which is attested in the Mycenaean tablets, has been variously etymologized.[38] Pre-modern suggestions are very various and sometimes smack of desperation: to take one example, the contention of the *EM* and *Et. Gud.* that the name comes *παρὰ τὸ τὰς ἀράς ἀνύειν*, that is 'from their fulfilling curses', is unpromising. These early attempts tend to strike at readily identifiable characteristics of the Erinyes, conceived as untiring chthonic deities who may fulfil an executive function in realizing curses and punishments. Modern etymology has come no closer to a solution. Uncertainty is widely admitted, and Chantraine states bluntly: 'Pas d'étymologie'.[39]

The Erinyes may be the children of Gaia (Hes. *Theog.* 185) or of Night (Aesch. *Eum.* 321 f., 416). They are agreed to be creatures of early date, older than the current aristocracy of Olympian gods and capable of working their work on them as well as on mortals: even a god who has been wronged may be thought to have his or her Erinyes.[40] It is also quite conceivable to present them locked in

very early: the *μητρὸς Ἐρινύες* ('mother's Erinyes') that afflict Oedipus at Hom. *Od.* 11. 280 belong to the pattern familiar from later texts, as does the curse-enforcing Erinys of the Cyclic *Thebaid* (fr. 2 Davies).

[37] See below, p. 104.

[38] In CV 200. 8 an offering of oil is apparently made to *e-ri-nu*, an Erinys or Erinyes. This instance has therefore been thought to have a closer affinity with the Demeter Erinys of the historical period than with the Erinyes of tragedy, but, as CV conclude, *ad loc.*, her or their 'early status is uncertain'. Some modern speculations on the origins and early career of the Erinyes are summarized in Lloyd-Jones (1990), but, as things stand, they cannot be more than speculation. On Mycenaean finds possibly confirming a Mycenaean cult of Demeter Erinys, see above, n. 15.

[39] Chantraine (1968), s.v. *Erinys*.

[40] Antiquity: it is entirely appropriate that at the end of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* the apparently reconfigured Eumenides should assume their home *γᾶς ὑπὸ κεύθεσιν ὠγυγίοισιν* (1036: 'deep in the **primeval** recesses of earth'). For the operation of these agents, and the related agents the *κῆρες* (cf. Aesch. *Septem* 1054 ff., Eur. *El.* 1252) upon deities, see Hes. *Theog.* 211 ff., 468 ff., with West *ad locc.*, quoting Hom. *Il.* 21. 412 etc. When, at *Il.* 15. 201 ff., Iris brings to Poseidon Zeus' order that he desist from battle, she reminds him *ὡς πρεσβυτέροισιν Ἐρινύες αἰὲν ἕπονται* (204: 'since the Erinyes always attend on those who are older'). The Erinyes are said to be on Zeus' side in this case not because he is supreme god but because under their familial aspect they follow the elder brother—apparently no less so among gods than among men.

conflict with an Olympian. 'Les E[rinyes]...ne se soumettent en aucune façon à l'autorité des dieux de la jeune génération.'[41] When they silence Achilles' horse in the *Iliad*, it is Hera, no mean goddess, who has endued it with speech in the first place (Hom. *Il.* 19. 407 ff.). In Aeschylus' *Eumenides* the Erinyes are the adversaries-at-law of Apollo, which implies equality—or at least a notional parity in that they are not subservient to him: the ultimate equality of votes cast (*ἰσόψηφος δίκη* 795) further reinforces the reality of their claim in the play.[42] Moreover, Athena is at great pains to placate them in the final scene, urging them *μὴ βαρυστόνως φέρειν* (794: 'to bear it without heavy groaning', tr. Collard).[43] She panders dexterously and untiringly (*οὗτοι καμοῦμαι κτλ.* 881) to their injured sense of honour (*ἄτιμος* 780 = 810 ~ *οὐκ ἀτιμίᾳ σέθεν* 796; *οὐκ ἔστ' ἄτιμοι* 824; *σεμνότιμος* 833; *τιμᾶν δαναιᾶν* 845 = 879 ~ *τιμιώτερος* 853; *τιμίαν ἕδραν* 854–5; *εὖ τιμωμένην* 868; (*μήποτ'*) *ἄτιμος* 884; *εἶναι δικαίως ἐς τὸ πᾶν τιμωμένῃ* 891, etc.). Not only are they worth placating: they are also very hard to placate. The persistence and obstinacy that they have demonstrated in their pursuit of Orestes is not dispersed by their legal defeat. Only after lengthy persuasion do they announce: *δέξομαι Παλλάδος ξυνοικίαν* (916: 'I shall accept the opportunity to dwell with Pallas'). We shall be concerned later with the changes in the Erinyes' position, and perhaps outlook, that occur in this play and in the *Oresteia* as a whole. This introduction of Erinyes on to the tragic stage, unique in extant tragedy, will presently demand close attention.[44]

Since tragedy is much concerned with curses and familial dysfunction, the workings of Erinyes might be expected to play a prominent part in the genre, as indeed they do. Like *δίκη* and curses, Erinyes may be invoked to suit the purposes of the speaker, and it follows that they may be important in a play without being introduced as characters.

[41] *LIMC* iii. 1 s.v. *Erinys*.

[42] On the vexed question of the voting in this trial-scene, see below.

[43] On 794, see Goldhill (1984), 263.

[44] Of course other minor divinities appear elsewhere in tragedy: thus (e.g.) the author of the *PV* introduces Kratos and Bia; Heracles appears *ex machina* in Soph. *Phil.*; and Iris and Lyssa are characters in Eur. *Her.* and the Discouri in Eur. *El.* But of these examples, three are straightforwardly personifications, one is both the rainbow and a minor Olympian in her own right, and the remainder are heroes. None, therefore, is precisely comparable with the Erinyes.

In fact, there is only one certain instance of Erinyes appearing on stage, when they serve as the chorus of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: they may or may not appear in the exodos of his *Choephori* and in that of Euripides' *Electra*.[45] Moreover, though Erinyes may madden their victim, there are instances of tragic madness in which Erinyes are neither cause nor means. In Euripides' *Heracles*, a play in which Erinyes might be thought suitable participants in the maddening of Heracles, the agents are instead Iris and Lyssa. Pentheus in the *Bacchae* and Ajax in his name play are maddened by the direct action of Dionysus and Athena respectively.[46] Thus, while the Erinyes are capable of causing insanity, not all insanity is attributable to them. Again, though they may punish familial transgression, there are many instances of such transgressions being punished by other means. In particular, inherited guilt, as we have already seen, need not be mediated by an Erinys.[47] So while the Erinyes are agents of punishment, they are not the agents of *all* punishment.

It has emerged that Erinyes resist a simple summation of their attributes and functions: though their character is in a sense strongly marked, to describe and delimit them concisely is not easy. We may have a clear sense of what the operation of an Erinys feels like, of what atmosphere attends on their workings, but this sense is not easily articulated. To conclude our preliminary survey of their nature and prerogatives with an artificially concise formulation: a possible summary of their functions would be that in their various aspects they preserve and enforce *Δίκη* in its broad sense of 'the order of things'.[48]

[45] At the end of Aesch. *Cho.* Orestes sees the Furies, though the chorus does not; and at the end of Eur. *El.* the Dioscouri refer to Erinyes with a deictic pronoun (*τάσδε* 1343, and see above), though the chorus, Electra, and Orestes give no indication whatsoever that they can see the creatures. These are of course not the only instances in tragedy of one character seeing something that is not visible to other characters or to the audience: compare Cassandra's uncannily true visions in Aesch. *Ag.*, or, in the context of clearly marked madness and delusion, Pentheus' deranged vision in Eur. *Bacch.* and Ajax's delusion in Soph. *Aj.* On deluded vision in tragedy as providing special access to truth, see Padel (1995), 78–81 and 95–6. The idea that madness accesses a different truth of its own is also found in recent times, e.g. in the account of schizophrenia given by R. D. Laing: see Laing (1990), *passim*, esp. 37–8, on the heavy price paid by schizophrenics for 'transvaluating the communal truth'.

[46] On the maddening of mortals by gods in tragedy, see Padel (1995), esp. 210–18.

[47] See above, Ch. 2.

[48] For this expansive and inclusive notion of *δίκη*, see Lloyd-Jones (1971), 83 ff. and *passim*.

Of course, to pin down their nature is problematic not only because of diachronic change, but also because of synchronic multiplicity. Alongside the changing role and prominence of the Erinyes through time must be set their multi-faceted and polymorphous character within the genre of tragedy. We shall see that these very attributes, their mutability and their complex and ramifying nature, are essential to the uses which the three tragedians make of them. I shall argue that fluidity and multiplicity of connotation are crucial to the workings of tragic Erinyes. It will emerge that the embodied and articulate Erinyes of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* are the exception that proves the rule. Whereas the immanent functioning of Erinyes, which is regular in tragedy, is characterized by their polyvalence and intractability, Aeschylus' Erinyes-made-flesh are both extremely specific and limited in their functioning and at the same time ultimately exorable and tractable. We begin by returning to a pair of plays that we have already had occasion to consider in detail.

Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas* and Euripides' *Phoenissae* have been considered above, in Chapters 2 and 3. I have argued that a close examination of both inherited guilt and curses is required for the interpretation of both these plays, though neither text demands, as some have thought, that we posit an inherited curse on the family. The two dramas are very differently conceived and constructed; but in both the House of Laius as a familial unit, in all its involutions and multifarious corruptions, is of central importance. While the *Phoenissae* traces its catalogue of inter-related disasters back to Cadmus' arrival at the site of Thebes and the internecine murders of the Spartoi, the *Septem* rests content with the transgression of Laius and the curse of Oedipus on his sons. In these sagas, with their recurrent slaughter and their reiteration of disastrous dispositions of choice in successive generations, the Erinyes might well be expected to figure. Two of their central aspects, their avenging of kindred blood and their enforcement of curses, seem at first sight superbly fitted to the workings of the Labdacid myth. This expectation is borne out by the texts, but in interesting ways. I shall now make yet another foray into these two plays, in order to show that the role of Erinyes is both closely related to and at the same time distinct from the roles of curses and inherited guilt. It is possible to tease apart the strands of this formidable causal nexus more precisely than

might at first appear. An inherited taint of guilt is one thing; a curse is another; and an Erinys another still. All three of these phenomena work in the present texts towards a single end, the mutual killings of Eteocles and Polyneices. But that is not to say that they do not each discharge distinct functions. In both plays, Erinyes have a discernible individuality.

The *Phoenissae* introduces Erinyes at moments of high drama. At the end of the *agon* between Eteocles and Polyneices, Jocasta's *rhesis* of intercession (528 ff.) has availed nothing, for neither brother is in a mood to negotiate. There follows a frenzy of name-calling in more than twenty lines of rapid *antilabe* (603 ff.). Eteocles claims that Polyneices has come to spoil the ancestral temples and is hated by the gods. Polyneices initially refrains from responding in kind, but is drawn to call Eteocles ἀνόσιος (609: 'impious'), only to be told that he is the πολέμιος ('enemy') of his fatherland.[49] Repeatedly insisting on the wrongs done to him in his exile, Polyneices is considerably more sympathetic than his brother, who came on stage displaying δεινὸν ὄμμα καὶ θυμοῦ πνοάς (454: 'dreadful aspect and snorts of wrath') and has consistently refused to soften his stance, which is after all in violation of their agreement. 'You drive me into exile without my due share,' he complains. καὶ κατακτενῶ γε πρός, replies Eteocles (610: 'yes, and I shall slay you too'). Now, when internecine murder has been mooted, Polyneices appeals in the succeeding four lines to his father, to the *polis*, and twice to his mother (611 ff.). These are undoubtedly powerful names for any Greek to invoke, but they are doubly so in the context of the family of Oedipus. The powers whom Polyneices calls to witness and implicitly thus to aid him are precisely the powers that are driving him, the accursed scion of a tainted line, to destruction.[50] The familial theme continues to occupy centre stage through the following lines: Polyneices' requests to see his father and his sisters are curtly refused. Bidding farewell to

[49] Polyneices has used this word before: ἀποστεροῦμαι πατρίδος ἀνοσιώτατα (493: 'I am most impiously deprived of my fatherland'). Cf. Mastronarde, *ad loc.*: 'Beyond the lack of fair play as man to man, Eteocles has, by conventional standards, offended the gods by violating his oath'—one of a number of 'polluting violations of fundamental moral laws' to which this word applies.

[50] This point has been illustrated at length above, Ch. 2, with special reference to inherited guilt.

his mother, he proposes to meet Eteocles in single combat and kill him, a desire which his brother shares:

Πο. ἀντιτάξομαι κτενῶν σε. *Ετ.* κἀμὲ τοῦδ' ἔρως ἔχει.
Ιο. ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ· τί δράσετ', ὦ τέκν'; *Πο.* αὐτὸ σημανεῖ.
Ιο. πατρὸς οὐ φεύξεσθ' Ἐρινῦς; *Ετ.* ἐρρέτω πρόπας δόμος.
(622–4)[51]

Pol.: I shall muster against you to slay you. *Et.*: I too yearn for this.
Joc.: Ah, woe is me! What will you do, my children? *Pol.*: The deed will show.
Joc.: Will you not avoid your father's Erinyes? *Et.*: Let the whole house perish.

This excited three-way dialogue with Jocasta's anguished interruption is a moment of the highest drama and a deciding point in the play. Eteocles and Polyneices will meet in battle. We know that when they do, they will kill one another. Thus they will renew in their own generation all the woes that are traceable to their father, their grandfather, and ultimately to Cadmus, whose name is the first word of the following stasimon. The Erinyes burst into the dialogue at precisely this moment, characterized by Jocasta as the Erinyes not of Eteocles' oath nor of Laius' murder but of Oedipus—πατρὸς Ἐρινῦς ('your father's Erinyes'). Now we know from Jocasta's prologue that Oedipus is still alive and virtually imprisoned in Thebes, and that he has cursed both his sons (63 ff.). It seems most natural, then, that the Erinyes envisaged by Jocasta are the enforcers of their father's curse, θηκτῷ σιδήρῳ δῶμα διαλαχεῖν τόδε (68: 'that they divide this house with whetted iron'), and that Jocasta sees in their combat the realization of the allotment by whetted iron.[52] There is no need to appeal

[51] The speaker ascriptions of 623b and 624b are not uniform in the MSS, some of which give 623b to Eteocles and 624b to Polyneices. Certainty is not attainable: in any case, manuscript speaker ascriptions have no textual authority. I follow Mastronarde's and Craik's ascriptions: Diggle adopts the opposite position, giving 623b to Et. and 624b to Pol. Since the brothers each desire to kill the other alike and equally (622), it is not of the first importance which one says, 'The deed will show', and which 'Let the whole house perish', as long as they are allowed one half-line each to maintain balance. Further arguments are proposed by Mastronarde, *ad loc.* Note also that 623–4 have been suspected as an actor's interpolation: Mastronarde rightly defends them as 'the needed conclusion to Jocasta's tragic frustration', quoting the echo of 624 in 919: χαιρέτω πόλις ('let the city go', tr. Craik).

[52] This is not intended to exclude the further nuance that Oedipus' virtual imprisonment might also in Greek eyes be seen as the kind of violation of familial

to the Chrysippus-story to explain this reference. But it is the Erinyes, rather than the ἀρά itself, that she mentions. She does not do so at random: to mention Erinyes is to bring into play a different and wider range of connotations than would be suggested by the mention of a curse *per se*.

Curses, as we have seen in Chapter 3, are a powerful instrument in the hands of the tragedians: they are performative utterances and may be pronounced on stage; sometimes they are even cast in the teeth of their intended victim. Thus, as I have illustrated, they lend themselves perfectly to moments of great dramatic impact in a fully mimetic genre, as when Theseus curses his son in Euripides' *Hippolytus* or Oedipus his in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*. In the *Phoenissae*, an *agon* between the two brothers could be imagined in which Jocasta warned of the dangers of Oedipus' curse in so many words. Thus, for example, the Clytaemestra of the *Choephori* brings *arai* into play as well as Erinyes in her attempts to dissuade Orestes from killing her (*Cho.* 912, 924). But Jocasta here, by invoking the entity rather than the utterance, loses nothing in sheer impact and gains something in polyvalence. It is possible to single out the following three distinct strands of significance that are suggested by this mention of the father's Erinyes.

(i) The Erinyes of Oedipus do of course suggest his curse; and, what is more, they suggest its untiring prosecution. Erinyes are nothing if not persistent.[53] When, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra speaks of a chorus of Erinyes besetting the house, she emphasizes its obdurate adherence to the place: οὔποτ' ἐκλείπει . . . μένει, δύσπεμπτος ἔξω

relations that itself calls the Erinyes into action: see below. The brothers have treated their afflicted father badly, and as such are liable to punishment by his Erinyes regardless of his curse. The multi-faceted character and prerogatives of Erinyes make simple formulations perilous. If beggars have Erinyes in the Odyssey when they are dishonoured, an ill-treated king who is also a father can be said to have his own protectresses, however polluted and degraded he may be. (The notion of Oedipus' ill-treatment at the hands of his sons is of course early: see above on the Cyclic *Thebais*.)

[53] When, at a later period, the Erinyes come to be three in number and assume canonical names, one of them is called Allecto, 'she who does not cease'. Cf. (e.g.) Harpocration s.v. *Εὐμενίδες* and (in a Roman context) Verg. *Aen.* 7.323 ff., where Allecto is Juno's power of choice for fomenting discord.

(Aesch. *Ag.* 1186, 1189 f.: 'it never leaves'…'it abides, hard to expel'). Indeed, the very persistence that Erinyes display in the discharge of their functions will come to dominate the later phases of the *Oresteia* (*Eum.* 75 ff., 139, 225 etc.).[54] Even the most efficacious curse, however surely it may find ultimate fulfilment, is a concatenation of words of power and as such cannot compete for dogged adherence with the entities it calls into existence. In other words, the Erinyes, persisting concrete beings rather than fleeting utterances, are the unfailing embodied reminder of the efficacy of the speech-act that is a spoken curse. If words cannot always be trusted, words made flesh are infinitely more reliable.

(ii) A curse, I have argued at length, is limited in scope. Erinyes are by nature multi-faceted, so that their presence can be suggestive of a complex causal nexus. Mention in this passage of the Erinyes of Oedipus suggests not only his curse but also the incident that provoked the curse, his ill-treatment at the hands of his sons (63 ff.). Even if no curse had been uttered, this is the kind of event that could in itself, as a violation of familial norms, call upon the services of Erinyes. To speak here of a father's Erinyes, then, carries a rather more pregnant connotation of familial disorder than a mere curse; and it wholly befits the corrupted generational economy of the Theban royal family, in which the mistreatment of *philoi* is rife.[55] Perhaps we are even invited to recall a third manifestation of familial disruption, Oedipus' killing of Laius: though Jocasta explicitly speaks of the Erinyes of Oedipus, and not those of Laius, we cannot help thinking also of this other Erinys-provoking event in recent family history. So this one mention of Erinyes serves, far more effectively than a mention of a curse or an ancestral transgression, to suggest the sheer multiplicity and polyvalence of relevant disaster within the family.

(iii) One final connotation is perhaps brought into play. Erinyes characteristically bring ἄτη ('infatuation') to their victim, and the tragic Erinys has been called '*ate*'s daemonic associate'.[56] In the

[54] Cf. Fraenkel (1950), *ad loc.*: 'Here the poet, with magnificent simplicity, has erected one of the supporting pillars of his great edifice. In this passage the choir of the Erinyes makes its entry into the trilogy, which it is to dominate until the end.'

[55] On Thebes and generational disorder, cf. Zeitlin (1986).

[56] Padel (1995), 189, quoting Aesch. *Ag.* 1432–3.

context of this *agon*, in which the two brothers are moving inexorably towards a terrible and polluting act of mutual fratricide, it is quite reasonable for Jocasta to discern infatuation in her sons' attitudes and intentions. Her anguished plea that they seek to avoid their father's furies thus carries an additional suggestion, over and above the curse, that Eteocles and Polyneices are in an abnormal mental state, such as might be brought about by the operation of Erinyes.

Thus the very complexity of the Erinyes, the feature of them that makes adequate definition and description difficult, lends them in this passage a threefold pregnancy of significance that a curse could not encompass. Erinyes are persistent; they are polyvalent; and they affect the mind of mortals. So does this hold for other texts? Can we discern other instances of these features? And does Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, in which Erinyes are more prominent than in any other tragedy, serve as any kind of counter-example?

A good parallel for this employment of Erinyes at a climactic moment in excited dialogue is offered by Orestes' final exchange with Clytaemestra in Aeschylus' *Choephori*. In her final stichomythia (Aesch. *Cho.* 908 ff.), with death almost palpably closing in on her, she has tried what breasts, fate, and womanhood will accomplish; and at last she appeals to the Erinyes: *ὅρα, φύλαξαι μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας* (924: 'Take care! Avoid a mother's grudge-bearing hounds'). Her warning will turn out to be correct—as is Jocasta's in the *Phoenissae*—but it is still a counsel of desperation. This warning to avoid Erinyes differs from Jocasta's, not least in that it is Clytaemestra's own skin that she is trying to save rather than that of her sons and family. But some of the factors that we have identified above in Jocasta's invocation of the Erinyes are applicable here too. Erinyes attached to the house have been in play since Cassandra's mention of them in the *Agamemnon* (*χορός . . . συγγόνων Ἐρινύων* 1186–90: 'a choir of kindred Erinyes'; and cf. 1119: *ποίαν Ἐρινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν*: 'What is this Erinys [that you urge to shriek over] the house?'). And their first general mention in the trilogy is even earlier, when Zeus in the chorus' initial anapaests *πέμπει παραβᾶσιν Ἐρινύν* (*Ag.* 59: 'sends an Erinys on the transgressors'). In the course of the first play various layers of familial corruption have been discerned, and in the *Choephori*

it is the most recent, the murder of Agamemnon, that assumes priority. Thus the mention of Erinyes here evokes a wider range of problems than the dog metaphor, with its suggestion of hunting and scenting, strictly denotes. 'The mother's wrathful hounds' (*μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας*), if they do indeed appear, will be the next step in a long Atreid progression, as Orestes himself is aware (*τὰς τοῦ πατρὸς δέ πῶς φύγω παρεὶς τάδε*; 925: 'But how am I to avoid those of my father if I omit to do this?').[57] Apollo has already threatened him with various *προσβολὰς Ἐρινύων* (283: 'assaults of Erinyes') if he does not do what his father's murder demands; and Orestes characterises Aegisthus' murder as the third in sequence:[58]

> *φόνου δ' Ἐρινὺς οὐχ ὑπεσπανισμένη*
> *ἄκρατον αἷμα πίεται τρίτην πόσιν.*
>
> (577–8)

The Erinys, not starved of gore, shall drink a third draught of unmixed blood.

Line 924 is Clytaemestra's final appeal. She utters three more lines before her death (926, 928–9), but these are her last words to Orestes, her last attempt to dissuade him. And it is no accident that Erinyes are mentioned here: on her way to her doom, she uses a pregnant expression that locates this latest familial crisis within the wider economy of the trilogy. Her words suggest, more economically than any others could, a complicated multiplicity of misfortune. There is neither need nor licence to think in terms of any curse laid on Pelops. But the curse laid by Thyestes on Atreus and reported at the end of the *Agamemnon* (1600–02) can be legitimately invoked as a resonance, though by no means a primary one, of these lines: any internecine strife in the family can be regarded as the perishing of the *genos* of Pleisthenes. The suggestion of implacability carried by the metaphor that Clytaemestra chooses is also very much to the point, both as a threat and as a prediction which subsequent events will very quickly prove right. Orestes will be feeling and seeing the power of

[57] On this employment of animal imagery, cf. Garvie, *ad loc.*

[58] Garvie, *ad loc.*, cautions against taking 'third' too literally, and suggests that 'Orestes, with characteristic wishful thinking, means simply the third and therefore final drink. This killing is to end the chain of crimes.'

his mother's Erinyes only a hundred lines later. By lines 1023–4 he feels himself carried away by his φρένες δύσαρκτοι ('my mind hard to govern'), and twenty lines later an extrametrical exclamation marks the sudden irruption into his consciousness of the band of Erinyes (*Cho.* 1048 ff.).[59] A verbal echo forcefully underlines the fulfilment of Clytaemestra's warning. Beset by hideous Gorgon-like visions invisible to the chorus, Orestes exclaims: σαφῶς γὰρ αἵδε μητρὸς ἔγκοτοι κύνες (1054 ∼ 924: 'for clearly these here are my mother's grudge-bearing hounds'). They will indeed hound him, first to Delphi and then to the Areopagus. The career of these Erinyes as it continues into the third and final stage of the trilogy, where their implacability is problematically neutralized, will be more usefully considered after we have examined certain other crucial appearances of Erinyes in tragedy. In conclusion, the *Choephori*, like the *Phoenissae*, introduces Erinyes at a climactic moment: they obtrude themselves into the play precisely at the consummation of the latest familial disaster. If curses tend to be used at moments of high drama, so do their animate handmaidens, appearing in a curse-like fashion, but connoting more ramifications of disaster than a curse ever could. Both the cardinal points of the great triptychal structure of the *Oresteia*, the deaths of Agamemnon and Clytaemestra, are articulated by the presence of Erinyes, first on the lips of Cassandra, then on those of Orestes' victim herself. In the plays that we have considered so far, then, the importance of Erinyes is both structural and local. They are crucial to the armatures or frameworks of the plays, as it were; but their appearances also carry a very great immediate dramatic impact.

Aeschylus' surviving Theban play exhibits similar features where Erinyes are concerned. The end of the great central scene of the *Septem* offers that play's nearest parallel to the *agon*-scene in the *Phoenissae*: this is the point where it emerges for certain that Eteocles will meet, and therefore kill, his brother. I have argued above, in Chapter 2, that the *Septem* emphasizes simplicity and economy in its treatment of the story, and that Euripides' more inclusive and diversified treatment may be regarded as an attempt at a less unilateral and more complicated dramatic effect. The later play spans a longer

[59] The translation of Collard (2002), 80, rightly gives as a stage direction for 1048: 'In sudden terror'.

sweep of time and introduces more characters. Aeschylus' play is the third in a connected trilogy, which doubtless covered in its three members a considerable stretch of familial history. Euripides, opting for a single unconnected drama, encompasses a longer diachronic span: the *Septem* alone, divorced as it now is from the *Laius* and the *Oedipus*, offers no parallel for the Menoeceus-theme of the *Phoenissae*, for the presence of Oedipus in the play, or for the introduction of Polyneices on stage. We are left with a sense, very familiar to the student of Euripides, that the later poet's work is deeply engaged with the earlier—that the *Phoenissae* appropriates and comments on Aeschylus' treatment of the Theban myth, which was performed more than fifty years earlier. Euripides demonstrates with almost ostentatious virtuosity that a single drama on the clash of Eteocles and Polyneices can quite comfortably reach as far back in time as the arrival of Cadmus and the internecine slaughter of the Spartoi. He shows that the many doomed and sinning generations of the Theban royal house can be traced in some 1,700 lines no less effectively than in an entire trilogy. While Aeschylus' use of trilogic form is symbiotically related to his view of catastrophes that unfold through the generations of a great and doomed family, Euripides demonstrates that moral inheritance and familial interaction can be crucial to a *praxis* within a single unconnected drama.

Just as Erinyes enter into the action of the *Phoenissae* at the end of the *agon*, so, at an equally climactic point, the earlier poet also introduces them. When Polyneices' presence at the seventh gate is announced, Eteocles immediately recognizes that his father's *ἀραί* are *τελεσφόροι* (655: 'curses [are] finding accomplishment'). He has mentioned it once before, at the end of the prologue, identifying curse and Erinys: *Ἀρά τ' Ἐρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής* (70: 'and Curse, the mighty Erinys of my father'). But nothing more has been said of it for 600 lines. Whether or not a curse laid by Oedipus on his sons was prominent earlier in the trilogy, it is certainly not mentioned between Eteocles' first and second invocations of it here.[60] We can do no more than speculate whether it was a dominant presence, brooding but unspoken, for an audience that had seen the *Oedipus* performed only hours before. Perhaps the curse will have been felt to

[60] More has been said of the contents of the trilogy's first two plays above, Chs. 2 and 3.

brood over the first part of the play, an unspoken horror liable to emerge at any moment, long and fully expected when it appears at line 655. Or perhaps it was not particularly prominent earlier in the trilogy, so that its climactic appearance here is its first moment in the limelight. In any case, the introduction of curse and Erinys at the end of the *Redepaare* is undoubtedly explosive.

The poet has taken care to set Eteocles up as an admirable, even a somewhat sympathetic, figure, firm and resolute and with the interests of the *polis* at heart.[61] Now his resolution is turned into the channel of determined destruction of self and family. It has been argued above that the character-traits established in the earlier part of the play are not altered after line 653, but are directed to a different object. The chorus emphasize that fratricide is polluting and characterize Eteocles' state of mind as *θυμοπληθὴς δορίμαργος ἄτα* (687: 'wrathful spear-raging infatuation') and his desire to meet Polyneices as *ὠμοδακής . . . ἄγαν ἵμερος* (692 f.: 'an over-savage desire'). In response he expresses the wish that the whole *genos* go to destruction, since that is the way god and the wind blows. And to their second attempt at persuasion he replies that his father's curse, *φίλου . . . ἐχθρά* (695: 'hostile [curse] of my dear [father]'), is in operation.[62] Thus, even before the mention of the Erinys in 700, he displays a curious mixture of resolution and resignation. Eteocles has not denied that he desires to fight his brother—quite the opposite (658–76)—but in parallel with this is a strain of making the best of things: *εἴπερ κακὸν φέροι τις, αἰσχύνης ἄτερ | ἔστω· μόνον γὰρ κέρδος ἐν τεθνηκόσιν* (683 f.: 'if someone is to bear evil, let it be without shame; for this is the only gain to be had among the dead'; and cf. 690 f.). As far as 697, then, it appears that Eteocles feels himself in the grip of a higher power and is quite unwilling to resist. He looks to

[61] Eteocles is acutely conscious of the responsibilities of the ruler and helmsman of the ship of state: 1 ff., 181 ff. etc. He will have order and obedience in the *polis* that he governs: 224–5. The shield-scene sees him quite unphased by enemy threats and blazons: at 397 f., 438–9, 516 etc. he gives evidence of supreme fearlessness and confidence in the face of these raging adversaries. He is arguably one of the most sharply and economically delineated characters in Aeschylus. By the time the curse comes to prominence, we have a very good idea of what sort of man Eteocles is; and he continues, I argue in Ch. 2, to be this kind of man even when he is about to face his brother in single combat. It is not his nature but his context that alters at line 653.

[62] See above, Ch. 3.

previous generations to explain this. It is because he labours under his father's curse (and in any case the whole race—*πᾶν το Λᾴιου γένος*—is riddled with internecine strife) that he wishes this consummation. 'An over-savage desire drives you to this murder.' 'Yes, because my father's curse is upon me.'

Even when Eteocles has articulated his position so clearly, the chorus does not cease in its attempt to dissuade him. They will try any tactic that carries even the faintest hope of success. If he offers propitiatory sacrifice, *μελάναιγις ἔξεισι δόμων Ἐρινύς* (699–700: 'the Erinys with black aegis will depart from the house'). This is clearly a response to Eteocles' mention of the curse at 695 ff., and a desperate one at that: there is no passage in tragedy, with the complicated exception of the end of *Eumenides*, where an Erinys is bought off. In the semantic field of curses, rage, and *ate*, the chorus quite naturally identifies an Erinys. Here again the entity is polyvalent. Its primary referent must be as enforcer of the curse of Oedipus, but it at least connotes also the welter of cross-generational misfortunes under which the whole family labours—a connotation, if this line of thought is right, that the *curse* of Oedipus cannot carry anything like as strongly. We have no evidence to tell us whether Oedipus was represented earlier in the trilogy as cursing his offspring in response to ill-treatment on their part. No argument can be based on such a supposition, but it does at least seem possible. There is, however, enough transgression without any need for such a complication. And this great weight of supernatural determining factors, far from unmanning Eteocles or plunging him into *uncharacteristic* rage, simply embraces him, even as he too, for his own perfectly intelligible reasons, embraces it. It is Eteocles the general, the honourable hoplite, the protector of his city, who appropriates his god-given doom, who discerns its operation and will not resist, precisely because he is the man that he is.

Eteocles entirely refuses to take the bait implicit in the chorus' suggestion that he offer sacrifice. His response is resigned and perhaps sarcastic: 'I appear to be neglected of the gods already: and will they respect a sacrifice from me, who am doomed?[63] Why should

[63] Punctuating with Hutchinson to make 703 a question. If this is right, the line is bitter indeed: why should the gods who have abandoned Eteocles duly receive offerings from him?

I fawn further on my fate of death?' (702–4). The doomed house, the curse, and the Erinys together constitute an irresistible force for his destruction, which he will at least face like an honourable man. He is equally obtuse to the chorus' further suggestion that the seething *daimon* might change its tack in future.[64] Oedipus' curse has 'boiled over' (*ἐξέζεσεν γὰρ Οἰδίπου κατεύγματα* 709).[65] Eteocles' *ἐνυπνίων φαντασμάτων . . . ὄψεις* (710–11: 'visions of apparitions appearing in sleep') are confirmed: apparently these visions, of which we hear nothing else, have represented to him the allotment of his and Polyneices' inheritance that is now to take place by the edge of the sword. In its context, this mention of dreams serves as another of many and various strands uniting to confirm the imminent destruction of Eteocles. His resolution remains firm through a short trimeter exchange with the chorus. And he goes to his death asserting that god-given *κακά* cannot be escaped (719).

The end of Sophocles' *Electra* has a valuable lesson to teach the student of tragic Erinyes. At the end of his Pelopid play, Sophocles, least concerned of the three tragedians with the unfolding of a catastrophe across the generations, leaves us with no hint of the Erinyes that are found in both the Aeschylean and the Euripidean versions. It is true that Aegisthus in the exodos makes mention of *τά τ' ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα Πελοπιδῶν κακά* (1498: 'both the present and the future troubles of the Pelopids'), but this hint is scarcely developed. We are left not with a sense of future links in a continuing chain of disaster, but with a stark and strikingly final closure as Aegisthus goes into the house to his death. One commentator speaks of the 'brutal realism of the final scene'.[66] And brutal indeed is Orestes' determination in his last speech that Aegisthus' death is to be 'bitter' (*πικρόν* 1504). An earlier portion of the play has identified a crucial past misfortune: immediately before the first entrance of the doomed Clytaemestra, the chorus has referred to Pelops' murder of Myrtilus as the beginning of the house's unceasing catalogue of woes

[64] On this employment of *daimon*, see below, Ch. 6.

[65] The plural *κατεύγματα* (709) need not be pressed: we do not need, I think, to reconstruct in the earlier plays of the trilogy any multiple cursing along the lines of the Cyclic *Thebais* (frr. 2–3 Davies). The present play contains no evidence of more than one curse.

[66] Kells (1973), 231.

(504–15). But they do not project the πολύπονος αἰκεία (515: 'the torment of many troubles', tr. Lloyd-Jones) of the house forward beyond the present events. On the whole the play invites very much less consideration of future events than Aeschylus' *Choephori*—and less too than Euripides' *Electra*. In the exodos of that play, the Dioscuri refer to Orestes' coming pursuit by the Erinyes. At 1250–72 they explain that Orestes must flee the Furies to Athens and there be acquitted on the Areopagus by ἴσαι . . . ψῆφοι (1265–6: 'equal votes'; and cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 741, 752–3). Later, they indicate the presence of Erinyes with a deictic pronoun, urging Orestes: κύνας | τάσδ' ὑποφεύγων στεῖχ' ἐπ' Ἀθηνῶν (1342–3: 'flee these hounds and go to Athens'). This is the last speech of the play: we are given no indication whatsoever that any other character can see the Erinyes, or that they were actually introduced on stage. This ending is perhaps not Euripides' finest hour.[67] His deployment of the *deus ex machina* here, with its characteristic tying up of loose ends, does indeed bring the play into conformity with Aeschylus' account.[68] But this conformity may seem inorganic, somehow a tacked-on agreement with the *Oresteia*'s version of pursuit and final acquittal. The earlier portions of the play have not emphasized that the house will undergo further woes before the ultimate resolution of its sorrows. But, after all, there is at least a future here: the play does not have the savage abruptness of Sophocles' treatment. And Euripides' future for the matricidal Orestes will involve Furies, and Furies that are not easily shaken off.[69] Thus neither Sophocles' nor Euripides' play about the vengeance of Orestes accords the Erinyes anything like the importance that they enjoy in Aeschylus. Sophocles, whose concern is with a terrible moment in time and not a chain of woes, gives us a particularly notable version, in that it offers no Erinyes at all. Hence we see that a treatment of this point in the Pelopid myth without any mention of Furies is not inconceivable in Greek eyes, a proposition that we would do well to ponder. The authority of Aeschylus' version

[67] Cf. Denniston (1939), *ad* 1245: a 'rather matter-of-fact speech'.

[68] On the *deus ex machina* in Euripides, see now Wildberg (2002), 119 ff.

[69] Euripides notoriously engages with Aeschylus' version of events earlier in the *Electra*, in the famous and problematic recognition-scene, where the three tokens of recognition used in Aeschylus—hair, footprint, clothing—are systematically dismissed (518 ff.). Though Euripides' engagement with Aeschylus in this play is less fruitful than his *Phoenissae-Septem* engagement, close engagement it remains.

is not such that the introduction of Erinyes is compulsory. Euripides, on the other hand, acknowledges Aeschylus' account and conforms to it, but does so by way of closure and without any of the anxious and protracted analysis that Aeschylus finds necessary before his treatment of this *praxis* may conclude.[70] To this involved and difficult treatment in the *Eumenides* we now turn. The role of the embodied Eumenides in this play, as we shall see, differs very dramatically in some respects from the other appearances of Erinyes that we have considered. In making this difference and its implications explicit, we will come to the conclusion of our account.

A good deal of the scholarship on Aeschylus' *Eumenides* has been directly or indirectly devoted to the Erinyes incarnate. It has been found troublesome that these untiring and implacable avengers should ultimately fail to avenge Clytaemestra's murder; and that the Orestes who has seen them in a mad vision at the end of the *Choephori* and been pursued over great distances by them in the interstice between the plays should escape their clutches and leave unharmed. And if the Erinyes are bringers of sorrow and strife, how can they be welcomed into Athenian cult in the final scene as protectresses and scarlet-robed metics, ἵλαοι δὲ καὶ εὐθύφρονες γᾷ (1040: 'propitious and well-disposed towards the land'), praying that the city be free from the στάσις ('civil strife') that Athena fears they might induce (861 ff.; 976 ff.)? At first sight, it would seem more sensible for Athena to expel them and order them to stay away, the better for her city to flourish. Answers to these problems have varied, and the literature on them is very large.[71] Among the most important suggestions for our purposes, some of them complementary, are:

(i) Athens—in the centre of which no other extant tragedy is set—is the locus of resolution *par excellence*, the quintessential place where

[70] In two other extant plays of Euripides, Erinyes are involved in the career of Orestes after his matricide. At the end of the *Orestes*, Euripides again makes a god, this time Apollo, predict trial and acquittal for Orestes on the Areopagus (1648–52), deploying the name Eumenides (1650), and making these entities three in number. Similarly, at Eur. *IT* 940 ff., Orestes relates his pursuit to Athens by the Erinyes and his acquittal on the Areopagus. Both these plays, like the *Electra*, display much less *anxiety* about Erinyes than Aeschylus does.

[71] See e.g. Winnington-Ingram (1983*b*), Goldhill (1984), Podlecki (1989), 38–50, Sommerstein (1989), *ad Eum.* 778–891, Erp Taalman Kip (1996), Garvie (1996).

this kind of accommodation can be reached. Thebes and Argos are places of deviance, Athens of resolution.[72] This approach is certainly useful for the elucidation of tragedy—it generates interesting results when applied to the Theban plays, especially perhaps Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*—and it may be thought to offer an insight into Athenian consciousness. But it cannot in itself solve the problem of the *Eumenides*. To say that the problem of Orestes' guilt must be resolved insofar as Athens tends to resolve these difficulties may be a true contribution to the *why* of the acquittal and integration, but is little use for the *how*.

(ii) A related approach will insist on the self-presentation of fifth-century Athens as a democratic *polis* in which the rule of law is supreme. The use of *peitho* to solve problems, then, both in the trial and in Athena's extended and difficult mollification of the Erinyes, presents the use of speech as a central Athenian institution.[73] Apollo's great power in his own Delphic domain is insufficient to the task. And Argos, the origin of the troubles, can offer nothing better than an unending vendetta. But Athens allows differences to be subjected to discussion and voted on in a court of law. This again is true so far as it goes, but still circumvents the central question of how the Erinyes can be first defeated and then integrated. It is practically undeniable that there is an atmosphere of patriotism at the end of the play, as it glorifies Athens in alliance with Argos and evokes universal civic participation in a cultic event.[74] But patriotism, whatever its adherents may wish, does not solve issues of justice and the natural order.

(iii) A related approach might invoke the play's evident aetiological aspect. Indeed, it is quite legitimate to appeal within definite bounds

[72] This view in a highly sophisticated form is ably championed by Zeitlin (1986).

[73] On *peitho* in the *Eumenides* see e.g. Winnington-Ingram (1983*a*), 168–173: Aeschylus, unlike Sophocles, 'hymns the triumphs of persuasion' (173). On the metamorphosis of *peitho* in the *Oresteia* 'from a curse into a blessing', see Sommerstein (1989), *ad* Eum. 885.

[74] See further Parker (1996), 298–99, on the cultic role of the *genos* 'Ησυχίδαι in the worship of the Semnai at Athens and on Aeschylus' evocation and modification of it at the end of the *Eumenides*: 'Aeschylus [in depicting the concluding procession] deliberately stresses the participation of the whole people and so neglects the specific role of the *genos*' (299).

to Aeschylus' presentation of the trial as a charter for the Areopagus, and of the immigration of the Erinyes as an *aition* for the cult of the Semnai Theai. By the familiar process of aetiology in tragedy, the events of the play *must* happen in this way: otherwise, the institutions thus inaugurated necessarily do not exist.[75] But this again is an inadequate account for present purposes.

(iv) More detailed political points may be made concerning the reforms of Ephialtes a few years before the play's composition.[76] Here attempts to discern Aeschylean partisanship in one direction or the other must be distinguished from the more conciliatory view that the poet engages with recent issues but does not in any discernible way take sides.[77] But any politicizing view, however mild, is necessarily unable to take account of the problem of the Erinyes as the plays themselves set it up. To think in terms of the reform of the Areopagus and the question of exiling undesirables is in itself to sidestep the exegetical issue of the power, functions, and character of the Erinyes.

(v) Recent work on textual closure may be brought to bear, and a position may be constructed along the following lines. The play appears to end the trilogy triumphantly with robes of scarlet and a torchlit procession. But the poor argumentation of the trial, the narrowness or equality of its voting, the placation of the Erinyes and other features fail to convince, and fail to the extent that we are invited to regard the ending as manifestly unsatisfactory. 'Those . . . who look to the trial of Orestes for a solution to the troubles of the house of Atreus will always be disappointed. . . . A verdict is reached, the knot is cut. But it solves nothing.'[78] In that the play offers palpable resistance to textual closure, it underscores

[75] This employment of a terminal aetiology is common practice in Euripides: e.g. the horrendous death of Hippolytus in Eur. *Hipp.* is guaranteed by the existence of his cult in Troezen (1423 ff., with Barrett, *ad loc.*).

[76] See Rose (1992), 246–56.

[77] Debates on which side the poet is supposed to be taking in the political controversy are in one sense foredoomed to futility by their very nature: this fully mimetic genre, most of whose plays—including this one—are set firmly in the mythical past, does not lend itself at all well to party political axe-grinding. On politics in the *Eumenides*, see further e.g. Dodds (1960), MacLeod (1982) [a non-partisan reading], Podlecki (1989), 17–21, Sommerstein (1989), 25–32.

[78] Thus, memorably, Jones (1962), 111–12.

the very insolubility of the issues at stake.[79] 'The trilogy ends 'happily', but it may be that Aeschylus himself was well aware that the real problems remain unresolved. . . . [T]he question of what Orestes (or Agamemnon) should have done remains unanswered, and the moral complexities of the first two plays are given no solution.'[80]

(vi) The *Eumenides* is simply in a different category of tragedy from the *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*. Thus it has been called 'supernatural' whereas its yokefellows are 'natural'.[81] On this account, whereas the trilogy even as far as the end of the *Choephori* moves in a world where divine presences are immanent or over-determining, the *Eumenides* moves in a quite different sphere, in which not only the Erinyes but also Apollo, Athena, and possibly Hermes may comfortably walk on stage. This approach might appear to be a very convenient mechanism for neutralizing some of the grave problems posed by the last play, but for our present purposes it may seem at best unhelpful and, at worst, specious. The validity of the distinction, which its proponent asserts to be rigid, may be very easily called into question. It is only necessary to ask whether the *Hippolytus*, with its divine 'frame' but an entirely human mode of causation within it, belongs to the category of the *Prometheus Vinctus* or to that of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and whether the end of the *Philoctetes* is shifted from one camp into the other by the epiphany of Heracles *ex machina* at the end. In any case, the application of labels in this way is only of descriptive, and not explanatory, use.

In the light of the account of Erinyes given thus far, it is immediately clear that a certain eclecticism is desirable with respect to this

[79] A version of this view, couched in deconstructionist terms, is given by Goldhill (1984), 262–83, esp. 279 ff., on the text's self-undercutting and resistance to satisfying closure: 'The telos of closure is resisted in the continuing play of difference. The final meaning remains undetermined' (283).

[80] Garvie (1996), 145–6.

[81] The distinction and terminology is expounded by Brown (1983). *Contra*, Erp Taalman Kip (1996), 131, rejecting the view that there is a marked division in the *Oresteia* between the *Choephori* and the *Eumenides*, argues that 'the true dividing-line runs between *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*'. See also the response of Garvie (1996).

welter of views. The problem of the *Eumenides* may be concisely restated: these tireless pursuers and avengers, almost the embodiment of the multiple horrors that may beset a deviant house, eventually desist from their pursuit of Orestes, who has beyond doubt killed his mother. How is this reconcilable with their definitional implacability and resistlessness? On these terms, the answer is not far to seek. The Erinyes, hideous concrete presences that terrify the Pythia and leave Apollo discomfited, are by their very embodiment rendered more tractable. Their immanent or over-determining presence in the other tragedies that we have considered is not precisely comparable. An Erinys as a byword for familial disorder, bringing all the manifold sorrows of a house into a moment of awful unity at a climactic moment in dialogue, is quite different from an Erinys incarnate. Their very incarnation puts them on a level playing field with other incarnate beings: they must give an account of themselves in a court of law opposite a divine adversary and with another incarnate divinity presiding. This is a world apart from a hypothetical trial-scene in which an Erinys-hounded Orestes should be tried in the physical absence of his tormentors. To this extent it is correct to speak of a change of atmosphere or quality between the end of the *Choephori* and the beginning of the *Eumenides*. The Erinyes here operate differently from the Erinyes identified by characters or chorus in any other tragedy, and perhaps are more in line with the *elasteroi* and *Eumenides* of the Selinuntine *lex sacra* that we have considered above.

We have seen that the immanent and over-determining Erinyes as they appear elsewhere in tragedy are characterized by, among other things, (i) sudden irruption into the action; (ii) implacability and irresistibility; and (iii) sheer breadth of connotation—they are by nature multi-faceted, and this quality allows the tragedians to deploy them allusively. One deployment of an Erinys, even more than a deployment of a curse or a taint of guilt, can encompass the multiple woes and corruptions of a blighted family. Aeschylus' embodied Erinyes, however, and the Eumenides that they eventually become, are virtually the negation of two of these characteristics. (ii) They are ultimately placable, albeit with difficulty, and are eventually persuaded to desist from their pursuit. As such, they bear a discernible relation to the placable Eumenides and *elasteroi* of the Selinuntine

law; though I should not wish to put too much weight on this resemblance. For the Selinuntine entities may be appeased through ritual, whereas in Aeschylus the Erinyes are won over by arguments and incentives. And (iii) they have reduced themselves and their functions to championing a single issue, Orestes' kin-murder narrowly defined, so that they no longer stand for the whole range of familial disaster among the Atreids, as they did earlier in the trilogy. They are now champions of a single issue, and one that is shown to be susceptible of decision. Thus Aeschylus' introduction of Erinyes onto the tragic stage, insofar as it is a reification, is thereby a simplification and thus a negation of the defining characteristics of the Erinyes as they appear in other plays. Elsewhere they are nothing if not broadly suggestive.

However much the *Eumenides* may teach us about possible presentations of Erinyes in tragedy, and however suggestive it may be in connection with other evidence about fifth-century cult practice, for these reasons it can teach very little about the Erinyes of Oedipus or Agamemnon in other plays. The Furies who take up residence in a primaeval cavern to preside as Semnai over the court of the Areopagus have as much to do with the exigencies of Athenian democracy as with the implacable vendetta of the *Septem* or *Phoenissae*. They raise quite different issues from the other passages that we have considered, in which Erinyes as furies of the mind take a hand at the climactic moment in the destruction of a tainted race. Thus the most Erinys-ridden of Greek tragedies actually stands far apart from what the tragedians generally intend to accomplish in deploying an Erinys. In general, as we have seen, tragic Erinyes, like curses and inherited guilt, have both explosive local impact and more general structural importance in the plays in which they appear. Their highly suggestive breadth of connotation, which makes them a byword for multiplicity of disaster, also makes them supremely important features in the depiction of afflicted tragic houses.

5

Irruption and Insight? The Intangible Burden of the Supernatural in Sophocles' Labdacid Plays and *Electra*

INTRODUCTION

Thus far we have found ourselves focusing primarily on Aeschylus and Euripides, not least on the great *Septem* and its fascinating reflection and antagonist, the *Phoenissae*. The time has come to turn our attention to Sophocles: the three Theban plays and the *Electra* cry out for examination. In the course of this discussion, it will become clear why Sophocles has a chapter to himself, and is not treated at any length in the three preceding thematic chapters.

Sophocles is now, and has always been, notoriously hard to characterize. As Aristophanes found, it is easy enough to establish a contrast between Aeschylus and Euripides—a contrast that the *Frogs* puts to brilliant effect in the form of an antagonism between the two poets in Hades. The *Frogs*, however, betrays some embarrassment about Sophocles, and is reduced to explaining his non-participation in the plot in terms of his amiable contentment, which the grave has done nothing to diminish: ὁ δ' εὔκολος μὲν ἐνθάδ', εὔκολος δ' ἐκεῖ (82: 'But he was good-tempered in life, and remains good-tempered in death').[1] This embarrassment has persisted in modern times. Like any major author,

[1] See also, on the amiability of Soph., *TrGF* iv. T1.7 and 1.12 (= *Vita* 7, 12); T105. The word εὔκολος suggests both contentment with one's lot ('good digestion') and amiability. The Sophocles of the *Vita* is also pious and θεοφιλὴς . . . ὡς οὐκ ἄλλος (12: 'singularly beloved of the gods'), among other agreeable qualities. Lloyd-Jones (1994), i. 6–15, has a useful overview.

Sophocles has assumed many masks and guises. Among other things, we might cite the distinction that separates interpreters of Sophocles into two camps, the 'pietists', for whom the poet justifies the ways of god to man and displays for all to see the punishments of excess; and the 'hero-worshippers', for whom he concentrates on the portrayal of a doomed and magnificent human greatness which is simply incompatible with the world as we know it.[2] Sophocles has sometimes seemed to be an embodiment of the mature perfection of the tragic form, slotting neatly into a scheme that begins with the rough archaic grandeur of Aeschylus and effectively ends with the late, cynical, and self-referential decline of the genre in the person of Euripides. (It hardly need be mentioned by way of caution that Sophocles produced his first plays ten years before the performance of the *Oresteia* and that he outlived Euripides: the bare and unadorned fact of relative dates of birth does not entail that he is in any *other* sense the 'middle' one of the three.[3]) As such, he has sometimes seemed quintessentially 'classical'.[4]

For our present purposes, the most important aspect of Sophocles' *oeuvre* is his engagement with divine causation and with its influence on corrupted familial interactions across the generations. This in itself limits our interest in his Protean nature to one field of activity. It also effectively limits our interest in his corpus to four plays, the three

[2] For the distinction between 'pietist' and 'hero-worshipping' approaches to Soph., see e.g. Winnington-Ingram (1980), 9 and 322 ff., Lloyd (2005), 78–9.

[3] Soph. first competes in 469/8: *TrGF* iv. T33. (Soph. comes second in the *agon* in which Aesch.'s Danaid tetralogy is produced: P. Oxy. 2256 fr. 3 = *TrGF* iii. T70.) Soph. dresses in mourning at the *proagon* when he hears of Euripides' death: T54.

[4] This view of Soph. owes at least something to Aristotle's well-known treatment of the *OT* as the paradigmatic tragedy: as is well known, the *Oedipus* is a pervasive presence in the crucial pages Arist. *Poet.* 1452[a] ff.; on which see Jones (1962), 159–66: 'It is … undeniable that Aristotle was holding Sophocles before him as a model when he wrote the *Poetics*, rather than any other of the great practitioners of Tragedy' (60). Jebb's great nineteenth-century edition of Soph. begins with the *OT*, 'in one sense the masterpiece of Attic tragedy' (xiii); for which view cf., in a popular translation of the mid-twentieth century, Watling (1947), 14: 'Returning to the Theban legend in the maturity of his powers, Sophocles produced in *King Oedipus* the masterpiece of his life's work. … This is the judgement also of Aristotle, who had this play constantly at his elbow as the perfect type of tragic composition.' In the view of [Longinus], comparing flawless correctness with flawed greatness in literature: *οὐδεὶς ἂν εὖ φρονῶν ἑνὸς δράματος, τοῦ Οἰδίποδος* [*sc. of Sophocles*], *εἰς ταὐτὸ συνθεὶς τὰ Ἴωνος <ἅπαντ'> ἀντιτιμήσαιτο ἐξῆς* (*De Sublimitate* 33.5: 'No one in his right mind would prefer the whole output of Ion put together to one play, the *Oedipus*.') Lesky's praise of the *OT* in his much-used handbook ((1965), 111 ff.), could hardly be more fulsome.

Theban plays and the *Electra*. This is not to say that his other works are of no interest at all for our enquiry: in the *Philoctetes*, for example, moral inheritance is clearly very much at work in the confused and conflicted emotions of Neoptolemus son of Achilles. Or again, it is almost otiose to mention that the *Trachiniae* depicts a turbulent and confused House of Heracles. But the richest seam of interest for this discussion lies in the Tantalids and Labdacids, not least because it is here that we can draw the most fruitful comparisons with the other two great tragedians. In this chapter, then, we shall continue and conclude our tracing of curses, Erinyes, and inherited guilt through the tragic corpus, by examining first the Theban plays of Sophocles and then his one extant Tantalid play, the *Electra*.

It has sometimes been suggested that the divine in Sophocles is more remote, and somehow more obscure, than in either of his counterparts. Our enquiry thus far has not struggled to identify and contrast the characteristics of divine powers and supernatural justice in Aeschylus and Euripides—which is not to say that they are easily encapsulated, but that the issues are to a large extent readily identifiable. We must now investigate whether this is true of Sophocles. Is it, we shall ask, possible for a mortal in Sophocles to come face to face with the divine, or is mortal knowledge of the workings of the gods always mediated 'through a glass, darkly'?[5] Is there, and can there be, a sudden and climactic moment of divine knowledge for Sophoclean man? Bearing these questions in mind, and bearing in mind also what we have learned thus far of Aeschylus and Euripides, we now turn to the Theban plays and their depiction of the blighted Labdacids.

I. THE PERPLEXING MISFORTUNES OF THE LABDACIDS

We have noted above, in Chapter 2, Aristotle's observation that the best tragedies revolve around a few *oikoi* and that a tragic effect of the kind that is to be sought might well revolve around internecine

[5] This quotation from I Corinthians is very aptly used as the title of a recent paper on the divine in Sophocles, Parker (1999).

slaughter within a household, *οἷον ἢ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφὸν ἢ υἱὸς πατέρα ἢ μήτηρ υἱὸν ἢ υἱὸς μητέρα ἀποκτείνῃ ἢ μέλλῃ ἤ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον δρᾷ* (*Poetics* 1453[b]20–22: 'for example, when a brother kills, or is about to kill, his brother, or the like; or a son his father; or a mother her son; or a son his mother'). Our examination of the misfortunes of the Labdacids in the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae* has stressed the dominant importance in both plays of familial dysfunction: for both Aeschylus and Euripides, this dysfunction is worked out in large part through the medium of inherited guilt, curses, and Erinyes. Supernatural causal determinants, and their counterparts in the make-up of the human protagonists within this unhappy household, beset the house in great profusion. Sophocles' Theban plays, written quite separately over a period of some years and not at all in the form of an Aeschylean connected trilogy, dwell no less on familial dysfunction: in the popular mind, indeed, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the *locus classicus* for a house at variance with itself.[6] But it is no accident that the same work is also the *locus classicus* for the imperfection and, indeed, the sheer futility of human insight and human agency in the face of the divine: 'The power and arbitrariness of the gods on the one hand and the powerlessness of humankind on the other are revealed in . . . terrible form in *Oedipus Rex*. . . . The tragic, morally undeserved ruin of the great and noble serves to reveal the sovereignty of the gods whom it behoves humankind to honour and hold in awe.'[7] The implications of the last sentence of this quotation will be examined in due course: for present purposes, it is enough to note these two pillars of the classic status of the *OT*. It is precisely the relationship between the two that we shall find ourselves investigating. Is the stark contrast between human and divine that is drawn in the play in any way related to the manifold involutions and inspissations of the house of Oedipus? The Oedipus of Aeschylus and the Oedipus of Euripides are not, as I have argued, separable from their

[6] See Vernant (1990*c*) for a stimulating account of and response to Freud's notorious appropriation of the Oedipus-myth. It is not only from an Aristotelian point of view that the *OT* has seemed to be the pattern of tragedy. Simon (1988), 253 ff., gives a brief account of psychoanalytic approaches to tragedy from an expert's perspective. Cf. Dawe (1982), 2 ff.; and see now also Griffith (2005), esp. 100–10.

[7] Dihle (1994), 116–17. See also e.g. Kitto (1961), 138–44, Vernant (1990*a*), *passim*.

familial background. Is the same true of the lapidary, almost monolithic Oedipus of Sophocles?

The *Antigone* is the one of the three Theban plays that most obviously calls out to be contrasted with the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae*. Here the clash of Eteocles and Polyneices, which is climactic for both Aeschylus and Euripides, is the immediate precursor and necessary premise of the action. In Sophocles too there is disaster on all sides and for all concerned—by the end of the play, Haemon, Antigone, and Eurydice have all perished and Creon, initially so exultant in his freshly acquired command, is prostrated and multiply bereaved. But, I shall ask, how essential to this catalogue of misfortune is any curse on the family? How far is moral inheritance or inherited guilt underscored by Sophocles?

The last of the Theban plays, the *Oedipus at Colonus*, is of all Sophocles' extant work the hardest to characterize and encapsulate. It may seem at first sight to partake of the bizarre and the incomprehensible, very much the product of an aged dramatist's last and most exalted reflections. Many of the respects in which this marvellous work reward profound reflection are irrelevant for our purposes; but there is, as we shall see, much material for contemplation in the fields of the corrupted *oikos*, the father's curse, and the impenetrability of the divine.

Having laid down in the sketchiest of outline some of the issues that we must confront, we turn to the *Antigone*, on which we shall bring to bear all that we have learnt from the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae*. If those two plays are, as I have suggested, in important ways closely related, indeed from a certain perspective almost thematically continuous, how do the blighted Labdacids here relate to the patterns that the other dramatists discerned? The great clash of the brothers is past; Creon is in power. Is Antigone, in her disobedience and her resolution, very much the daughter of Oedipus and sister of Eteocles and Polyneices? And is there in the play's familial disasters any counterpart to the 'irruption' of the divine that we have felt so strongly in the *Septem*? *A priori* the *Antigone* might well seem an ideal field in which overbearing gods and *daimones* might act, playing their part in Antigone's suicidally unilateral actions and the various disasters that they precipitate. We shall find that this is very much less the case here than a reader fresh from the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae* might perhaps expect.

In this play, as elsewhere in tragedy, Lloyd-Jones has discerned a pervasive strand of supernatural familial causation:

> It seems to result that Antigone must be accounted a victim of the family curse. If we do not believe that in Sophocles the gods were always just, we shall not be troubled by the thought that, unlike Creon, she has done nothing to deserve her fate. But if we think that the gods seemed just to Sophocles as they did to Aeschylus, we may feel that this suggestion makes the play easier to understand.[8]

Those who have played down the importance of the curse have included Griffith in his recent commentary: 'The family's legacy of horrors, though not so insistently kept in our minds as in [Aeschylus' *Septem*], does surface intermittently.'[9] Conformably to the interpretative principles that I have laid down earlier, I shall argue that, while the *Antigone* undeniably situates its disasters within the long and terrible catalogue of Labdacid woes, it does not in any significant sense rely on any curse in the family or even on any taint of ancestral guilt. We must, I have insisted, come to a tragedy as to an entity that has a diachronic, as well as a synchronic, existence: a play is necessarily played out in a certain order. And in any play, this order is not random and consequently not negligible. A Greek tragedy, I have insisted, is not a murder mystery in which some key, some dominant causal factor, is left implicit for the reader to discover and which, when discovered, puts a different complexion on the entire edifice. It is one thing to claim, as I have claimed above, that Erinyes and a curse become suddenly visible in the action of Aeschylus' *Septem* at its half-way point and weigh very heavily on the action thenceforth: it is something quite different to claim that a play in which there are only the most glancing allusions to a curse or a relevant Erinys is equally reliant on these things as causal factors.

[8] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 115–16. This is broadly the view taken much earlier by Jebb, where see *ad* 593: '*ἀρχαῖα* carries us back to the starting-point of the troubles,—the curse pronounced on Laius by Pelops'. A recent reading of the play which emphasizes the importance of 'ancient evils' for the understanding of the *Antigone* but locates them firmly in the context of human agency and freedom is Mogyoródi (1996). On these questions, see further below, Ch. 6.

[9] Griffith (1999), *ad Ant.* 2–3; and see *ad* 582–625 on the chorus' failure to emphasize Labdacid ancestral guilt. Cf. Brown (1987), *ad* 582–695 and *ad* 593.

Two lines into the play, Antigone says to Ismene:

> ἆρ' οἶσθ' ὅτι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν —
> ἆ, ποῖον οὐχὶ νῷν ἔτι ζῶσιαν τελεῖ;
>
> (2–3)

Do you know that Zeus—ah!—which of the evils deriving from Oedipus does he not visit on us while yet we live?

There is no grievous, shameful, or ruinous disaster, she continues, that has not played a part in her and her sister's misfortunes.[10] The chorus' utterances at 379–80 and 471–2 reveal a similar estimation of familial continuity in Antigone's fortunes and character: Antigone is respectively 'unhappy child of unhappy Oedipus'; and possessed of τὸ γέννημ' ὠμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρός ('The inborn nature deriving from her savage father is savage').[11] Considered as the beginning of a play, lines 2 ff. very firmly fix the action of the *Antigone* within the frame of successive Labdacid disasters. And no wonder. We will presently learn from Ismene (49 ff.) that, at this point in dramatic time, not only Eteocles and Polyneices, but also Oedipus and Jocasta, are already dead. For Antigone, the edict that Polyneices must remain unburied is simply the crowning misfortune, the unkindest cut of all that impels her to act. What is not said in the prologue, however, is that the present situation is the working-out of a curse or the re-enactment of ancestral guilt. We must draw the elementary distinction between Labdacid horrors *per se* and supernatural factors that contribute to or constitute a part of these horrors. The former are mentioned here, the latter are not. It would not be difficult to imagine a counter-factual *Antigone* in which the sisters saw the edict as yet another instance of a curse. This might in its own way have been a very interesting and successful play: Aeschylus could make his Eteocles appropriate the curse of Oedipus as a factor in his crucial decision—could we not imagine Antigone doing something similar here? This question may be postponed: she simply does not.

[10] Accepting with modern edd. that the last *metron* of line 4 requires a word or words meaning something like 'ruinous', 'disastrous'.

[11] Griffith (1999), *ad* 471–2, notes that ὠμός ('savage') is 'elsewhere in tragedy used only of men'.

This is very much a play about Antigone's agency, her unwavering adherence to her own perspective. In her adherence to *philia*, she paradoxically circumscribes and limits the field in which she perceives familial affection to be operative.[12] Ismene must, at a crucial moment, be effectively disowned and her sisterly solidarity repudiated: *λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην* (536 ff., at 543: 'I do not brook a loved one who loves only in words'). Despite their close familial conjunction, the two sisters occupy very different worlds: an 'abyss . . . lies between them'.[13] As has often been noted, this forces Antigone into a highly individualistic, if not positively bizarre, valuation of family ties. She would not have defied the edict in order to bury a husband or a son of hers, for these relatives can by their nature be replaced, while a brother cannot once one's parents have died (905–12).[14] Sophocles implacably steers this attitude to its logical conclusion: Antigone is to marry not Haemon, but Acheron (816); and her mortal betrothed will eventually die with her (1175 ff.).[15] 'In the fourth episode, Sophocles intertwines motifs and rites of funeral and marriage that create a liminal zone or marginal state in time and space in which Antigone is simultaneously daughter of Oedipus' incest with Jocasta and bride of Hades.'[16] It is telling that Knox, in laying out his useful and influential concept of the 'Sophoclean hero', devotes not one but two chapters to the *Antigone*.[17]

But, play about agency and resolve that it is, the *Antigone* does not emphasize the divine component of human action in anything like the way that Aeschylus was wont to emphasize it. The divine does, of course, have great leverage on Antigone's motivations, in the form of

[12] For an account of Antigone's perverted and paradoxical *philia*, cf. e.g. Blundell (1989), 106–15, Nussbaum (1986), 54–6.

[13] Thus the happy formulation of Tyrrell and Bennett (1998), 78.

[14] On the connections of this striking and memorable passage with Hdt. 3.119, see S. West (1999).

[15] The conceit 'bride of death' will probably have been a little less outlandish to a classical Athenian audience than to us: thus Griffith (1999), *ad* 806–16, with references. That is not to say that this is not 'a chilling image' nonetheless: Brown (1987), *ad* 816; and a motif which has abundant subversive and transgressive potential. On Antigone's 'death/marriage', see also Ormand (1999), 90–98. See further Rehm (1994) on the concept of marriage to death in tragedy more generally.

[16] Tyrrell and Bennett (1998), 97 ff., at 101.

[17] Knox (1964), 62–116.

her obsession with avoiding impiety and sacrilege. But Sophocles does not rely on double motivation, on an over-determined component to her resolve. In this respect we may draw a strong contrast with Aeschylus' central characters: we have seen that the earlier dramatist's plays tend to revolve around a central decision, often the decision of a single mortal agent under the canopy of a curse, a taint of guilt, or the over-arching principles of divine justice. In this respect, though Antigone reveres the gods, and though she is willing to act courageously to protect and reinforce family ties, she is an entirely different agent from the Orestes of the *Choephori* or the Eteocles of the *Septem*. We must examine two passages of the play in order to demonstrate this point.

Lines 582 ff. dwells for a moment on questions of *ate* and familial continuity. We have noted in an earlier chapter (see above, p. 71) the phrase *ἀρχαῖα τὰ Λαβδακιδᾶν οἴκων ... πήματα φθιτῶν ἐπὶ πήμασι πίπτοντ'* (593–95: 'From ancient times ... the troubles of the dead of the Labdacid house falling hard upon one another', tr. Lloyd-Jones). Even the last scions of the house, they continue, are being cut down by *λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν 'Ερινύς* (603: 'both folly of speech and an Erinys of the mind').[18] It cannot be denied that there is an element of moral inheritance at work in this formulation: the chorus, from its relatively disengaged perspective, steps back and observes a continuity in sorrow that is also a continuity in folly: Labdacid after Labdacid is being destroyed, even unto the last survivors. And they undeniably see an Erinys at work here, in Antigone's present resolve. But this would be a tenuous straw at which to clutch to discern a pervasive network of Erinyes lying behind the action of the play. This is a disastrous situation: *ergo*, an Erinys is at work. Syntactically, the 'Erinys' of the mind is very closely coordinated with the 'folly in words': these two, together with the 'cleaver of the gods', are destroying the last of the house of Oedipus. In this situation as the chorus views it, there is folly and madness here, and madness sent from the gods below. A few lines later (620–25), the chorus proceeds to deploy the familiar concept of *ate*, used without reference to specific persons

[18] On this vexed and difficult sentence, see Griffith (1999), *ad loc.* Tyrrell and Bennett (1998), 81 ff., question the chorus' assessment of the situation: is it really justifiable, they ask, to see Antigone's action as continuous with the follies of previous generations?

as a general reflection on the mechanisms by which mortals come to disaster. It is not my purpose to deny these matters of fact; but to limit their significance. I do not claim that Erinyes are of vanishingly small importance in this passage, but rather that there is nothing here to warrant positing Erinyes or curses as a crucial underlying factor in the play. These things do, indeed, 'surface intermittently'.[19]

The other passage that we must consider, 856 ff., need not drive us back from this position. Antigone, on her way to death, is lamenting her unhappy fate before the chorus, who at 856 say that she is 'paying for some ancestral crime' (*πατρῷον δ' ἐκτίνεις τιν' ἄθλον*. 856) Antigone does not disagree, and is prompted to reflect for a moment on her position in the chain of Labdacid sorrows: her mother's marriage was *atai*, her father's coupling incestuous: *πρὸς οὓς ἀραῖος ἄγαμος ἆδ' ἐγω μέτοικος ἔρχομαι* (867–8: 'Towards whom I go now, to dwell with them, accursed, unwed'). Thus she firmly sets herself in her ancestral context, agreeing with the chorus' assessment and expanding on it. Ancestral guilt is, she agrees, a factor in her demise.[20] But again, this is only a brief allusion, accounting for some dozen lines of this *kommos*. She acknowledges, to be sure, the parallels with her ancestors' repeated re-incriminations and sufferings. But this is something that she laments, a part of her catalogue of self-pity in this her final scene. This passage is emphatically not the kind of appropriation of familial determinants that has become familiar to us in the plays of Aeschylus. Like the stasimon that we have just considered, this allusion serves to enrich, deepen, and contextualize the action, rather than to motivate or determine it. The other great *kommos* that we have had occasion to consider, that of the *Choephori*, is a different case.

These two passages, then, both conspire to take a longer view of the manifold re-emerging corruptions that characterize the house of Laius. But Antigone's agency, that central concern of the play, is not significantly qualified or determined by this longer, inter-generational view.

While divine causation is a factor in the plot, it is no major factor. It is telling in itself that there are simply no other passages in the play that demand consideration for the purposes of this argument. We are not, I contend, left with the sense that inherited guilt or some curse is the crucial fact—or even *a* crucial fact—that is needed to explain or account

[19] Griffith (1999), *ad* 2–3, quoted in full above.
[20] Cf. Tyrrell and Bennett (1998), 110.

for the events of the play and the decisions taken. Sophocles' focus in the *Antigone* is very much on the interactions of human characters and the disastrous effects of their inter-relations. It is in this sense that the *oikos* of the *Antigone* is blighted, and that Antigone lives up to her heritage as a Labdacid.[21] The divine figures here primarily in the form of divine laws, rules for human conduct, as Antigone and Creon variously and incompatibly interpret them. If indeed the mortals of this drama view the divine through a glass, darkly; and if the plot is motivated precisely by this obscurity and by two interpretations placed on it by two characters; the only approach to viewing it face to face comes in the form of the shattered Creon of the exodos, realizing all that has befallen him; and in the chorus' bleak parting words:

> μέγαλοι δὲ λόγοι
> μεγάλας πλήγας τῶν ὑπεραύχων
> ἀποτείσαντες
> γήρᾳ τὸ φρονεῖν ἐδίδαξαν.
>
> (1350–*fin.*)

The great words of the overweening, incurring great blows as their punishment, teach wisdom in old age.

From this play, we turn to the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Oedipus at Colonus*, the action of both of which is chronologically prior to that of the *Antigone*. To treat these two works too much in the same breath is to belie the gap of some years that separates their composition. And it is a mistake to treat all three Theban plays implicitly as though they were in some sense a quasi-connected trilogy, which does violence to their undeniable self-containment as dramas standing quite happily alone. However, the *OC* does very much presuppose the action of the *OT*, as we shall see; and, as such, an interpenetrating treatment of the two is legitimate and, for our purposes, useful. It might almost be said, with Kamerbeek, that the *OC* is 'a sequel to the *Oedipus Tyrannus*', taking the earlier Oedipus play as its starting-point.[22] We shall discover that the Oedipus plays demonstrate with greater clarity even than the *Antigone* the gulf that

[21] On this perverted and endogamous family, see further Griffith (1999), 48–50, esp. 50.

[22] Kamerbeek (1984), 3. On the relationship between *OT* and *OC* see further Segal (2001), 43–5, 131–43.

separates Sophocles' treatment of the Labdacids on the one hand from the treatments of Aeschylus and Euripides on the other.

Aeschylus and Euripides, as we have seen, agree with the early *Thebaid* that the clash of Eteocles and Polyneices arises in part from a curse that Oedipus has laid on them beforehand.[23] This allows the two authors to present the battle of the Seven and the fratricidal duel of the brothers as the ultimate stage in a progression of familial disaster informed by supernatural causal determinants, their father's curse and the ever re-arising taint of the race that led first Laius into destructive folly, then Oedipus, then his sons. We have noted in earlier chapters certain verbal echoes in the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae* that bring out these connections. Sophocles' version differs markedly. The Eteocles and Polyneices of the *OC* are at odds before any curse of Oedipus has been uttered: as Ismene reports when she has just entered, δεινὰ τἀν κείνοις τανῦν (336: 'Their situation is now dreadful'). She proceeds to report that Polyneices is already at Argos and preparing for the fight (361–84). It is only now that Oedipus, horrified and embittered, proceeds to utter his first imprecation, praying that the brothers' struggle be unending (421 ff.).[24] A recent interpreter argues that, in making this alteration to the sequence of events, Sophocles 'very nearly eliminates supernatural elements from the play entirely'.[25] This is perhaps too sweeping a statement, as I shall argue; but in point of curses, at least, it is quite true to say that Sophocles has Oedipus' sons quite able to quarrel and threaten violence without the support of any dreadful father's curse. The tendency to violence and corruption in the family is quite efficacious enough without the aid of words of power. As Jebb saw, this innovation bears a twofold burden: first, the brothers manage to incur an evident and undeniable blame without being *stricto sensu* accursed; second, Oedipus, not having cursed before, holds in reserve for the appropriate moment 'the weapon with which to smite' Polyneices.[26]

[23] See above, Chs. 2 and 3.

[24] Jebb long ago appreciated the importance of this Sophoclean innovation: see his Introduction to the play, xxiv–xxv. 'The curse descends at the supreme crisis, and with more terrible effect because it has been delayed' (xxv). See further below.

[25] Wilson (1997), 153; and see further his 153–64, arguing that there is no real trace in the play of the chronologically previous, or 'epic', curse of Oedipus as found in the Cyclic *Thebaid* frr. 2–3, Aesch. and Eur.

[26] Jebb, Introduction, xxv.

Oedipus' principal curse in the *OC*—leaving aside the subsidiary curse of 421 ff.—when it finally arrives in the fourth episode, is terrible and magnificent:

> σὺ δ' ἔρρ' ἀπόπτυστός τε κἀπάτωρ ἐμοῦ,
> κακῶν κάκιστε, τάσδε συλλαβὼν ἀράς,
> ἃς σοι καλοῦμαι, μήτε γῆς ἐμφυλίου
> δόρει κρατῆσαι μήτε νοστῆσαί ποτε
> τὸ κοῖλον Ἄργος, ἀλλὰ συγγενεῖ χερὶ
> θανεῖν κτανεῖν θ' ὑφ' οὗπερ ἐξελήλασαι.
> τοιαῦτ' ἀρῶμαι, καὶ καλῶ τὸ Ταρτάρου
> στυγνὸν πατρῷον ἔρεβος, ὥς σ' ἀποικίσῃ,
> καλῶ δὲ τάσδε δαίμονας, καλῶ δ' Ἄρη
> τὸν σφῷν τὸ δεινὸν μῖσος ἐμβεβληκότα.
> ... *Οἰδίπους*
> τοιαῦτ' ἔνειμε παισὶ τοῖς αὑτοῦ γέρα.
>
> (*OC* 1383–92, 1395–6)

Away with you, spurned and disowned by me, worst of the evil! And take with you these curses, which I invoke upon you: may you never win power by the spear over your native land, nor may you ever return to low Argos; but may you die and kill by kindred hand him by whom you were exiled. These are my curses. And I call upon the hateful and paternal dark of Tartarus, that it may establish you there to dwell; and I call upon these spirits here [i.e. the Eumenides]; and I call upon Ares, who cast this dread hatred upon the two of you. ... Oedipus bestowed such prizes as these upon his own children.

Though the brothers have arrived at this point without the aid of a curse, their final encounter and deaths will proceed under its auspices, so to speak. I have noted above, in Chapter 3, that curses tend to be deployed at pivotal moments in the dramatic action of a play. In my earlier discussion, I was most concerned with curses that were pronounced before the beginning of the play and whose efficacy is revealed or discerned during the action. This curse is not of that type: it is rather a parallel to the curse of Theseus in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, in that it is a grand curse the very pronouncement of which is climactic. Since the Ismene-scene, which began almost a thousand lines before the curse, the brothers and the fate of Thebes have been very much in the audience's mind: here, when we actually see Oedipus and his son interacting, their interaction culminates in a curse.

This, it would seem, is how familial interactions between male Labdacids proceed: in this house, when a son is not killing his father (as Oedipus killed Laius), then a son who has urgent need of his father's good offices receives not a benison but a curse. In a sense, the pervasive dysfunction that has brought the family to this point cannot but be capped by such an interaction. We cannot know whether Aeschylus in the lost plays of his Labdacid trilogy actually dramatized Oedipus' curse; but, that question aside, this is the only place in the five extant Labdacid-plays where the curse is uttered on stage. As we might expect, there is nothing comparable in the *OT*, and of course nothing in the *Antigone*.[27] And we have discussed at length the workings of curses in the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae*. It is fitting that one of the most heightened moments in this very late play is precisely this curse, which perhaps had not been dramatized before.

Fathers' curses, as we have noted, tend to be especially efficacious. Polyneices here is very much downcast, and immediately gives instructions for the eventuality of the curse's fulfilment: let his sisters, if possible, duly bury him with proper ceremony ἐὰν αἱ τοῦδ' ἀραὶ | πατρὸς τελῶνται (1407–08: 'if the curses of this my father are accomplished'). It is not his rift with his brother that was accursed, but his encounter with him now will be.

We have now seen that Sophocles' chronological displacement of this curse in the *OC* is of a piece with his handling of curses in the *Antigone*. The poet is not much concerned to trace in the stage-action of either play the unfolding of some prior curse that has a bearing on the protagonists' inclinations and dispositions of choice. Indeed, the arguments of this chapter thus far seem to suggest that Sophocles prefers to rely on other methods to represent and explore Labdacid dysfunction. It is not that he has no interest in the involutions and manifold corruptions of the family: rather, he would sooner dramatize a sister breaking laws to bury a brother or a father vituperating his son in order to depict the woes of the house. There is no great moment of the revelation of an existing curse in these plays, no 'irruption' of curses and Erinyes—as I have called it—such as we find in the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae*. But we must pursue this

[27] But see below on the heavily ironic curse of Oedipus on the unknown malefactor in that play.

enquiry a little further before we can confidently assent to this generalization. In particular, we must think a little more about a play that contains an *anagnorisis* as climactic and explosive as any in tragedy, the *OT*. But is there any irruption there, any great revelation or recognition specifically of the operation of supernatural causal determinants?

Much has been written about the great revelation of the *OT*, from Aristotle onwards.[28] It has seemed important to many that the recognition that Oedipus himself is the killer itself constitutes the *peripeteia* of the play.[29] Knowledge has seemed a crucial theme of the work, and its concomitant, the systematic dramatic irony that inheres deeply in the play's structure and themes, has received much attention.[30] In the words of a classic handbook on Greek tragedy: 'It is the most brilliant feature of the construction of the play, the most dramatically effective in the literature of the world, that the whole truth is unequivocally exposed at the very beginning of the play.'[31] The importance of oracles in the text is undeniable—without them, the action could never have been set in motion, and here too Oedipus' insatiable desire to know is crucial; but what of curses and inherited guilt?

Oedipus pronounces a curse on the unknown malefactor early in the play, at the start of the first episode (236 ff.): if anyone knows the identity of the murderer and fails to come forward, he is to face 'a sentence of civil and religious excommunication', being utterly rejected from the human and divine life of Thebes.[32] And let the murderer himself, whether alone or acting with accomplices, live out a life of misery, even if he is a member of Oedipus' own household, οἴκοισιν εἰ ξυνέστιος | ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς γένοιτ' ἐμοῦ ξυνειδότος (249–50: 'if he should become a member of the household, dwelling in my own house with my knowledge'). This last part of the imprecation, the curse proper (246–51), has come under the suspicion of editors,

[28] Segal (2001), 179–89, has an annotated select bibliography of scholarship on the *OT*, which is helpful in navigating the great mass of work that exists on all aspects of this play.

[29] Thus e.g. Goldhill (1986), 207 ff.

[30] A good example is Vernant (1990*a*)—illuminating on the systematic ambiguities of the *OT*.

[31] Lesky (1965), 111–12, and see also 114.

[32] Dawe (1982), *ad* 269.

and was deleted by Wecklein (followed by Lloyd-Jones and Wilson), defended by Jebb and transposed after 268 by Dawe. For present purposes, suffice to say two things. First, the curse on the malefactor (*τὸν δεδρακότ'* 246), as Jebb notes, properly comes before the concluding curse on any who fail to obey Oedipus' edicts, which is a fitting end to his speech (269 ff.). To transpose the two curses, with Dawe, is to do some violence both to the logical sequence of the speech and, perhaps, to its dramatic effectiveness. Second, to excise it with Lloyd-Jones and Wilson is to remove the point of two passages, Oedipus' own words at 744–5: *οἴμοι τάλας· ἔοικ' ἐμαυτὸν εἰς ἀρὰς | δεινὰς προβάλλων ἀρτίως οὐκ εἰδέναι* ('Ah me! unwittingly, it seems, I have even now subjected myself to dreadful curses'); and the messenger's report at Oedipus' self-characterization after the disaster at 1291: *ἀραῖος, ὡς ἠράσατο* ('under the curse, even as he cursed').[33]

I accept, then, that this curse is in place at 246 ff., and that it is referred to twice at later points in the play. It is an aspect of the pervasive irony of the *OT* that the cursing, confident Oedipus of the beginning becomes, when he is destroyed, accursed in virtue of his own utterance. This is but a part of the complete and terrible symmetry that prevails in the text, pivoting on the moment of *peripeteia*: the blinded Oedipus of the closing passages is the mirror image of the king of the first half. But how relevant to the play is any prior curse or taint of guilt? Is there an irruption in the *OT*?

Apart from the many appearances in the text of Apollo's prophetic power, references to the divine are, broadly speaking, confined to the choral odes. There is certainly nothing to compare with Eteocles' or Orestes' decision-scenes in Aeschylus. The supernatural force that Oedipus recognizes in his terrible demise is chiefly Apollo (1329), and a little later Creon stays his hand till he has enquired of the god what is to become of Oedipus (1438 ff.). In the exodos, no one

[33] Taking *μενῶν δόμοις* together, with *δόμοις* having a locative force, with Lloyd-Jones ('to linger *in the house under the curse*, that curse that was his own'). The alternative interpretation, adopted by Jebb, takes *δόμοις ἀραῖος* together, '*to make the house accursed* under his own curse'. I adopt the former on the grounds that at this point in the play, directly after the *peripeteia*, an emphasis on an accursed Oedipus is more apposite than a reference to his polluting power over the household. That his own curse in the first episode has rebounded on him is more relevant than that, under the provisions of his earlier speech, the murderer's presence blights the household that conceals him.

attributes the present misfortunes to any curse or even to any taint on the race: it is Apollo who has destroyed Oedipus, and not his Labdacid affiliations—still less any rape of Chrysippus and what Lemprière calls Laius' 'unnatural lusts'. Here, as elsewhere in Sophocles, Lloyd-Jones has discerned a hereditary curse underlying the action.[34] Sophocles, he contends, 'took it for granted that . . . a curse inherited from Laius rested upon Oedipus'.[35] The poet 'has made an allusive and almost enigmatic use of a story whose existence is essential to his purpose, but which for artistic reasons must not be allowed to loom too large'.[36] I shall not rehearse here the methodological considerations that I have already deployed against this argument in my consideration of curses.[37] It is enough to say here that, if we bear in mind our insistence on carefully and clearly distinguishing curses from taints of inherited guilt, the passages marshalled by Lloyd-Jones in support of his contention (principally 1184–5, 1360) establish very little. They do establish, what I do not attempt to deny, that Sophocles' version does acknowledge and make use of a taint on the race.[38] But they do not establish the importance of any curse on the race. Indeed, it is revealing that the only curse that is explicitly deployed by the characters in the play is the curse of Oedipus on the malefactor that we have already considered. It is this curse that comes home to roost in the exodos, not any curse of Pelops on Laius.

To complete this investigation, we must mention the choral odes of the *OT*, where most of the play's supernatural reflections are concentrated. As we have noted before, the chorus in a tragedy offers only one view, one perspective on the action, and not an authoritative key or hint to interpretation.[39] That said, the chorus of the *OT* is obsessed with Zeus. As has recently been pointed out, whereas the characters, and particularly Oedipus, concentrate their reflections on Apollo, the chorus' reflections on divine power, focusing

[34] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 104–28, esp. 119 ff.
[35] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 121.
[36] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 121
[37] See above, Ch. 3.
[38] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 121.
[39] See further Gould (1996), and, specifically on the *OT*, Segal (1995), 197–8. See now also Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 265–84, for some stimulating observations on choral identity and collectiveness.

on the chief god, provide 'a cosmic frame for human suffering'.[40] Thus their first utterance of the play, the opening line of the parodos, begins: *ὦ Διὸς ἁδυεπὲς φάτι* (151: 'O sweet-speaking message of Zeus'). Creon is just returned from Delphi, and the chorus wastes no time in reminding us that Apollo's utterances are guaranteed and underpinned by Zeus. Again, in the first stasimon, directly after the Teiresias-scene, they conclude despairingly that, while prophecy is obscure to them as mortals, *ἀλλ' ὁ μεν οὖν Ζεὺς ὅ τ' Ἀπόλλων | ξυνετοὶ καὶ τὰ βροτῶν | εἴδοτες* (498–9: 'But Zeus and Apollo have understanding, and know the affairs of men'). They could hardly underline more sharply the familiar Sophoclean epistemic gulf between god and man, which is so often mediated through knowledge and ignorance of the meaning of prophecy.[41]

Most relevant to our concerns is the second stasimon (863–910). The clouds are gathering, and the chorus reflects on the great truths of *hybris* and consequent destruction. May they, they pray, be pure and live in conformity with the laws of Olympus. *Hybris* begets a tyrant, and, mounting on high, leaps down *ἀπότομον . . . εἰς ἀνάγκαν* (877: 'into sheer constraint', Lloyd-Jones; not quite 'on the abyss of doom', Jebb). Pride and neglect of *dike* deserve punishment; and, if the oracles are not true, *ἔρρει . . . τὰ θεῖα* (910: 'the divine is passing away.')

Here the chorus identifies no curse or taint of ancestral guilt. Their generalizations are a version of those of which tragic choruses never tire: one who is puffed up above his station will fall. This is not the place to consider in detail the relevance of this ode to its context, which has sometimes seemed puzzling.[42] It is enough to say that this ode, the most sustained and detailed reflection in the play on the power of the divine and its bearing on the stage-action, conceptualizes things familially only in one respect. There is a striking and sustained generative metaphor in the first part of the ode: see not only the notorious 873, *ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον* ('*hybris* begets a

[40] Segal (1995), 195.

[41] Aside from the familiar examples in the Labdacid-plays, we might mention as a clear example the crucial prophecy revealed in the middle of the *Ajax*, revealed to us and the chorus at the very moment that Ajax has just left camp to commit suicide. Had it come a moment earlier—had the chorus and Ajax been possessed of the crucial piece of knowledge that if he stays inside this day, the crisis will pass—things might have turned out differently.

[42] See further Segal (1995), 180–98.

tyrant'); but also the more extended figure of 865 ff., *νόμοι . . . οὐρανίᾳ 'ν αἰθέρι τεκνωθέντες, ὧν Ὄλυμπος πατὴρ μόνος, οὐδέ νιν θνατὰ φύσις ἀνέρων ἔτικτεν* ('laws begotten in the heavenly ether, whose only father is Olympus, nor did the mortal nature of men beget them'). It is very much to the point that these metaphors of begetting appear here, in the context of the corrupted begetting of the Labdacids. Indeed, this is an aspect of the dramatic irony of the play: the chorus cannot *know* at this point in the action that Oedipus has got children on his own mother, and thus they hit the mark only unwittingly.[43] Here again, as we have seen repeatedly in this chapter, Sophocles bears in mind the corruptions of the Labdacid line and makes use of them, but without making the Labdacids especially accursed. This ode offers a more oblique depiction of the disorder of the line than would content Aeschylus.[44]

Generational interactions, then, in the sense that is relevant for our purposes, are of relatively limited importance in the *OT*. They certainly do not begin to approach the dominance of Labdacid familial concerns in the *Septem* and the *Phoenissae*. Aeschylus and Euripides never allow us to forget that their protagonists are accursed members of a certain line. Sophocles, I have argued, takes a very different tack in this play. His concerns are rather different: it seems to be his purpose to lay bare the impotence and futility of mortal enquiry in the face of the relentless and awful perfection of divine knowledge.

[43] Of course the generative metaphor in the context of *hybris* is not unique to this passage: cf., famously, Solon fr. 6.3–4 West ~ Theognis 153–4. But in those passages it is *koros* that begets *hybris*. Sophocles' metaphor of *hybris* begetting a ruler is in itself striking and unusual. For *hybris* as a parent cf. the very approximate parallel at Aesch. *Ag*. 763 ff., where *hybris* begets new *hybris*. Perhaps the thought here in Sophocles is similar: we might tentatively gloss, *it is hybris that gives rise to the qualities that characterize the absolute ruler*. (I reject Blaydes' emendation *ὕβριν . . . τυραννίς* (i.e. 'tyranny/absolute rule begets *hybris*'), which is defended confidently by Dawe (1982), *ad* 872. The change brings the passage into closer conformity with the more familiar commonplace, smoothing the path of the sense unnecessarily and rejecting a more pregnant *lectio difficilior*.) See further Fisher (1992), 329–39, esp. 331 ff., where the transmitted reading is defended, with references. Fisher argues that at this date 'a pejorative meaning for *tyrannos*' is available (332), and that *OT* 873 can legitimately be read to mean: 'a monarch might be tempted, by the hybristic desire to abuse his power in pursuit of his own pleasures, to begin to commit the types of unjust, dishonouring and impious acts of violence and sexual abuse characteristic of tyrants' (335).

[44] But see above, Ch. 3 n. 73, on metaphors of generation and parenthood in the *Oresteia*.

As I have argued, it is by no means inessential to the poet's concerns that Oedipus is a Labdacid; but this, I suggest, is not on account of any family curse. If there is an irruption of any kind in the *OT*, the truth that obtrudes itself is not that a supernatural cause has ever been at work behind and within the action. It is rather the great truth of Oedipus' identity and familial relations. For Sophocles, the simple fact of his being the son of Laius is quite destructive enough in itself. The irruption of the *OT* is a great insight, the illumination of a terrible fact, not the revealing of an Erinys that has walked hitherto unseen in the mist. This is perhaps to restate from another perspective the truth that the *OT* is a deeply ironic play.

The *OC*, of course, is pervaded by Erinyes, but here too they do not appear climactically after the fashion of the *Septem*. The Oedipus of this play, a difficult figure combining the potential of great beneficence with that of great harm, seems to have a particularly close relation to the Erinyes, whom he often invokes.[45] Three times he explicitly calls on their aid to support him and his imprecations (864 ff., 1010–13, and 1389–92, on which see above). Polyneices suspects that his misfortunes are attributable to *τὴν σὴν Ἐρινύν* (1299: 'your Erinys'). Later, well and truly cursed, he laments the ill-starred influence of his father and his father's Erinyes (1434). And theirs, of course, is the grove to which Oedipus has come. This odd and pregnant association is the principal form in which the Erinyes appear: what we definitely do not see is a development of the idea that some Erinys of the house lies behind the action and that its will is being played out through the course of events.

Our investigation of Sophocles' Labdacid plays has yielded a twofold result. Negatively speaking, we have noticed the marked absence of any hereditary curse on the line that serves as the causal lynchpin of the action. The same is true, as we have found, of inherited guilt and Erinyes. But this is not to deny the importance in Sophocles' eyes of the fact that his protagonists are scions of this corrupted and dysfunctional family. He simply works through the associated issues by means of mechanisms different from those employed by Aeschylus and Euripides. The role of the divine in this family is by no means negligible: as we have shown, all three Theban

[45] On the ambivalence of Oedipus, see e.g. Kamerbeek (1984), Introduction.

plays make use of divine will in various ways, and prophecy, cursing, and Erinyes are all severally prominent in Sophocles' versions. Thus we have concluded not only, negatively, that certain features are absent, but also, rather more positively, that Sophocles has his own individual approach to the Oedipus-myth which proceeds by other means. This is a salutary reminder for the student of Attic tragedy: it is quite possible to deploy the fate of this house in the genre of tragedy without conforming to an Aeschylean generational scheme and without employing the medium of the connected, diachronically advancing trilogy. Tragic reflections on ancient evils and successive re-incriminations within a line do not necessarily shed their complexity and interest when they slough off an inherited curse.

II. THE *ELECTRA* AND THE SORROWS OF THE PELOPIDS, PAST, PRESENT—AND FUTURE?

We have one more play of Sophocles to consider in detail, the *Electra*. Does Sophocles' one extant handling of the Pelopid myths conform to the highly individual pattern that we have discerned in his Theban plays?[46] Do the marked differentia that distinguish the Sophoclean from the Aeschylean and the Euripidean handling of the Labdacids apply also in his treatment of this other great and greatly unfortunate *oikos*?

A crucial debate among interpreters of this play has concerned the presentation and evaluation of the matricide and the absence of specific references to future consequences for Orestes.[47] Is the play to be viewed ironically, with emphasis on the dark undercurrents of the action; or affirmatively, with the emphasis falling rather on the justifications that are proposed for the killings and the near-complete silence concerning problems to come? 'The *Electra* of Sophocles might be thought to prove the impossibility of objective literary criticism: so diverse are the interpretations to which it has given

[46] It is infuriating that we do not have Soph. *Iphigenia* and his (three? cf. Radt, *TrGF* iv. 239–40, Lloyd-Jones (1996), 106–7) Thyestes plays.

[47] Two useful recent summaries of the debate between ironic and affirmative views of the play are given by Lloyd (2005), 99–115, and MacLeod (2001), 4–20.

rise. The greatest divergence of opinion concerns the poet's attitude towards the matricidal vengeance.'[48] In an earlier chapter, we have noted that the one clear and undeniable reference to a continuation of the woes of the line after the end of this play is given by Aegisthus as he goes to his death:

> ἦ πᾶσ' ἀνάγκη τήνδε τὴν στέγην ἰδεῖν
> τά τ' ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα Πελοπιδῶν κακά;
>
> (1497–8)

Is it quite necessary that this house here behold both the present and the future ills of the Pelopids?

We might add to our previous discussion only that this is not, by any measure, a disinterested analysis of the situation. Aegisthus, less than ecstatic that he is about to be done to death, very naturally hits on a strategy for dissuasion: not only is the present problematic, he warns, but so also will be the future. We have seen the Clytaemestra of Aeschylus' *Choephori* clutching at straws when she faces Orestes—'Stay, and revere my breast!'; 'Think of a mother's curse!'; 'Think of the Erinyes!' (*Cho.* 896–930). This passage of the *Electra* is parallel—'Are you ashamed of this deed so that you must commit it indoors?' he says; 'Future woes will come!'; 'Must I go first? Do you seriously believe that I may escape?' (*El.* 1493–1503). These utterances are perfectly plausible psychologically, as Aegisthus runs the gamut of horror, attempted dissuasion and, finally, a kind of bitter irony. Had it been the chorus speaking of μέλλοντα κακά ('future ills'), the locution might have demanded a different consideration, particularly if the prediction came in a stasimon and in a more reflective context. As it stands, however, not too much can be built on this couplet: it is hardly a solid peg on which to hang a reading of gathering clouds and coming darkness.[49]

There is, by contrast, plenty in the text about the burden of the past. It has been well said that in the *Electra*, by contrast with Aeschylus' *Choephori*, 'Sophocles concentrates on the present as

[48] Winnington-Ingram (1980), 217, and see generally his chapter on the *Electra*, 217 ff.

[49] But see also the further considerations adduced with characteristic intelligence and sensitivity by Winnington-Ingram (1980), 226 ff.

generated by the past.'[50] This tendency culminates in the chorus's chilling utterance at the very moment of matricide:

> τελοῦσ' ἀραί· ζῶσιν οἱ
> γᾶς ὑπαὶ κείμενοι.
> παλίρρυτον γὰρ αἷμ' ὑπεξαιροῦσι τῶν κτανόντων
> οἱ πάλαι θανόντες.
>
> (1417 ff.)

The curses are being fulfilled. Those who lie beneath the earth yet live. For those long dead extract the killers' blood that flows in return.

τελοῦσι here in the chorus's utterance picks up Electra's words at 1398–9: ἄνδρες αὐτίκα | τελοῦσι τοὔργον ('The men straightway will be accomplishing their work'); and is in turn picked up by the last word of the play, τελεωθέν (1510: 'completed/accomplished'.)[51] All is accomplishment and finality: the doing of the deed, or rather the twofold deed, is emphatically the focus of the exodos of the work. But what, precisely, are the *curses* of which the chorus speaks? This has plausibly been referred to Electra's magnificent invocation of the powers below at the end of the prologue, where she prays in the same breath for vengeance and for the return of her brother (110 ff.): 'The dramatic effect is to suggest that the divinities whom Electra invokes have already acted on her behalf, and will continue to act.'[52] This interpretation lends the play a neat effect of ring-composition, Electra's lament and curse at the start explicitly answering to the vengeance at the end. It may be objected that the chorus does not enter the orchestra until the end of Electra's curse-speech, and so has not technically heard her curse at all. Thus we would need to think more in terms of some prior curse, not to say some family curse. Such was the line adopted by Lloyd-Jones in *The Justice of Zeus*, where he refers the choric utterance 1417 ff. to the affair of Myrtilus and Pelops, which has been mentioned by the chorus at 504 ff. He freely admits, however, that

[50] Winnington-Ingram (1980), 228

[51] See March (2001), *ad* 1508–10, on the cluster of τέλος-words at the end of the play.

[52] March (2001), *ad* 110–18; and cf. *ad* 1417–18, where she refers the choric utterance to this curse.

There is no explicit statement that this was the origin of the curse, but only of the woes of the Atreidae; still, there seems little doubt that Sophocles meant to imply what Euripides in his *Orestes* explicitly states. When at the moment of Clytemnestra's murder the Chorus exclaims 'The curse is accomplishing its work!', I doubt if they mean simply the curse of the murdered Agamemnon.[53]

I share this concluding doubt, but I think we need look no further back than Electra's invocation within the play. The objection just mentioned loses much of its force when we take into account two considerations: first, that the chorus is on the point or in the process of entering when Electra utters her curse at 110 ff.; second, even if they have not been in the arena for all the curse, the interstice is so small that it will have passed entirely unnoticed in performance. We the audience will hardly object at 1417 ff. that the chorus did not actually hear the curse of 110 ff., having begun the parodos a few seconds later.

Here too, then, we find no necessity to refer to a previous family curse, an inherited curse of the Pelopids. It is otiose to mention that there is a great deal in Sophocles' *Electra* about divine justice and the workings of Zeus. My point is not that cursing and supernatural causation are irrelevant here—and of course not that familial dysfunction and the tracing of woes through the generations are irrelevant; but rather that within the confines of the text itself we are provided with all the cursing and inherited guilt that we need to understand the play. Precisely as we found in our consideration of Sophocles' Theban plays, the corollary of this negative conclusion, this conclusion about absence, is the positive conclusion that here too Sophocles works out the woes of the house not through the climactic operation of a pre-existing curse, not through the sudden revelation that an Erinys is at work, but through the desires, concerns, and epistemic status of his protagonists. If any piece of knowledge climactically comes to the fore in the *Electra*, it is that Orestes is Orestes and that he is come to kill his mother. Here too Sophocles' characteristic irony is central to the play; but here too, as in the *OT*, this is an irony concerning human identity, not one concerning the suddenly realized workings of the divine. Sophocles is concerned in the *Electra* to portray a terrible present that is rooted in a terrible

[53] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 113.

past. To project the audience's attention forward to some more or less obscure but certainly terrible future would be alien to his intention. 'Any allusion to the pursuit and acquittal of Orestes that lie ahead would be damaging to the particular effect at which the poet aims, so that the persistence over three generations of the chain of murder and revenge is not here stressed.'[54] It is precisely Sophocles' rigid confining of the play to the present, his rigorous exclusion of the future, that has embarrassed some interpreters and given rise to the great debates about the portrayal of the killings and about their consequences.

CONCLUSION

These readings and comparisons have identified a crucial difference between Sophocles on the one hand and Aeschylus and Euripides on the other. Despite the many and marked differentia between Aeschylus and Euripides that we have found in previous chapters, by comparison with Sophocles the two very much stand together. It has now emerged that our study of certain features of corrupted familial interactions and their connection with supernatural modes of causation *inevitably* has less to say about Sophocles: curses, Erinyes, and taints of inherited guilt simply do not operate in the same way in this author. Far from establishing the simple absence of certain features, this chapter has sketched the beginnings of a new direction of enquiry. Sophocles, I have argued, does not share the Aeschylean preoccupation with doubly motivated action and its bearing on mortal decisions. At the same time, he is no less concerned than his two counterparts with familial dysfunction and with supernatural causation. It is simply that his concern with these concepts is differently handled.

There will always be imponderables in the comparison and contrast of the characters of different authors' work. To deny this is to over-simplify. We have identified something of the character of Sophocles without pretending to adumbrate a grand theory of his

[54] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 112.

tragic *Weltanschauung*. Within the compass of this enquiry, we have said enough: the pursuit of the clues and hints that we have discerned in this chapter belongs to another study—a study which I intend to pursue elsewhere. The time has now come for us to view tragedy from a different perspective; to step back and consider the inevitable questions of how, precisely, the causal mechanisms that we have identified operate. How does tragic decision making work, especially within a blighted family? Do the tragedians explore a problem of freedom bearing on their accursed mortal agents? And, not least, why have we so far said so little about fate?

6

Fate, Freedom, Decision Making: Eteocles and Others

We have now investigated in depth the tragic workings of inherited guilt, curses, and Erinyes. We have come to see that these three concepts form a constellation of inter-related causal determinants, and that all three work in closely similar, though ultimately distinct, ways. The time has now come to turn our attention from these determinants to what they determine—to examine the acting mortal character considered as the field on which a taint of guilt, a curse, or an Erinys may operate. It is characteristic of tragedy to investigate closely and with some anxiety what it is for a man or woman to perform an action that is ultimately destructive, whether of self or of others. Though Aeschylus is the most concerned of the tragedians to explore how a human can possibly act under the canopy of the divine order, both Sophocles and Euripides, as we shall see, evince anxieties of their own about human agency. It is to precisely this point that our investigations have led us: we find ourselves at the interface between divine and mortal, between doom and crime, between action and suffering. In tragedy, awful and lamentable things regularly occur. But the genre is quite capable of presenting something as simultaneously a terrible happening, a calamitous element of the universe, and also an intelligible deed, something that arises for comprehensible reasons from the human motivations and concerns of the agent. In other words, tragedy can comfortably encompass both subjective and objective perspectives on its action, can show both the awfulness of something and the reasons why someone might have done such an awful thing. And these reasons frequently involve both a supernatural and a human component. Ajax's suicide in Sophocles is in

conformity with divine will: in both Aeschylus and Euripides, Eteocles and Polyneices kill each other in fulfilment of their father's curse. But Sophocles is at pains to give us an insight into why Ajax the man should behave in such a way; and similarly, Aeschylus and Euripides show at some length the human reasons why such men as the two sons of Oedipus should do what they do.

In this chapter, I address the issue of how mortals in tragedy come to act, specifically with reference to the concerns that have occupied us so far: this chapter does not pretend to be anything like an exhaustive account, nor would such an account be in place here. Rather, it is an examination of certain key passages and plays, an examination of agency and freedom as they impinge on the causal frameworks that we have analysed in the preceding chapters of our investigation. I examine here some tragic decisions where the causation of the resultant action clearly has both a divine and a human component. This discussion will compel us to examine the role of fate in tragedy and to ask whether we can justifiably think in terms of a problem of freedom. For our purposes, as we shall see, fate is remarkably, even arrestingly, peripheral. This final part of our enquiry will, it is hoped, reveal some further nuances of the causal factors in tragedy that have been our concern in previous chapters. It will emerge that we cannot give a satisfactory account of a taint of guilt, a curse, or an Erinys without addressing these issues.

I. FATE

The modern Western world is less at home with the concept of fate than with the concepts of predestination and of determinism. These two things are clearly distinguishable from fate. To take predestination first: some Christians have deployed the notion that their one God certainly and irreversibly elects some mortals to enjoy ultimate beatitude. On this account, certain fortunate souls are simply destined to attain heaven. This form of the doctrine of predestination has been called single predestination. Distinct from it, and reached by a further step, is what is called double predestination. This doctrine states that not only are some inalienably elected to heaven, but

others, with equal inalienability, are condemned to damnation, and have been from everlasting.[1] Even to state these ideas is to demonstrate that they belong to a thought world very different from that of Greek tragedy, where no such notions are important. Conversely, the tragic concept of fate is not at home in this Christian world: 'Fate is a conception for which there is no foothold in the Christian system.'[2] Broadly speaking, from the Christian perspective, no entity but God, who is omnipotent, can be conceived as enduing the present and future with order; and He cannot conceivably be subject to any order or dispensation higher than Himself.[3] It belongs to another *Weltanschauung* entirely to envisage a Zeus subject to fate and the Erinyes:

> *Χο. τίς οὖν ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν οἰακοστρόφος;*
> *Πρ. Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες.*
> *Χο. τούτων ἄρα Ζεύς ἐστιν ἀσθενέστερος;*
> *Πρ. οὔκουν ἂν ἐκφύγοι γε τὴν πεπρωμένην.*
>
> ([Aesch.] *PV* 515 ff.)[4]

> *Chorus*: Who then is the helmsman of necessity?
> *Prom.*: The three-formed fates and the mindful Erinyes.
> *Chorus*: Is Zeus then weaker than these?
> *Prom.*: He could not escape what is fated.

[1] Cf. Martin (1918). Cf. also Neill, Goodwin, and Dowle (1967), s.v. *predestination.*

[2] Martin (1918), 229 col. 1.

[3] Following these lines of thought, Aeschylus and Sophocles may appear more elevated than the benighted Homer, in that they at least nod towards a moralized conception of the universe and even a divine realm that oversees justice for mortals and may be closely allied to fate: thus Martin (1918), 230. On the question whether even Zeus can be constrained by fate, see below.

[4] On this passage cf. Fraenkel, *ad* Aesch. *Ag.* 1535 f., arguing that 'In a number of passages . . . *Μοῖρα* (or *Μοῖραι*) denotes not Destiny in general but the particular fate which causes the appropriate penalty to follow inevitably upon every sin', citing *Cho.* 306 ff. and discerning the same idea in Agamemnon's apology at *Il.* 19. 86 f., where *Moira* and *Erinys* are again coupled. (On the apology and its apparent inconsistency with *Il.* 9. 119, where Agamemnon says *ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἀασάμην φρεσὶ λευγαλέῃσι πιθήσας* ('But since I was subject to infatuation, obeying my perverse mind'), omitting mention of fate and divine powers and instead attributing his infatuation to his own mental perversity, see Lesky (2001), 195–7, viewing the two passages as 'two faces of one coin. . . . Which face of things Agamemnon sees and displays to other people depends . . . on his situation at the time' (197).) On this account, the *Moirai* and *Erinyes* in the present passage have it in common that they ensure the sequence of crime followed by punishment, a connection that not even Zeus can break.

The second concept more familiar to us than fate and less easy to discern in Greek tragedy is determinism. In essence, determinism is the doctrine that the state of the world at any given moment is purely a function of its state at a previous moment, where certain invariable laws of causation apply. It is a short step from this notion to the denial of human freedom and thus human responsibility. For if, in performing an action, I could not have done otherwise than I have in fact done, then it would seem that, theoretically at least, I cannot be held responsible for my action. We shall consider the concept of determinism in greater detail below. This formulation immediately declares its own distinctness from the belief that some things, at least, are ineluctably fated to happen. I defer till later the large and vexed question whether and how Greek tragedy raises a problem of human freedom. Suffice it to say here that those words in Greek tragedy that may be translated by 'fate' and its cognates are not amenable to translation by 'determinism'; and that some have thought that no problem of freedom is raised before both the Stoics and the Epicureans begin to wrestle with notions of causation and human action.[5]

Having established negatively what fate is not, and having seen that two ideas very much more familiar in our own thought-world are clearly distinct from fate, we turn now to a positive account of the workings of fate in tragedy and elsewhere. First we shall consider its nature and functioning in some extra-tragic texts, and, in particular, examples of its importance in two narrative genres, historiography and epic.[6]

[5] The Epicureans, aware of the undesirable implications of a determinist hypothesis, sought to preserve human freedom through the device of the atomic 'swerve' (*κίνησις παρενκλιτική*, *declinatio, clinamen*): see Long and Sedley (1987), i. 102–12, ii. 104–13. On Stoic accounts of causation and fate, see Long and Sedley (1987), i. 333–43, ii. 332–41, and Bobzien (1998), *passim*. We also defer discussion of the view exemplified by Greene (1944), 89–104, that the tragedians in their treatment of fate exhibit a stage of development between 'primitive superstition' and full-fledged engagement with 'the problems of philosophy'. The argument of the present chapter will itself suggest, *contra* the tenor of Greene's thesis (outlined with admirable honesty, 3–9), that the tragedians' interest in fate cannot in the rigour of the term be called a philosophical or proto-philosophical interest; and that tragedy is not profitably viewed as a step in the teleological advancement of Greek thought towards raising the problem of freedom.

[6] It is worth noticing the superficially bewildering proliferation of Greek words for fate. Many of them may be reduced etymologically to the idea of a mortal's allotted portion, that which is meted out to him. The root of *μοῖρα* in its meaning 'portion' or 'share' is found a number of times on the Linear B tablets in the word *mo-ro-pa*$_2$,

An earlier chapter discusses the fall of Croesus in the first book of Herodotus, and the explanation that he subsequently receives from Delphi (1. 91), which attributes his defeat to inherited guilt and ineluctable fate.[7] This instance of a fated calamity early in the text, prepared over a wide span of chapters, may to some extent be seen as programmatic: fate has been said to lend the work 'its inner unity'.[8] At any rate, the text's narrative exuberance is informed by a repetitive pattern: successive Persian kings and Greek tyrants inexorably rise and fall, and the Cyrus who has vanquished Croesus is utterly destroyed in his turn by Tomyris. Xerxes himself, castigator of the elements and bridger of the Hellespont, will only narrowly escape obliteration at the hands of the Greeks. The sense of repetition and ineluctability in the cycle of human affairs that the text engenders is a matter as much of what is unsaid as what is said. This is not to claim that *moira* is the clue to Herodotus' world view.[9] But, as we read his text through to the end,

glossed by CV, *ad* PY43, ' 'possessor of a share or portion', evidently a high-ranking title', and cf. CV, Glossary, s.v. *mo-ro-pa*. The *EM* relates μοῖρα and μόρος to μείρω (s.vv.). The *Suda* (s.v.) is in implicit agreement with this etymology. The *EM* s.v. αἶσα continues the theme of apportionment, deriving the word from *δαΐσα and thus from δαίω, τὸ μερίζω ('I apportion, divide into parts'): the word is then glossed ἡ ἑκάστῳ μεμερισμένη ('that which has been apportioned to each'). Its third suggestion s.v. δαίμων suggests the same line of thought: παρὰ τὸ δαίω, τό μερίζω, ὁ ἑκάστῳ ἀπομερίζων (s.v.: 'from *I divide, I apportion*, the one who apportions to each man'). The entry s.v. εἱμαρμένη καὶ εἵμαρτο notes their derivation from μείρω. The idea of fate as one's due share is pervasive in these etymologies. Its other suggestions connect the word with δαίω, τὸ μανθάνω ('I learn') and δαίω, τὸ γινώσκω ('I come to know'). This derivation is certainly ancient: cf. Plat. *Cratylus* 398b–c, where, in a section of etymologies of divine names, Socrates (citing Hesiod *WD* 121–3, where see West, *ad loc.*, on the variations between the quotation and the direct tradition) claims that the deified men of the Golden Age were called *daimones* because of their prudence and wisdom: [Hesiod] ὅτι φρόνιμοι καὶ δαήμονες ἦσαν, 'δαίμονας' αὐτοὺς ὠνόμασεν (398b6–7). Modern etymology is inclined to agree. Chantraine derives δαίμων from δαίομαι, 'au sens de "puissance qui attribue", d'où "divinité, destin" ', and broadly agrees with the ancients in tracing μοῖρα, μόρος, and εἱμαρμένη to μείρομαι, μέρος—Chantraine (1968), s.vv.

[7] Contrast the ineluctability of *moira* here with the prologue of Euripides' *Alcestis*, where Apollo says that he has saved Admetus from death Μοίρας δολώσας (*Alc.* 10–21, at 12: 'by tricking the fates').

[8] Lesky (1966*a*), 323. Cf. Harrison (2000), 223–42; and the discussion in Gould (1989), 67–76, arguing that 'the supernatural strand of causation . . . goes to the heart of [Hdt.'s] perception of historical events' (67); but see my important qualifications below, n. 9.

[9] Supernatural causation in Herodotus is considered in more detail above, Ch. 1. *Moira* not the Grand Clue to Hdt.: see Gould (1989), 72–82, denying that Hdt.

the uncertainty of human life and the inevitability of decline are, we feel, something of which we can be sure.

If fate in Herodotus tends to be implacable where it is deployed, the rigidity and sovereignty of fate in both Homer and Hesiod may be called into question. We have noticed above, in Chapter 4, that the Erinyes in Homer are conceived as working on the gods as well as on mortals. Similarly, fate itself may also sometimes appear to be part of an order that can constrain the gods—some stratum which is older than the Olympians and that they have not fully mastered. Towards mortals, of course, Fate is quite uncompromising.[10] At two decisive moments in battle (*Iliad* 8. 68–77, 22. 209–13), Zeus is shown balancing in his golden scales δύο κῆρε ταν ηλεγέος θανάτοιο ('two *keres* of death that lays men low'), once those of the Achaeans and Trojans, once those of Achilles and Hector. The αἴσιμον ἦμαρ ('appointed day') of one party tips down, and defeat and death follows for the mortal or mortals to whom it corresponds. To call this 'Zeus' fateful act' and 'a scene . . . worthy to describe the fate of mighty heroes' is true enough but unhelpful for present purposes: this formulation elides the important question of Zeus' relation to the fates of mortals.[11] One approach to this passage is exemplified in the view that 'Zeus weighs on the scales of Moira the destiny of men and cannot give aid to a man condemned by

subscribes to a grand and all-pervasive script of fate that informs all the actions of his narrative. I am in complete agreement with this: my remarks in the main text here are not intended to refute Gould, but rather to insist that Hdt.'s *moira*, where deployed, is *in those cases* a force to be reckoned with.

[10] Cf. e.g. *Il.* 6. 487–9 (Hector to Andromache). The formula κῆρ' ἀλεείνων (*Il.* 3. 32 etc.: 'avoiding his *ker*') does not serve as a counter-example. It is true that the word κῆρ can shade into μοῖρα, but only 'where μοῖρα means or implies "death" ': thus Hainsworth (1993), 117. To avoid one's *ker* is therefore to avoid death at this moment, and not to cheat or frustrate one's fate in a larger sense. Hainsworth (ibid)., points out that 'κῆρ never signifies (as μοῖρα can) 'the natural order' '.

[11] Griffin (1980), 154 and 154–5 respectively. It is unfortunate that the fragments of Aeschylus' Ψυχοστασία are too sparse for anything to be made of them. A tradition grew up of criticizing Aeschylus for metamorphosing or simply misunderstanding the gist of the two Homeric passages. Thus Plut. *Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat* 17A, warning the young not to allow themselves to be carried away by poetry's element of πλάσμα, observes that the whole play is worked up from an Homeric μυθοποίημα καὶ πλάσμα πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἢ ἔκπληξιν ἀκροατοῦ ('story and fiction intended for the pleasure or astonishment of the hearer'). The scholia on both Homeric passages bluntly criticize the tragedian for misunderstanding κῆρε as ψυχάς: cf. ΣT Hom. *Il.* 8. 70 and 22. 210 (Aesch. φαύλως ἐκδεξάμενος τὸ εἰρημένον: 'badly taking up the locution'!), with Eust. *Il.* 1266. 37, quoted by Erbse, *ad loc.*

Moira'.[12] Opposed to this is the view that the will of Zeus essentially *is* Moira. It has been said of the Iliadic Zeus that 'He exercises a vague general control over events, and since his thought is identical with future happenings, the future can be known by him or by whoever knows his mind. *Moira*, one's 'portion', is in the last resort identical with the will of Zeus; when Hera reminds him that he cannot save his son Sarpedon she is only warning him that he cannot sacrifice to a sudden whim his own settled policy.'[13] On one account, Zeus is subordinate to Moira and bound by it: on another, his will constitutes it.[14] The famous episode in which Zeus deliberates whether to save Sarpedon from death (*Il.* 16. 431–61) at least raises the possibility that he might contravene what is fated. It is, he says, *μοῖρα* that his son be overcome by Patroclus (433 f.), and Hera describes the unfortunate mortal as *πάλαι πεπρωμένον αἴσῃ* (441: 'long since fated by appointment'). She appears to concede, however, that Zeus can rescue Sarpedon if he wants to (443). The strongest dissuasions that she brings to bear are that the other gods will not approve his action, and that a dangerous precedent might be set: other Olympians have children on the battlefield, and they too might want to save their lives in future (445–9). She pursues the train of thought no further, and in the event her husband contents himself with a bloody shower; but *prima facie* this passage does seem to raise difficulties for those who would identify fate in the *Iliad* with Zeus' will. A closely similar situation arises in book 22, when Athena dissuades her father from saving Hector. The goddess uses three of the same lines that Hera has used in book 16, to equally good effect: 16. 441–3 are identical with 22. 179–81. Here too, Athena seems to think that it is in Zeus' power to save Hector, but in the event the hero is abandoned to Achilles and death.[15] This repeated problematization of the supreme god's relation to fate in Homer is only the beginning of a long career of complex interaction between what Zeus intends or

[12] Zieliński (1926), 168.

[13] Lloyd-Jones (1971), 4–5. He restates the essence of this position at 166 n. 19: 'in the last resort what Zeus wishes to happen happens'. Noteworthy in this connection is *Σ Il.* 22. 209: *ἴσως ἀλληγορεῖ τὴν Διὸς γνώμην κτλ.* ('Perhaps this is an allegory for the intention of Zeus').

[14] The *Διὸς … βουλή* of the *Iliad*'s proem need not be inclusively interpreted: the 'design of Zeus' does not necessarily signify the entire action of the epic. Thus (e.g.) Lesky (2001), 174–6, strictly limits the significance of this half-line.

[15] Cf. Janko (1992), *ad loc.*

desires and what is destined to be. 'While Greek religion lives, the idea of divine omnipotence is in constant rivalry with the idea of the authority of Moira over the gods.'[16]

Hesiod notoriously gives the Fates two parentages in the *Theogony*, at first sight inconsistent with one another. In the earlier of these passages, the poet makes both *Μόρον καὶ Κῆρα* and *Μοίρας καὶ Κῆρας* children of Night (211–17). In the later, the *Μοῖραι* are daughters of Zeus and Themis (903 ff.): they receive *πλείστην τίμην* ('the greatest honour') from their father and are named Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, *αἵ τε διδοῦσι | θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισιν ἔχειν ἀγαθόν τε κακόν τε* ('who grant to mortal men the possession of good and ill').[17] As a matter of logic, the Fates clearly cannot be both fatherless children of night and children of Zeus by Themis. West notes the inconsistency in his commentary but claims that it is 'not a very serious one'.[18] In his note on the second passage, he rightly observes that here the Fates are 'subordinate to Zeus', being his daughters and receiving their *τίμη* from him.[19] 'Even the Moirai are numbered among his daughters, as if to make it plain that in critical cases their power is subordinate to his.'[20] Solmsen also acknowledges the inconsistency and rightly refuses to see the problem as 'purely . . . textual'.[21] He suggests that the two passages may profitably be viewed as reflecting two moods of the poet, respectively (i) 'a mood of despair' in which human life is arbitrary and harsh and (ii) a more sanguine view of the Fates 'as agents of a stern but fundamentally just world order. . . . The character of their parents imposes a restriction on the arbitrariness of their dispensations.'[22]

For present purposes we must note that at a very early date, in both Homer and Hesiod, fate may appear under two aspects. On the one hand it represents a dispensation older and more venerable than the present order of the Olympians; on the other it can be said to derive from the most powerful Olympian and therefore be dependent upon

[16] Zieliński (1926), 169. Cf. also Lesky (2001), 176: 'In general I agree with Martin Nilsson and many other scholars that these [*sc.* fate and the gods] were originally two coexisting sets of conceptions that subsequently came of necessity into conflict with each other.'

[17] For the names, cf. *Od.* 7. 197, where the Fates collectively are called *Κλῶθες*.

[18] West, *ad Theog.* 217.

[19] West, *ad Theog.* 904.

[20] West, *ad Theog.* 37.

[21] Solmsen (1949), 36.

[22] Solmsen (1949), 37.

him. In both these early poets, then, the relation of fate to the present divine hierarchy is problematic. We shall see that in tragedy, too, there are traces of similar tensions.[23]

After the Messenger's speech in Euripides' *Heracles*, the chorus sings a lament relating Heracles' killing of his family to other mythical exemplars. In a priamel-like figure, the deaths of Danaus' children and Itys lead up to the indescribable (1025–7) murder Heracles has perpetrated on his children, whom he has slain λυσσάδι ... μοίρᾳ (1024: 'by a fate of raving madness'). Now the economy of the play quite clearly attributes this killing to Hera's χόλος (840: 'wrath') through the agency of Lyssa, and certainly not to any grand plan of Zeus. When the chorus invokes Fate here, it does not appeal to some over-arching cosmic design but rather states simply that madness has fallen to Heracles for his portion and has caused his murders. This madness is imposed from without, and 'to [Fate] one refers what one cannot understand, just as religious people refer the unacceptable to "God's will" '.[24] The play emphasizes by its diptychal structure both mortal potency—Heracles is saviour of his doomed family—and mortal vulnerability in the face of the divine—the victorious Heracles is abased in his moment of triumph. This double aspect of humanity embattled in the face of change and chance is sharply focused here by the word μοῖρα. Certain things simply happen for reasons impenetrable to mortals, and this impenetrability is encompassed by the notion of what is or was to be. Thus an appeal to fate can be a kind of shrug of the shoulders, an acceptance that some things, however awful, simply happen.[25]

Closely related are tragic appeals to fate to differentiate mortals' experiences and fortunes: thus the second stasimon of Euripides' *Heraclidae* has its first strophe devoted to the mutability of human prosperity and its dependence on the gods and fate. This ode comes after Eurystheus' defeat but before Alcmene's resolve to kill him,

[23] Cf., *à propos* of Aeschylus, Winnington-Ingram (1983*a*), 170–73, on Moira as connoting 'the rigid, the intractable, the violent, the blind, the primitive aspect of divine operation' (171), and as sharing characteristics—rigidity, blindness, implacability—with the Erinyes. On [Aesch.] *PV* 515 ff., quoted by Winnington-Ingram at 171 n. 57, see below, and above, text to n. 4.

[24] Bond (1981), *ad* Eur. *HF* 1024.

[25] See above on fate and inevitability in Herodotus.

entirely an appropriate point for an account of mortal vicissitudes. Here mutability and ineluctability are combined: *παρά δ' ἄλλαν ἄλλα | μοῖρα διώκει* (611–12: see below: 'one *moira* after another pursues us'), reducing some from high estate and exalting others,

> *μόρσιμα δ' οὔτι φυγεῖν θέμις, οὐ σοφι-*
> *ᾳ τις ἀπώσεται, ἀλλὰ μάταν*
> *ὁ πρόθυμος ἀεὶ πόνον ἕξει.*
>
> (615–17: see below)

It is in no way ordained that one may escape *morsima*; no one will dispel it by cleverness, but he who so desires shall always take his trouble in vain.

The sense of the notion that *moira* after *moira* attends or pursues human life must surely be not alternate predeterminations succeeding one another, but something much closer to the etymological sense of the word: one fortune after another, one *lot*, attends the same person or group as time passes. A recent translator renders 611–12: 'One fortune after another pursues us.'[26] But the sense of *moira* 'lot' is clearly not felt—at least by the chorus as they sing—to jar with the sense of *moira* 'what is to be', for the related word *μόρσιμος* appears a few lines later in its sense of 'ineluctably determined', used of events against which *sophia* and resolution are futile. The first colon of the sentence deserves attention for the precise manner in which it describes inevitability. Line 615 has been rendered: 'It is not possible to flee from fate [etc.]'; or again: 'What is ordained no man may escape.'[27] I do not find either of these translations wholly satisfactory: *θέμις* is notoriously not what is *possible*, but what is *laid down* or *established by custom or right*.[28] The gist of both translations quoted is quite appropriate to the marked emphasis in the context on mortal helplessness, but 'not possible' and 'no man . . . may' fail to bring out the connotation that it is 'not *lawful*' or 'not *within the bounds of established ordinances*' to go against fate. The passage depicts an order as a whole, albeit an order of mutability, in which fated good and ill are inescapable. But they occupy their crucial position alongside the gods: *θεῶν* is the third

[26] Kovacs (1995), 67.
[27] Respectively Kovacs (1995), 67; and Davie and Rutherford (1996), 109.
[28] Cf. LSJ, s.v. *θέμις*.

word of the stasimon. Here there is no problematization of the gods' relation to fate: from the chorus' mortal point of view, the two agencies need not be sharply distinguished, for both rule over human fortunes alike and their vicissitudes may be attributed to either or both.

A similar conjunction occurs in the exodos of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*; but here, as has often been suggested, the complex of Zeus and Moira is problematized not in its internal relations but in relation to the overwhelming human logic of the play.[29] Before the sudden appearance of Heracles, Philoctetes and Neoptolemus stand on the point of going, not to Troy, but home, in perfect conformity with the psychological dynamics of the play thus far, but in danger of doing violence to the possibility of Troy's fall. Twice in the body of the tragedy the predictions of the captured seer Helenus are reported, once by the so-called *Emporos* and once, later, by Neoptolemus (603–21; 1314–47). Philoctetes will not be cured of his suppurating wound until he goes to Troy and encounters the sons of Asclepius. When there, with the aid of Neoptolemus and Heracles' bow, he will compass the city's capture. Helenus guarantees with his own life that this is what *must* happen:

> ὡς δεῖ γενέσθαι ταῦτα, καὶ πρὸς τοῖσδ' ἔτι,
> ὡς ἔστ' ἀνάγκη τοῦ παρεστῶτος θέρους
> Τροίαν ἁλῶναι πᾶσαν κτλ.
>
> (1339–41)

[who says] that this must happen, and, in addition, that it is inevitable that all Troy be taken during this present summer…

But as the end of the play approaches, Neoptolemus and Philoctetes come to the point of departing for Oeta: guile, persuasion, and the threat of force have accomplished nothing, and those events that the prophet has declared inevitable are on the point of not happening. In the trochaic tetrameters of 1402–8, Philoctetes assuages his young companion's fears for Phthia and the two begin to set off, when Heracles appears unannounced. The hero, whose special connection with Philoctetes has been emphasized throughout the tragedy (262, 802, 943, 1131), is come from heaven to explain Διὸς … βουλεύματα and to check their departure (1415–16: 'the counsels of Zeus'). His

[29] On fate in *Phil.* and the problematic exodos of the play, see Alt (1961).

peitho succeeds, and the play closes with the pair leaving for Troy. This ending has been seen as at least arresting and at most profoundly problematic, in that it may appear to set the designs of Zeus in diametrical opposition to the human dynamic of the play. 'The play has two "endings"; and it would contradict its whole trend and the whole artistry of Sophocles, if the "second ending" deprived the "first ending" of all its value.'[30] The archer essential to the capture of Troy almost makes his way home, overwhelmed by resentment against the Greeks who abandoned him to his desolation and pain: this fact is not, on such an account, obliterated by the final onslaught of persuasion that makes him change his mind. It is almost as if Philoctetes' character and circumstances, and their influence on Neoptolemus, are inimical to the will of Zeus and the dictates of fate. But how can what is ineluctably fated, what Helenus says is *ἀνάγκη*, be frustrated?

Heracles has much to offer Philoctetes: glory (1422); a cure for his malady (1424); *ἀρετή* (1425); death to the criminal Paris who is the ultimate cause of his woes (1426–7); and spoils from the sack of Troy (1428–9).[31] This list of inducements from a deity with special connections to Philoctetes is *peitho* enough: *οὐκ ἀπιθήσω τοῖς σοῖς μύθοις* (1447: 'I shall not disobey your words'). Heracles also has something to set before Neoptolemus: together, the two of them, *λεόντε συννόμω* (1436: 'a pair of lions feeding together'), will protect each other in their endeavour to take Troy. This is not quite the list of enticements proffered to Philoctetes, but for the Neoptolemus whose youth has been so much emphasized, and for whom, indeed, the action of the play is something of a rite of passage, it is enough.[32] The young man is by this stage dramatically an adjunct of the elder, and his last words in the play are an expression of assent: *κἀγὼ γνώμην ταὐτῇ τίθεμαι* (1448: 'I too make the same decision', tr. Lloyd-Jones). It is undeniable that in both cases this is consent won by persuasion, as opposed to, say, some forcible and supernatural translation of the two mortals from Lemnos to Ilium. The means is divine epiphany, but

[30] Winnington-Ingram (1980), 301–2.

[31] Sophocles' own *Philoctetes at Troy* (Soph. frr. 697–703 Radt) may have dealt with Philoctetes' cure and the death of Paris. Thus Radt, *TrGF* iv. 482: 'Argumentum Philoctetis curationem et Paridis necem fuisse veri simile est'. Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1996), 332–3.

[32] Neoptolemus' youth: cf. e.g. Blundell (1989), 184–225, esp. 184–5.

that is not to say that it is in the terms of Greek tragedy an unnatural means, or that the victory of the fated order is cheaply bought by a ruse of dramaturgy.[33] The divinity concerned is after all a specially relevant one. The strongest form of the 'two endings' approach that will stand is that the momentum of the play is very much opposed to the conclusion effected by the appearance of Heracles, and that the return of events into their proper groove, the groove leading to the fall of Troy, involves a *volte-face* of the logic of the story.[34]

When the new ending has been effected, Philoctetes' very last words are an acknowledgement of the role of Moira, the judgement of his friends, *χὠ πανδαμάτωρ | δαίμων, ὃς ταῦτ' ἐπέκρανεν* (1466–8: 'and the all-conquering god, who has brought this to pass'): these three factors all carry him (*κομίζει*) in the direction of Troy, healing, and victory. It has been observed that these three lines offer an ABA arrangement, a mortal factor sandwiched by two divine elements in the pattern *fate–friends–daimon*. The acknowledgement of fate is both an acceptance of Helenus' predictions and a climactic affirmation that the new course is what must and will be. The reference to the 'all-conquering *daimon*' is more problematic: it has often been taken to refer to Zeus, a view that perhaps gains some support from the famous last words of the same poet's *Trachiniae*, where Zeus is effectively said by Hyllus to have pervaded the whole action of the tragedy: *κοὐδὲν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεύς* (1278: 'and there is nothing in all this that is not Zeus').[35] The combination of Zeus and fate might draw further tragic support from their coupling at the end of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. But it is perhaps not absolutely necessary to pin a name on this *daimon*: I do not see that it is impossible to regard this as an instance of the familiar usage 'guiding entity', 'personalized agent and governor of individual fate'.[36] On this

[33] Aristotle's cautions against wanton use of the *deus ex machina* are not a real objection: *Poetics* 1454[a]37–[b]8 appears to warn, not precisely against a *Philoctetes*-like closure, but against violent and artificial uses of the device to introduce extraneous matter or to procure a wholly external *lusis*, *ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Μηδείᾳ* ('as in the *Medea*').

[34] I take it as clear that the fall of Troy is one of the most entrenched 'facts' of Greek myth, a lynchpin of very many traditions and not open, or not easily open, to dramaturgical meddling. This being so, the tendency of the *Philoctetes* might be said to involve a degree of friction between 'fact' and the apparent course of events.

[35] The *daimon* here as Zeus: Webster (1970), *ad* 1466 f., adducing in support *Ant.* 604 ff. (inappositely, I think: all that this passage establishes is the omnipotence of Zeus and his *νόμος*); Winnington-Ingram (1980), 300 n. 63; Kamerbeek (1980), *ad* 1466–8.

[36] On this usage of *daimon*, see above.

account, Philoctetes' last words come close to a pleonastic double acknowledgement of fate, which would not be out of place at the climax of this play: the imperilled destiny of the hero, and therefore of the whole Greek and Trojan forces at Troy, is finally reaffirmed, giving the 'second ending' added weight. The powers whose operation and validity have been imperilled for 1,400 lines are shown to win through in the end, for fate is indeed ineluctable.[37]

We have now examined some instances of the workings of fate in tragedy, and we might examine others. The problematization of fate in the *Philoctetes*, we have found, is pregnant and repays study. But we are fast approaching the conclusion that, in tragedy as a whole, fate is not as important as one might expect. Homer and Herodotus both accord considerable significance to μοῖρα, as a driving force in their narratives, articulating the flow of the story at crucial moments and helping to show how and why the chain of events in question proceeds as it does. Tragedy is not a narrative form. It has no authorial voice, no privileged discourse to relate and explain from an Olympian height what happens. Nor does it generally enjoy the luxury of retrospective explanation, which is where the concept of fate comes into its own: Herodotus is able to see with the benefit of hindsight that some event that he narrates did happen *in the past* and had a particular role to play within some causal nexus. Tragedy, on the other hand, by its nature, represents events in the present tense, events that are in some sense played out before our eyes, and consequently cannot retroject in the same way. This is perhaps one reason why fate does not occupy the central position that we might perhaps expect to find: where there is no narrative, fate has less of a role to play.[38] Inherited guilt, curses, and Erinyes, among their other functions, often serve to explain why a catastrophe occurs, when there is some feature of a blighted family that causes the present generation to re-enact some past horror. We do not find fate working in this way: in this sense, there is less content to it

[37] This tragedy serves as an interesting example of the much-discussed impenetrability of the divine in Sophocles: until the end, its action is very much anthropocentric, played out in a world where the gods are accessible only in the prophecies of Helenus, while the human action proceeds through the play and interplay of mortal characters.

[38] Cf., on the narrative role of fate in Herodotus, Gould (1989), 73: *moira* there 'is not so much an explanation as means of avoiding the necessity of explanation and the consequent break in the pace and flow of the story.' See further above, Ch. 1.

than to other familiar causal determinants in tragedy. In other words, the surprisingly unimportant position occupied by fate in Attic drama is perhaps attributable both to the genre's mimetic nature, and to the relative explanatory sparseness of the concept in the kinds of situations that tragedy tends to depict. The notion that certain things simply must happen does not, from this point of view, have an interesting depth of significance. Hence, it emerges, questions of tragic causation are best approached through those other features of the texts with which this study has been largely concerned. Having touched on fate and mentioned in passing its distinctness from the modern concept of causal determinism, we are now led to consider a question that has long been present beneath the surface of our enquiry, the question whether the tragic causal determinants that have been occupying us have in any sense an impact on mortal freedom.

II. FREEDOM

The enquiry of this book raises an important question of causation. This question resides at the very intersection of supernatural determinants of action with mortal agency and with human decision. Our tragic characters do things. What is from one point of view a human action is from another point of view an infallibly determined part of a scheme of events with a strong component of the divine. Eteocles' and Polyneices' internecine fratricide is both what the two brothers fully intend to do and also the fulfilment of Oedipus' curse. This is not to say that their mortal action is futile or specious—far from it. Precisely here lies the issue. We denizens of the modern Western world are very familiar with problems of free will. The idea that some proposition about causation impacts on our agency or responsibility is, whether we agree with it or not, part of our mental landscape. We would therefore not be surprised by, and we may even find ourselves expecting, problems at the interface in tragedy between divine and human determinants of action. In tragic texts, curses and other divinely sponsored determinants have undeniable causal power. But so too, apparently, does the mortal agent. So is his causal efficacy in any way imperilled by that great and central proposition about the

structure of the cosmos, that the gods exist and their will influences the world? Or, to state the question differently, do we see any problematization of human agency in the face of supernatural causal determinants that is in any way parallel with the problematization effected by modern determinism? Does tragedy, that genre of unwearied questioning and examination, raise any difficulties in this area?

It has been observed that the Greeks do not have a word that corresponds closely with the English noun *will*: while there are classical Greek words for an appetitive impulse to action and for a deliberative impulse to action, there is not a single word for the impulse or inclination towards a certain action regardless of the source of that inclination.[39] It has also been held that in the classical period at least Greece is innocent of the modern problem of free will: if the Greeks have neither a word for nor a concept of the will, then necessarily they cannot raise the question whether the will is free. Moreover, if they do not have something that answers to the modern concept of causal determinism—which will presently be explained in more detail—they are necessarily unable to moot its opposition to free human action. Dodds has forcefully stated this position with respect to the mortals of Homer: 'To ask whether Homer's people are determinists or libertarians is a fantastic anachronism: the question has never occurred to them, and if it were put to them it would be very difficult to make them understand what it meant.'[40]

The divine level of causation is, of course, a very familiar feature of tragedy. We sense no oddity when Aphrodite explains in the prologue of Euripides' *Hippolytus* that she will destroy Hippolytus, and then his destruction is brought about by a very human chain of events rooted deeply in the psychology of Phaedra and indeed of Hippolytus himself.[41] If Phaedra were not deeply concerned with her own and her children's good name, and if Hippolytus did not carry his

[39] Cf. e.g. Dihle (1982), 20 ff., Dover (1974), 150–51, Vernant (1972), 49–51. According to Vernant, tragedy 'pursues an anxious enquiry into the relationship between man and his own actions' (79): see below.

[40] Dodds (1951), 7.

[41] Cf. Knox (1952), 216: 'The demonstration [of the ultimate futility of moral choice and speech] is in fact powerful precisely because the choices and alternations of choice made by the human beings are in each case the natural expression of the individual character. ... The external directing force works not against but through the characteristic thoughts and impulses of the characters involved.'

chastity and his devotion to Artemis to the point of misogyny, then his annihilation would not, and indeed could not, proceed precisely as it does. But, I now ask, does the power of a goddess' hatred, or of a curse, or of divine punishment for the sins of the fathers, imperil human freedom? To apply to Greek tragedy the terminology of a widely used modern handbook of philosophy, 'is the universe such as to leave room for moral thought as we understand it, above all with respect to freedom and responsibility?'[42]

To state the question in this form is to show that it requires immediate refining. As has often been said, to treat a tragic text as though it were a contribution to a philosophical debate, not to say a *modern* philosophical debate, is to do it grave violence.[43] We have seen in the course of previous chapters that our attempts to come to terms with divine modes of causation in tragedy must never lose sight of dramatic and literary effect. Any sophisticated account of a scene such as the so-called decision scene of Eteocles in Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas* must give due acknowledgement to its status as an important moment in the dynamic of the play in which it appears. No investigation of conceptual aspects of the scene can afford to lose sight of this, if it is to retain a lively and nuanced engagement with what a play—and specifically a classical Attic tragedy—is, and how it works. The question then becomes, not whether Aeschylus expounds a problem of freedom with reference, say, to Eteocles' resolve to fight Polyneices, but whether Eteocles' resolve to fight Polyneices as presented here involves an issue of freedom. A consideration of this particular scene, the interpretation of which has long been vexed, will help to clarify both the problem and this approach to it. We have already treated this 'decision' scene at length in Chapter 2 from the perspective of inherited guilt. Subsequently, Chapter 3 has considered it from the perspective of curses. We shall now make our final approach to this crucial passage. I argue that, for present purposes, the scene is interesting in that it exemplifies features found elsewhere in the tragedians, and particularly in Aeschylus, often enough to

[42] Williams (1995), 576.

[43] See the sober comments of Williams (1993), 14–15, where he cautions both against treating tragedy as philosophy and against treating it as 'a medium for discussion that was replaced by philosophy'. Gill (1996), 2–6, has remarks of a similar tenor *à propos* of the study of personality and selfhood in antiquity.

form a pattern; but that it retains at the same time a peculiar individuality of its own. We shall attempt to distil its particular tincture of uniqueness. As our analysis progresses, it will become clear why the battleground of these few lines has been contested no less fiercely even than the great dilemma of Agamemnon at Aulis in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

At a climactic moment in the *Septem*, Laius' disobedience to Apollo and Oedipus' curse are obtruded on our notice with explosive force. They have hardly been mentioned in the first half of the play—but now they come to dominate.[44] In my earlier treatments of the scene, I have deliberately refrained from asking whether Eteocles is felt to be compelled to act as he does, and whether, if some compulsion does appear to obtain, it has any impact on his freedom and his responsibility for his imminent fratricide. It has been maintained that, since the Greeks of Aeschylus' time were ignorant both of the modern problem of free will and even of the requisite vocabulary, 'even raising the question of free will in connection with a play of Aeschylus seems inappropriate'.[45] This is a view that we shall have occasion to re-examine, asking whether, when divine and human coincide, there is at least a certain *friction* felt. If the workings of the two levels of causation are not entirely smooth, then at least their potential distinctness is felt, and this distinctness is a potential starting-point for a clash. That is to say, (i) if the divine order is arranged or ordered in some particular way, and (ii) if it is anything other than identical to the human, then (iii) these two orders of things are at least potentially a *locus* of conflict. We need not be committed to any teleological framework, any belief that the modern problem of freedom is a necessary outgrowth of ancient attitudes, to claim that the recognition of the non-identity of divine and human causation is a step in the direction of a problem of freedom. Without complicating the issue further at this early stage, I proceed to clarify some relevant features of the modern problem.

This perplexing subject has taken a number of forms and has spanned the disciplines of theology, metaphysics, and ethics. To offer some examples, it has been thought problematic that an omnipotent and thoroughly good deity should be the ultimate cause of our delicts;

[44] I consider the one early reference—which falls, appropriately enough, in a speech of Eteocles in the prologue—in Chapter 2, p. 26.

[45] Thalmann (1978), 147.

or that humans, who as a matter of fact have a strong and ingrained sense of their own autonomous agency, should yet be subject to a pressure of causal forces under which that agency appears to fracture and give way; or that moral responsibility—perhaps 'ultimate' moral responsibility, which may be conceived as having little or no impact on how we actually order our lives and how we in fact ascribe responsibility from day to day—is annulled in the face of the inviolable laws of nature. These and other problems that may be classed under the free will debate seem, roughly speaking, to have in common the clash of some proposition about the workings of the world with some proposition about human action. The proposition about the workings of the world may refer to divine forces or to some supposed facts of physics or neurology, but in any case it is seen to threaten our deeply rooted intuitions that there simply are such things as human agency and moral responsibility. Consequently, *aporia* and despair are never far to seek. This has been well brought out by Thomas Nagel, who calls the problem 'a bafflement of our feelings and attitudes—a loss of confidence, conviction or equilibrium. ... When we try to explain what we believe which seems to be undermined by a conception of actions as events in the world—determined or not—we end up with something that is either incomprehensible or clearly inadequate. ... We are apparently condemned to want something impossible.'[46]

To continue speaking in outline, some philosophers believe that the truth of a determinist hypothesis does not imperil freedom and responsibility—that even if determinism obtains, our agency is not diminished in relevant respects. Those who hold such a belief are often called compatibilists. Those who oppose this belief and hold that the truth of a determinist hypothesis would imperil our freedom and responsibility fall into two camps. (i) Some maintain that determinism does not obtain and that we are free. They are often called libertarians. (ii) We may describe as anti-libertarians those who believe that determinism in some form does obtain and that we are not free.[47] The dialectic between compatibilists and their opponents may take the form of a debate about the ability to do otherwise. The truth of determinism, it might be maintained, imposes constraint on all human actions. Now we do not attribute moral responsibility to

[46] Nagel (1986), 231–2. [47] Cf. Williams (1995), 576 ff.

someone who acts under certain kinds of constraint or compulsion and who therefore cannot do otherwise: by extension, if all the events in the universe, including our actions, could not have occurred any other way, then, it might be argued, we may not be held morally responsible for any of our actions. For the conjunction of the past state of the universe together with the set of the deterministic laws of nature entails that the universe, including its human constituents, could not at this moment be otherwise than it now is. This anti-compatibilist position manifestly poses very serious problems for moral responsibility, and consequently it is profoundly disquieting.[48] It flies squarely in the face of all our intuitions and all the practical needs that we have as functioning human beings in a society. A classic response has been to insist on drawing the elementary distinction between on the one hand the prisoner or the man with a gun to his head, whose actions few would claim to be truly free, and on the other the ordinarily unconstrained man, who, it is maintained, has liberty enough to be held morally responsible for his actions regardless of the truth of any determinist hypothesis. Thus, for example, Hume, in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, states: 'By liberty . . . we can only mean *a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will*; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to every one who is not a prisoner and in chains' (8. 1. 73). A more recent approach refines this classic position by distinguishing two *kinds* of causal chains.[49] Even if determinism obtains in some form, the argument runs, the causal chain that issues in the action of an ordinarily free agent is in the relevant respect sufficiently distinct from the causal chain that leads to the action of the constrained or compelled man for the former to be held responsible and the latter not.[50]

We now see how some interpreters, familiar with the free will debate, might find it appropriate, when faced with the notion of divine causation that is so familiar in Greek tragedy, to raise the

[48] For a stark statement of an anti-compatibilist position, cf. Strawson (1994).

[49] Cf. Frankfurt (1969), answered by Widerker (1995).

[50] Of course a crucial feature of this position is that it abandons any necessity for the compatibilist to call the ordinarily unconstrained man free *simpliciter*, which would be obviously unsatisfactory.

question whether the operation of a curse or a taint of inherited guilt might imperil the freedom or responsibility of the accursed man. If a god wills or a curse determines, there is, at least at first sight, a parallel with those propositions about the world that modern philosophers have taken as imperilling responsibility. Eteocles must die because his father cursed him and killed his own father, and because his grandfather disobeyed Apollo. If these supernatural determinants are to take effect, then Eteocles' death is inevitable; and if it is inevitable, can Eteocles make any choice except to meet his brother in single combat?[51]

Fratricide is without doubt a terrible thing. In the *Septem*, the chorus makes much of this: they call Eteocles' projected deed πικρόκαρπον ἀνδροκτασίαν ... αἵματος οὐ θεμιστοῦ (693–4: 'a bitter-fruiting slaughter of unlawful blood'), among other names, and he does not deny that it is atrocious:

> *Χο.* ἀλλ' αὐτάδελφον αἷμα δρέψασθαι θέλεις;
> *Ετ.* θεῶν διδόντων οὐκ ἂν ἐκφύγοις κακά.
>
> (718–19)[52]

[51] Cairns (1993), 182 n. 9, while he does see a choice for Eteocles, denies that a free will issue arises, precisely because Eteocles himself does not raise any alternatives: 'The question of free will versus compulsion, often raised here, does not really arise, for the demands of the curse do not conflict with Eteocles' desire.' Those who would deny Eteocles any choice in the matter at all have notably included Lloyd-Jones (1959), 86, one of many scholars to compare Agamemnon's position at Aulis in the parodos of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*—on which see below, nn. 66, 73. Lesky (1983), 60, is among those who argue from the variety of verb tenses deployed in the *Redepaare* that Eteocles has 'only partly decided on the distribution', which itself implies that he has some latitude of choice as the scene unfolds before us on stage.

[52] Cf. also 683–5, where Eteocles implies that while this deed makes him κακός ('bad'), he will not also be αἰσχρός ('base'): it is one thing to kill your brother, another to shrink from your duty as a fighting man. Whatever else he may do, he will not countenance cowardice. See Cairns (1993), 181–3, where this element of Eteocles' motivation is classed in the category of *aidos*: 'personal motives, among which *aidos* is prominent, play a full and significant part in the motivation of conduct and in the ascription of responsibility for that conduct, even where supernatural causation is also present' (182). On Cairns's account, Eteocles' cowardice-shunning *aidos* 'obscures' the other *aidos*-reaction that ought to restrain him from an offence against family and φιλία. Nussbaum (1986), 38–41, treats Eteocles' clash of obligations as a 'practical conflict' in which he subordinates his familial to his civic obligations. She too compares Agamemnon's dilemma at Aulis. The *Opfertod* approach dies hard, despite

Chorus: But do you wish to harvest the blood of your own brother?
Et.: When the gods bestow evils, you cannot escape them.

Accepting that all parties regard Eteocles' fatal duel with Polyneices as deplorable, some have asked whether it is also morally culpable as an action. It is one thing to regard the deed as an objective act, an element of the universe, and another to consider it in its relation to the agent, who labours both under the guilt flowing from Laius' disregard of the Pythian Apollo and from Oedipus' parricide, and under his father's curse. Now Aeschylus, quite capable of making this distinction, invites consideration of the deed under both these heads. While Eteocles is not shown deliberating as Agamemnon is in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*, he says enough to show that he views the deed as both lamentable and inevitable.[53] The very absence of any other option on his lips is indeed noteworthy: the voice of opposition is not his but that of the chorus, which remonstrates lyrically while Eteocles maintains his iambic calm. He has allowed himself only a brief expression of strong emotion (653–5), after which his tone is one of grim determination. The Atreidae of the *Agamemnon* are made to weep and strike their staves on the ground when Calchas suggests Iphigenia's sacrifice (*Ag.* 202 ff.). Eteocles expressly forbids himself any such reaction:

> ἀλλ' οὔτε κλαίειν οὔτ' ὀδύρεσθαι πρέπει,
> μὴ καὶ τεκνωθῇ δυσφορώτερος γόος.
>
> (656–57)

But it is not fitting to weep or lament, lest some lamentation be begotten that is even harder to bear.

Lesky (1983), 61, and the scholars cited *ibid.* Note that the fruit and harvesting metaphor of 693 ff. and 718 f., πικρόκαρπον . . . δρέψασθαι, used of Eteocles' potential fratricide, might in itself be taken to suggest some degree of choice on Eteocles' part—are we to think of him willingly harvesting his brother's blood? See further below, p. 159.

[53] Agamemnon, whether or not he is believed to have any real choice or to face a real dilemma, at least enumerates two alternatives, which Eteocles indubitably does not. Daube (1938), 169–70, compares the Pelasgus of Aesch. *Supplices*: 'Wie Pelasgos hat er [*sc.* Agamemnon] nicht die Wahl, etwas Böses zu tun oder zu unterlassen, sondern er muß zwischen zwei Übeln wählen' (169). Eteocles here says nothing to suggest that he views himself as caught 'zwischen zwei Übeln'.

He has chided the chorus in the first episode precisely for showing too much emotion in a time of national danger, and he is not about to be unfaithful to his principles now.[54] This Eteocles, the same man who has calmly distributed champions to the other six gates, will go to his death at the seventh with remarkable self-control. His level-headedness, running in tandem with a full realization of the enormity of the deed he faces, serves to situate the meeting with Polyneices both as an event, an abominable occurrence, and as an act that he is himself willing to undertake as the scion of Oedipus and Laius.[55]

Herein lies the crux. On the one hand, Eteocles' resolve, in its broad outline at least, fits the familiar tragic pattern of a human impetus coinciding with a divine, a pattern that hardly requires further exemplification here. As Lesky says in a classic treatment of the play, the 'decision' exhibits 'the intertwining of destiny's call with the free will that accepts the call and transforms an inescapable fate into a personal deed'.[56] A little more specifically, Eteocles' situation seems to be paralleled closely in other Aeschylean dramas inasmuch

[54] See above, Ch. 2, where I argue that Eteocles' character is constant across the end of the *Redepaare*, which some have seen as a dividing point. His determination and firm leadership are not annulled by the realization that Polyneices stands at the seventh gate—they are merely turned towards a different, more personal end. He keeps himself in check just as he has kept the *polis* in check. (One is perhaps reminded of the state–*psyche* analogy expounded by Plato in the *Republic*, esp. 434e–441d) Scholars who have seen an Eteocles essentially constant across the end of the shield scene (allowing for the differences of circumstance) include Gagarin (1976), 124–5; Thalmann (1978), 147, rightly observing that it is 'quite credible' that Eteocles should act differently when faced with different circumstances; Lesky (1983), 61; and Hutchinson, xxxv-xxxviii and *ad* 653–719. Cf. also Kitto (1961), 51–2, calling Eteocles' stern resolve to face Polyneices 'the consummation of the rigid control which has been exercised so long'. On Kitto's further—and lapidary—comment, 'The *Septem* is our earliest tragedy of character, Eteocles the first Man of the European stage' (54), see below.

[55] Vernant (1972), 79, situating the problem of the will in tragedy in relation to his notion of the 'historical moment' occupied by the genre, calls tragic man 'actively committed, facing up to the consequences of his actions'. Contextualizing in respect of the developing Athenian legal system and tracing the unfolding notions of agency and responsibility, Vernant would have the protagonists of tragedy, or at least Aeschylean tragedy, stand at the point where their disastrous deeds are their own but cannot be separated from the divine causation that also precipitates them. This chapter may be regarded as addressing precisely the issue of the relations between these two levels of causation.

[56] Lesky (1983), 58, following a similar line to his earlier piece, Lesky (1966*a*). The important notion of *appropriation* of a divinely willed course of action is expanded by Mogyoródi (1996), and see below.

as he exhibits an impetus towards an act that is not without a distasteful aspect—he never claims that fratricide is a pleasant thing—but he presses on nonetheless. The *Oresteia* offers two parallels, Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter in the *Agamemnon* and the matricide of Orestes in the *Choephori*. On the other hand, there is something about this so-called 'decision' scene that seems unique. Its oddity is not easy to fix, but one is perhaps left with a sense that Eteocles' resolve is a different thing from Agamemnon's or Orestes', not simply in magnitude but in quality. This is not simply to say, what is quite true, that Eteocles is much more controlled than either Agamemnon or Orestes. Of course his emotions are very strong, as the chorus repeatedly points out and as he himself admits; and of course he does succeed in mastering them, or, at the very least, remaining calm and rational in giving an account of them. But there is more than this to the quiddity of this scene. In Chapter 2, we have noted that Eteocles appears to appropriate the curse on him as at least an explanation of his fratricidal impulse, and perhaps actually a positive motive force towards it. As Pelling has observed, it is 'peculiarly bizarre and exceptional when Eteocles accepts an external chain of causes as if it were his own motive.'[57] Granted that Eteocles' resolve to do something very distasteful is closely paralleled elsewhere in Aeschylus, his acknowledgement that it is his lying under a curse that drives him to it is unusual, an oddity that gives the lie to the comfortable use of the word 'parallelism'. We can happily say that Orestes' desire to avenge his father in the *Choephori* is in conformity with the dictates of a divine justice that is presumably overseen by Zeus. We need not baulk at going on to assert that Apollo's threats are a factor in his having formed this resolve. Moreover, the magnificent *kommos* at the heart of the play

[57] Pelling (1990*b*), 248. The context is a discussion of the tendency of Greek tragic characters to explain their actions in terms of their desires and beliefs rather than external circumstances, which makes it odd that Eteocles here should explain his resolve by appropriating the curse. Referring to earlier pieces in the same collection, Pelling draws the distinction between this and our modern tendency to explain our *own* actions with reference to precipitating circumstances and the actions of *others* with reference to their established characters. In a sense, of course, the Eteocles of this noble scene straddles the divide: his references to his belief in the justice of his own cause and to his hoplite status would count as explanations of the other, supposedly more characteristic, kind.

marks a degree of appropriation of the external determinants of the action. The presence of the father Agamemnon, a presence very strongly felt in this part of the drama (315–18, 332–5 434–7 and *passim*), helps the young man steel himself for an atrocious deed. All this parallels Eteocles' situation very neatly.

But the parallels do not stretch all the way. We may summarize the causal structure of Eteocles' motivation as follows. He identifies five reasons for facing Polyneices:

(i) He is very confident that δίκη is on his side, and that it has never thrown in its lot with his brother (as we have noted above, in Chapter 2, his speech at 653–76 contains a constellation of five δικ- words).
(ii) He must make the best of a bad situation (677 ff.).
(iii) As a ὁπλίτης he cannot shirk his duty (717).

We have noted above, in Chapter 1, that not all necessities are created equal. We see here, in Eteocles' complicated constellation of motivations, necessities of different kinds, necessities exerting different forms of leverage. Motivation (i) is a necessity grounded in Eteocles' perception of morality, and motivation (iii) is located in his construction of how a good citizen ought to behave—it is, in other words, a necessity grounded in the πόλις of Thebes. Motivation (ii) relies on the subjectively constructed inevitability of the situation: if Eteocles did not regard the clash as inevitable, the bad situation of which he must, he says, make the best, would be differently described. In addition to these entirely human motivations, he makes repeated appeals to two elements of the supernatural order, two necessities of a different kind again:

(iv) His family is hated by Apollo, and it is the god's desire that it be obliterated (689 ff., 702 ff., and 719, his last words in the play: θεῶν διδόντων οὐκ ἂν ἐκφύγοις κακά: see above).
(v) His father's curse is in operation (695 ff., 709 ff.).

Human and divine motivations, including personal, familial and *polis*-motivations, thus intertwine closely, and perhaps the unique element in the mix has now emerged. It may be located in the nature of the two divine impetuses (iv) and (v), which are not threats or oracles or prophecies of the kinds that press upon Agamemnon and

Orestes. No one, man or god, is telling Eteocles to meet his brother—far from it: the scene is constructed to show the chorus doing its utmost to dissuade him, not least because fratricide is impious and polluting. The king presses on to his destruction nonetheless. The only person who urges him to go forth to the fight is Eteocles himself. It is this that distinguishes this 'decision' scene from the terrible dilemma of Agamemnon at Aulis or Orestes' grim steeling of himself in the *Choephori*: Eteocles is both self-motivated and untouched by doubt. He is so locked in to his Labdacid heritage that he needs no divine monitions or human cajolings. It is thus, by means of this remarkable and arresting causal nexus, that his father's curse proceeds.

We have found no significant problematization of freedom and responsibility here. Eteocles labours under what might be called a curiously voluntary compulsion. If we are left with the sense that he cannot do otherwise, this does not in any way imperil his agency. He must face his brother both on account of his father's inexorable curse and because his every instinct, indeed the whole composition of his character, cries out to him that the deed must be done. The compulsion under which Eteocles labours is neither more nor less than the compulsion of his being Eteocles, son of Oedipus, and grandson of Laius. Neither here nor in the other passages that we have considered is there any trace of a problem of free will that would be recognizable to the modern philosopher. What we have found, however, is a delicate and intriguing play of subjective and objective necessity—of *constructed* necessity. Eteocles, like other tragic characters, makes his compulsions for himself in a process of appropriation. The whole direction of our endeavours thus far demanded that this question be raised, and it may now be laid to rest.

I conclude by considering some crucial decisions in tragedy. Some passages that we have had occasion to consider several times will receive their final treatment here, as we examine tragic interest in the state of mind of a mortal character considered as an agent endowed with intention. Without such an account, our study of supernatural causal determinants would clearly remain incomplete. For, as I have said, our accursed and Erinys-ridden mortals do not only *suffer* misfortunes. They are in part architects of their own sorrows: crucially, they *act*.

III. DECISION MAKING AND STATES OF MIND

We have seen that Eteocles' decision scene has a peculiar essence of its own, but that in some respects it is comparable with other Aeschylean decisions. It might be maintained that in all the extant plays of Aeschylus a decision is central. Is the king in the *Supplices* to accept the supplication? Is Eteocles to face his brother? Is Agamemnon to kill Iphigenia? Is Orestes to press on and kill his mother? Is he to be acquitted on the Areopagus?[58] The one possible exception, the *Persae*, seems to prove the rule convincingly. While not a great deal actually happens in this play of realization and retrospect, and while the stage-action contains no crucial decision, nonetheless the characters and chorus are much occupied with Xerxes' mad folly in settling on the expedition in the first place. The king's decision to embark on this enterprise is frequently characterized in terms of a deviant state of mind: thus, for example, he will certainly incur *ὕβρεως ἄποινα κἀθέων φρονημάτων* (808: 'the penalty for *hybris* and godless thoughts'); or again, the invasion is certain to be punished by *Ζεύς ... κολαστὴς τῶν ὑπερκόμπων ἄγαν | φρονημάτων ... εὔθυνος βαρύς* (827–8: 'Zeus, who punishes over-bold thoughts ... the stern auditor'). Some of this vocabulary is not too far removed from that used of Eteocles or even Agamemnon (e.g. *Septem* 686–7, *Agamemnon* 221): Xerxes' mental excess and his impiety are frequently insisted upon. His decision, for all that it resides in the temporal background, is repeatedly foregrounded by the characters to the point of becoming a major theme of the drama. The oriental autocracy wielded by Xerxes, which stands at the heart of the alterity of the Persians as it is presented in this play, is itself put to service in making him a clear case of the possibility of a bad decision by one in power.[59]

We need not address at any length the difficult and interesting but doubtless insoluble question whether and to what extent Aeschylus' audience will have thought in terms of a coherent corpus of his work

[58] Though the crucial verdict of the jurors and Athena in the *Eumenides* is not the decision of a single mortal, it nonetheless remains undeniably a decision. It constitutes a crucial moment of the play as a whole and perhaps the culminating moment of the entire trilogy.

[59] On Persian alterity, cf. Hall (1989), *passim*.

whose parts will have seemed to them to illuminate each other. This issue can for present purposes be circumvented. Whether or not an Athenian who had witnessed all these Aeschylean decisions over the years would have approached the *Oresteia* with, say, the Theban and Danaid trilogies in mind, the exegetical legitimacy of comparing and contrasting these different decisions cannot easily be called into doubt. To observe Eteocles' appropriation of his father's curse in the light of Agamemnon's yoke-strap of necessity and *vice versa* does not necessarily commit the scholar to any particular position on how important the comparison will have been to the original audience. Of course, Aristophanes' *Frogs* deploys the concept of an Aeschylean and Euripidean corpus at a date not far removed from the composition and first performances of the two poets' plays. This is evidence at least that certain qualities could be predicated of the poets' *oeuvres* as a whole; but our current enquiry does not require the further pursuit of this difficult and vexing line of questioning.

Having observed the pervasiveness of decision making in the Aeschylean corpus, we now make a final approach to the great decision scene in the *Septem*, and to its counterpart, such as it is, in the *Phoenissae*, with both of which we have been much concerned in these pages. The presentation of Eteocles and Polyneices in the later tragedy indicates a very different set of concerns from the *Septem*. We have considered these concerns and the relevant portions of the play at some length in previous chapters. Here we conclude our consideration of this absorbing work with another indispensable component of any account of the play, namely some remarks *à propos* of Eteocles and decision making.[60] The fact that he and his brother meet at all, let alone engage in an *agon*, is notable. To summarize some of our earlier findings, the highly formalized and essentially bi-partite nature of the *agon* necessarily invites comparison and contrast between the two brothers.[61] Eteocles, fuming and of terrible aspect (454), is unjustly tenacious of the kingship, while the relatively calm Polyneices is also relatively sympathetic in that he is allowed to enter his home city and describe his sufferings before he states his case to his brother. This Polyneices 'is clearly right on the narrower

[60] See above, Ch. 2.

[61] On the stylized antithesis central to the Euripidean *agon*, see Lloyd (1992), ch. 1.

issue of the *agon* but open to criticism about his general behaviour in the play.'[62] For there is no doubt at all that Eteocles is in default of his obligation to cede the throne. But whether Polyneices is right to bring an invading army to claim his due is another issue, and one that the *agon* does not properly address. Neither character is wholly clean of stain. Euripides, in allowing both brothers to state their cases on stage, is at pains to make both of them human and humanly intelligible. There is, as we have seen, no such precise formal balance in the *Septem*, which presents the two brothers very asymmetrically. The Aeschylean Polyneices is almost a bogey (*ἁλώσιμον παιᾶν' ἐπεξιαχάσας* 635: 'crying aloud a hymn of capture'; *φωτὶ παντόλμῳ φρένας* 671: 'a man whose mind would dare anything'; with which compare *Agamemnon* 221: *τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν*, 'the state of mind that would dare anything'—of Agamemnon's state of mind on the point of sacrificing Iphigenia), a figure to be regarded more with horror than with understanding, and in any case remains the attacker raging outside the walls, while it is Eteocles, who is in no small measure a sympathetic character, with whom we engage in detail. Euripides, on the other hand, highlights not one man coming to a crucial self-destructive decision, but rather the brothers' consent. Not only are both ready to fight even if the house is to be brought low, but they virtually decide on this mutually satisfactory course in consultation:

Πο. ἀντιτάξομαι κτενῶν σε. *Ετ. κἀμὲ τοῦδ' ἔρως ἔχει.* (622)

Pol.: I shall muster against you to slay you. *Et.*: I too yearn for this.

Aeschylus, on the other hand, focuses on Eteocles' decision almost in a vacuum: no one is present to engage with his decision making except the chorus, and the emphasis is very much on the mind of Eteocles. Is he mad? Is he in the sort of frame of mind that might be said to characterize a cursed man? The vocabulary used by the chorus to describe his mental processes is vivid and indeed graphic, making of his apparent infatuation almost a concrete presence. He is in the grip of *θυμοπληθὴς δορίμαργος ἄτα* (686–7: 'wrathful spear-raging

[62] Lloyd (1992), 16.

infatuation') and of ὠμοδακὴς ... ἵμερος (692: 'a savage desire'). He and the house are beset by a μελάναιγις ... Ἐρινύς (699–700: 'Erinys with her black aegis') and a δαίμων (705). We have noted in a previous chapter that curses in tragedy habitually intrude into the action with violent suddenness. Here, in a classic instance, the curse is almost a second character on stage, sitting hard by Eteocles' tearless eyes and driving him to his own and his brother's death.[63] That is to say, the dramatic effect of this scene in the *Septem* is to show one brother as the lynchpin of the curse and the taint of inherited guilt, which he himself sees as a very real entity in his own mind and which, as we have seen, he identifies as a motive force behind his dreadful resolve.

Euripides, whose interest in the psychology and theology of mortal decision making is less intense, elects to make Polyneices behave much less like an obviously cursed man and Eteocles much more, without in either case allowing much insight into their states of mind.[64] This is, I think, at the heart of his very different interpretation of the family's self-destruction. Neither of the Euripidean brothers is a bogey, though Eteocles does come close. Aside from the exchanges of the *agon*, the very fact of Jocasta's mediation contributes to a more tightly familial effect.[65] Not only the two sons, but also their mother, are party to the crucial conversation that precipitates the dynasty's self-annihilation. Indeed, to speak more generally, the relation between family and the civic is handled rather differently in this play: there can be no question at all of either brother in the *Phoenissae* giving himself up in an *Opfertod*. This lot falls instead to the willingly self-sacrificing Menoeceus (997–1012). When others are ready to stand and fight, and to give up their lives for Thebes, would it not be shameful for him to live on in cowardice? While we have argued against an *Opfertod* interpretation of

[63] 'Irruption' of curses: cf. Ch. 3, p. 74. On the similar behaviour of tragic Erinyes, cf. Ch. 4, p. 98. The vexed interpretation of the 'tearless eyes' line is discussed above, Ch. 2, p. 31.

[64] In speaking of what it is to be 'obviously cursed', I do not mean to deploy the phrase in any question-begging sense. I mean simply that visible rage or apparent madness in a character may serve as clear indices of coming destruction or divine displeasure of whatever kind.

[65] Lloyd (1992), 83–4, notes that the Lille fragment of Stesichorus provides a precedent for the brothers' meeting and their mother's attempted intercession. On this papyrus (Stes. fr. 222(b) Davies) and its implications for the history of the Labdacid myth, cf. above, Ch. 2, with the references there.

Eteocles' demise in the *Septem*, such an approach is at least an intelligible response to Eteocles' decision as it is presented there—particularly inasmuch as the welfare of the city is very close to his heart from the prologue on. In a sense, Aeschylus' Eteocles does indeed give himself up for his *polis*, and to this extent an *Opfertod* interpretation is not absurd. But there can be no question of the Euripidean Eteocles or Polyneices conforming to this mould: it is Menoeceus who dies for the city, a youth who has none of the dynastic ambitions entertained by the two brothers. If the Aeschylean Eteocles is the nexus of both familial and *polis*-interests, Euripides shows a purer instance of self-sacrifice in the person of Menoeceus, while both Eteocles and Polyneices are largely occupied with their own and their family's concerns. It is as though Euripides would have the family more completely blighted than Aeschylus' Labdacids. On Euripides' interpretation of the woes of this house, first focalized by Jocasta in the prologue and subsequently never far from the surface, relatively little room is left in the catalogue of sin and disaster for the kind of subtle and nuanced chiaroscuro with which Aeschylus paints his Eteocles. Both poets delineate their Eteocles carefully, but Aeschylus paints a much more refined and sympathetic, if not precisely an affectionate, portrait.

Other Aeschylean instances of decision making offer much closer parallels with the decision in the *Septem* than does Euripides' reworking of the myth in the *Phoenissae*. We saw above that if we do demand parallels, we must look in particular to Agamemnon in his name-play and to the *Choephori*, in both of which it is one man's resolution that is crucial.[66]

These Aeschylean instances may be further illuminated by a consideration of a tragedy of Sophocles in which one character's intentions and states of mind are of paramount importance—the *Ajax*.[67] Here the mind of Ajax is a dominant theme. His madness is the theme of the prologue, first made explicit by Athena, who announces

[66] This is not intended to imply that Clytaemestra's resolve to kill her husband is less important in the *Agamemnon* than the Aulis-scene in the parodos or the subsequent 'carpet'-scene. It simply belongs to a different category, never being explicitly revealed or debated before the act itself, and so is of limited interest for present purposes—but see below on Sophocles' *Ajax*.

[67] On the importance of the great central figure in most plays of Sophocles, cf. the classic treatment of Knox (1964). On the decision of Ajax, see Schadewaldt (1926), 77 ff.; and see now the very useful treatment of Hesk (2003), 74–103.

that she has cast on his sight δυσφόρους γνώμας (51–2: 'oppressive ideas') and that she has driven him on with μανιάσιν νόσοις (59: 'a sickness of madness'). Odysseus, self-confessed ἐχθρός of Ajax, is terrified of encountering him in this altered state (78, 82). But after the grim spectacle of Athena's taunting Ajax, a demonstration of the power—and also the cruelty—of the divine (118 ff.), his enmity is, though not tempered by pity, at least complemented by it (121 ff.). If Ajax has been the centre of attention throughout the prologue, both on stage and off, he continues to be so as the play progresses: we are treated to the spectacle of the hero coming to his senses by degrees, first from within the *skene*-building and then in full view. From the parodos on, the chorus and Tecmessa have no interest but the fortunes and sanity of their lord.[68] Ajax comes to his senses, first uttering inarticulate cries. But then among the first of his intelligible utterances is the express desire for death: ἀλλά με συνδάιξον (361: 'Come, kill me also'), a theme that he will elaborate at 393 ff., and again, implicitly but clearly, at 479 ff.[69] The scene with Eurysaces, immediately before his exit, is also shot through with impending doom: Tecmessa and the chorus, who construe their fortunes as one with those of Ajax, serve by their entreaties and forebodings to heighten the tension (e.g. δέδοικα 583, ἀθυμῶ 587, ταρβῶ 593). The one question on everyone's mind at this point is summed up by Tecmessa: ὦ δέσποτ' Αἴας, τί ποτε δρασείεις φρενί; (585: 'O Lord Ajax, whatever do you intend to do?'). 'The long first episode end[s] with Ajax impervious to Tecmessa's pleas, and clearly intending suicide.'[70]

The stasimon that follows is clouded with foreboding, but the so-called *Trugrede* that follows causes the chorus to revise its opinion. Taking at face value Ajax's expressed intention to go and purify

[68] Thus Garvie (1998), *ad* 201–347, rightly notes that the two functions of this section are to round off the madness-theme and to introduce the notion that, having realized what he has done, Ajax may be planning something terrible. On Ajax's relationship with Tecmessa, cf. Ronnet (1969), 105 ff.

[69] Garvie (1998), *ad* 361, rightly notes that the συν- is ambiguous between 'join me in' and 'with the cattle', but, as he also notes, for present purposes this is of little import: Ajax has in any case expressed the desire to be killed, proving true Tecmessa's forebodings of 326.

[70] Garvie (1998), *ad* 596–645. See also, on Ajax's suicidal intent, Seidensticker (1983), 125–41.

himself, they palpitate and soar aloft in an ecstasy (ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι κτλ. 693 ff.: 'I shudder with desire'): in this bleak and louring play, even their moment of joy is overcast by a pall of dramatic irony. And in any case, this respite from anxiety is soon ended: by line 737 the clouds have begun to gather again, as Ajax's state of mind is called into question anew, from a slightly different angle. The wrath of Athena will be on Ajax till the ending of the day, its cause explained as his impious rejection of her aid in battle (δεινὸν ἄρρητόν τ' ἔπος 773: 'a terrible word that should not be spoken'; οὐ κατ' ἄνθρωπον φρονῶν 777: 'with thoughts beyond mortal measure'). This boast is contextualized by his hot-headed response to Telamon's advice when he was first setting off for Troy (ἄνους 763: 'foolish'; ὑψικόμπως κἀφρόνως 766: 'arrogantly and foolishly'; ἐκόμπει 770: 'he said boastfully'): then too he rejected divine aid (767 ff.). Here again, then, even when Ajax is no longer hallucinating, his soundness of mind is in question, and the characters' picture of their master's intentions has undergone a diametric reversal: Tecmessa now sees, or at least fears, that Ajax σπεύδει θανεῖν (812: 'presses on to death').[71] And so the chorus leaves the orchestra, and by this exceptional dramatic device the solitude of

[71] Garvie (1998), *ad* 331–2, has a good note, with references, on the difficult and absorbing question where sanity ends and madness begins in the case of this enigmatic character. The man who seems to the chorus leader διαπεφοιβάσθαι at 332 ('to be out of his wits'), φρονεῖν ἔοικεν at 344 ('seems to be sensible'); and now, at the end of the hero's life, the vocabulary of ἄνοια is being applied to him again. A point of comparison and contrast is offered by the madness of Cambyses in Herodotus 3. Already at 3. 25 Cambyses launches his expedition against the Ethiopians οἷα δὲ ἐμμανής τε ἐὼν καὶ οὐ φρενήρης ('like a madman and one who is not in his right mind'), and his treatment of the Apis-bull is not that of a wholly sane man (ὑπομαργότερος 29: 'rather crazy'), but the text problematizes the causation of his madness and the point of its outset. According to the Egyptians, it is his treatment of Apis that sends him mad (30), but even they agree that he was not fully sane before. The narrative voice is open to other, alternative, explanations: if Apis is not responsible, perhaps the king's madness can be attributed to a hereditary cause, the sacred disease (33). Or again, according to Prexaspes, the Persians say that Cambyses is too much given to φιλοινίη (34). At ch. 38, Herodotus gives his own assessment: Cambyses must have been mad, for only a madman would make such attempts to mock the νόμοι. The one thing that the text offers as certain is the point of Cambyses' return to sanity (61).

(It is also notable that the report of the danger that Ajax is facing on this blighted day is curiously removed and second-hand in nature: we hear from the messenger what Calchas said to Teucer in private, taking him aside from the royal council. At a point in the play where, on one plausible reading, Ajax is doing his best to hide his

Ajax as he delivers his suicide-speech is doubly emphasized. Here all ambiguity and deception is cast aside: speaking to an audience consisting successively of Hector's sword, Zeus, the Erinyes, the sun, and Salamis, he attains once again to that simplicity and directness of expression that he abandoned during the 'deception' speech, becoming once again a man more akin to the direct and straightforward Ajax of Homer.[72]

This brief review of the first half of the *Ajax* suggests a very great interest in the central character's states of mind and intentions. Access to Ajax's mind, that tantalizing but unattainable Holy Grail for Tecmessa and the chorus, is constantly problematized: is he sane at any point, and if so, when? But above all, the question that looms largest throughout the portion of the play in which he is alive is: what is he going to do next? It is tempting to say that the Sophoclean Ajax, in stark contrast with the doughty and straightforward man of the *Iliad*, is at least as elusive in these respects as any of the Aeschylean characters that we have considered in this chapter. We hear a good deal from Ajax himself in various states of mind and in a larger range of situations than Aeschylus allows Eteocles, and we hear a great deal *about* him from other characters. The sequence of so-called *Trugrede* and suicide-speech sets in motion a good deal of psychological interest; and its peculiar problematization of direct mental access to the motives and intentions of Ajax, on the part not only of characters and chorus but also of the audience, seems quite foreign to the extant

true intentions, true and pertinent information about him comes also at a remove. There is no reason why Sophocles should not have introduced Calchas as a character on stage, full of vatic foreboding—a scene that might easily have had great dramatic potential, like the prophecies of Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*. Instead the information comes from an underling: it is pure hearsay, if undoubtedly accurate. This detail helps to underline the primacy in the tragedy both of the theme of communication, true and false, and indeed of Ajax himself as a central figure: whenever he is not an active presence on stage, whether in the first episode or now or after his death, he is on everyone's lips.)

[72] For a reading that detects in Ajax's decision to commit suicide a fatal lack of self-knowledge, see Lefèvre (2001), 51–62: 'Aias ist unfähig, sich zu erkennen. . . . So leidet er für sein Vergehen unverhältnismässig schwer' (62). On the other hand, see Seidensticker (1983), 142–2, for suicide in Sophocles as 'ein freier Akt der Selbstbehauptung und der Selbstachtung' (143). On this account, Ajax's suicide is not a punishment for transgression but a 'Signum heroischer Kompromisslosigkeit und Grösse' (143).

Aeschylean decisions that we have considered earlier in this chapter.[73] If anything, we are in a comparable field of mental interest to that generated by the Achilles of the Iliadic Embassy, whose problematic decision making I intend to consider elsewhere. Here as there, the mental processes of the central character are to be inferred and speculated upon—an area of speculation that is of paramount importance precisely because, in both Sophocles and Homer, it is on this deliberation, this instance of rational agency, that the fortunes of so many others depend.

Our consideration of the *Ajax* and the *Phoenissae* has helped to isolate the essence of the so-called decision scene of Eteocles by setting it off first against a later treatment of the myth by another hand, and then against a Sophoclean play where states of mind and intention are of paramount importance, but very differently handled. The *Septem* continues to exert a powerful fascination, which further study rather deepens than diminishes. Its uniqueness, as we have seen, lies as much as anything in the peculiar starkness of Eteocles' position. He is a head of state whose only intercourse on stage is with subordinates, the chorus of terrified women, and a very sketchily characterized spy, while Euripides allows him a brother and mother. And Ajax in his name-play, in one sense the most isolated of Sophoclean heroes, is at least seen interacting with Tecmessa, his son, and a chorus whom he calls *φίλοι ναυβάται* (349: 'dear sailors'). Aeschylus in his depiction of Eteocles shows virtually the whole burden of inherited guilt and his father's curse devolving on a single man

[73] The figure of Clytaemestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* has been hovering around the edges of this enquiry continually. What we see in her case is not an explicit decision-making process, but rather a stark shift from concealment and falsehood to open and avowedly shameless admission of what her real purpose was all along: *πολλῶν πάροιθεν καιρίως εἰρημένων | τἀναντί' εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἐπαισχυνθήσομαι* (1373 f.: 'I have said much before according to the demands of the moment: I shall not be ashamed to say the opposite now'). (Note that the same word *καιρίως* has also been used more than once in the same play of the *mortal* blow, the blow *hitting the mark* in Agamemnon's body: *καιρίως οὐτασμένος* 1345 etc., and that, ironically, Orestes will echo Clytaemestra's choice of words closely at *Cho.* 582. It is as if Clytaemestra's words stab to the heart no less than her blows.) This is in some degree parallel to Ajax's sequence (i) *Trugrede* (ii) suicide-speech. Of course, the parallel is by no means exact: for one thing, Ajax does not at any point show the kind of awareness of divine pressures on his action shown in a great measure by Eteocles, and even, in rather different ways, by Clytaemestra.

who must act with this weight on his shoulders, both to protect his people and to satisfy the claims of justice as he interprets them by meeting his brother in single combat.

Tragedy is deeply concerned with decision. Decision is the essential link between the awful happening and the mortal act: in that a character does something, an element of the universe becomes an instance of human agency that may be explored as such. Thus horror and suffering become humanly intelligible, and their well-springs may be examined. These well-springs, in the nature of Greek tragedy, often reside in familial disorder, in interconnected genetic corruption. We have seen in this chapter that fate is for our purposes much less important than we might expect. Following the same line of thought, we have failed to find in some crucial passages any problem of freedom in the relevant sense. We have found instead a subtle and nuanced interest in the creation and appropriation of necessity by doomed characters: in tragedy, what must happen, or what cannot be avoided, is defined and circumscribed by the position, concerns, and character of the mortal or mortals involved. Finally, we have examined the central importance in some plays of decision making and states of mind, and considered how interest in them may be generated. It is no surprise that we have found ourselves returning repeatedly to Eteocles, both as he is presented by Aeschylus and as he is reinterpreted by Euripides. We have now come to an understanding of why, for our purposes, this supreme victim and agent of familial disaster is an inescapably fascinating figure.

Conclusion

The last word has not been said on the interface between tragic causal determinants and the mortal agent. In this book we have examined this interface from several perspectives. The work has enumerated and examined some of the principal causal factors that the tragedians bring to bear on the careers of blighted families. We have concentrated on the Labdacid plays of the three tragedians, but not to the exclusion of the Tantalid plays and others. It has not been my intention to advance a general theory of tragedy: this investigation does not pretend to strike directly at the heart of that problematic and endlessly slippery concept, the tragic. It is disconcertingly easy to make sweeping statements about tragedy, as many people have demonstrated over the last few generations; but it is extremely difficult to make sweeping statements that stand the twin tests of empirical verification and the passage of time. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen in Greek tragedy, among other things, the exploration of the problematic relations of individual and democratic πόλις; or the rites of passage of the ephebe; or the ritual celebration of that complex and multi-faceted deity, Dionysus.[1] It is not always easy to see which elements of these readings will stand the test of time, and this is not a question that our enquiry seeks to address directly. Nonetheless, this study does, I think, have potentially important ramifications.

[1] Individual and *polis*: Griffin (1999*b*), protesting against the recent over-emphasis on the *polis* in scholarship on tragedy, amply documents examples of this kind of view. Ephebes: see e.g. Vidal-Naquet (1990*b*), with references. Dionysus: see e.g. the very stimulating discussion in Vernant (1990*b*), with references.

At the heart of this enquiry lie three inter-related causal determinants, inherited guilt, curses, and Erinyes. We have found many points of contact between the three. Not least among these points of contact is a similarity in their deployment: they tend to surface in plays, or, as I have termed it, to 'irrupt' into them, at moments of heightened pathos and with great dramatic effect. For example, Chapters 2 and 3 have considered the decision of Eteocles in Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas*, and we have noted there that supernatural causal determinants are almost entirely absent from the first half of the play, but suddenly appear *en masse* at the end of the shield-scene. The effect of this sudden irruption is startling and deeply moving. Or again, in Chapter 4, we have seen how, in the climactic dialogue between Orestes and Clytaemestra in the *Choephori*, the 'mother's hounds' and her curse suddenly come into play on the very point of Clytaemestra's death, with similarly explosive effect. In Sophocles, as we have seen in Chapter 5, the sorrows of the house and its manifold corruptions also have a way of irrupting into the action, but in this case they tend to irrupt into consciousness, becoming *known* and *realized*, rather than working through the medium of Erinyes and curses in the Aeschylean or Euripidean fashion. It has by now become clear why the bulk of our consideration of Sophocles has been undertaken in a separate chapter. For, though his interest in causation and familial corruption is no less acute than that of his two peers, it is, as we have seen, rather differently—and perhaps, I have suggested, more inscrutably—handled.

None of this is to say that the be-all and end-all of tragedy is dramatic effect and the realization of pathos; but rather that we must be alive to the relation of form and content, of dramatic structure and concepts, if we are not to lose sight of the fact that tragic texts are first and foremost drama. This is not an easy line to tread: it is disturbingly easy to err in one of two directions. Some scholars have become too absorbed in the conceptual and philosophical aspects of tragedy at the expense of its nature as drama, and have found themselves treating tragedy as a philosophical or quasi-philosophical medium. This, as we have seen, is manifestly unsatisfactory. The tragedians, especially Sophocles and Euripides, are not in the habit of putting forward propositions for our consideration: to treat them as if they did is to detach the medium of signification from the

signified, to operate with a naïve separation of form and content. Throughout Chapters 2–5 I have sought to show the value of this insight by highlighting certain crucial cases in which the burden of pathos and the invitation to understand—to think conceptually—are indissolubly linked, not least, but certainly not *only*, in the Labdacid plays of the three tragedians. On the other hand, other interpreters of tragedy have erred in the opposite direction, becoming absorbed in tragedy as drama to the exclusion of its conceptual aspect.[2] This too is an easy error to fall into: from Aristotle onward, tragedy has seemed to be very much a matter of *pathos*, as indeed it is. Few human cultural artefacts appeal more consistently, subtly and effectively to the emotions than Greek tragedy. But to become exclusively absorbed in this aspect of tragedy, if it is a less grave error than to become absorbed in its abstract dimension, is an error nonetheless. Tragedy must be regarded as both an intense emotional experience and, simultaneously with this, a medium of discussion and exploration. We have seen throughout this study that these two aspects of tragedy interpenetrate very closely.

Important too in this monograph has been the interface of supernatural causation with human agency, or, in other words, the point where curses, inherited guilt, and Erinyes exert their leverage over the mortal who is depicted making decisions and initiating actions. In the nature of Greek tragedy, which is much concerned with the deviant and the destructive, mortal actions are very often disastrous. And these disasters are often both supernaturally and humanly determined. We have found that these multiply determined, or over-determined, actions within blighted houses involve a delicate and subtle play of freedom, necessity, and moral responsibility. Thus, in Chapter 1, we have considered the inherited guilt of Croesus in Herodotus book 1, and found that the question of his desert to be punished for the wrong of Gyges is profoundly complicated by the text's suggestion that he is himself a Gyges-like figure in the relevant respect. In Chapter 2, we have seen at some length that a similar principle applies in some tragedies: for example, in both the *Septem*

[2] A notable example is Heath (1987), an undeniably interesting and powerful reading of tragedy, but one that overplays its emotional aspect at the expense of the conceptual.

contra Thebas and the *Phoenissae*, Eteocles is implicitly likened to Oedipus and to Laius, both of whom have transgressed and ended unhappily. Thus the end of Eteocles may be viewed, at least in part, as resulting from a re-surfacing of ancestral traits of character and dispositions of choice. This militates, I have argued, against viewing the percolation of inherited guilt as an amoral process.

Moreover, I have suggested that doomed characters in tragedy sometimes take a hand in making for themselves their own disastrous necessities. Necessity may be of many kinds: it may involve the divine and the human, the *polis* and the family. And it is in part constructed by the agent himself. The Gyges of Herodotus 1 and the Eteocles of the *Septem contra Thebas* make their own compulsion—which is not to say that it is any less real, simply that it is firmly grounded in their autonomous mortal agency. The mortal of tragedy is no puppet of the gods. Even Euripides, who of the three tragedians is by far the most concerned to depict humans at the mercy of a cruel and arbitrary divine government, does not minimize the role of human character and choice; and for Aeschylus, this is arguably the most pressing concern of all. Greek tragedy has often been said to reside at a crucial moment in the history of ideas. The argument of this book has offered one perspective on this approach to tragedy. We have seen that the tragedians stand at the opening of a gap between human and supernatural realms, between the divine and the mortal impetus to action. In Chapter 6 we have considered the bearing of supernatural necessity on the deciding mortal, with special reference to Aeschylus' Eteocles. We have seen that Eteocles is a man on whom divine pressures to act weigh as heavily as on any character in Greek tragedy. And while in his case the coexistence of divine and human reasons to face Polyneices is relatively frictionless, the possibility of friction is raised: Eteocles implies, as we have seen, that a possible reaction to his unfortunate situation would be weeping and prostration. It is his own strength and resolution that prevent him from treading that road.

These conclusions, concerning, first, the interaction of form and content in exegesis and, second, the interplay of responsibility, freedom, and mortal action in doomed families, suggest further lines of enquiry. In particular, the conclusions that we have drawn in Chapter 2 about inherited guilt, responsibility, and moral inheritance open avenues for further investigation both within and outside tragedy.

To take but one instance, Chapter 1 has begun to consider the parallelism of inherited guilt and inherited characteristics in Herodotus 1: this enquiry urgently demands pursuit through the remainder of Herodotus' text, which is informed on all levels by genetic relations between kings and tyrants, both Greek and Persian. I hope to pursue this Herodotean investigation at some length elsewhere.

Some modern interpretations of tragedy have said little of the matters that have occupied us in the course of this enquiry. I have, I hope, shown in these pages that issues of familial interaction, causation, human action, and moral responsibility in Attic tragedy are by no means settled; and that interpreters of these endlessly absorbing and undeniably intoxicating texts ignore them at their peril.

References

Alt, K. (1961). 'Schicksal und *φύσις* im *Philoktet* des Sophokles', *Hermes*, 89: 141–74.

Annas, J. (1981). *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford).

Arnott, P. D. (1989). *Public and Performance in the Greek Theatre* (London and New York).

Arthur, M. B. (1977). 'The Curse of Civilisation: The Choral Odes of the *Phoenissae*', *HSCP*, 81: 163–85.

Audollent, A. (1904). *Defixionum Tabellae Quotquot Innotuerunt* etc. (Paris).

Bacon, H. H. (1964). 'The Shield of Eteocles', *Arion*, 3.3: 27–38. [Cited from repr. E. Segal. (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1983), 24–33.]

Blundell, M. W. (1989). *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge).

Bobzien, S. (1998). *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford).

Bond, G. W. (1981). *Euripides: Heracles* (Oxford).

Brown, A. L. (1982). 'Some Problems in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus', *JHS*, 102: 26–32.

—— (1983). 'The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*: Real Life, the Supernatural and the Stage', *JHS*, 103: 13–34.

—— (1984). 'Eumenides in Greek Tragedy', *CQ*, ns 34: 260–81.

—— (1987). *Sophocles: Antigone* (Warminster).

Burkert, W. (1985). *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Oxford). [Tr. with revisions of W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart, 1977).]

—— (1992). *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, tr. M. E. Pinder and W. Burkert (Cambridge, MA, and London). [Tr. of W. Burkert, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur* (Heidelberg, 1984).]

Burnett, A. P. (1983). *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (London).

Büschel, F. (1964). 'Curse (and Blessing)', in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Michigan), i. 448–51.

Bushnell, R. W. (1988). *Prophesying Tragedy: Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays* (Ithaca and London).

Cairns, D. L. (1993). *Aidos: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford).

Calasso, R. (1994). *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, tr. T. Parks (London). [Tr. of R. Calasso, *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia* (Milan, 1988).]

Chantraine, P. (1968). *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris).

Clinton, K. (1996). 'A New *lex sacra* from Selinus: Kindly Zeuses, Eumenides, Impure and Pure *tritopatores*, and *elasteroi*', *CP*, 91: 159–79.

Collard, C. (2002) (tr.). *Aeschylus: Oresteia* (Oxford).

Conacher, D. J. (1987). *Aeschylus' Oresteia: A Literary Commentary* (Toronto).

Craik, E. (1988). *Euripides: Phoenissae* (Warminster).

Croiset, M. (1965). *Eschyle: études sur l'invention dramatique dans son théâtre*, 3rd edn. (Paris).

Cropp, M. J. (1995). (ed.). *Euripides' Cresphontes*, in C. Collard, M. J. Cropp, and K. H. Lee, *Euripides: Selected Fragmentary Plays* (Warminster, 1995), i. 121–47.

Daube, B. (1938). *Zu den Rechtsproblemen in Aischylos' Agamemnon* (Zurich).

Davie, J., and Rutherford, R. (1996). *Euripides: Alcestis and Other Plays* (Harmondsworth).

Davies, M. (1991). *Sophocles: Trachiniae* (Oxford).

Dawe, R. D. (1982). *Sophocles: Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge).

Denniston, J. D. (1939). *Euripides: Electra* (Oxford).

Dihle, A. (1982). *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles).

—— (1994). *A History of Greek Literature: From Homer to the Hellenistic Period*, tr. C. Krojzl (London and New York). [Tr. of A. Dihle, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte* (Munich, 1991).]

Dodds, E. R. (1951). *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley).

—— (1960). 'Morals and Politics in the *Oresteia*', *PCPS*, 186: 19–31. [Quoted from repr. *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford, 1973), 45–63.]

—— (1966). 'On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*', *G&R*, 13: 37–49. [Quoted from repr. *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford, 1973), 64–77.]

Dover, K. J. (1973). 'Some Neglected Aspects of Agamemnon's Dilemma', *JHS*, 93: 58–69.

—— (1974). *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford). [Quoted from repr. with corrections (Indianapolis, 1994).]

Easterling, P. E. (1978). 'The Second Stasimon of *Antigone*', in R. D. Dawe, J. Diggle, and P. E. Easterling (eds.), *Dionysiaca: Nine Studies in Greek Poetry* (Cambridge), 141–58.
—— (1982). *Sophocles: Trachiniae* (Cambridge).
—— (1985). 'Sophocles', in Easterling and Knox (1985), 295–316.
—— (1997) (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge).
Easterling, P. E., and Knox, B. M. W. (1985) (eds.). *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature. I: Greek Literature* (Cambridge).
Edmonds, J. M. (1954). *Elegy and Iambus*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA, and London).
Erp Taalman Kip, A. M. van (1996). 'The Unity of the *Oresteia*', in Silk (1996), 119–38.
Faraone, C. A. (1985). 'Aeschylus' ὕμνος δέσμιος (*Eum.* 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets', *JHS*, 105: 150–54.
—— (1991). 'The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells', in Faraone and Obbink (1991), 3–32.
Faraone, C. and Obbink, D. (1991) (eds.). *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford).
Farnell, L. R. (1896–1909). *The Cults of the Greek States*, 5 vols. (Oxford).
Fehling, D. (1989). *Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art*, tr. J. G. Howie (Leeds). [Tr. of D. Fehling, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot* (Berlin and New York, 1971).]
Fisher, N. R. E. (1992). *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (Warminster).
Flower, M. A., and Marincola, J. (2002). *Herodotus: Histories Book IX* (Cambridge).
Foley, H. P. (1996). 'Antigone as Moral Agent', in Silk (1996), 49–73.
Fraenkel, E. (1950). *Aeschylus: Agamemnon*, 3 vols. (Oxford).
—— (1957). *Die sieben Redepaare im Thebanerdrama des Aeschylus* (Munich).
—— (1963). *Zu den Phoenissen des Euripides* (Munich).
Fränkel, H. (1975). *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, tr. M. Hadas and J. Willis (Oxford).
Frankfurt, H. G. (1969). 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility', *Journal of Philosophy*, 66: 829–39. [Quoted from repr. Watson (2003), 167–76.]
—— (1971). 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', *Journal of Philosophy*, 68: 5–20. [Quoted from repr. Watson (2003), 322–36.]
Gagarin, M. (1976). *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles).
Gager, J. G. (1992). *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford).
Garvie, A. F. (1986). *Aeschylus: Choephori* (Oxford).

Garvie, A. F. (1996). 'The Tragedy of the *Oresteia*: Response to van Erp Taalman Kip', in Silk (1996), 139–48.
—— (1998). *Sophocles: Ajax* (Warminster).
Geddes, A. G. (1984). 'Who's Who in 'Homeric' Society', *CQ*, ns 34: 17–36.
Gerber, D. E. (1982). *Pindar's Olympian One: A Commentary* (Toronto).
Gill, C. (1996). *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford).
Goldhill, S. D. (1984). *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* (Cambridge).
—— (1986). *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge).
Goossens, R. (1962). *Euripide et Athènes* (Brussels).
Gould, J. (1989). *Herodotus* (London).
—— (1996). 'Tragedy and Collective Experience', in Silk (1996), 217–43. [Repr. *Myth, Ritual, Memory and Exchange* (Oxford, 2001), 378–404.]
Goward, B. (2005). *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* (London).
Graf, F. (1991). 'Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual', in Faraone and Obbink (1991), 188–213.
—— (1997). *Magic in the Ancient World*, tr. F. Philip (Cambridge, MA, and London). [Tr. of *Idéologie et practique de la magie dans l'antiquité Gréco-Romaine* (Paris, 1994.)]
Green, R., and Handley, E. (1995). *Images of the Greek Theatre* (London).
Greene, W. C. (1944). *Moira: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, MA).
Griffin, J. (1980). *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford).
—— (1999*a*) (ed.). *Sophocles Revisited: Essays Presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford).
—— (1999*b*). 'Sophocles and the Democratic City', in Griffin (1999*a*), 73–94.
Griffith, M. (1999). *Sophocles: Antigone* (Cambridge).
—— (2005). 'The Subject of Desire in Sophocles' *Antigone*', in Pedrick and Oberhelman (2005), 91–135.
Groeneboom, P. (1960). *Aischylos' Perser*, 2 vols. (Göttingen).
Hainsworth, J. B. (1993). *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. iii (Cambridge).
Hall, E. (1989). *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford).
—— (1996). *Aeschylus: Persians* (Warminster).
Halliwell, S. (1990). 'Traditional Greek Conceptions of Character', in Pelling (1990*a*), 32–59.
—— (1997). 'Between Public and Private: Tragedy and Athenian Experience of Rhetoric', in Pelling (1997*a*), 121–41.
Harrison, J. E. (1903). *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge).

Harrison, T. (2000). *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford).
Heath, M. (1987). *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London).
Henrichs, A. (1991). 'Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus: Zur Ambivalenz der chthonischen Mächte im attischen Drama', in H. Hofmann and A. Harder (eds.), *Fragmenta dramatica: Beiträge zur Interpretation der griechischen Tragikerfragmente und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Göttingen), 161–201.
Hesk, J. (2003). *Sophocles: Ajax* (London).
Holford-Strevens, L. (1999). 'Sophocles at Rome', in Griffin (1999*a*), 219–59.
Hunter, R. L. (1989). *Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica Book III* (Cambridge).
Hutchinson, G. O. (1985). *Aeschylus: Seven against Thebes* (Oxford).
Huxley, G. L. (1969). *Greek Epic Poetry* (London).
Immerwahr, H. R. (1966). *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Cleveland, OH).
Janko, R. (1992). *The Iliad: a Commentary*, vol. iv (Cambridge).
Jebb, R. C. (1883). *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, part 1: *the Oedipus Tyrannus* (Cambridge).
—— (1894). *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, part 6: *the Electra* (Cambridge).
Jones, J. (1962). *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London). [Quoted from repr. (Stanford, 1980).]
Jordan, D. R. (1985). 'A Survey of Greek *defixiones* not Included in the Special *corpora*', *GRBS*, 26: 151–97.
—— (2000). 'New Greek Curse Tablets', *GRBS*, 41: 5–46.
Kamerbeek, J. C. (1960) (ed.). *Euripide: sept exposés et discussions* (Geneva).
—— (1980). *The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries. Part VI: the Philoctetes* (Leiden).
—— (1984). *The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries. Part VII: the Oedipus Coloneus* (Leiden).
Kells, J. H. (1973). *Sophocles: Electra* (Cambridge).
Kindstrand, J. F. (1976). *Bion of Borysthenes: A Collection of the Fragments with Introduction and Commentary* (Stockholm).
Kirk, G. S. (1985). *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. i (Cambridge).
—— (1989). 'Homer', in P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. i part 1: *Early Greek Poetry* (Cambridge), 1–50.
—— (1990). *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. ii (Cambridge).
Kitto, H. D. F. (1961). *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study*, 3rd edn. (London).
Knox, B. M. W. (1952). 'The *Hippolytus* of Euripides', *YCS*, 13: 3–31. [Repr. Knox (1979), 205–30.]

Knox, B. M. W. (1957). *Oedipus at Thebes: Sophocles' Tragic Hero and His Time* (New Haven and London).
—— (1961). 'The *Ajax* of Sophocles', *HSCP*, 65: 1–37. [Repr. Knox (1979), 125–60.]
—— (1964). *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley).
—— (1979). *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore and London).
—— (1983) (ed.). *Sophocle: sept exposés suivis de discussions* (Geneva).
Kovacs, D. (1995). *Euripides: Children of Heracles, Hippolytus, Andromache, Hecuba* (Cambridge, MA, and London).
Laing, R. D. (1990). *The Divided Self* (London). [Repr. of *The Divided Self* (London, 1960).]
Lebeck, A. (1971). *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Cambridge, MA).
Lefèvre, E. (2001). *Die Unfähigkeit, sich zu erkennen: Sophokles' Tragödien* (Leiden).
Lesky, A. (1960). 'Psychologie bei Euripides', in Kamerbeek (1960), 125–50.
—— (1965). *Greek Tragedy*, tr. H. A. Frankfort (London). [Tr. of *Die Griechische Tragoedie*, 3rd edn. (Stuttgart, 1964).]
—— (1966*a*). *A History of Greek Literature*, tr. J. Willis and C. de Heer (London).
—— (1966*b*), 'Decision and Responsibility in the Tragedy of Aeschylus', *JHS*, 86: 78–86. [Quoted from rev. repr. E. Segal (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1983), 13–23.]
—— (1983). *Greek Tragic Poetry*, tr. M. Dillon (New Haven and London). [Tr. of *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, 3rd edn. (Göttingen, 1972).]
—— (2001). 'Divine and Human Causation in Homeric Epic', tr. L. Holford-Strevens, in D. L. Cairns (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford), 170–202.
Lloyd, M. A. (1992). *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford).
—— (2005). *Sophocles: Electra* (London).
Lloyd-Jones, H. (1959). 'The End of the *Seven against Thebes*', *CQ*, ns 9: 80–115.
—— (1962). 'The Guilt of Agamemnon', *CQ*, ns 12: 187–99. [Cited from repr. *Greek Epic, Lyric and Tragedy: The Academic Papers of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford, 1990), 283–99.]
—— (1971). *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley).
—— (1990). 'Erinyes, *Semnai Theai*, Eumenides', in E. M. Craik (ed.), *Owls to Athens: Essays on Classical Subjects Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover* (Oxford), 203–11. [Repr. Lloyd-Jones (2005), 90–99.]

Lloyd-Jones, H. (1994). *Sophocles*, vols. i: *Ajax, Electra, Oedipus Tyrannus*; and ii: *Antigone, Women of Trachis, Philoctetes, Oedipus at Colonus*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, and London).
—— (1996). *Sophocles: Fragments*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, and London).
—— (2002). 'Curses and Divine Anger in Early Greek Epic: The Pisander scholion', *CQ*, ns 52: 1–14. [Repr. Lloyd-Jones (2005), 18–35.]
—— (2005). *The Further Academic Papers of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford).
Long, A. A., and Sedley, D. N. (1987). *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge).
Loraux, N. (1987). *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, tr. A. Forster (Cambridge, MA, and London).
Lucas, D. W. (1968). *Aristotle: Poetics* (Oxford).
Luck, G. (1985). *Arcana Mundi* (Baltimore and London).
Lupu, E. (2005). *Greek Sacred Law: A Collection of New Documents* (Leiden).
MacLeod, C. (1982). 'Politics and the *Oresteia*', *JHS*, 102: 124–44. [Repr. *Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1983).]
MacLeod, L. (2001). *Dolos and Dike in Sophokles' Elektra* (Leiden).
March, J. (2001). *Sophocles: Electra* (Warminster).
Marinatos, S. (1973). 'Demeter Erinys in Mycenae', *AAA*, 6: 189–92.
Martin, A. S. (1918). 'Predestination', in J. Hastings and J. A. Selbie (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh and New York, 1908–26), vol. 10, 225–35.
Mastronarde, D. J. (1994). *Euripides: Phoenissae* (Cambridge).
—— (2002). *Euripides: Medea* (Cambridge).
Mikalson, J. D. (1983). *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill and London).
—— (1991). *Honor thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy* (Chapel Hill and London).
Mogyoródi, E. (1996). 'Tragic Freedom and Fate in Sophocles' *Antigone*: Notes on the Role of the "ancient evils" in "the tragic" ', in Silk (1996), 358–76.
Mueller, M. (1984). *The Iliad* (London, Boston, and Sydney).
Murray, G. (1913). *Euripidis Fabulae*, 3rd edn. (Oxford).
Nagel, T. (1986). 'Freedom', in *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford), 110–37. [Quoted from repr. in Watson (2003), 229–56.]
Neill, S., Goodwin, J., and Dowle, A. (1967) (eds.). *Concise Dictionary of the Bible* (London).
Nussbaum, M. C. (1986). *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge).
Ogden, D. (1999). 'Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds', in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelphia), 3–90.

Ogden, D. (2002). *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford).

Ormand, K. (1999). *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Austin).

Padel, R. (1995). *Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness* (Princeton).

Parker, R. (1983). *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford).

—— (1996). *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford).

—— (1997). 'Gods Cruel and Kind: Tragic and Civic Theology', in Pelling (1997*a*), 143–160.

—— (1999). 'Through a Glass Darkly: Sophocles and the Divine', in Griffin (1999*a*), 11–27.

Pearson, A. C. (1911). 'Demons and Spirits (Greek)', in J. Hastings and J. A. Selbie (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh and New York, 1908–26), vol. 4, 590–94.

Pease, A. S. (1955–8). *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).

Pedrick, V. and Oberhelman, S. M. (2005). *The Soul of Tragedy: Essays on Athenian Drama* (Chicago).

Pelling, C. B. R. (1990*a*) (ed.). *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford).

—— (1990*b*), 'Conclusion', in Pelling (1990*a*), 245–62.

—— (1997*a*) (ed.). *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford).

—— (1997*b*). 'East is East and West is West—or Are They? National Stereotypes in Herodotus', *Histos* 1 <*http://www.dur.ac.uk/Classics/histos*>.

Podlecki, A. J. (1989), *Aeschylus: Eumenides* (Warminster).

Pulleyn, S. (1997). *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford).

Redfield, J. M. (1994), *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector*, expanded edn. (Durham and London).

Rehm, R. (1994). *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton).

Riemer, P. (1991). *Sophokles, Antigone: Götterwille und menschliche Freiheit* (Stuttgart).

Rivier, A. (1960). 'L'élement démonique chez Euripide jusqu'en 428', in Kamerbeek (1960), 45–72.

Roisman, H. (1999). *Nothing Is As It Seems: The Tragedy of the Implicit in Euripides' Hippolytus* (Lanham and Oxford).

Romilly, J. de (1971). *La crainte et l'angoisse dans le théatre d'Éschyle* (Paris).

Ronnet, G. (1969). *Sophocle, poète tragique* (Paris).

Rose, P. W. (1992). *Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth: Ideology and Literary Form in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca and London).

Rudhardt, J. (1992). *Notions fondamentales de la pensée réligieuse et actes constitutifs du culte dans la Grèce classique*, 2nd edn. (Paris).

Russell, D. A. (1964). *'Longinus' On the Sublime* (Oxford).

Rutherford, R. B. (1982). 'Tragic Form and Feeling in the *Iliad*', *JHS*, 102: 145–60.

—— (2005). *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (Oxford).

Schadewaldt, W. (1926). *Monolog und Selbstgespräch: Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte der griechischen Tragödie* (Berlin).

Seal, D. (1982). *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles* (London and Canberra).

Segal, C. (1986). 'Greek Tragedy: Writing, Truth and the Representation of the Self', in C. Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text* (Ithaca and London), 75–109. [Expanded reprint of C. Segal, 'Greek Tragedy: Writing, Truth and the Representation of the Self', in H. J. Evjen (ed.), *Mnemai: Classical Studies in Memory of Karl K. Hulley* (Chico, 1984), 41–67.]

—— (1995). *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society* (Cambridge, MA, and London).

—— (2001). *Oedipus Tyrannus: Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge*, 2nd edn. (Oxford).

Seidensticker, B. (1983). 'Der Wahl des Todes bei Sophokles', in Knox (1983), 105–44.

Sier, K. (1988). *Die lyrischen Partien der Choephoren des Aischylos* (Stuttgart).

Silk, M. S., and Stern, J. P. (1981). *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge).

Silk, M. S. (1987). *Homer: The Iliad* (Cambridge).

—— (1996). (ed.). *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond* (Oxford).

Simon, B. (1988). *Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic Studies from Aeschylus to Beckett* (New Haven and London).

Snell, B. (1982). *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*, tr. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Oxford). [Tr. of *Die Entdeckung des Geistes* (Hamburg, 1948).]

Solmsen, F. (1949). *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca and London). [Reprinted 1995.]

Sommerstein, A. H. (1989). *Aeschylus: Eumenides* (Cambridge).

Sourvinou-Inwood, C. (2003). *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (Lanham and Oxford).

Stehle, E. (2005). 'Prayer and Curse in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*', *CP*, 100: 101–22.

Stinton, T. C. W. (1986). 'The Scope and Limits of Allusion in Greek Tragedy', in M. J. Cropp, E. Fantham, and S. E. Scully (eds.), *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays Presented to D. J. Conacher* (Calgary, 1986), 67–102.

[Repr. T. C. W. Stinton, *Collected Papers on Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1990), 454–92.]

Storey, I. C., and Allan, A. (2005). *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama* (Oxford).

Strawson, G. (1994). 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility', *Philosophical Studies*, 75: 5–24. [Quoted from repr. Watson (2003), 212–28.]

Strubbe, J. H. M. (1991). 'Cursed be he that moves my bones', in Faraone and Obbink (1991), 33–59.

Taplin, O. (1977). *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford).

—— (1978). *Greek Tragedy in Action* (London).

—— (1992). *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford).

—— (2000). 'The Spring of the Muses: Homer and Related Poetry', in id. (ed.), *Literature in the Greek World* (Oxford), 4–39.

Thalmann, W. G. (1978). *Dramatic Art in Aeschylus's Seven against Thebes* (New Haven and London).

Trapp, M. (1996). 'Tragedy and the Fragility of Moral Reasoning: Response to Foley', in Silk (1996), 74–84.

Tyrrell, W. B., and Bennett, L. J. (1998). *Recapturing Sophocles' Antigone* (Lanham and Oxford).

Vernant, J.-P. (1972). 'Intimations of the Will in Greek Tragedy', in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 49–84.

—— (1990*a*). 'Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of *Oedipus Rex*', in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 113–40.

—— (1990*b*). 'The Masked Dionysus of Euripides' *Bacchae*', in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 381–412.

—— (1990*c*), 'Oedipus without the Complex', in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 85–111.

Vernant, J.-P., and Vidal-Naquet, P. (1990). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, tr. J. Lloyd (New York). [Tr. of J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1972–86).]

Versnel, H. S. (1991). 'Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers', in Faraone and Obbink (1991), 60–106.

Vidal-Naquet, P. (1990*a*). 'Hunting and sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 141–59.

—— (1990*b*). 'Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the *ephebeia*', in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 161–79.

Waldock, A. J. A. (1951). *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge).

Waters, K. H. (1985). *Herodotos the Historian: His Problems, Methods and Originality* (London).

Watling, E. F. (1947). *Sophocles: The Theban Plays*, tr. with introduction and notes (Harmondsworth).
Watson, G. (2003) (ed.). *Free Will*, 2nd edn. (Oxford).
Watson, L. (1991). *Arae: The Curse Poetry of Antiquity* (Leeds).
Webster, T. B. L. (1970). *Sophocles: Philoctetes* (Cambridge).
West, M. L. (1966). *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford).
—— (1978). *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford).
—— (1987a). *Euripides: Orestes* (Warminster).
—— (1987*b*). review of Garvie (1986), *Gnomon*, 59: 193–8.
—— (1997). *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford).
—— (1998). *Aeschylus: Tragoediae* (Stuttgart and Leipzig).
—— (1999). 'Ancestral Curses', in Griffin (1999*a*), 31–45.
—— (2003). *Greek Epic Fragments* (Cambridge, MA, and London).
West, S. (1999). 'Sophocles' *Antigone* and Herodotus Book Three', in Griffin (1999*a*), 109–36.
Widerker, D. (1995). 'Libertarianism and Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities', *Philosophical Review*, 104: 247–61. [Quoted from repr. Watson (2003), 177–89.]
Wildberg, C. (2002). *Hyperesie und Epiphanie: ein Versuch über die Bedeutung der Götter in den Dramen des Euripides* (Munich).
Wiles, D. (2000). *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge).
Williams, B. (1993). *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles).
—— (1995). 'Ethics', in A. C. Grayling (ed.), *Philosophy: A Guide through the Subject* (Oxford, 1995), 545–82.
Wilson, J. P. (1997). *The Hero and the City: An Interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus* (Ann Arbor).
Winnington-Ingram, R. P. (1980). *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge).
—— (1983*a*). *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge).
—— (1983*b*). 'Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena', in Winnington-Ingram (1983*a*), 101–31. [Rev. repr. of 'Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena', *JHS*, 88 (1949), 130–47.]
—— (1985), 'Aeschylus', in Easterling and Knox (1985), 281–95.
Wolf, S. (1987). 'Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility', in id., *Responsibility, Character and the Emotions* (Cambridge), 46–62. [Quoted from repr. in Watson (2003), 372–87.]
Wünsch, R. (1897). *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum vol. iii, Appendix (Berlin).
Zanker, G. (1994). *The Heart of Achilles: Characterization and Personal Ethics in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor).

Zeitlin, F. I. (1986). 'Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama', in J. P. Euben (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Los Angeles and London), 101–41. [Repr. J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Nothing to do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context* (Princeton, 1990), 130–67.]

Zieliński, T. (1926). *The Religion of Ancient Greece: An Outline*, tr. G. R. Noyes (Oxford).

Index Locorum

Citations in footnotes are indexed selectively. Scholia (*Σ*) to ancient texts and Hypotheses to dramas are indexed under the texts to which they pertain.

General Index

Ancient texts, ancient authors and modern scholars are indexed selectively. For passages from classical texts, see the *Index Locorum*.

Concepts which appear in chapter titles are generally not indexed, and footnotes are indexed selectively.